

Chastity Begins at Home

A guidebook for parents seeking to lead their children through the sexual minefield

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Salt and Light Ministries

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Foreword

“What is hidden in the roots will be revealed in the shoots.”

This has been one of the lifelong principles by which I have sought to live and build. Experience tells us that what the roots of the plant are like, and what they feed on, determines what sort of fruit grows; where the foundations of a building are shaky, time and disaster will reveal it; where the most simple flaws are not spotted, dreadful disasters can follow – as when a basic defect in the fuel system of the Challenger space craft cost the lives of seven brave astronauts.

So it is with people. What we believe in our hearts will eventually determine how we live, how we build and what we end up with.

This “Roots and Shoots” series is not so much an attempt to define the distinctives of our family of churches, but rather to ensure that all our beliefs and practices are firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

Many people have asked us over the years: “Who are you and what do you believe?” While our structure may appear to be somewhat nebulous, nevertheless the understanding of our common beliefs needs to be clear and unambiguous.

We are a family of churches that believe we are to be “sons of the kingdom” sown into God’s earth. The key that transforms “the word of the kingdom” into “sons of the kingdom” is *understanding* (Matthew 13:23). In the Lord’s first parable of the kingdom (the Sower), the ‘word’ of the kingdom – the seed – when properly received and understood produces fruit. In the second parable of the kingdom (the Weeds), we discover that the fruit has become the seed, and that the seed is “the sons of the kingdom”. The word, bearing fruit, producing seed as sons of the kingdom, planted in the world! That is our prayer for this series of books.

Barney Coombs

Introduction

Two years ago I took part in a seminar organised by *CARE for the Family* entitled “Christian Initiative in Teenage Sexuality” (CITS). The day was spent in reviewing the current sexual behaviour, standards and attitudes of young people, primarily in the UK, although it also drew on data and material from North America. After three decades of working with young people both within and outside the church, the day did not present me with many major surprises, but it helped to crystallise my ideas and lead me to form three inescapable conclusions:

First, sexual behaviour and attitudes of young people in the church run parallel to that of unchurched young people.

Second, Christians need to be pro-active in their approach to this issue. We have to take the initiative away from “the world, the flesh and the devil”, and train up children in godly standards of sexuality. It is no good hiding behind cloistered wishful-thinking that ‘it won’t affect our children’; nor trying to reshape their thinking and behaviour long after the world has done its work.

Third, the primary responsibility for, and most effective means of, doing this lies with *PARENTS*; and the time to start is not when our children are in their teens or commencing puberty, but in their infancy. (Though having said this, if your children are already teenagers, it is still not too late to begin.)

In the light of this, I was very happy to share in the writing of this booklet, which is designed to help parents to take the initiative in teaching their children about sex and sexuality. The title - *Chastity begins at Home* - is a play on words on that old English maxim, “*Charity begins at home*”, and serves to underline the fact that God has entrusted parents with this responsibility. *Chastity* is itself a word which is not in common usage - which says something about modern Western society. One dictionary defines it as:

“virtue, virginity, purity or decency”. These qualities may not perhaps be very fashionable, but they are lifesavers, both for individuals and for society, and they are pleasing in the sight of God.

Some people may feel that the authors have been too idealistic; others may feel that we have not stated the ideal clearly enough. It is impossible, within the few pages of this booklet, to put everything which could, or possibly should, have been said. Our main aim has been to get you thinking and talking about these issues. A resource list has been included with suggestions for further reading; but the best reading, of course, is of what the Bible has to say itself on these matters. We encourage you to get out your concordance and start searching to see what God has to say for yourself.

One final word - RELAX! Remember that God intends sex itself to be fun; and there is no reason therefore why teaching our children about it should not be fun as well.

Rob Buckeridge
on behalf of the authors

Chapter 1

There's a lot of it about!

We live in what appears to be a sex-mad society. It seems like wherever you look - advertising, magazines, TV, newspapers - that sex is a constant and dominating theme. The media constantly proclaims a dogma of every individual's *right* to sexual gratification, and the lie of 'responsible safe sex' is broadcast loud and long.

Sex in the Media

The Message of the World of Advertising: to be a real person you have to be sexually active.

Sex sells. The advertising industry's use of sex, whether explicit or implied, to sell anything from designer jeans to ice cream, is becoming increasingly blatant. Our young people are bombarded with the message 'To be a real person you have to be sexually active'. It has been estimated that, by the age of 18, the average young person in the west will have seen around 9,000 suggested or actual acts of sexual intercourse portrayed in the media (*ALPHA Magazine*, May 1993).

The Message of TV: sex, violence and bad language increase our viewing pleasure.

In Britain, the so-called '9 O'clock watershed' (the time before which TV programme producers should be aware of the presence of younger viewers and therefore careful of the material they produce) is being increasingly eroded. The Broadcasting Standards Council has stated, "A degree of strong language,

explicit sex and violence does not detract from, and may contribute to, viewers' enjoyment of plays and films." (Source: CITS Quotations) Children's TV could be accused of encouraging sexual experimentation under the guise of exploring 'real-life issues', and an undiluted diet of TV soaps and sit-coms could seriously damage your moral health. Radio in Britain has no watershed, and some presenters appear to go out of their way to push back the frontiers of taste and decency. (Radio One's highly popular Breakfast Show recently featured a regular phone-in time entitled "In Bed with your Boyfriend".)

The Message of Teenage magazines: it's normal to have under-age sex.

