

Conversation starters about  
honoring God, ourselves and others

—— Brian Dietz



# milestones

**RAISING A JESUS LOVING GENERATION**

## Reclaiming God's Good Gift of Sex

### *Introduction*

Sex is a good gift that our loving heavenly Father blessed us with. Sadly, this gift has been misused and abused in many ways and teens face seemingly insurmountable obstacles in trying to navigate our overly sexualized culture. And as much as I want to help the next generation handle their sexuality well, my real goal for the teenage years is to help students own their faith and come to know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ! Sex is one of many areas where Satan likes to deceive us and draw us away from building our identity around Jesus.

It is a big one though. So we are wise to dive in and offer wisdom, support, boundaries and encouragement for our beloved teens. While naming and wrestling with our positions on the many complexities of sexuality is part of the journey, what I hope this resource can also offer is a posture. My hope is that our community, both at home and at church, can create a space where teens experience Christ and His people as friends they can turn to for support, grace, wisdom, forgiveness and life no matter where they are or what they do.

## So how can we start this conversation?

# A few suggestions

1

Make it part of many spiritual conversations. One of my favorite parenting books, *The Sticky Faith Guide to Parenting* by Kara Powell, is filled with numerous ideas for how to make faith conversations and interactions a regular part of your family. Allow talking about sex to be one of the various ways you seek to nurture faith in your family. If we simplify following Jesus down to going to church and not having sex or doing drugs, we get a very small picture of God. This small God will not give teens what they need for all the big issues of this world. And while we are thrilled to partner with you in creating spaces for these conversations in our small groups at church, we get a fraction of the time that you as parents have each year (about 40 hours at church vs. 3000 hours at home). Our goal is to provide additional voices and support through small group leaders and to help students learn how to have biblically grounded, Christ-centered conversations with one another. But you as parents have daily access to really guide and lead the way here. So let's team up and work well together on this!

2

Embrace the opportunity to grow personally and relationally. Regardless of past struggles or the way you were brought up, know that God did create sex and it is designed to be a good gift. Receive forgiveness and renew your mind (Romans 12:2, 1 John 1:8-9, Philippians 4:8-9) with regard to any past baggage that causes you to think sex is dirty, bad or meant to be so private it can't be discussed. What if talking to your kids about sex could actually help redeem it for you? What if talking to your kids about sex could actually deepen your relationship with them? Both are very much possible! Pray, talk with your spouse, seek counsel from others and believe that God would love to bless you and your kids through these conversations.

3

Commit to reclaiming sex as a good gift that can honor God and others. To counter the many cultural forces that seek to mar the beauty of sex we do need to make a concerted effort to reclaim its goodness. This will require more than just "the talk". An ongoing conversation is needed. And this conversation need not focus primarily on the dangers, though those must be addressed. Rather, view your conversations about sex as another opportunity to teach your kids about how to honor God and honor others.



# How to use this guide

I've been seeking to help families reclaim sex as God's good gift since 2002 when I first started as a youth pastor. The following are many of the key questions that have come up, primarily from teens we've worked with, followed by biblical and practical suggestions and some relevant, fictional case studies. You can use this material in any way you like and I certainly suggest you carefully consider the age, maturity and temperament of your child in determining which questions to ask at any given time and how long to spend on it. But here's the general approach I have in mind.

## Get comfortable

Set up a comfortable, enjoyable space, likely involving food or maybe a fun experience or setting that your teen would enjoy.

## Involve both parents

While it's typical to only have this be a father/son or mother/daughter conversation, we found it rich and helpful to have both parents present for these conversations. If that is possible, even for just some of it, give it a whirl so they know both parents are comfortable with and available for support in this area just like every other area of their life. Or if you are a single parent or aren't able to include a spouse for other reasons, consider inviting someone of the opposite sex to offer their perspective, insight and support along the way as well.

## Plan on multiple conversation blocks

There are three sections - Honoring God, Honoring Yourself and Honoring Others, built around some of my favorite verses on relating with God and others. Depending on attention span and time available consider doing at most one section at a time over a nice meal or during a fun experience that allows you space to talk. Your pace will likely depend on how new this topic is and how mature your child is.

## Prepare yourself

To make this conversation as comfortable as possible for your teen (and you) you will be wise to get yourself ready to use sexual language without cringing or convulsing. It may seem silly, but being ready to talk freely, without stumbling over the appropriate terms, will go a long way in reclaiming the beauty of sex. And if/when you or your teen do get uncomfortable, it's also okay to name that and even laugh along the way. To get warmed up and go ahead and practice with these words, saying each one 5 times as you remember that these are beautiful parts of God's creation, not dirty words to be avoided: Penis, Vagina, Ejaculation, Breasts, Clitoris, Orgasm.

# How to use this guide

## Be the first or at least the best

With the premise that we're talking about a beautiful and good gift, I suggest that being the first one to tell them about all of these topics is not just a chore, it's a great opportunity. The alternative is they learn it from friends and the internet and even if that's where they first learn a few things, you can do WAY better! So decide when exactly is the best time to go through all this - definitely make reviewing the content part of your prep as well and decide if there are things you want to hold off on.

But my vision was to be the first one to explore all these topics with my kids so they didn't get as thrown off by confusing feelings, misinformation or strong temptations without having a solid biblical foundation and clear relational connection to get support. Thus, this resource is intended to be started and completed during the middle school years in most cases.

## Keep it moving

Let your kids be the guide and remember that Jesus asked WAY more questions than he just gave answers. So don't lecture and try hard not to bore your kids.

## Ask, listen, read, discuss and share personally

At the beginning of each section there's a short intro that we would read to set things up. Then we liked to start by asking the question and allowing them to share what they know, if anything. It was a helpful gauge in seeing where they were and made it more of a conversation from the start. Then we would read the response or even have them read the response themselves. After that we would invite them to share what they agreed/disagreed with and whether they had additional questions - there are certainly many terms that aren't explicitly defined so be sure to check that they know what everything means. We would also share personally about any of the ways we wrestled, struggled or found blessings through that aspect of God's good gift.

