Purity Talk
By Kristen and Whitney

Sex is serious. God takes it seriously and so should you. It is a powerful tool that can be used by the creator within marriage to unite or by man outside of marriage to destroy.

- Reasons for not having sex
  - **Biblical (reasons God give this command)**
    - What does scripture say? (I Corinthians 6:12-20)
      - I Corinthians 6:12-13 – your body is the Lord’s
      - I Corinthians 6:18 – sin against own body - sex before marriage affects you life in a big way.
      - 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 – abstain from sexual immorality
      - Matthew 15:16-19 – sexual sin comes from the heart – your heart cannot be right with God if you are committing sexual sin
      - Ephesians 5:3 – Christians should not even have a hint of sexual immorality
      - Hebrew 13:4 – your marriage bed should be kept pure
  - **Practical (science – proof) – some stats / facts taken from**
    - [http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0000055.cfm](http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0000055.cfm)
    - Abstinence shows strength of character and shows your recognition of your own self worth
    - Premarital sex harms the ability to trust future spouse and creates guilt
    - Premarital sex harms your marriage bed
      - Is he thinking of me?
      - Jealousy
      - Unequal experience
      - Trust issues
      - “naughtiness” of premarital sex steals some of the joy out of your marriage sex
      - Guilt – can lead to emotional issues as well as physical (impotence)
    - Diseases and pregnancy (no abortion)
    - Emotional side effects
      - False sense of love
      - Brain altering chemical (oxytocin) which is released during sex clouds your judgment (makes you think you’re in love when you’re not) – can lead to marriages that are bound to fail
      - Harder break ups
      - Love is a choice, not a feeling. Prove that you can make good choices. Sex makes you feel in love. It is VERY emotional. Don’t be unwise.
  - **Married people have better sex**
    - Family Research Council surveyed 1,100 people about their sexual satisfaction. The poll “found that 72 percent of all married ‘traditionalists (those who 'strongly' believe out of wedlock sex is wrong) report high sexual satisfaction, about 31 percentage points higher than the level registered by unmarried ‘non-traditionalists’ (those who have no or only some objection to sex outside of marriage) and 13 percentage points higher than that registered by married non-traditionals.
    - The survey “found that strictly monogamous women experienced orgasm during sex more than twice as often as promiscuous women.” National Institutes of Health researcher David Larson said that couples who don't sleep together before marriage and who are faithful during marriage “are more satisfied with their current sex life and also with their marriages compared to those who were involved sexually before marriage.”
    - Scientific studies show that your brain responds in a positive way to the individual you slept with when you see him, triggering the pleasure center of your brain and creating a memory in “storage” in your brain. Monogamous sex actually improves over time as the folds in your brain grow deeper, creating more memories, and your brain automatically triggers a quicker response to the individual. If you have had multiple partners, there is less “storage” in this area of your brain for the person you end up marrying.
  - **Couples who engage in sex before marriage are far more likely to divorce.** According to a study by the National Survey of Family Growth, women who have had premarital sex increase their odds of divorce by about 60 percent.
• The more promiscuous you are before marriage, the more likely you are to commit adultery AFTER marriage. (The sexually self-indulgent have had no practice in self-restraint.)
• Couples who live together before marriage are unlikely to marry. A Columbia University study found that "only 26 percent of women surveyed and a scant 19 percent of men" married the person they were living with. Another study showed that even if they do marry, couples who begin their marriages through cohabitation are almost twice as likely to divorce within 10 years compared to all first marriages: 57 percent to 80 percent.
• Anticipation builds desire. We all know this. Imagine what your husband is going to feel for you after years of anticipation… this is partly why sex is so good in marriage. By waiting you have made it special.
• Marriage is hard, if you are having sex before marriage then instead of having both hard issues (hard part of marriage) and fun new things (learning each other’s bodies) you are just left with the hard part. This realization after marriage often leads to disappointment with your mate.
• But what if I’m going to marry him anyways?
  • You want a man that is faithful, have him prove that he can be faithful now in NOT having sex and you can trust him later to not have sex with others (Why would you want a man who cannot exhibit self control? This is a part of his character that will be very important later in marriage)
  • By not having sex before marriage you are adding value to your marriage bed. It should be one of the most important things in your marriage, don’t treat it like it doesn’t matter.
  • You aren’t married yet…. You do NOT know the future, so don’t ever assume that your boyfriend is your husband, even if you get engaged.
  • Problem of habituation – becoming so used to doing something you can’t do it any other way – if you are not married your life is not the same. Don’t form habits now that will limit your marriage.
• Union of man and woman on every level – INSIDE marriage this creates a bond that strengthens your love, OUTSIDE marriage this can create a bond that give you a false sense of love and weakens your future bond with your husband.
• Don’t harm your witness. Live a life above reproach. Others are watching you and they know you are Christian, even the APPEARANCE of impropriety [i.e. sleepovers, same hotel rooms, etc.] can make others think you are a hypocrite (the number one complaint of non-Christians is that Christians are all hypocrites). Witnessing with your life is one of the most important parts of Christianity.
• In the bonds of marriage you know that your mate loves EVERY part of you and that love is unconditional. This makes for way better sex. 😊
• When you start having sex every time you’re alone you stop getting to know someone emotionally/spiritually/in general and only get to know him physically… you should spend this time getting to know him so that when you are married there are no “hidden” surprises. This time also allows you do discover your common bonds / interests / hobbies.
• Sex AFTER marriage is GREAT… seriously… amazing… ask Kris. It might be hard to wait for something that seems like it can’t possibly be better than what you can get now… but it is. It’s like settling for earth when you can have heaven.
• Not only in sex inside marriage good, but it is commanded. God wants this union between couples and he gave us sex for a reason.
• Your purity is a gift of God, given to you for you to give to your husband. It is one of the most precious possessions you own.
• Your purity is always given, not taken. If any boy has done anything without your consent and you feel like he has made you impure, know that God looks at the heart and he knows you are pure.
• Waiting shows you are a woman who is worth it, he will respect you more for it. Men in general don’t want a wife who slept around (even if he did… not really fair, I know). Boys EVENTUALLY mature into men and then want an honorable wife.
• Why buy the cow when you can have the milk for free? 😊 Abstinence makes a guy decide whether to commit to marriage. If he’s not going to, it’s best to know now.

- Sex of the Past
  o Forgiveness
    ▪ God forgives all sin
  o Not an excuse for future sex
Romans 6:1-2 – we should not go on sinning just because we have grace, we are dead to sin.
- Stopping now will help stop some of the consequences. Not all will be removed, but some of them can be lessened.
- Your future mate will respect your decision to start over.
- It is never too late to turn from the wrong path; we see this time and again in scripture.
- Though you can never get your virginity back, the Lord can purify anyone. God makes the impure pure.

What to do now?

Whether or not you’re in a relationship
- Pray for your future spouse – God has someone specifically chosen for you. Your goal in dating should be to find that person, not just find anyone who will keep you company.

In relationship
- I Corinthians 10:13 – resisting temptation
- I Corinthians 6:12 – Do not let it master you
- It is the man’s job to protect the woman, which includes her purity. You are the daughter of the Almighty and if he can not see that he is not going to make a good husband anyways.
- Don’t let yourself be manipulated. Stand strong in your purity.
- If one of you is more experienced that isn’t an excuse to “catch” the other person up. All of the reasons to wait are still in place. It will STILL harm your relationship. As the old saying goes, two wrongs don’t make a right.

Claire’s Story.

Set boundaries (what should be my boundaries sexually when I do get a boyfriend? How do you prevent failure?)
- Boundaries
  - Many different views on this in the church but everyone agrees that you shouldn’t do the following:
    - Sex
    - Oral sex
    - Anything that causes an orgasm
    - Excessive touching
    - Phone sex and cyber sex
  - Pray about this. Pray together about this. Set definitive boundaries. (This list is not exclusive). You should be able to comfortably tell your pastor what you are doing. Whatever you decide your boundaries are, stick with them. Don’t set a precedent for changing your boundaries.
  - Think about what you want your future husband to be doing with other girls. If you don’t want him to do it… don’t do it yourself.
- Prevention
  - Pray together whenever in a tempting situation. When you invite God on your date it makes it harder to slip.
  - Talk about your boundaries with your boyfriend. Have open communication (this is a GREAT habit to develop before marriage).
  - Study the Bible/pray together (and still individually). Make sure to keep your relationship with God the main priority in your life and seek God’s Will in your relationship with your boyfriend. Attend small group, have your accountability partner hold you to God’s standard.
  - Attend church together.
  - Set a curfew, if you tend to slip in the late evenings, end your date earlier.
  - Limit time alone in a private room (plan activities to do out of your own room, double dates!)
  - If you have a roommate, have them come check on you.
  - Talk to your accountability partner. If necessary have them call you periodically in the evening or when your curfew arrives.
  - Dress modestly. Ask your boyfriend if there are certain outfits you shouldn’t wear.
  - These measures might sound extreme but remember you are guarding one of the most important gifts from God. He will bless your efforts and you will grow closer to Him.
Sex Is Not About Waiting
by Michael Lawrence

Parents are big believers in waiting. Do you remember any of these? "Wait for your little brother!" as you ran off with your friends, "Wait a half hour before you get into the pool" just as you finished your lunch. "Wait until your father gets home!" as mom caught you pummeling your sibling for being such a nuisance.

Of course, it's not really that they saw virtue in waiting itself. It's just that waiting ensured something more important — loving your little brother, or protecting you from danger, or impressing on you the consequences of your actions.