# How to use this guide

## Apply

At the end of each section is a newly added component - case studies. The thinking is to use these to help your kids imagine themselves in different situations where the material covered would apply to them or their friends. But you might also find that starting with these scenarios could set up an interest in diving in to the questions/responses so you could try them first.

## Focus on relationship, not rules

I've found that far too many resources and conferences elevate sexual purity to such a high level that teens either become overly self-righteous if they "stay pure" or they become overly guilt-ridden if they "mess up". Either scenario has the potential to build up a works-based faith devoid of grace and actual relationship with God. I also find that it is easy to over-focus on not having sex before marriage to the point that teens don't know how to enjoy their sexuality and prepare well for when it is time to experience intercourse and all that sexual intimacy can be. Sex is a good gift, but despite what the culture and, at times, the church make it seem in taking it to opposite extremes, it is not the critical path to finding life and meaning; Christ is. So the goal is not to make sure they know all the rules! The goal is to help your teen grow relationally closer to you, to Jesus and learn how to enjoy healthy relationships with others as well. I'm hopeful this shorter resource can serve as a simple guide to get you going and cover many of the main topics you will want to address as you seek to reclaim God's good gift and build more of Christ's character into your kids.



# HONORING GOD

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19 - 20

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples 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 bodies.”

It's hard to believe or even fully understand how the Holy Spirit could be in us. But God loves us so much He came to earth as Jesus to be with us and He left His Spirit to even be in us when we commit to follow Him. Our bodies were actually created to be places where God could dwell and could then bless others through us. So sex is like anything else we do in this life in that it provides us an opportunity to honor God and demonstrate our love for Him. God created us to love relationships. In the same way that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all in relationship with each other, we are created to want connection with others as well. When we love others well in the ways that God has designed, those connections can be rich and filled with joy. God has given us His Spirit to help guide us in having a good relationship with Him that will lead to creating good relationships with others. So how can we honor God with our bodies? This first section focuses on what the Bible specifically teaches about enjoying sex as God designed.



# HONORING GOD

## WHY DID GOD CREATE SEX?

There are many wonderful reasons God gave sex as a blessing (Genesis 1:27-31). It enables humans to create and nurture life and love (aka create and care for babies/children) just like God because we are his image bearers (the pinnacle of God's creation who most fully represent and reflect who God is). Sex is also designed to demonstrate physically how two become one through marriage. It is meant to bond a husband and wife together physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually (Matthew 19:4-6). The two become one flesh (Genesis 2:23-25) and the husband and wife are to love and respect one another as a representation of Christ's love for the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). And sex is also pleasurable. It feels good and it is a fun way to enjoy our body and the body of our spouse. Song of Solomon is a book in the Bible that talks all about the joys, blessings and pleasures of a loving, sexual, marriage relationship.



# HONORING GOD

## WHY IS SEX DESIGNED FOR MARRIAGE?

Sex is a powerful gift that is designed to unite two people for their whole lives. Sex involves two people uniting their bodies as one, and this is intended to be a physical expression of the spiritual commitment we make in marriage. God created marriage to bring two people together in a special way that involves teaming up (the Bible calls it two becoming one - Genesis 2:23-25) to love and serve each other and the world. Having sex with just that one special person is how we show our commitment to them and to God's good plan. God cautions us to flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18, 1 Thes. 4:3) which includes sex before marriage or anything else that doesn't respect the power that sex can have. Sex is like heat. Heat can burn our dinner or destroy our house if used improperly. But when used well, it can create a delicious feast and keep us warm all winter. Despite the way that movies make it seem, sex is too powerful to engage in before marriage without it causing our hearts and relationships pain. But when we save that power for marriage, it is an awesome way that God has given us to connect with our spouse and show our commitment to them. Song of Songs, a book in the Bible that is all about enjoying great sex, gives wise advice not to arouse or awaken love until the time is right (Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5, 8:4). God has designed just the right time for all of us to be marriage.



# HONORING GOD

## SHOULD I DATE ONLY CHRISTIANS?

To answer this question you should probably ask how important is Jesus to you? If Jesus is just a guy you talk about at church sometimes, then you might be missing out on how much more He has to offer you through a deeper relationship with Him. But if you're committed to honoring Jesus and serving Him with your whole life, why would you want to date someone who doesn't share that goal? The Bible gives wise advice on this one, teaching that being unequally yoked (marrying someone who is not a Christian) is not God's best design for us (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). So there is wisdom in only dating people you would be potentially willing to marry. While some people have had success with "missionary dating", it's often the exception and not the rule. Far too often people deceive themselves into thinking the other person will change later, but that doesn't end up happening. Either the unbeliever pulls down the believer during the dating relationship or once the unbeliever gets married, they typically turn back to their usual patterns of not pursuing Christ. Marrying someone who shares your faith is not only about obeying God, but it is also wise. Dating and marriage can be hard and both partners will need to know all about God's love and grace to help each other build a strong relationship that stands up against challenges.



# HONORING GOD

HOW SHOULD I UNDERSTAND  
MY IDENTITY AS A YOUNG  
MAN OR WOMAN?

It is quite common during our journey from childhood to adulthood to wonder about what makes a man a man and a woman a woman. Biologically there are external attributes and genetic coding that gives us physical definitions. At the same time, understanding how God made us uniquely wonderful (Psalm 139:14) takes time (even your parents are still learning more about themselves all the time) and can feel confusing at points.

Some people have started using the word queer to describe the feeling that we don't quite fit into the boxes and stereotypes our culture has created. But isn't that how ALL of us feel at some points? God designed each of us with care and creativity so finding simple categories for what a guy is "supposed" to be like or a girl is "supposed" to do will always fall short. Of course we don't fit into culturally mandated little boxes! That is what we all have in common. And during adolescence, we may feel that more than ever before.