There's one other kind of waiting that parents try to teach — the patient waiting involved in delayed gratification. From staying in school because of the better job we'd someday get, to working hard at practice every day, so we'd be ready for the competition that was weeks or months away, to saving the money we earned mowing lawns or babysitting so we could pay for college or buy an engagement ring (I can't tell you how many lawns are sitting on my wife's finger right now!), we learn to patiently wait in order to maximize our gratification in the future. It's a good lesson, as far as it goes.

But it doesn't work for everything. Some things are best when done as soon as possible — like eating an ice cream cone on a hot day. And other things can be delayed too long — like the vacation of a lifetime that comes too late in life to be really enjoyed.

And then there's sex.

At first, the argument to wait makes sense on the grounds of protecting yourself from something you're not emotionally or physically ready for. Later, it makes sense on the grounds that it will be better if it happens in the context of a committed, adult relationship. But what about now? You're in your 20s or 30s; your career is taking off, and your body and emotions are about as developed as they're ever going to be. And though you're not married, your relationships with the opposite sex are mature and adult-like in every other respect. So why keep waiting? You're not a kid anymore. And even if sex is marginally better inside of marriage than outside, what if your prospects for marriage aren't that good? Isn't sub-optimal sex now better than no sex at all, ever?

That's where we come to the limits of the "wait, because it's better in marriage" argument. And it's one of the reasons why so many of the single men and women I counsel in the local church find themselves in tears on my couch, telling me that after years of waiting, they just couldn't wait any longer.

The Biblical Command

When we turn to what the Bible has to say about sex outside of marriage, it's not hard to sum up the message. Don't do it. From the Ten Commandments in Exodus to the laws of Leviticus 18, to the instructions of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6-7 to the public embarrassment that attached to the Virgin Mary, the Bible is clear that God's standard is that sex is to be reserved for marriage, and marriage alone.

And unlike much that you'll find on the shelves of your local Christian bookstore, the Bible doesn't spend much time trying to justify that standard. You won't find a verse that says "Thou shalt wait, because it's better in marriage." There is no chapter in Scripture that touts the protection from physical disease and emotional heartache that comes from monogamy, although both of those things are true.

Instead, the Bible says things like, "You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 18:4). Or, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The Bible teaches that we should reserve sexual intimacy for marriage for no other reason than that, if we are Christians, we belong to God. Sex outside of marriage is not only a sin against ourselves and our partner, but a fraudulent misrepresentation of God and a cruel distortion of the intimacy he created to be a picture of the eternal intimacy of the Trinity itself.

A Union of Bodies, But So Much More
What is the point of sexual intimacy? Genesis 1 tells us that one of the points is procreation. We're to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with the image of God, and it's through sexual intimacy that we do that.

But right away it's obvious that there's more going on than mere reproduction. For one thing, though all living creatures are created to reproduce after their kind, not all do so sexually. And among those that do reproduce sexually, simple observation tells us that humans are unique in their experience of sex. Mating in the animal world is clearly attended with much urgency and instinctual drive, but not much more. Why are we different?

Of course, as far as the world is concerned, only a nerdy biologist, or a prudish Christian would bother to ask such a question. To the world, the point of sex is pleasure, release, orgasm. What other point would anyone need? Sex results in pleasure. I want pleasure, so I have sex. I want more pleasure, I have more sex. I suppose it's a given that men in our culture tend to buy into this view — even married men; even Christian married men. What seems to be new in the last generation is the increasing extent to which women are viewing sex this way as well.

Ironically, though the first view is historically associated with Christianity, and the second view is associated with the world, both miss the main point of sexual intimacy, because both reduce sex to an instrument, a means to another end. And whenever something is reduced to a tool, a utilitarian process, it ceases to be an object of beauty in and of itself, and is only as good as what it gets you.

Why is our experience of sex so different than the rest of creation? Why did God pronounce it very good? Simply put, because the point of sexual intimacy is neither the children nor the pleasure it produces, but the union of persons that it represents and is itself a part of.

A Unions that Displays ... A Marriage

Sexual intimacy is all about union. Physically, of course, that's obvious. But there's so much more. In sexual intimacy, we also know a union that is emotional, as our hearts are knit together even as our bodies are. We know a union that is intellectual, as we come to understand and know one another in intimate detail. We know a union that is even spiritual, for as every married couple figures out, the best sex isn't when I make sure I get what I want, but when I forget about myself, and give myself for the blessing and delight of my spouse. And at that moment, we are very close to the heart of Christ, "who loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25).

But there's more. This union of sexual intimacy, complete in itself, is also a sign and symbol of an even more profound union of lives in the covenant marriage, when a man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Being "one flesh" with someone can refer in a secondary way to sex, but primarily it's just a Hebrew way of saying one family, flesh and blood. The union of marriage is not an alliance of families, with each partner representing a previous set of priorities and loyalties. No, and this was and remains quite radical, marriage is a union that dissolves the old bonds, the old loyalties, the old priorities, and creates one new family, with all that entails — one new set of priorities, one new set of fundamental loyalties.

Do you see the picture so far? The beauty of sex is that it is a profound union that stands as a sign and symbol of an even more profound union of lives in the covenant of marriage. This of course is why sex outside of marriage is ultimately unsatisfying and destructive. Without the union of marriage, the union of bodies is a parody and mockery of itself. Bereft of it's proper point and context, sexual intimacy outside of marriage does not bring us into the lover's embrace, but merely exposes us to the stranger's stare, and reduces us to the means of someone else's pleasure.

But there's even more to this union that makes sexual intimacy as God designed it so beautiful. I mentioned that many men tend to view sex as a means to the end of their pleasure. If that is the typical failure of men, then I think many women tend to view intimacy, broadly considered, as an end in itself. But women, that view is just as much idolatry as the man's worship of pleasure. There is no created thing, including the intimacy of marriage, that exists for its own sake.

The amazing thing that Paul reveals in Ephesians 5 is that the union between a husband and wife is ultimately beautiful because it too stands as a sign, a picture of something else. And that is the union between Christ and the church.
A Union that Displays ... the Gospel

The ultimate point of marriage isn't your emotional satisfaction, but to make visible the gospel reality of Christ's love for the church and the church's love for Christ. The absolutely amazing truth of the gospel is that we who were separated and alienated from God have been united by faith to the Son he loves in the New Covenant of his grace. The marriage covenant illustrates the New Covenant; the marriage union points to that even more profound union between Christ and the church.

What does this have to do with the beauty of sexual intimacy and the single who is still waiting to experience it? You can think of this like matryoshka, or nested Russian dolls, in which each doll's shape is determined by the shape of the next doll hidden inside. The intimacy of sexual union, as desirable as that is, is also picture of the marriage union, which in turn is a picture of our union with Christ.

As profoundly intimate the experience of sexual union is, at it's best, it is just a hint, a small taste of the joy and satisfaction and perfect intimacy we will know with Jesus, when we are united to Him as his Bride. That union won't be sexual, but there is no other union God's given us that speaks more truly of the intimate love we'll know in Christ. To rip one of these unions out of it's connection with the others is to destroy not only it's goodness and meaning, but to distort the pattern that it was designed to display.

A Union that Displays ... God

There is one more connection to draw, one more union to think about. For as profound as our union with Christ is, that union is not the ultimate and final union in the universe. Have you ever wondered why we are united to Christ? It's kind of an odd image, when you think about it. Jesus himself gives us the answer. In John 14-17, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples to abide in him, to remain in him, for in that union they had life. And then, in his high priestly prayer in John 17, he says the most remarkable thing:

"Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

There is more there than we can possibly unpack, but at least this much is clear. The union we have with Christ in the gospel, and the transformation that union effects, is meant to be a visible sign, a proof, of the prior eternal union of Christ and the Father in the Trinity. So that when the world looked at those united to Christ, they could not help but see that Christ himself is one with the Father.

What is the point of our union with Christ? It is the glory of God. As Jesus concludes his prayer, "I have made you known to them ... that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." In our union with Christ we are mysteriously made signs and symbols of the Son's union with the Father. What's more, through that union we participate in and are taken up into the eternal love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father.

Here we have finally come to the mystery of union, the core that defines every other union in the universe, including the union of sex. That's right, you read that correctly. Sex is a foretaste, a hint of what it will mean for us to participate in the eternal union of love that exists at the very heart of the Trinity. The beauty of intimacy is that it is a taste of the glory of God.

Isn't God good that he would make something so enjoyable at the same time so noble? Isn't he good that he would make something so full of pleasure so good and pure. Isn't he gracious that he would make us in such a way that delighting in our spouse leads us to find our ultimate delight in him?

What does this mean for you if you're single? It means that the problem with sex outside of marriage isn't finally that you're breaking an arbitrary rule, or that it is emotionally destructive, or that it is more likely to expose you to an STD.

No, the problem is that sex outside of marriage is a fraud and a fake. It pretends to be true intimacy, but is nothing more than exposure. It uses the language of love and commitment, but knows nothing of either. And by suggesting that true pleasure and intimacy can be had without loving, covenantal commitment, it perpetrates a massive assault.
against the very character and glory of God, whose eternal, intimate, loving relationship within the Trinity is the blueprint and pattern for every intimate pleasure that you or I will ever know.

What if you gave up waiting? Some things can't be undone in this life. But for those who repent of their sin and trust in the grace of God held out through cross of Jesus Christ, all things may be forgiven.

If you're still waiting (or waiting again) for marriage to have sex, keep waiting. Because it's not about waiting. It's about displaying the glory of God and his gospel in your life.

http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001405.cfm


How far can you go without a marriage licence? It would be really nice if the Bible said "with thy lips together thou may kiss, but with thy lips parted thou shalt not kiss" or "above the waist you shall touch freely, but below the waist you shall not touch." Because such detailed limits are not given some will suggest that God does not care if we slip a hand under a blouse, up a skirt, or into a pair of pants. It is increasingly common for Christians to believe, and even teach others, that as long as the penis does not enter the vagina, it's "not sex."

Why didn't God spell it out for us in the Bible? Actually we think He did, but because we are products of the society we live in we don't see it. Up until very recently it was commonly accepted that stimulating the breasts or genitals directly or indirectly WAS SEX. In the days before reliable birth control many prostitutes made a living doing everything but intercourse. So when Paul says "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her?" (1 Co 16a NKJV) those who read it would not have thought he was referring only to intercourse, but to any and all of the ways a prostitute of the day would pleasure a man. Even married couples might regularly resort to sex without intercourse in order to not conceive. So perhaps our failure to understand that things like oral sex and petting to orgasm are unacceptable outside of marriage is our fault, not God's.

It's our fault, not God's, that we don't understand. We will begin by making a few of the Biblical cases against premarital sex and "playing around." Then will look at some scientific and experience based reasons why it's a very bad plan to push sexual boundaries.

The Word says ...

In the seventh chapter of first Corinthians, Paul says a lot about sex and marriage. He begins by saying it's good for a man to "not touch" a woman. Paul knew those who were unmarried could better server the Lord, and wanted those who could abstain to not marry. But look at the word Paul used - "touch". The same Greek word is used repeatedly when Jesus touched people to heal them, and it means "to fasten one's self to, adhere to, cling to". The word is intimate, but not inherently sexual. It sure seems that Paul was concerned about more than just sexual intercourse - he seems to be excluding all intimate contact between unmarried men and women.

In verse 2 Paul says that we should marry in order to avoid "fornication." The Greek word there is "Porneia," and it means far more than the English word fornication. The best translation would be "immoral sexuality" and this would include adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, and even bestiality. Paul's solution for dealing with sexual desires was to get married and have sex (a LOT of sex actually). Given his desire to see folks not marry, this is significant. If some sort of "foreplay to orgasm" could deal with a persons sexual needs and leave them unmarried, don't you think Paul would have advocated it? But in addition to the fact that this behavior is wrong, it leads to, rather than prevents, marriage.
The only Biblical solution for sexual needs is marriage.

Finally, let's jump down to verse 36-38, where Paul talks about a man and "his virgin." Some have said these verses are about a man's virgin daughter, others say it's about a man who is betrothed to a virgin, but not yet married. Verse 38 can be read either way (compare the NASB and the RSV for example). Consider that in verse 36 we have a question about the man "behaving improperly" towards the virgin. If we dig into the Greek roots for the word translated as "behaving improperly" we see it can mean "indecent." We also read about "need" in verse 36, and the man's self control in verse 37. All of these show that the issue is the man's self control over his own sexuality, and this would mean the verses are about a man who has chosen a wife, but has not yet married. Again, the only solution offered for sexual needs is marriage. Clearly Paul did not think it was acceptable to have sex, any kind of sex, just because a couple was engaged.

Logic says ...

Still, how do we draw a Godly line about what we can and can not do with a man or woman to whom we are not married? Read that question again - "to whom we are not married." If a married man, rubbed on the crotch of a woman's jeans other than his wife, would it be sin? Is it likely the wife would say "It's okay, it's not sex"? And if the wife performed oral sex on some man other than her husband, would he be wrong to be upset because "it's not sex?" Clearly these examples are cases of sexual sin! If it's sexual sin for a married person to do these things with another, then how can it not be sexual, or not be sin, for two single people to do these things? Why would it be alright to do these things with anyone we feel close to while we are single, but not after we marry?

Science says ...

Sex clouds our ability to make intelligent, rational decisions. The idea that necking, petting, and oral sex are not "really sex" can also be dispelled by looking at the biology of sex. Sexual interaction has profound effects on our bodies and minds. Sexual arousal causes our bodies to increase production of pheromones (think air borne hormones) from the upper lip, the underarms, and the genitals in both men and women, and the navel and aureole (the area around the nipple) in women. These pheromones are so powerful that 20 minutes of exposure to a man's pheromones can alter a woman's menstrual cycle. Exposure to sexual pheromones effects how we think and feel about the person we are with, causing us to bond with them. In marriage this sex induced bonding is a good thing, but outside of marriage it can be a very bad thing. Sex, including sexual contact far short of intercourse, clouds our ability to make intelligent, rational decisions about the person we are being sexual with. Sexual contact causes us to feel closer to the person we are sexual with, and this can and does result in marriages that are doomed to fail. It is better and wiser to make life long decisions about marriage without sex making it impossible to see and think clearly.

Real live experience says ...

Setting all of that above aside for a moment, the best reason we give for a single person to say away from anything even remotely sexual is because we have seen the results of sexual contact before marriage.

Each new partner leaves more marks on our sexuality. Our sexuality is like a white board - but we write on it with permanent markers. All of the sexual messages we get from our culture make marks on that white board, but because of how God created us the things we experience while highly aroused make larger marks, and the things we experience along with orgasm make the very largest of marks. Again, this is a good thing in marriage - what we do with our spouse gets written down and becomes a part of what we want, expect, and enjoy. But what if we have sexual contact with several individuals before we marry? The first person we are with leaves a lot of marks on us, and we want and expect sex to be however it was with them. Each new partner leaves more marks on us. Soon our white board is unreadable, and our sexual expectations and desires are a mess.
What if the person you marry can't do that "special thing" a former partner did? What if your spouse can't do something you like as well as the last person you were sexual with? What if you have come to enjoy and be aroused by the way a certain partner's body part looked or felt, and your spouse does not look or feel this way? What if the man or woman you marry finds something you have come to enjoy and want to be gross? Or what if they "need" something that you don't like because of a bad experience with another person?

What if you wait until you are sure you are with the one you are going to marry? This avoids some of the problems, but not all of them. Unmarried couples don't have the same regular contact and opportunities that married couples have, and this means their sex life will not be the same as it will be when the do marry. There is the problem of habituation - becoming so used to doing something a certain way that you can't do it any other way. As an extreme example, one couple we've talked with engaged in "dry humping" to mutual orgasm before marriage. When they did marry they found very little enjoyment in being naked together, and both of them found it difficult to be aroused or orgasm during intercourse. The had become so used to the only kind of sex they knew that intercourse was difficult and not enjoyable.

But the dangers of sexual contact before marriage with the one we marry go far beyond setting up patterns. Talk to 100 women who "messed around" before marriage a year after the wedding and at least 95% will say they wish they had not done it. In theory these women should be able to repent and go on, but in practice it usually results in guilt, resentment, and sexual difficulties. Couples married for many years often trace long term sexual problems to the fact that they did not wait till after the wedding to become sexual.

**Women who felt coerced say ...**

Premarital sex cause guilt, resentment, and marital sexual problems for women. We think a major part of this is that most women really don't want to be sexual before they marry. Sure, their bodies are pushing them for it, and they may get some pleasure out of it (although many do not), but most of them know deep down inside that it's just not right. So why are so many "good Christian girls" so easily persuaded to go at least "part way"? Because they don't think they have a choice. These young women have learned that many of their brothers in Christ will not continue to date a girl who does not "put out." There are exceptions, but the sad reality is that many men who say they follow Jesus want and expect to be taken to climax by a woman they are "serious" about. The perception is that a woman has very little chance of getting married is she does not give out some free samples. If the choice is "let him feel me up" or "stay home every Friday and Saturday night," you can see why a young lady might allow something she does not want to do. If the choice is "take care of him with my hand" or "still be single at thirty" you can see why a woman might do something she does not want to do.

There is a second problem that goes hand in hand with this. Because she is doing something she does not want to do, the young lady is likely to feel she cannot say no to anything. So she not only does what she feels is wrong as a single woman, she also does things she finds distasteful - things she would not want to do even if she were married. This creates a great deal of resentment in the woman, and this resentment will be vented on her husband after she marries. And once she is married, the woman may decide to stop doing things she just does not like. This leads to resentment in the husband, who feels like he has been the victim of "bait and switch."

**Don't believe what the world says ...**

Because she is doing what she knows is wrong, a woman may also do what she does not like. We know it's difficult for teens and young adults to not be sexual. Most will have to deal with a full blown adult sex drive for more than a decade before they marry. It seems that "everyone is doing it" and it seems that if you don't do it now you will miss the best sex of your life. Let's dispel the myth that sex is for the young. We talk to others our age, 40-something, who agree that it is still getting better every year. We have also talked to a 70-something semi-retired pastor who says he and his wife are still going strong ... almost nightly! Please don't think you have to start having sex now because the best sexual years of your life are passing you by - it just is not so! You have decades of sexual pleasure ahead of you IF you don't mess it up by jumping the gun.

**Paul (not that one) says ...**

One thing that I, Paul, have leaned to do when seeking information from anyone from a doctor to a mechanic, is to ask the person I'm talking to what they would do if they were in my position. So in closing let me to tell you what my understanding and experience would have me do if I were single. I would not "French kiss" a woman until she was my
wife. I'm not saying it's sinful to French kiss outside of marriage, but I know that the way I was created means this activity results in strong sexual arousal, a great deal of temptation, and a bonding that is unwise outside of marriage. The first time I kissed a woman on the lips would be when she said "yes" to my proposal of marriage. I would make a point of never being alone enough to have sex with any woman I liked. Once I knew for sure that God wanted me to marry a woman, there would be a very short engagement.