# HONORING GOD

HOW SHOULD I UNDERSTAND  
MY IDENTITY AS A YOUNG  
MAN OR WOMAN?

Each body can take on a variety of shapes (short, tall, big, small, etc.) during any season of life. During adolescence we have the added craziness of all sorts of shifts in our bodies (voice changes, zits and various developments in our reproductive organs). Both genders experience emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness, jealousy, disgust and joy (Inside Out was such a cool movie!). During adolescence our emotions can feel extra crazy at times as we experience all the chemical, emotional and physical changes during this season. And ultimately, we see each gender having gifts that lead them into a full range of professions and roles such as teachers, engineers, pastors and parents. Figuring out your ultimate meaning and purpose can be quite confusing during the teenage years as you are trying to understand what makes you, you. But be assured, God truly has knit us together in wonderful and amazing ways (Psalm 139:13-14) and He has some pretty awesome plans in mind for you (Matt. 28:18-20).



# HONORING GOD

WHAT IS SEXUALITY  
AND HOW DOES THAT  
AFFECT MY IDENTITY?

As you're sorting through the incredible ways God designed you in particular, it is also important to know that God made all of us as sexual beings. That means part of God's design includes desires and feelings that draw us to want deeper connections physically, emotionally and spiritually with others.

Most people are attracted to someone of the opposite sex, but a small percentage of our population also experiences same-sex attraction. No one can fully explain why, but there are men who are attracted to men, women who are attracted to women and some people who are attracted to both genders. Another challenge is that some people don't feel like the biological sex they were born with aligns with their present identity. This can all be very confusing to sort through. But the place we, as Christians, always look to when trying to figure out who we are and how to live is the Bible.

While all of us get confused at times regarding who we are, the Bible offers helpful, foundational starting points regarding our identity. First, we know that God made us and delights in us (Psalm 139:14). Second, we know that God wants to save us and have an eternal relationship with us (John 3:16). And third, we know that God created us male and female (Gen. 1:27) to be different from one another in special and wonderful ways, which tells us that gender matters.



# HONORING GOD

WHAT IS SEXUALITY  
AND HOW DOES THAT  
AFFECT MY IDENTITY?

God made us male and female on purpose because there is something about us being different in complementary ways that helps us reflect God better. Our three-in-one God is relationship in His very nature. He made gender so fundamental to our essence that we can't reproduce without both genders involved - both are essential, but neither one is enough to truly reflect the nature of God.

So the Bible explains in various places (Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) that men having sex with men or women having sex with women is not what God intended.

In every area of our lives, including with money, power, food, possessions and relationships, we will all have feelings and desires that tempt us to live differently from what the Bible teaches. Our feelings are an important part of who we are, but only one part of who we are. Feelings can be wonderful guides, but dangerous masters. Our calling as Christ-followers is to move beyond just feelings and live out our faith according to what God wants for us. As you experience any temptation in any aspect of your sexuality, know that you are not alone in that struggle and you can talk to a trusted Christian adult to get help and support.



# HONORING GOD

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO  
PEOPLE WHO DON'T SHARE OUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUALITY?

Gender and sexuality are really big topics in our culture lately. You may hear your friends talk about LGBT+ people, which refers to people who are same-sex attracted or question their gender. Everyone struggles with questions about their sexuality, particularly during adolescence, and that is more true than ever today when our culture is giving us so many confusing and contradictory messages. It's hard for many people to navigate these confusing waters, which is why it is such a hot topic recently.

In many other cultures, the church is the one safe place where LGBT+ people can come and be loved because everyone else is so against them. Sadly, in our culture some churches have treated LGBT+ people horribly and they don't feel safe there. But the rest of the culture, which is just as confused, has responded to their uncertainty by saying YES to EVERYTHING - no limits, no guidelines, no certainties. This seems to be loving, but it can also leave people asking important questions a little lost.



# HONORING GOD

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO  
PEOPLE WHO DON'T SHARE OUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF SEXUALITY?

In every area of our life, including how to manage money, relationships, our spiritual life, figure out our career or face the death of our dreams and loved ones, we all need guidance from others, wiser than we are, in order to avoid disastrous mistakes. The church has tried to do that, but since some churches have used shame and overly harsh rules to provide clearer boundaries, all churches are sometimes assumed to share that same awful approach. The truth is that giving people perspective, insight, and even boundaries can be helpful! We want this with our money, our schooling and our health - why not our sexuality? But the key is that it has to be an expression of our love, not of our fear.

We all struggle and sin, and we all need God's grace and truth (John 1:14). While we may not agree with people's beliefs on a variety of topics or choices on how they want to live, everyone is created by God (Gen. 1:27) and meant to be loved and welcomed by His people (Romans 15:7). So getting to know the stories of any person God brings into our lives and sharing the good news of God's grace and truth is always our calling as Christ-followers (Rom. 10:14-15). As a church we want to seek to love and support one another and others regardless of where they stand on this issue. Sexuality is such a complicated experience that all of us are going to need help navigating it in a life-giving and faithful way.



# HONORING GOD

## CASE STUDY #1

Luke and Jenna started dating their sophomore year of high school and are coming up on one year. As they approach their one year dating anniversary they've had a lot of friends ask and even tease them about whether they are going to have sex. They've heard at church that waiting until marriage is a good idea, but they're really attracted to each other and have gotten pretty close to having sex a few times already. If they feel like they really love each other and it feels right to them, why not go ahead and celebrate one year by having sex! If you were in this situation, how might you handle it?