Premarital sex is a gamble, and the odds are stacked against you. We see it this way: you have two sex lives, the one before you marry and the one after you marry. Everything you do in your premarital sex life will have an impact on your married sex life - and the impact is never positive. It's a gamble, and the odds are stacked against you. Sex in marriage can be a wonderful thing, don't destroy it before you even get to try it. We have never had a couple tell us they are sorry they waited, and have had some tell us how glad they are to have waited. On the other hand we have heard over and over from couples who wish they had been completely inexperienced on their wedding night. What sex play before marriage can get you is nothing compared to what it can cost you. It's like having a million dollar trust fund you can't touch until you marry - and agreeing to trade it all for a thousand dollars right now.


Why Wait?
Lori

To singles ...

... what you are doing now will effect your married sexuality, either for good or bad. What you do or don't do can make the difference between a wonderful, happy marriage and a marriage with regrets and problems.

A little groundwork ...

God is very cool. He's worth getting to know. He is love. He is truth. He is holy. He's a lot of great stuff. He's also the source for real wisdom and when He talks, He's worth listening to.

God inspired people to write the stuff that became our Bible. His character shows through those writings and His commands show us a bit of His heart and wisdom. When God asks us to do something or not do something, it's because there's truth and wisdom in it. And given that God is love and wants to bless us, there are usually good reasons for His direction, blessings for following His direction, and harm that follows when you don't follow His direction.

When I read the scriptures I hear God telling us to save sex for the committed covenant relationship of marriage. He calls anything we do sexually with people other than our spouse ~ sexual sin. I think most of us know that, but sex feels so good that we tend to want to fudge the rules.

Now for the rough stuff (in no particular order) ...

Premarital sex seems to do damage to someone's ability to trust their future spouse. I haven't figured this out entirely, but I've seen it too many times to dismiss. There is a sense of being used. Even if they both wanted it, there always seems to be a sense of regret and a sense of shame and hurt that they weren't important enough to wait for.

Premarital sex brings on the guilt. Whether you want to make it about cultural moralities or legitimate guilt for breaking God's commands, guilt is a common problem that creates a wedge of blame and shame between spouses.

Premarital sex with other partners creates a variety of sexual experience. Some may see this as a plus but in real life it's not. Your spouse may not do things the way a past lover did and then you have frustration and dissatisfaction. You have sexual memories that pop up at inopportune times. There can be jealousy over past relationships or fears over
comparisons to past lovers. You don't need to be an experienced lover to please your spouse. You can learn to be a great lover after marriage. Think of it as on the job training. ;)

Premarital sex opens the door to disease. I'm sure we've all heard this spiel and we tend to get glassy eyed because we've heard it so often ... but, y'all this is serious stuff. Do a Google search on STDs. I'm telling you there is some scary stuff out there. You are taking serious risks with your health, your reproductive health (you want to have kids someday?), and even your life.

Premarital sex opens the door to greater heartbreak. I know many of you feel you are in love with "the one." You want the real truth? They are not "the one" until you say "I do." There are any number of things that can happen between making love because you are going to get married anyway and walking down the aisle. If you give yourself to the one you love and then break up before the "I do" you will have a broken heart and will have given yourself to someone that you will never marry. How's that sound?

Premarital sex is not like marital sex. No kidding. There is a certain "naughtiness" and excitement about premarital sex. That "naughtiness" backfires after marriage. People tend to back away from it to have "good married sex." The problem is that they've already done everything and it's already been labeled "naughty." Talk about frustration. It feels like bait and switch and can take some real unlearning to make sexual things ok for marriage. If you wait for marriage that sexual excitement becomes a part of married sex instead of being the "naughty stuff" you did before marriage."

You lose the specialness of first sex on your wedding night. When you have sex before marriage there is nothing really special to look forward to after marriage. It's like opening all your Christmas presents a week before Christmas and when Christmas rolls around there is a real let down because there are no presents to open.

And then there are the kids. Now don't be shocked. When you have sex ....... drumroll ....... you can produce a child! A living breathing human being that doesn't have anything to say about the circumstances of its birth. I'd like to think that every child deserves the best possible chance at having a good life and that means being born into a home with a mom and dad who will love and want that child. Premarital sex can mean a child born with a shadow over it's head. Did Mom and Dad marry because of me? And, of course, not all unmarried parents choose to get married and the child has to deal with the deep pain of rejection from a parent and often the financial and emotional lack in a one parent household. A child conceived can also put pressure on the mother to abort. Thinking about it causes guilt and shame, and doing it produces profound guilt, shame, and ongoing grief. You have to live with the knowledge that there is a little one who never had the chance to play with mud and chase fireflies. You'll wonder what they would have looked like and what they would have grown up to be. Please don't go there.

Premarital sex makes sex less important than God designed it to be. Sex is the unique union between a man and woman that makes them one. God designed that to happen after you have exchanged vows before friends and family and made it plain that you are a couple for life. Anything less, is a hollow sham of what God designed it to be.

Now for the good stuff ...

When you wait to have sex in marriage, you'll feel respected and honored. You won't have to deal with guilt or shame. You won't have to worry about sexual comparisons or disease. You won't have to worry about being used and left (you are committed for life). You will be starting a wonderful adventure together. You will have something special to share and you have a life time to learn to please each other. Children born will have a fighting chance at a good life with loving parents and you will have the satisfaction of pleasing a loving God by following His directions and commands.

Sounds good to me.

One more thing ...

What is sex? I think anything that results in orgasm would qualify. I personally think that anything that causes significant arousal needs to wait for marriage too. That kind of play leads too easily to sex and would fall into the "if I do this and we don't marry, I will feel used and defrauded" category. Biologically speaking anything that causes arousal releases bonding chemicals in your bloodstream. How bonded do you want to be before you say "I do"?
I hope I've given you something to think about. I'm not just some uptight old lady trying to ruin your fun. I'm someone who has listened to the pain and anguish of too many married folk who played around before marriage and got burned. I'd love to spare you from that grief by warning you and giving you a few reasons to wait.

I know it will make you unpopular in some ways if you say no to sex before marriage. I know you won't get some dates and you may even lose a current boyfriend/girlfriend. Some folks may tease you and some may even get down right rude. I guess it comes down to what is really important to you and what you want for your life. I'm hoping that you think it's important enough to make those hard choices, to find those friends who won't laugh at your choices, and eventually find that spouse who will love you for those choices.


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Keeping Sexually Pure

Tom & Catherine

From Tom:

One of the most important things a Christian couple can do is to stay sexually pure for each other, for themselves, and for God. However, there isn't a lot of practical information out there on what can be done to make sure you don't go too far. Temptation can be really strong, because, after all, the person you're engaged to is the person you plan to have sex with for the rest of your lives. Most engaged couples spend a lot of time kissing and holding on to each other, and so it would be easy to move just a few steps farther and get into trouble. It's often difficult to keep your thoughts and actions pure, but there is hope. Here are a few things I've discovered in the 10 months I've been engaged, and the time I spent dating before that.

Spending time worshipping God together is one of the best things you can do with your time.

1) Keep your focus on God. It is God who gave you your fiance(e), and God who commanded you keep yourselves pure. It is also God who should be first and foremost in your life. There are a few ways to do this:

- Start a Bible study together. Not only will this help you remember to stay sexually pure, but it will help you build your relationships with God and with each other.

- Pray together. You can do this any time you eat together, or at the start of a Bible study, or at any time you feel it's appropriate. It helps to do this regularly. You can pray silently or out loud or any combination of the two, as long as you get into the habit of standing together before God. Make sure to pray specifically for your fiance(e), that (s)he would be able to stay pure, both in mind and in body.

- Attend church together. If you come from different backgrounds, this will help ease the transition and make it easier to decide which church to attend after you're married. Spending time worshipping God together is one of the best things you can do with your time. And, it gives you extra motivation to remain pure.

2) Always be prepared to stop. If you start to feel like maybe you can't control yourself, or if you see signs your significant other is having trouble, stop. Pull back from whatever kissing or other activity you're doing, and clearly state that you think you need to stop before you go too far. Be ready to do this yourself, and be ready to back off if your fiance(e) asks you to. I generally recommend that if you have to stop, move a little ways apart, and don't do anything more than holding hands until you've had a chance to cool off a little bit and talk to each other about what was getting you into trouble, and maybe set a rule to keep it from happening again (which brings us to...)

Anything covered by a modest bathing suit or a modest pair of shorts is off limits.

3) Lay down ground rules. Don't be afraid to modify them if you find they're inadequate, but be very careful modifying them if they seem too restrictive. When you make changes to your rules, it's good to make additions when you realize they're needed, but it's not good to remove any rules until you've had the chance to think through the consequences, talk it out, and sleep on it. Here are the rules my fiancee and I use:

- on her: anything covered by a modest bathing suit or a modest pair of shorts is off limits. Back and shoulder massages are OK, but kissing should be limited to the neck and above.
-on him: anything covered by a modest pair of shorts is off limits. Kissing should be limited to the neck and above. She should be able to rest her head or hands on your chest, but because the male chest is quite sensitive to caresses, she should be very careful.

-for both: if you find you're getting really aroused from some activity, place limits on it. If you feel uncomfortable with the way you're being touched, gently move their hand away and ask that they be more careful (if a problem persists, break off the encounter entirely.) Don't be shy asking if your fiance(e) feels comfortable, and if you can't figure out where to rest your hand, don't be shy asking for help placing it somewhere safe (my arm happens to be the right length that, when she leans against me a certain way, no matter how I bend my elbow I'd end up resting my hand somewhere I shouldn't. Usually she's able to shift her position just a little and guide my hand somewhere safe.)

Finally, "DON'T" try to push your limits. I hate to use the old cliche, but it really is playing with fire.

If you're going to have the house to yourselves for a while, get out of the house. 4) Limit your own privacy. I know it's great to spend time together in private, but make sure there are people nearby. I always like to know her parents are in the next room and could walk past at any moment, since it adds extra motivation for being careful. If you're going to have the house to yourselves for a while, get out of the house. Spend time in the park, or at a restaurant, or in the McDonald's playplace if you can get away with it. If you're going to be in a bedroom for "anything", leave the door wide open, and scatter some papers or books across the bed so they'd get in the way of inappropriate activities. Make sure your private time is never so private that you feel you don't have to be careful.

5) Plan activities together. If you don't have any plans, you're likely to spend the vast majority of your time kissing and caressing each other. Too much time doing this will leave you in an extremely aroused state, and so you place yourselves at risk of going too far. Instead of spending all of your time like this, do other things together. A few suggestions: Go for a walk in the park, watch a movie (make sure it's appropriate), look for constellations, play some mini-golf, do a puzzle, play Monopoly, have a nerf/water fight (no white T-shirts), help either set of parents around the house (they'll appreciate it), go to a concert, help each other with schoolwork or job-related tasks, or just talk. There are so many ways you can spend your time together while showing each other how deep your love is, and most of these ways don't involve kissing.

6) Stay awake and alert. You tend to do stupider stuff when you're tired or otherwise out of it. Don't drink, do drugs, or take any medications that you know will compromise your ability to think clearly. If one of you has to drive home after you finish your time together, that usually helps, because it means you'll plan to be awake enough to do so. If you start to feel tired and it's late, go to sleep. If you start to feel tired in the middle of the day, go take a nap. Men, if she needs a nap, let her fall asleep in your arms while you sit on the couch (note: this requires a lot of trust. If she's not comfortable with it, don't push it.) Remember it's your responsibility to treat her with respect whether she's awake or asleep. Finally, for both of you, learn to recognize when your fiance(e) is getting tired, and when that time comes, say "good night" and go back to your respective homes.

Men should avoid spending their time looking at scantily-clad members of the opposite sex. 7) Keep your mind pure. Men are very visual, and so should avoid spending their time looking at scantily-clad members of the opposite sex. Women are a lot more responsive to stories, and so should keep away from romance novels. Both should avoid any situations that will make them think about sex (you know yourself, and what gets you into trouble, better than I do), and both should be willing to break a date if their thoughts are such that they think they'll get into trouble.

Following these rules, plus any others you find appropriate, will be a good start toward maintaining purity in your relationship. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but I believe it's a good basis for any couple to begin their walk together until marriage. May God bless you in your relationship.

Why Wait for Sex?
A Look at the Lies We Face

by Alice Fryling

History teaches us that people believe what they want to hear. Lies can sound so true when people are starving for truth. Even whole societies will feast on their promises. The Inquisition was based on the lie that some people could force other people to change their religious beliefs. American colonists believed the lie that people of one race had the right to own, buy and sell people of another race. More recently, hundreds of thousands of people believed Hitler's lie that the Jewish race should be eradicated. Most of us can hardly imagine that anyone could have believed these lies. And yet we swallow other lies all the time.

Our society is starving for intimacy. And many of the lies we believe in our culture have to do with our hunger for relationship. We want acceptance, loving relationships and deep intimacy, and yet we believe the lie that sex will satisfy our hunger. It's true that we are profoundly sexual beings, but it's time to examine some of the lies we feast on: the lie that premarital sex is one of our unalienable rights, the lie that sexual intercourse is the route to intimacy, and the lie that premarital abstinence is obsolete at best and repressive at worst. These are all lies.

We have bought into these lies because we are a starving people. We are people who long to be loved, touched and understood in a world of declining family ties and epidemic dysfunction. Our desires are certainly not new; they are as old as humanity. The difference in our world today is that people are trying to fulfill these longings in strange ways: through machines (TV's, CD players, and computers), through sports, material possessions, institutions and sex. Especially through sex. "Try it just once and you'll be fulfilled." "Go for variety and you won't be bored." "A life without sex is a life without belonging." Sexual experience has become a personal right, a need to be met and a norm to be accepted.

The tragedy of all this is that people are dying of emotional starvation, and they are looking for food in the wrong places. I would like to identify seven lies that our society is making about sex. The truth is that sex outside of marriage is not all it's cracked up to be. There is no pot of gold at the end of that rainbow.

**Lie #1: Sex creates intimacy.** Genital sex is an expression of intimacy, not the means to intimacy. True intimacy springs from verbal and emotional communion. True intimacy is built on a commitment to honesty, love and freedom. True intimacy is not primarily a sexual encounter. Intimacy, in fact, has almost nothing to do with our sex organs. A prostitute may expose her body, but her relationships are hardly intimate.

Premarital sexual intercourse may actually hinder intimacy. Donald Joy writes that indulging in sexual intercourse prematurely short-circuits the emotional bonding process. He cites one study of 100,000 women that links early sexual experience with dissatisfaction in their present marriages, unhappiness with the level of sexual intimacy and a prevalence of low self-esteem (Christianity Today, October 3, 1986).

**Lie #2: Starting sex early in a relationship will help you get to know one another and become better partners later.** Sexual intercourse and extensive physical exploration early in a relationship do not reflect sex at its best. Of course there is sensuous pleasure for those who engage in premarital sexual experiences, but they are missing out on the best route to marital happiness. Sex is an art that is learned best in the safe environment of marriage. I met with one student whose disappointment with her sexual encounters prompted her to overcome great embarrassment and ask me point blank: "Is sex in marriage as bad as it is outside of marriage?" She had arrived at the end of the rainbow, looking for the promised pot of gold, and she had found only disillusionment.

When unrestrained physical intimacy dominates a relationship, other parts of that relationship suffer. In healthy marriages, sex takes its natural place beside the intellectual, emotional and practical aspects of life. Married couples spend less time in bed than they do in conversation, in problem solving, and in emotional communion. The lie that premarital sex prepares you for marriage denies the fact that sexual happiness grows only through years of intimate relationship. The height of sexual pleasure, psychologists tell us, usually comes after ten to twenty years of marriage.

Good sex begins in the head. It depends on intimate knowledge of your partner. The Bible uses the words "to know" to describe sexual intercourse: "Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived . . ." (Genesis 4:1, NRSV). This choice of words elevates human sexuality from mere animal sex where availability is the main requirement to a full, intimate expression of love and commitment.
Lie #3: Casual sex without long-term commitments is both fun and freeing. Those who settle for short-term sexual relationships are settling for second-best sex. Journalist George Leonard observed that "casual recreational sex is hardly a feast-not even a good hearty sandwich. It is a diet of fast food served in plastic containers. Life's feast is available only to those who are willing and able to engage life on a deeply personal level, giving all, holding back nothing." (Quoted by Joyce Huggett in Dating, Sex & Friendship, InterVarsity Press, p. 82.) For a woman, particularly, sex can reveal hidden fears and lack of trust. Good sex—which can be a healing agent over time—requires trust, trust which grows best in the context of the life-long commitment of marriage.

Lie #4: If you don't express your sexuality freely, you must be repressed, sick or prudish. This can be a very intimidating lie, but the facts are that premature sex is bad for your emotional, physical and cultural health. The February 1991 issue of the journal Pediatrics reported that researchers at Indiana University found that sexually active teenagers are more likely to be prone to alcohol abuse and illegal drugs, and are more likely to have trouble in school. They reported that sexually active girls were more likely to be depressed, have low self esteem, feel lonely or attempt suicide.

Premarital sex may be bad for the emotional health of your future marriage. It lays the groundwork for comparisons, suspicions, and mistrust. "Am I as attractive (or as sexually stimulating) as his last partner?" "If she didn't wait for me before we were married, why do I think she will settle for only me now?" "If someone better comes along, will I be left in the dust?"

Premarital sex is also bad for your physical health. Sexually transmitted diseases have received abundant attention from the press in recent years. Equal time has not been given to the opinion held by many medical experts that extra-marital abstinence is without a doubt the best way to avoid these diseases.

Sexual promiscuity is even bad for the health of our civilization. One study of more than eighty societies ranging in development from ancient to primitive to more modern revealed "an unvarying correlation between the degree of sexual restraints and the rate of social progress. Cultures that were more sexually permissive displayed less cultural energy, creativity, intellectual development and individualism, and a slower general cultural ascent . . ." (Reo Christenson, Christianity Today, February 19, 1982). Why, then, do we--as individuals and as a society--trade our energy, creativity, and intellectual development for momentary sexual pleasure? Because we have believed a lie.

Lie #5: Sex is freedom. Premarital sex is hardly an expression of freedom. Young people who become sexually active in response to peer pressure to be sophisticated and independent are actually becoming victims of current public opinion. No one is really free who engages in any activity in order to impress the majority.

Lie #6: Surely God understands that this is the twentieth century! How can what society says is okay be wrong? Scripture is clear that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage is sin. Even if we had no other evidence, God's word makes it clear that intercourse outside of marriage is not only outside our best interests, but it is also wrong. In his seventh commandment to the Israelites, God said "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Jesus was even more inclusive when he described the evil within men's hearts, including "sexual immorality" (Mark 7:21). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "flee from sexual immorality" (see 1 Corinthians 6:18-19), and to the Ephesians he said that there must not be among them even a "hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4).