# HONORING GOD

## CASE STUDY # 2

Mark and Lisa are really good friends as 8th graders and a lot of their other friends think they should start dating. Mark enjoys Lisa a lot, but Lisa isn't a Christian and Mark is pretty serious about his faith. Mark thinks dating Lisa would be a lot of fun and wonders if she might even become a Christian if they get even closer and she sees more of his faith. Lisa currently loves hanging out with Mark and has gone a couple times to youth group with him, but lets him know that the "Jesus stuff" isn't her thing. She's definitely fine with it being "his thing" and seems quite open to dating. How would you handle this if you were in this situation?



# HONORING GOD

## CASE STUDY #3

Lyla, a 13-year-old eighth grader, started noticing that she felt differently about her best friend, Kara, compared to her other friends. While her classmates talked about crushes on boys, Lyla found herself more drawn to girls and felt confused about what that meant. She began researching online and came across the term "lesbian," which seemed to fit her feelings, but she wasn't sure if she was ready to label herself. If Lyla shared this with you, what might you want to say to her?



# HONORING YOURSELF

PSALM 139:13-14 & MARK 12:31

“You made the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – how well I know it.”

“Love your neighbor, AS YOURSELF”

It is often hard for people to enjoy God’s good gift of sex because they struggle to believe how good God made them. God created us! He wasn’t having a bad day. He didn’t make a mistake. He knit each of us together and His works are wonderful! Do you know that? There will be days, weeks, maybe even years where you forget that truth. Some people will try to pretend like they are really great and be super arrogant as they put others down to help them feel better about their own feelings of falling short. Other people will be afraid of interacting with others and will think no one would even want to be their friend because they don’t like themselves. Surround yourself with people who remind you of God’s love for you regularly. Don’t buy the lies when people tell you there is something wrong with who you are. Yes, sin does damage us, but Christ can redeem us. And Christ coming to redeem and forgive us is the most powerful reminder of just how much God LOVES us! Can you then love yourself? Not because you get good grades or play a sport well or can draw or dance or act or make money or look really attractive. Can you love yourself, simply because God LOVES you! He delights in you. He wants to fill you with so much love that that love would then overflow to others. Learn to love yourself and you’ll be in a great position to go out and love others in amazing ways!

This next set of questions and responses focuses on aspects of how we need to love ourselves as we prepare to enter into relationships with the opposite sex.



# HONORING YOURSELF

WHEN SHOULD  
I DATE?

Okay, so back to that magical age, since you're probably still wondering. How about 16 as an age to start considering dating? You are able to drive which means you can actually go on a date without having your mom drive you. But more importantly, you've had some time to sort through high school and the various social and physiological challenges of adolescence. That age seems like a common point where students start learning to really know and love themselves in ways that they could make some good dating choices. But the key is not the age as much as it is about your faith and being ready to really love someone else out of the love you are receiving from God. And here's one other tip, dating shouldn't be something you just decide on your own. Ask lots of other people for wisdom and before you date anyone, definitely make sure they meet your parents! It may not seem cool at the beginning, but your parents know you well and their input will be so helpful in making the relationship better!



# HONORING YOURSELF

W H E N   S H O U L D  
I   D A T E ?

It would be so nice to have a magical age that when that birthday hits you are transformed into a Cinderella or Prince Charming (or maybe Hermione Granger or Luke Skywalker with Magical, Jedi dating skills would be cooler). But that birthday doesn't exist. Some studies suggest that the earlier you date the more likely you are to have sex before you are married (70% more likely if you start at 12 vs. 16). That makes sense because we all need time to really get to know ourselves well enough to be able to date well. Let's be honest, middle school dating is just awkward and way too stressful – a “long” relationship lasts, what, a month? But getting to know the opposite sex can be a great way to start getting to know yourself and what you would be looking for in a future relationship. So why not hang out in groups with the opposite sex. It is much less pressure, though it still can be challenging and you may even prefer to wait to do that for a while.



# HONORING YOURSELF

## WHAT IS MODESTY ALL ABOUT?

Modesty is a great way to let people know how confident you are in God's love. It is rather common in our culture to dress in ways that seek to impress people with the way we look. Dressing nicely in ways that demonstrate your beauty and handsomeness are great ways to show off God's amazing work in creating you. Dressing provocatively in ways that try to get people to want you sexually will likely cause you to lose sight of God's love. You may not even realize how the changes in your body might affect someone of the opposite sex and you're just dressing to fit in with others. But some things to think carefully about might be: overly short or tight clothing, low cut tops (girls) or no tops (guys) and anything that reveals your underwear. Adam and Eve got to walk around naked and they "felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25). I wonder if that will be how things are in heaven when sin and shame are no longer an issue! In the meantime, let's be thoughtful about why we dress the way we dress and consider ways to best value ourselves and honor others just like God does.



# HONORING YOURSELF

WHAT DO I LOOK FOR  
IN SOMEONE I'M  
DATING?

A lot of people start with wanting to date someone they think is “fine”, “hot”, “attractive”, etc. If that’s all it is, though, the relationship probably won’t last, or if it does, it probably won’t be very meaningful and healthy. So a second thing people look for is someone they have things in common with, like you both love under-water basket weaving. That gives you more to work with, for sure, but what if you find a person who is super gorgeous, loves all the same activities you love, but is a total jerk? That won't go well either. So how about starting with their faith. Not just someone who says they are Christian, which may just mean they show up at church for Christmas and Easter, sometimes. Look for someone who has a faith that affects their whole life. And pay attention especially to their character and how they treat others and you. It is so sad how many people date people who are awful to them, just because they want a boyfriend or girlfriend. You are amazingly and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and anyone who doesn't treat you that way isn't worth dating at all. But when you find someone who loves Jesus and shows it by how they treat you and others, then enjoying some things in common and being attracted to them physically can all work well together to make for a wonderful relationship.



# HONORING YOURSELF

WHAT DO I DO IF I AM  
ATTRACTED TO  
SOMEONE?