I do not believe that God gave these rules because he is a spoil-sport. Quite the contrary. Because God created us and because he loves us more than we can ever know, he has told us how to have the best, most satisfying sexual experiences: in marriage. That's where sex is fun! Premarital abstinence and marital faithfulness is not a denial of my rights or my pleasures. It is choosing to experience sex in the healthiest, happiest context.

Lie #7: Why wait? How can you know for sure that waiting is best? Maybe sex isn't worth the wait. Maybe it's best to take the opportunities you have now. Obedience to God's commands includes trusting him to know what's best for us—even if we don't fully grasp his reasons. The choices we make in our sexual behavior require faith in truths we may not understand. God required the Israelites to obey dozens of laws, many of which were good for their health even though they didn't know why. Look at one example in Leviticus 15:2, 9-10: "When any man has a bodily discharge, the discharge is unclean. . . . Everything the man sits on while riding will be unclean." Thousands of years ago, no one had heard of germs and micro-organisms that carry disease. If some young man had complained about God's
unfairness in not letting him ride the same horse as his friend who had the discharge, could he have understood if God had explained venereal disease to him in scientific detail? Not likely. Likewise, there are spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological reasons why God has limited sexual intercourse to the marriage bed. Some of those reasons are beyond our understanding. We simply must believe that God knows what is best for us.

When we live within the confines of God's limits, we live by faith in a loving God. Sexual purity is, in the final analysis, an expression of our confidence in God's goodness, an indication of our trust in Jesus. "You are my friends," Jesus said, "if you do what I command" (John 15:14). "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Living by faith means applying this definition of faith to the situation at hand. We exercise faith and obedience, not because of what we know, but because of the person we love, Jesus himself. The truth that sex is best within the context of marriage cannot be proven ahead of time. But we can learn from those who have already made their choices. I asked my friend Liz, a psychotherapist, "How often do you see clients who wish they had not explored their sexuality so much before marriage?" "Oh, very often," she answered. Then I asked, "And how often do you have clients who wish they had gone further in physical intimacy before marriage?" Her eyes widened, and she looked at me with surprise as she answered emphatically, "Never!" This is one of life's great faith issues.

If you decide to wait, it will take great courage and strength. If you decide not to wait, you will never know what you missed. You cannot have it both ways. No one can prove that premarital abstinence works. I believe that medical, psychological, and sociological evidence strongly supports the position that sex outside of marriage is not good for us. But in the final analysis, it is an issue of faith. For Christian men and women at the end of the twentieth century, the choices we make in our sexual behavior may be one of the main ways God calls us to believe. Do we dare to be different? Do we dare to believe the truth of God's Word even though it contradicts most of the lies surrounding us? I believe that God is calling us to this kind of radical faith.

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Experiencing God's Grace: One Woman's Story

There is no sin so offensive to a woman's body, soul and mind as sexual sin. A decision I made about sex more than twenty years ago has had difficult and serious consequences. Perhaps I was ripe for what happened. I was frequently uprooted from friends, relatives and safe environments by our frequent moves as a family. I felt isolated from a busy, preoccupied mother and an absent father who travelled a lot. I don't remember being lavished with love from either of them.

The decision was mine, however, to have intercourse as a teen. Looking to boyfriends as a source of love and security gave me what my family didn't: identity, belonging and security.

My husband says sin happens in increments. This is especially true with sexual sin. I didn't wake up one day and say, "This is it-I want to have intercourse." Instead, I gave in slowly to my boyfriend, over a period of a year and in small steps. It wasn't long before it dawned on me that I had given so much that preserving my virginity didn't really matter anymore.

It took months, perhaps years, to fully realize what I had done. Shame slowly crept in, robbing me of joy. I found myself active in my church, with young women looking to me as a role model, and yet my past sins haunted me through embarrassing and painful memories. As I grew in my faith, I became more and more disappointed that I had
not been stronger in those early years. I also realized with great sadness that I could no longer give my future husband (whoever he would be) the gift of my virginity.

For ten years after that early relationship ended, I was haunted by the weight of my sin. But then my healing process started through sharing with women friends, praying, and praying some more. I felt God's forgiveness as counseling, reading, studying Scripture and healing prayer became significant stages of that process. But it wasn't easy. It was long, twisted and painful.

One experience was particularly helpful. At one prayer meeting some women were praying for me. My feet felt heavy, as if encased in cement. I described the sensation and began sharing my past sexual experiences. As I received their love and assurances of forgiveness, the cement broke into pieces, and soon I felt as if my feet were in dancing shoes! I felt free of the shame and bondage of my past, and I felt God's love and forgiveness deep within my bones. That prayer meeting was just one of many steps in the healing process for me.

Years later, I began dating the man I eventually married. After we had been dating for many months, he honored me by asking if he could kiss me - a gift to me that I'll always treasure. He was the first man whose standards for our physical relationship were good and upright. The discoveries on our honeymoon night were a delight. His virginity was a gift to me beyond words. And my restoration freed me to share myself with him. Anonymous

Scripture and Waiting

What does God think about sexual activity before marriage? For Christians, behavior in a dating relationship isn't driven by passion or the advice of friends. The bottom line is what Jesus thinks about it. The "mini" Bible studies which follow will help you to determine, confirm or change your own convictions about God's perspective on sexual activity in dating. You might want to use these questions as the basis for a Bible study with the person you're dating or with your small group.

1. Jesus said concerning Satan that "there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). What are some of the values or beliefs accepted by those around you which are contrary to the specific truths of Scripture? What spiritual lies cause you the biggest struggles in your own life? How do you personally respond to the prevalent belief that premarital intercourse is a right, a need or an expectation? How does your conviction in this area affect your behavior?

2. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3). Why do you suppose Paul connected sexual immorality, impurity and greed in this command to the Ephesians? What are some "hints" of immorality that you have seen in your own life? Does it challenge you, discourage you or give you hope to think that your behavior reflects (for better or worse) that you are one of God's "holy people"?

3. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure" (Hebrews 13:4). What does "pure" mean as it is used here in relationship to sex? Why do you think God says that marriage is to be honored? Why is purity important? In what ways would you like God to help you stay pure (or be restored to purity) before marriage? In what ways do you hope that God is helping your future spouse to stay pure?

4. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Define faith in your own words from the perspective offered by this verse. In what ways is sexual behavior in a dating relationship a matter of faith? In what ways do you wish you had more faith in your life right now? How do you think God might be wanting to give you more faith in the area of your sexuality? Alice Fryling
Wait Training: Living with Unfulfilled Desires

Does God’s abundant forgiveness mean that we can go ahead and sin, knowing that God is gracious? Paul addressed this question in his letter to the Romans. “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2). Paul goes on to give an excellent theological basis for righteous living. But some very honest people get stuck in verse 2. “Wait a minute!” they say. “Would to God my sexual desires were dead! Then I wouldn't be having the problems I'm facing in waiting until marriage to see my desires fulfilled. What am I supposed to do in the meantime?”

While Paul goes on to his theological treatise, let me offer eight suggestions for maintaining healthy relationships in spite of strong sexual desires.

1. **Admit your strong sexual hunger.** Ignoring it won't make it go away. God created us as sexual beings. It was his idea that we experience sexual stimulation. If stimulation becomes a seemingly unbearable temptation, look at your lifestyle to see if you can make changes which will help you cope more effectively with your desires. Maybe there are some situations you can avoid. (Alcoholics avoid cocktail parties. Likewise, there's nothing wrong with avoiding too much sexual stimulation.) Beyond avoiding sexually stimulating situations, do something for others which will help you take the focus off yourself. For many people, vigorous exercise helps calm their strong sexual desires. Be honest with yourself, and remember, "no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

2. **Accept the fact that complete satisfaction has to wait.** A dating relationship is not intended to bring full sexual satisfaction. If that's your goal, you will be disappointed. The potential for complete sexual satisfaction is only found in marital communion and sexual intercourse. The sacrifice you make in the name of Christian obedience is that you will give up that physical fulfillment before marriage, but the pleasure you will receive will be like opening a beautiful gift on just the right occasion.

3. **Value your future mate now.** Keep your future marriage partner in mind as you determine your behavior in your current relationship. Set your goal. What do you want to save for your husband or wife? The answer can lead to some very practical decisions: You may decide not to lie down close beside anyone else. You should save all forms of undressing. Some even decide to save their passionate kisses for their future marriage partners. When you're with your date, ask yourself, "If I marry someone else, will I be sorry about what I am doing right now?"

4. **Set your standards high.** Christians walk along a steep cliff regarding sexual behavior. The idea is not to see how close to the edge you can get without falling off, but to see how carefully you can walk to avoid potential danger. Be honest about the activities which are in your danger zone. If an activity (studying together in your bedroom, seeing "R" rated movies, passionate kissing) is too hot for you to handle, then it's off limits for you, no matter what anyone else says. Try to determine beforehand what these activities are. Be ready and able to verbalize your own standards and guidelines. Don't wait until 1 a.m. when you arrive home with your date to figure out what you believe is appropriate. Fight the battle on a level that you can win.

5. **Guard your commitments carefully.** Never make a commitment on a physical level which you have not already made on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. One of the lies of our society is that a romantic relationship needs sexual intercourse in order to be truly intimate. In fact, intercourse merely reflects intimacy; it does not create it. Intimacy is the result of the bonding of hearts, the meeting of minds and the communion of souls. Too much physical involvement actually detracts from this kind of intimacy. Anyone can kiss, but not everyone can carry on an intimate conversation.

6. **Help each other stay true.** If there is a difference of opinion about what is appropriate behavior in a relationship, the couple should go with the one with the more tender conscience. It's damaging to the relationship when one person is pressured to move too fast into physical intimacy. That tender conscience may be God's gift to the couple to help keep their relationship healthy.