That is such a fun thing! Being attracted to someone of the opposite sex is awesome! As you experience those feelings, celebrate your hormones and thank God for creating the person and your desires that make you interested in them! Then go ahead and get to know the person and enjoy being with them. It is great that you enjoy their physical appearance and that you also might enjoy aspects of their personality – they are funny, smart, athletic, etc. Just remember that God knit together the innermost part of you and others too (Psalm 139:13). As noted above, to experience the fullness of another person, you’ll want to get to know more about their faith and their love for God. So don’t go around talking to your friends about how “hot” (or whatever other words you might use) people are. Instead, enjoy being attracted to some people and seek to get to know everyone both inside and out. Some people that the world considers really attractive are actually awful people that you would never want to date. And some people that the world only values for how they look or how they perform would love for someone to actually value them for who they are. You want people to know the real you, so make sure you get to know others for who they really are too.



# HONORING YOURSELF

IF I DON'T GET  
PHYSICAL WILL  
HE/SHE LEAVE ME?

Hey, this one does have a magical response. If someone you are in a relationship with demands that you have to get physical with them, run! Break up and don't look back. You are already loved by the God of the universe. If someone says you aren't loveable unless you get physical, that's a flat out lie. And if someone says they can't feel loved by you unless you get physical, they need to get to know God's love the way you do. But it won't help them at all to just get physical.

When you start dating someone it is wise to have a conversation early on about boundaries in your physical relationship. If you discover that your boundaries differ, that is a major red flag. Probably not if one person is okay with kissing and the other is not (assuming the person who is okay with it does not pressure the other person). But, for example, if a person you want to date wants to keep the door open to touching each other's private parts or being naked together, that is likely a danger flag. When that door is open it is likely to be entered at some point and stopping there is quite a challenge (like balancing with one leg on the edge of a cliff – yikes). Plus, consider this question, “Is a person who wants to get as close as possible to pre-marital sex fully committed to honoring God and others with their bodies?” This may sound too picky or conservative, but far too many people have gotten burned by negotiating boundaries too much. So talk about it early on and be sure to invite others to help you keep your boundaries.



# HONORING YOURSELF

HOW LONG SHOULD I  
DATE SOMEONE BEFORE  
I GET MARRIED?

This probably seems really far off, but it is not a bad question to ask now so you have something in mind later on. And this question definitely has a ton to do with how well you know and love yourself. It is really easy to get married because you only feel 50% loved and your hope is that your spouse can fill you up the rest of the way. Movies and cheesy Hallmark cards often use the line, “You complete me” when talking about a significant other. But God is the only one who can complete us. Marriage is best enjoyed when two people who are both whole in Christ come together rather than if two people come in looking for the other person to always fill them up.

So getting practical, let’s start with four seasons (one year) so you get a chance to see each other in all the various contexts a year brings. If you’re older and really know yourself well, a year might be enough. But the younger you are, the more likely it is that you’ll need more time since you’re maturing and still learning a lot about yourself and others. Love at first sight is another nice concept that movies make millions off of, but in real life, time is helpful because it allows you to get past infatuation and truly begin to see the other person clearly.



# HONORING YOURSELF

WHAT IF I MAKE A CHOICE  
THAT I KNOW/REALIZE IS  
WRONG?

Know that God still loves you and is always ready and waiting to restore your broken heart and refill you with His love! Your relationship with God is not simply based on what you do or don't do. It's not all about your performance. Even though it feels like so much of everything else in life is constantly being graded or judged, our faith is not like that. God's love for you goes back to when he created you wonderfully complex. He is saddened when we make choices that draw us away from His love, but His love is still there no matter how much or long we mess up. Making wise choices sexually is a great way to help you stay close and enjoy God's best for you, but so is avoiding gossip, not lying or stealing and not being greedy. In other words, there are many ways we can miss out on God's best for us. Sin is impossible for us to avoid completely and every sinful act will create a barrier in our relationships with God and others. But God is faithful. God is gracious. God is good. God restores! When we confess our sins, He can bring us back. Even if we stumble and seem to ruin sex in some way for ourselves, God loves to make things new again. It may take time and work on our part, but God is able. He can redeem anything!

So if you make a bad choice or even lots of them, run from whatever caused you to stumble, talk to a trusted, most likely older (parent or youth leader), follower of Christ and begin the journey of redemption. You can still love yourself, because God definitely still does.



# HONORING YOURSELF

WHAT IF SOMEONE  
HURTS ME SEXUALLY?

That's awful, sad and heartbreaking. Satan knows how good and powerful sex can be and, therefore, tries very hard to ruin it. Unhealthy relationships, trauma, abuse and rape are all ways that Satan's lies have made sex an ugly, dirty, disgusting and harmful thing for far too many people. If any of that has or does happen to you, you do not have to hide from God or others. Paul writes, "that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love." (Romans 8:38) God's heart breaks with yours over how His good gift has been turned into something awful and evil far too often. But God has shown his commitment to redeem, heal and restore our broken world through his son Jesus. So if someone has hurt you, even if you're not sure, talk to someone you trust and get help in drawing closer to God and others who can remind you of how dearly loved you are.



# HONORING YOURSELF

## CASE STUDY #1

James is in 8th grade and is noticing that a ton of his friends have girlfriends. He's not even sure how they get them, but it seems like he's missing something since he doesn't have one yet. His friend suggested that maybe he should start dressing a little differently and try lifting weights to attract more girls' attention. How would you advise James in this situation?



# HONORING YOURSELF

## CASE STUDY # 2

Jade is in 8th grade, dating a 9th grader who she can't believe is willing to go out with her. They've been on three dates and during the last one, he started getting physical in ways that didn't feel comfortable to Jade. On their next date, Jade tried to talk to him about some boundaries, but he told her that he needed to get to know her physically in order to really decide if he wanted to keep dating her. It seemed like he was saying if she didn't get physical with him, he would break up with her. What should Jade do?