7. **Keep in mind that men and women respond differently to sexual stimulation.** One statistic says that a man is stimulated four times more quickly and more intensely than a woman. A man's sexual arousal is apt to come early in the relationship. This may or may not be followed by emotional bonding. A woman, on the other hand, is more apt to bond emotionally first, and then experience sexual arousal. If a woman doesn't remember this, she may assume that
a man's sexual advances imply an emotional bonding which is not necessarily there. If a man doesn't keep this in mind, he may make advances which miscommunicate his level of commitment. In marriage, these differences in sexual timing keep the relationship well-rounded and growing, but it can be confusing to young couples starting to date.

Another difference in stimulation is that men are generally more stimulated by sight and women by touch. Again, this is a creative difference in marriage, but it can wreak havoc for a single person. I remember a single male staff member who was distracted on campus by the skimpy tee shirts and short shorts worn by the women students. If he was distracted in his daily ministry, I can imagine the pressure would be pretty high on a date! Likewise, I've talked with single women who feel deceived by male friends who have communicated with touch more affection than they really feel in the relationship. Just as a woman needs to be loving toward her male companion in what she wears and how she carries herself, likewise a man needs to be loving in the way he chooses to touch or not touch a woman.

8. Don't let feelings guide your sexual behavior. Feelings are a wonderful gift from God, but they are risky. If ever there is a time to apply Jeremiah 17:9, it is now: "The heart is deceitful above all things." This is an area of life where we desperately need to follow Paul's instructions: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is" (Romans 12:2). We can "renew our minds" in terms of our sexual behavior by studying Scripture, journaling about our convictions, praying alone and with a friend, and by daily reminding ourselves that God's will for us is good, that he loves us completely, and that he desires only the very best for us, in sex and in life.

Alice Fryling (Back)

For Those Who Didn't Wait

If you've already chosen to have sex before marriage, you probably believed one of three things: 1) if we are truly in love, this is okay; 2) if I want it so badly, it must be natural and therefore okay; or 3) if God doesn't take away my desire, it must be okay. These are three of the biggest lies about sex that Satan feeds to Christians. And, remember, "When he lies, he Speaks his native language" (John 8:44).

To make matters worse, if you discover that you've caved in to a lie and then admit your sin, Satan may hit you with another set of lies: "You are damaged goods. No one will ever love you. God will never be able to accept you or use you again in his Kingdom." One friend told me that she had a harder time dealing with the shame of her premarital sexual experience than with the guilt. She said that as she grew in her faith, she experienced more awareness of God's forgiveness of her guilt. But she continued to feel deep shame about her actions.

Whether Satan uses lies, unwarranted guilt or shame, his intent is that we write ourselves off because of our sin. But this is utterly contrary to Scripture. If our sins destroyed us completely, there would not be hope for any of us.

Paul wrote to the Romans that God hates many sins: sexual impurity, idolatry, murder, evil doing and a host of other terrible sins. But notice what else Paul includes in his list: gossip, boastfulness, disobedience to parents, and deceit (Romans 1:24-32). What a mixed list! Who can claim innocence? The bottom line is that all of us are utterly dependent upon his grace, whatever the expression of our own sinfulness. None of us can stand before God except on the basis of a "righteousness that is by faith from first to last" (Romans 1:17).

But some of us need more reassurance than this verse gives. "Being forgiven is one thing, but am I so tainted by my sin that purpose and meaning are gone from my life?" If this is your question, take a look at the account of Jesus' ancestors in Matthew 1:1-16. There are only four women listed in this passage, yet from prostitution to adultery, these women were affected by the evil in their worlds. This is no oversight on God's part. I think he intentionally chose women to whom we can relate. In this list are women and men who are like us. Some sinned sexually. Others were deeply affected by the moral climate around them. But these were the people in the lineage of Jesus. God not only fully forgives, he also fully redeems. He's using sinful people, like you and me, to build his Kingdom. Alice Fryling (Back)

The Best Sex
by Anne Morse

I usually start my day with a cup of hot cocoa and *The Washington Post*. Last month while reading Carolyn Hax's weekly advice column, "For the Under-30 Crowd," I was stunned by her advice to a college student. He was disturbed because his fiancée had slept with several men before meeting the man of her dreams.

"Before we were together," the man wrote, "my fiancée had sex with three other guys ... I have a really hard time dealing with this past. I know it's something I need to work through, and I talk to her about it ... [but] most of all I just want to forget."

"In case you're wondering, we're sophomores in college, recently engaged, tying the knot after graduation. I have no previous sexual experience, not even so much as a kiss. I was saving myself for the one I wanted to marry (although I did have sex with my fiancée before we were engaged)."

He signed the letter "Wanting to Forget."

Well, "Wanting to Forget" isn't likely to forget Carolyn Hax's tart reply:

Since "wanting to forget" is just another way of saying "not wanting to deal with it," which is just another way of saying "seriously screwed-up marriage," you need to think about this more, not less. But not the sex, the engagement — specifically your mind-bending rush to secure it. What exactly are you afraid of? Dating? Disease? Virginia Woolf?

... But you didn't question your engagement, you asked for professional help. So I got you some free. Melissa Berler, a licensed clinical social worker based in Chicago, suggests you "reframe" your fiancée's hay-rolling as an advantage for you. "She chose you ... despite her past sexual, emotional and intellectual experiences. Her choice is a compliment, and actually it is a more informed choice than yours."

Saving yourself for marriage is often just a cover, "hiding fears of one's sexual capabilities as well of emotional and sexual intimacy."

Just how bad IS Hax's advice? Let me count the ways.

First, she tells "Wanting to Forget" to "reframe" his fiancée's "hay-rolling" as an advantage, because in choosing him, she's made a "more informed choice." But if you take this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, it follows that the more people you roll in the hay with, the better informed you are. Does Hax have any limits in mind? Five partners? Ten? Would fifty be enough? But how many of us really want our future spouses THAT well informed?

Second, if people take Hax's advice, they may become better informed about things they never anticipated — such as venereal disease. Every year, three million young people are infected with one of 60-odd sexually transmittable diseases (STDs). According to the *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, "because of the high incidence of STDs among adolescents, they are more likely to have sexual partners with an STD than are adults, even if the adolescent has had only one partner." Left untreated, these diseases can lead to severe health problems, including infertility.

There's more grim news for women: Females who have slept with three or more people over a lifetime are 15 times more likely to get cervical cancer.

That's a pretty steep price to pay for being "well-informed."

Third, Hax claims that "saving yourself for marriage is often just a cover" for people who are really afraid of intimacy, both sexual and emotional.
Far from being afraid of intimacy, most unmarried Christians I know would LOVE to engage in sex — but they know it's wrong. Only those who have not scratched every sexual itch know how difficult it is to remain pure in an impure culture.

If people really want to make well-informed choices about sex and marriage, they ought to listen to the real experts: People like Mike McManus, a Christian newspaper columnist and author of Marriage Savers: Helping Your Friends and Family Avoid Divorce. McManus, with his wife Harriet, has counseled hundreds of engaged couples. A few of the facts he's collected about sex and marriage:

- Couples who engage in sex before marriage are far more likely to divorce. According to a study by the National Survey of Family Growth, women who have the kind of sexual experience Hax advocates — the premarital kind — increase their odds of divorce by about 60 percent. It is, McManus notes, "secular evidence for St. Paul's injunction, "flee fornication."
- The more promiscuous you are before marriage, the more likely you are to commit adultery AFTER marriage. (The sexually self-indulgent have had no practice in self-restraint.)
- Couples who live together before marriage are unlikely to marry. A Columbia University study found that "only 26 percent of women surveyed and a scant 19 percent of men" married the person they were living with. Another study showed that even if they do marry, couples who begin their marriages through cohabitation are almost twice as likely to divorce within 10 years compared to all first marriages: 57 percent to 80 percent.
- People who have premarital sex run the chance of marrying someone who's not right for them. Why? Because sexual intimacy can be emotionally blinding; it makes couples feel closer than they really are. "Real love," McManus says, "can stand the test of time without physical intimacy. The sexually active lose objectivity."
- Couples who sleep together outside of marriage "often suffer guilt and fear due to the dangers of STDs or unwanted pregnancy. Guilt can lead to frigidity and impotence."

Disease, divorce, guilt, adultery, impotence — who'd want to miss out on those? And we haven't even talked about pregnancy, another frequent, unpleasant side effect of premarital sex. The vast majority of the million and a half abortions performed each year are sought by singles. And among these women who do give birth, their babies don't thrive the way they should — even if the mother is well educated. According to columnist Maggie Gallagher, "a baby born to a college-educated single mother is more likely to die than a baby born to a married high school dropout." Gallagher says that's because "unwed mothers, doing double or triple duty with little or no relief, are simply less likely to be consistently effective parents than married mothers, and their children show the effects."

The evidence is out there: It's better by far to remain chaste prior to marriage. So why are people like Hax ignoring the evidence? Even if she's unaware of the empirical evidence, surely she's seen enough anecdotal evidence — friends with STDs, "crisis" pregnancies and broken relationships — to know that non-marital sex is a dodgy proposition at best.

Roberto Rivera, a cultural critic and Fellow at the Wilberforce Forum in Reston, Virginia, explains it this way: "We live," he says, "in an age in which people say, 'facts, schmacts.' To previous generations, the fact that sex outside of marriage might lead to disease and sterility would give them pause. But today's culture teaches that there is no one truth out there that governs everything, so they feel free to pick and choose AMONG truths."