# HONORING YOURSELF

## CASE STUDY #3

Alyssa messed up. She knew the guy she was dating wasn't a Christian and he didn't have the same boundaries as her, but things just kept progressing and after six months, they ended up having sex. Then a month later, he ended up breaking up with her and moving on to another girl. She was crushed. How did this happen? She had planned to wait to have sex until she got married, but now she can't go back. The break up was probably God's way of punishing her. But no one else knows, so maybe she can just keep it a secret. And maybe she can find another boyfriend to fill the gap she feels in her life from losing her last one. What do you think? What advice would you give to Alyssa?



# HONORING OTHERS

ROMANS 12:10

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

Selfishness will be a never-ending battle for us as we seek to love others the way Christ has loved us. Replacing selfishness with honor for others is a noble pursuit. Honoring others involves three key things:

1. Treating them as special
2. Doing more than what's expected
3. Having a good attitude

Sex, in our culture, is primarily presented as a selfish pursuit: a way for us to feel physical pleasure and relational comfort. But when we try to engage in sex selfishly, we steal the true joy that it is meant to offer. Sex is an opportunity to not only honor God by keeping His commands, but it is also an opportunity to honor others by serving and blessing them. So how can we flip things around?



# HONORING OTHERS

HOW SHOULD WE INTERACT  
WITH SOMEONE OF THE  
OPPOSITE SEX WE LIKE?

This is a big question. The foundational concept is certainly to honor one another, but what could that look like practically? Though we often tend to focus a lot on the physical aspects of sex, the emotional aspects are just as important to pay attention to. Our hearts can be a lot like glue, ready to quickly stick to a guy or girl and terribly painful to rip off. So giving what I call “special attention” to any guy or girl is something to be done very carefully. By special attention I mean things like flirting, giving gifts, one-on-one time together and certainly physical interaction. Sometimes it is just fun to flirt and get attention from lots of members of the opposite sex. But this could be quite hard on people who take the flirting seriously. Pointing one another to Christ first is the goal so for a guy or a girl to try to do things just to get attention for themselves can be quite selfish. Honoring someone of the opposite sex that you are interested in should center as much as possible on being a servant who seeks to encourage their faith. That may actually mean spending less time with them and being careful to let them have time with various other friends. And as you are getting to know each other, you may want to take your time in sharing personal things. Do fun activities together and in groups and slowly connect over time, not all at once.



# HONORING OTHERS

## HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

This is a super common and good question, but the question itself could be a problem if rooted in selfishness. Many times this question is about how much I can do for ME that will make ME happy without getting ME in trouble. But what if the question could be switched around. How can I best honor my girlfriend or boyfriend when it comes to our physical relationship? As we noted above, sex is powerful. In the same way that a small match needs to be handled wisely because it can lead to a huge forest fire, understanding the power of even just holding hands, hugging and kissing is important. So some people choose to wait a few months before holding hands to make that a special thing. Or if getting too physical is something a person struggles with, sometimes they might hold off on kissing at all until they get engaged. There's no exact prescription and you have to be honest with yourself and your significant other about what is healthy for you and them. Something to know, however, is that things like French kissing, petting/fondling genitals, removing clothes and laying down together are all part of foreplay. Foreplay is designed to help our bodies get ready to have sex so as you seek to honor God and others by saving sex for marriage here are four guidelines.

1. Tongue in (no French kissing)
2. Clothes on
3. Hands off (no petting)
4. Four on the floor (no lying down together).



# HONORING OTHERS

IS ORAL SEX, SEX?

Again let's consider the possible selfishness in this question. Some would argue for "technical virginity" if they only have oral sex. But the reality is there is not much difference physically between oral sex and intercourse and the emotional bonds are certainly still there. This is a form of sex that is designed to be enjoyed (if both partners agree to it) in marriage. Outside of marriage it can be used to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (some of which could still be contracted) or maintain technical virginity or for a quick sexual encounter. None of these things seem to have honoring one another as the primary goal. Don't be fooled by the idea of "technical virginity". Oral sex is something that will be best enjoyed in the context of a marriage covenant.



# HONORING OTHERS

WHAT SHOULD I DO  
ABOUT ALL THE PORN  
THAT IS OUT THERE?

This is a great question because learning to deal with pornography is very much about learning to honor God, others and ourselves. Pornography creates a false reality where sex is played out on a screen that creates a fantasy world that cannot be attained in reality. It is sex without relationship, which is not at all how God designed it to be enjoyed. Sadly, it is also highly addictive. Just like a drug, even one viewing of porn will cause you to desire more, most likely. Most pornography addicts, whose marriages and other relationships are deeply wounded or ruined later in life, report that they first started watching porn when they were as young as 10 or 11 years old. It starts as curiosity or even an accidental click or search online, but quickly progresses to more. And even if you don't become addicted, the power of pornography is so great that the images you see will stay with you and hinder your ability to enjoy the beauty of sex as God designed it. One of the best gifts we can give to all our future relationships and especially to a future spouse is to ruthlessly avoid pornography. Some good practices are:

1. No computers/phones in private rooms with doors closed.
2. Always go to homes where parents are around who will also monitor things carefully.
3. Have an adult who checks in regularly to make sure that "accidents" have not happened. If they do, go directly to a trusted adult for support.
4. Consider putting a filter on your devices to help keep you accountable.
5. Know that God can forgive and heal even the worst porn addiction so get help if you are struggling.



# HONORING OTHERS

IS SENDING OR ASKING  
FOR NUDES OKAY?

As opposed to pornography where you see total strangers naked, it might seem more personal to share or receive a nude picture from someone you know. And maybe you might think that just seeing a picture protects you from getting more directly involved sexually with that person. But despite how common it is becoming for people to share sexual pictures or talk about sex with people over text (the word for this is sexting) or social media, there is nothing helpful or healthy about it. First, regardless of whether you know the person or not, the picture still has the same addictive draw as all pornography does. It is still causing you to have a sexual experience with a picture, rather than the real person. But now it is even worse in some ways. Knowing the person means that when you do see them, your mind will be filled with pictures that make you lust for more sexually from them rather than just enjoy them as a whole person.