For example, Rivera says, "we have statistical facts that say, 'if you engage in ready-and-rampant sexual behavior before marriage, ultimately, it's harmful.' On the other hand, there's this competing fact: 'I enjoy sex.'" What really miffs America's secular elites, Rivera believes, "is that these two truths are mutually exclusive: You can't enjoy the benefits of chaste behavior without being chaste." People like Hax get angry at people like "Wanting to Forget" because, Rivera maintains, they're reminders that some things are true whether we want them to be or not. "They know that a biblical view of sexuality brings physical and emotional health benefits. But the last thing they want to admit is that the way they choose to live has this big downside."

The consequences are hidden by cultural trend setters who pretend that sexual downsides don't exist. Take the recent hit film Pleasantville. The plot revolves around a teenage brother and sister whose TV remote control magically transports them into the peaceful, black-and-white world of a Fifties TV sitcom. The sister promptly seduces the captain of the high school basketball team, and before long, the once-innocent teenagers of Pleasantville are all engaging in sex. Soon, their dull, black-and-white world turns to glorious color. The director's message is obvious: Sexual promiscuity will lead to freedom and happiness.
The *Pleasantville* view of the universe could benefit from a little perspective. In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis reminds us that "for the wise men of old, the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality. And the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline and virtue." But for modern men and women, Lewis notes, "the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of man" — in this case, the wish to engage in non-marital sex without consequence.

Ironically, it's people who marry as virgins and remain monogamous who actually have the best sex lives.

A few years ago the Family Research Council surveyed 1,100 people about their sexual satisfaction. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, FRC's William Mattox, Jr. took a look at the exciting results. The poll "found that 72 percent of all married 'traditionalists' (those who 'strongly' believe out of wedlock sex is wrong) report high sexual satisfaction. This is," Mattox said, "roughly 31 percentage points higher than the level registered by unmarried 'non-traditionalists' (those who have no or only some objection to sex outside of marriage) and 13 percentage points higher than that registered by married non-traditionalists."

It gets better. Mattox noted that the survey "found that strictly monogamous women experienced orgasm during sex more than twice as often as promiscuous women." He quoted National Institutes of Health researcher David Larson, who says that couples who don't sleep together before marriage and who are faithful during marriage "are more satisfied with their current sex life and also with their marriages compared to those who were involved sexually before marriage."

But what about "Wanting to Forget," who can't get those memories of his fiancée's former partners out of his mind? Given the evidence, he's right to be concerned about her sexual history. Mike McManus thinks it's good that this couple is planning to wait a couple more years before tying the knot, and he recommends that they stop having sex and continue to get to know one another in nonssexual ways. He also recommends that they take part in a premarital inventory program such as PREPARE (Premarital Personal and Relationship Evaluation), which identifies a relationship's strengths and weaknesses, and determines with about 80 percent accuracy which couples will divorce.

This premarital program includes having engaged couples work with older "mentor" couples who have been married for many years and who will help them work through problem areas — such as how to work through concerns about a fiancée's sexual history.

This is a godly approach to sex and marriage, and as McManus puts it, if you "play by God's rules, you're much more likely to have a lifelong marriage, which is a goal that almost everyone longs for."

McManus is right, and if "Wanting to Forget" is smart, he'll take his advice. People who wait till marriage to have sex are healthier, both physically and emotionally. Plus, they have a better sex life when they DO marry. Much, much better!

* * *

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, one of the best selling books in America was "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex, But Were Afraid To Ask." Today, there is nothing that anybody could possibly want to know about sex that Oprah, Geraldo, Howard Stern and Dr. Ruth have not already told them.

A recent survey commissioned by the Family Research Council contains a finding that is bound to surprise most Cosmo readers and MTV viewers: Sexual satisfaction is strongly and positively linked to marriage and traditional sexual ethics. That is, the people most apt to report that they are very satisfied with their current sex life are marrieds who "strongly" believe sex outside of marriage is wrong.

Roll over, Hugh Hefner. Tell Madonna the news.

FRC's poll data - from a nationwide random telephone sample of 1,100 people conducted by an independent Bethesda firm and analyzed by an American University psychologist - contribute to a growing body of research linking sexual satisfaction to marital harmony, fidelity and permanence.

The FRC poll found that 72 percent of all married "traditionalists" (those who "strongly" believe out-of-wedlock sex is wrong) report high sexual satisfaction. This is roughly 31 percentage points higher than the level registered by unmarried "non-traditionalists" (those who have no or only some objection to sex outside of marriage) and 13 percentage points higher than that registered by married non-traditionalists.

FRC's findings are consistent with the results of a major sex survey commissioned by Redbook magazine during the mid-1970s. That survey, which included responses from approximately 100,000 women, found that women who were sexually active at age 15 were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their current sex lives than those who refrained from early sexual involvement. It also found that strictly monogamous women experienced orgasm during sex more than twice as often as promiscuous women. And it found that highly religious women were less likely to engage in sex prior to marriage and more likely to describe their sex lives as "good" or "very good" than moderately- or non-religious women.

The FRC poll also found a correlation between sexual satisfaction and religious commitment, but our findings indicate that sexual satisfaction is influenced more by one's sexual ethics than by one's religious practice.

"Couples not involved before marriage and faithful during marriage are more satisfied with their current sex life and also with their marriages compared to those who were involved sexually before marriage," says David Larson, a senior researcher with the National Institutes of Health in a review of existing research.

Some might argue that the FRC survey results merely demonstrate that strict monogamists are "easier to please," that their limited sexual partners and rigid sexual boundaries make it difficult for them to aspire to anything better.

This sounds a bit like criticizing a contented rich man for not being greedy. But, in an ironic sense, the "easier to please" argument does have legitimacy: Objective measures of sexual responsiveness (such as frequency of orgasm) do show that strict monogamists are more easily - and more often - satisfied than other adults.

Interestingly, this greater responsiveness does not appear to be connected to any special lovemaking technique. Instead, Larson and his colleagues find that responsiveness and satisfaction are significantly affected by the relational context in which lovemaking takes place.

"Women are more likely to be orgasmic when they feel secure, loved and trusting that their man is around to stay," they write. "Marriage provides a foundation that increases the odds a woman will be able to risk a level of vulnerability that goes beyond the ability to participate in the act but enables her to 'let go' and experience orgasm."
Thus, sexual satisfaction is often a by-product of, and a contributor to, marital satisfaction. This is especially true for women, who are less apt to "compartmentalize" sexual relations. But it is also true for men. Indeed, a 1993 study in the Journal of Sex Research found that during bouts of unemployment, unhappily married men are more likely to experience sexual dysfunction than are happily married men.

A 1982 study of married and cohabiting couples by two UCLA psychologists shows that sexual satisfaction is also positively affected by "the absence of sexual anxiety." Thus, part of the reason why monogamous married couples have an easier time achieving greater intimacy is because they enjoy greater sexual freedom. They are free from the guilt associated with violating one's sexual standards - a factor found to hinder sexual satisfaction among unmarried college students.

Moreover, monogamous married couples are largely free from many of the fears often associated with out-of-wedlock sexuality, including fear of AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases, fear of rejection, fear of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, fear of comparison to other partners, fear of exposure, fear of failure, fear of embarrassment and fear of losing one's partner to another lover.

Sadly, the messages we send to young people about sexuality rarely speak of marriage. They rarely convey to young people what the research now tells us to be true: that marital permanence and fidelity are a good thing. These ideals promote trust and communication and cooperation and negotiation and sensitivity to others' needs and protection from diseases such as AIDS. They foster satisfaction and harmony in marriage - and thus marital satisfaction. And they facilitate a very satisfying sex life.

This last point should not be minimized, for both sides in the current teen sex debate have a tendency to frame their appeal (be it abstinence or "safe sex") in largely negative terms. It is certainly appropriate to offer young people stern warnings about the daunting consequences of early sexual activity. But it is unrealistic to expect a fear-based message to be enough. They lack maturity and tend to have a mistaken belief in their own immortality.

Yet, even if an entirely negative message were successful in deterring unwanted sexual behavior, it would be a mistake to rely solely on such an appeal. Teens, after all, tend to be poor risk-assessors and magnificent risk-ignorers. Moreover, sex is very different from smoking or drug use. Whereas the latter are bad ideas at any time and under any circumstances - hence, the legitimacy of a "just say no" message - sex is a very beautiful and wonderful thing at the right time and under the right circumstances.

It is probably too much to ask of policymakers to lead an effort to revive conventional sexual ethics. But they should be willing to follow other cultural forces interested in affirming abstinence. And they should be willing to refrain from contributing to the moral confusion of our day by distributing condoms to teenagers.

The role of offering leadership in these matters is best left to parents, voluntary youth organizations, and (perhaps especially) religious institutions. Clearly, as the FRC poll shows, it is not necessary for one to be religious in order to see the wisdom of sexual purity. But it is no small thing that the same God who puts "Thou shalt not commit adultery" on his Top 10 List also instructs men to "rejoice in the wife of your youth . . . let her breasts satisfy you at all times," and includes in the Song of Songs a romantic passage which begins, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth . . . ."

Like a beautifully wrapped package under a Christmas tree, the gift of sexuality is mysterious. Enticing. A celebratory expression of the love we share with another special person. However difficult it may be to resist the temptation to open that package prematurely, the research suggests that there are tremendous rewards for patience and self-control. Apparently good sex comes to those who wait. If we are really as interested in sexual gratification as we say we are, maybe it's time to reconnect sex with marriage.

William Mattox is vice president for policy at the Family Research Council.