# HONORING OTHERS

IS SENDING OR ASKING  
FOR NUDES OKAY?

Second, sharing our private parts in any way with someone other than our husband or wife won't help you build a healthy relationship with that person and it will likely make it harder to connect with your future spouse someday. Our private parts are meant to be shared in the safety and love of marriage, not over WiFi with someone we probably won't even talk to after high school.

(Seriously, ask your parents how many people they still keep up with from middle school or even high school. For most people the number is super low and often is zero.) So save the gift of showing off your beautiful private parts to someone you are married to.

And third, you are definitely smarter than that. You know how easy it is for people to share whatever you send them with others. So be honest. If someone is asking for or sending you naked pictures, how trustworthy are they really? Maybe things are going great right now, but what happens if you break up, or they just get mad at you? Those pictures could be all over the school with just a few clicks! Yikes!



# HONORING OTHERS

## IS MASTURBATION WRONG?

Masturbation is a natural part of discovering and exploring our sexuality. It is common for guys and girls to masturbate, even as little kids, and certainly as hormones kick in and can make arousing yourself desirable and pleasurable. Enjoying our bodies as gifts from God that can one day be shared with someone else is a healthy part of adolescent sexuality. There are a couple things to pay attention to, though. First, masturbation can easily become an unhealthy way to cope with stress and anxiety. Self-soothing through sexual arousal feels good and may help you feel better physically without actually dealing with the emotional and even spiritual issues you're facing and need deeper help to address. Second, masturbation is often accompanied by sexual fantasy (i.e. lustfully thinking about the opposite sex). It can also be a key part of viewing pornography either as something that makes you want to get involved with porn, or as something that accompanies your porn addiction. Because it can become quite an addiction as well, it is wise to limit it. So don't freak out if you occasionally masturbate, and guys definitely don't worry about wet dreams - ask your parents if you're not sure what those are. But if it starts to become a habit, or you're just not sure what to think, talking to a trusted adult about any struggles you have with masturbation could be really helpful and is quite wise.



# HONORING OTHERS

WHAT AND HOW DO I  
AVOID GETTING AN  
STD OR STI

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) or infections (STI's) are rampant in our culture. They are transmitted primarily through sexual intercourse, but some can be transmitted without penetration. Teens used to simply fear pregnancy when they were sexually active, but now the reality is that sex before marriage can be deadly. At best STD's cause genital discomfort that can be dealt with through medication. At worst STD's can be incurable diseases you will pass on to your spouse, could cause infertility or could lead to death. Birth control does not guarantee protection. Abstinence (not having sex) is the only guaranteed protection. God isn't just being mean in telling us to wait for marriage to have sex. Along with all the other good things we've talked about, He is also protecting us and our future spouse from serious consequences that have developed as a result of people misusing and abusing sex.



# HONORING OTHERS

## WHAT IS SEX IN MARRIAGE LIKE?

Sex in marriage is a wonderful opportunity to honor God's good gift of getting to be fruitful and multiply (create babies), enjoy personal pleasure and offer love to your partner. That being said, the way sex looks in movies, on television shows and certainly through porn is not a very helpful depiction and can often set up unhealthy expectations. Sex is designed to be a literal explosion (orgasm) of the various forms of love that make up a marriage. Under the safe umbrella of your covenant love commitment and with the foundation of your friendship and affection for one another, sexual love can thrive and be a rich expression of the fullness of all your love for each other. But all of this love must be nurtured and developed. You won't be nearly as good at loving each other in your first year as you will be after 10, 20 and 30 years. So the whole idea of meeting someone in a bar and heading up to a hotel room minutes later for passionate sex is not about love, but rather just lust. Lust is a sin involving selfishly craving someone physically without really wanting to love them as a person. Lust can create a quick high, but will also leave our hearts damaged. True lovemaking, like any other skill, will take work, practice, getting back up after failing and much grace with yourself and each other to figure it out. But sex in the context of a loving marriage is rich, lasting and heart-filling!



# HONORING OTHERS

## WHAT IS SEX IN MARRIAGE LIKE?

Getting more practical, some couples struggle to even figure out sex early on - it might even take a few days or in some cases months to have sex for the first time. That is okay, sex is not just about being selfish, it is about serving each other and creating a safe place for both partners to be naked and not ashamed.

Once things get going, sex is something newlyweds often like to enjoy quite frequently, maybe daily for a while, though everyone is different. As I said, sex early on may not be the best you'll ever have, but it is fun to start practicing and getting better at it.

As couples get busy with work or with having kids it can be hard to keep up with your sexual intimacy, but it is worth making it a priority to maintain your connection with your spouse. So you may need to schedule time for it. But beyond just scheduling certain times, you'll also want to keep romance alive through things like kissing, hugging, encouraging notes, planning dates and getting away for weekends together.

There are many wonderful ways to enjoy sex and, when the time is right. You can start preparing now as you learn to honor God, yourself and others well. But despite what culture often suggests, there is more to life than sex! The real goal is to enjoy a deep, lasting relationship with Christ that will guide and shape connections with others and give you a vision for how to live out God's many joy-filled purposes for your life!



# HONORING OTHERS

## CASE STUDY #1

Joe loves to flirt and he is pretty good at it. He had four girls with crushes on him, but he just recently decided to choose one and asked her to be his girlfriend. She said yes, of course. And now he's so excited to share his whole life with her. Marissa, his new girlfriend loves how open he is and she decides to also share all about her struggles with loneliness and depression. Joe assures her that he will be such a good boyfriend that she'll no longer have anything to be depressed about. She loves that, but then when she comes to school a week later and lets Joe know that her depression is still a struggle, he seems to be really bummed out that he isn't enough to make her better. How might you coach Joe and Marissa in this relationship - from start to finish?



# HONORING OTHERS

## CASE STUDY # 2

Steve is hooked on pornography. He was bored one day in 6th grade and was just jumping around on the internet and found something he immediately knew wasn't good, but he was so curious and found it so enticing he kept going back. Now in 8th grade, he's addicted and he doesn't know how to stop. His parents caught him once and he promised he wouldn't do it again, but that only lasted a few days. Then he found ways to get around their blocks and he's not even sure he wants to stop, though he knows it's getting worse and it does make him feel lousy after he does it. What could Steve have done after that first time, and what might he do now to deal with his addiction?



# HONORING OTHERS

## CASE STUDY #3

Selene met a boy at District Chorus in 9th grade from another school and they hit it right off. The bummer is they live about two hours from each other so the only thing they can do is text and FaceTime each other. Jose, the boy she met, suggests that since they can't be together in person, they can deepen their relationship by sending pictures of themselves to each other throughout the day. At first the pictures are just silly ones of them eating a snack or playing a video game. But then Jose suggests that Selene send a picture of herself in her underwear. Selene laughs it off at first, but Jose keeps asking her to do it. He says he loves her so much and he can't think of any other way to help him really connect with her since they live so far away. Selene is pretty uncomfortable with the idea, but she does feel bad that they live so far away and wants to help Jose connect more with her. What do you think she should do?



# HONORING

# GOD YOURSELF OTHERS

The above questions and answers are not exhaustive by any means. There are many books and resources that go much further into detail. I will include a few below. My hope is the material above will simply get the conversation started. For parents and youth leaders, I hope this guide can help you gather your own thoughts on these issues and have a sense of what teens might be wondering or needing to know. For students, I'm hopeful that by going through these various topics and inviting their thoughts as you share your own, a safe place will develop where they can talk freely about their faith and how it affects their sexuality. It makes me angry sometimes when I think about the ways that our world has made sex so dirty and perverted. But it excites me to think about the chance we have as a community to reclaim the beauty of sex for the next generation. Many blessings as you undertake this rich discipling opportunity!





ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES

There are no “perfect” resources on any topic. This topic, in particular, has so many “hot button” dynamics it is especially hard to find materials we can recommend wholeheartedly. Everything below has been carefully vetted and found helpful to other parents in our community, but there are still elements here and there we cringe over at times. So particularly with the materials to use with your teens, previewing things ahead of time to be ready to name any pieces you might like to tweak, skip or expand upon is encouraged. But we do believe these resources can set you up well for good conversations, connection and teaching on a wonderfully rich topic. Enjoy!



## FOR PARENTS

Working on your own relationship with Christ, your spouse and your sex life will likely be the best way you can shape and nurture healthy faith, relationships and resilience in your teens! Here's some resources that can help.

### **Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas**

A robust theological and practical look at marriage that helps cast a vision for how marriage isn't just intended for happiness, but for holiness as well.

### **The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller**

A rich look into why and how God designed marriage.

### **The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by John Gottman**

Based on excellent psychological research and studies in his "love lab", Gottman gives outstanding practice advice for what wreck marriages and what makes them last.

### **Intimacy Ignited by Dillow and Pintus**

This is a great book to help ignite couples in their own sexual relationship. The best way to teach the next generation is to model great sex for them.

### **The Gift of Sex by Clifford and Joyce Penner**

This is the sex bible pretty much. It covers almost everything a couple would need to know to develop a healthy sexual relationship. The Penner's have done sex therapy for years and offer many helpful exercises to deal with sexual struggles and enhance your sexual relationship. They've also recently published followed up hers (Enjoy: The Gift of Pleasure for Women) and his (The Married Guy's Guide to Great Sex) books that are excellent as well.



FOR KIDS/TEENS  
& PARENTS

**Pure Foundations Series by Jim Burns**

Book 1 (Ages 3-5) – God Made Your Body

Book 2 (Ages 6-9) – How God Makes Babies

These two books are helpful in getting the conversation started early so it can feel natural and normal when the teenage years role around. If you've missed the window, no worries, it's not too late. If you do have younger kids, though, do yourself a favor and get the ball rolling early.

Note: There are some other books for teens and parents that I don't find as helpful, but these first two are excellent.

**The Whole Story Video Series by Sheila Wray Gregoire**

This series is a very practically oriented course you can walk through with your younger or older teens. They have four versions: 10-13 Boys, 14-16 Boys, 10-12 Girls, 13-16 Girls.

These are designed as father/son or mother/daughter conversation starters and relationship builders. The production quality is lacking, but it's got an authentic, family feel to it since the speakers are all related to one another. While the creator and communicators are all Christian and make that known throughout, it leans heavily toward the practical and relational aspects of preparing your teens for adolescence. There is very little faith development incorporated into the material, but it does a solid job of offering a Christian view of sex, dating and self-image. There is nothing on the LGBTQ+ community. The girls' versions seem a bit stronger than the boys', but both offer excellent content to help you dive into what could be seen as a Christian Home Health Class for parents to offer their teens.



FOR KIDS/TEENS  
& PARENTS

**Christian Sexuality by the Center for Faith Sexuality and Gender**

This series offers a theologically and practically rich look at the key challenges our culture throws at teens regarding their sexuality. It would be a big investment of both money (\$150) and time (12 , 20 minute sessions to watch with your teens along with many other materials to go along with them). The series avoids most of the pitfalls of the purity movement and grounds everything in seeking to deepen our relationship with Jesus, not just following a bunch of rules. It also addresses the more controversial topics with a conservative, loving approach that aligns with a traditional view of marriage and gender.



# Reclaiming God's Good Gift of Sex

Conversation starters about  
honoring God, ourselves and others

—— Brian Dietz



**milestones**

**RAISING A JESUS LOVING GENERATION**