In early 1996, Mr Peter Luff, Member of Parliament for Worcester, introduced a Private Member's Bill to Parliament, seeking to introduce a code of conduct for teenage magazines. Such magazines received strong criticism at a recent conference of the British Medical Association, where one researcher stated that they encourage girls to think that it is normal to have under-age sex. In the February edition of "19" Magazine (the majority of whose readers are aged 13-16), there was a feature entitled: "Seven Steps to Sexual Heaven - Bedtime Bliss starts here". Illustrated with a picture of a semi-clad boy and girl on top of a bed, the article began: "Anyone can slip between the sheets for a bit of rumpy pumpy, but for mind-blowing, toe-curling ecstasy, there are seven vital ingredients. Follow 19's guide to bedtime bliss - satisfaction guaranteed!" With the March issue of *Sugar*, which sells 270,000 copies a month with an average reader's age of 12-14, came a 16-page booklet entitled "Sex and You", to accompany their more regular features on 'flirting tips' and 'will you get a Valentine snog?' In December, 1995, several major retailers removed copies of *TV Hits* magazine, which is aimed at 11-19 year olds, because of its explicit description of how to engage in oral sex.

While claiming to take a high moral tone and insisting that they always point out that under-age sex is illegal, the message of such magazines is 'everybody's doing it'. "The impression given is that most other people of their age are having sex or are in romantic relationships ... girls were left with the impression that they were being left out if they did not engage in sex. But the latest research suggests that only 23% of girls under 16 had sexual relationships." (Daniel Wright, Medical Research Council, quoted in The

Daily Telegraph, February 3rd, 1996). (Compare these figures with the Family Planning Association's claim in 1992 that "half of Britain's teenage girls under 16 are having illegal sex.")

The figure of the Medical Research Council may be more encouraging - but it's still 23% too many. The tragedy is that our teenagers are falling for The Lie, and are being pushed by a voyeuristic media and by intense peer group pressure into becoming sexually active before they are physically and emotionally ready - and, in the majority of cases, before they want to. 88% of teenage girls who responded to a recent survey in "19" magazine said that they felt pressurised into having their first sexual experience.

Sex and Popular Music

While most western popular music still focuses on the mythical ideal of the perfect romance, either lost or found (often found, lost, then found again!), a large proportion is becoming increasingly sexually explicit. This is particularly true of some forms of rap music and other contemporary styles. Records which were banned by the BBC a few years ago are now being played in a re-released, but not expurgated, version. Artistes such as Madonna seem determined to push herself through the boundaries of pornography. A recently released video includes scenes of her masturbating on a bed, accompanied by two male exotic dancers. Where she leads, others follow. Such 'stars' become the role models for our young people, who, living in such an environment, daily run the inevitable risk of adopting the standards which are being advocated, either consciously or unconsciously.

The film "True Lies" with actor Arnold Schwarzenegger contains one of the most telling observations of contemporary society we have heard. Arnie is talking to his colleague about his concerns over the behaviour of his 14-year old daughter. The colleague replies: "*But you're not her parents any more, you and Helen. Her real parents are Axel Rose and Madonna. The five minutes a day you spend with her can't compete with that sort of bombardment. You're outgunned, Daddy-O.*" Frighteningly true. And let's not kid ourselves that our own children are immune, just because they are brought up in a Christian home, are part of a good church, or attend a Christian school. We can equip them to recognise the big guns which are ranged against

them, and to learn to take cover; but propaganda is a major weapon in modern warfare. It is harder to identify, and erodes standards of righteousness and the will to resist.

Medical and Educational Practice

Shortly before Rob's daughter's 16th birthday, she received a letter from their local Health Centre, stating that an appointment had been made by the Centre on her behalf, for her to receive confidential advice from one of the health workers. Though well-worded and undoubtedly well-meaning, the implications of such a letter are clear: now you're 16, sexual intercourse is legal for you; you'll probably become sexually active in the next year or so; therefore make sure that you take precautions.

Advice on contraception in Britain is not restricted to those aged 16 or over. In May 1996 there were allegations that a Family Planning Clinic near Bristol was handing out free condoms to children as young as *nine*. Though it may be a broad generalisation, and is unfair to the many conscientious doctors and health workers who have a genuine concern for young people who are sexually active, the official medical line could well be seen by teenagers looking for guidance as "It's OK, go ahead - just so long as you take precautions, that's all that matters." Readers in other nations may face different legal and medical practices, but the underlying attitude will almost invariably be the same.

In schools in the UK sex education now has to be given with "*due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life*" (*Education [No. 2] Act 1986, Section 46*). Merely giving the basic biology is no longer sufficient. In the vast majority of cases, Sex Education is taught to a high standard and with sensitivity; but no matter how well taught, the underlying implication is likely to be: the majority of you are, or will become, sexually active; the most important thing is that you take precautions against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Despite all claims that Sex Education would reduce teenage pregnancy, the number of teenage conceptions continues to increase. It is unfortunately true that information leads to investigation, and education appears to lead to experiment.

Standards and Attitudes

Underneath all this sensational talk and media hype and wishful thinking, what's the real picture? What *are* the sexual attitudes and standards of today's young people in the West? Many surveys and questionnaires have been conducted over recent years, with varying conclusions. (One of the drawbacks of these surveys is reliability. There may be a tendency to exaggerate the truth when answering, in order to avoid losing face. However, the most reliable ones are designed to detect and overcome any such flaws.)

For example, a Family Policy Studies Centre Report found that 50% of girls and 36% of boys had taken part in sexual intercourse before the age of 16. This differs markedly from the more recent Medical Research Council figure of 23% of girls quoted above. A slightly less scholarly tome (The 'Blind Date' Book of Romance!) claims that only 3% of British males are virgins on their wedding night. So, whom do we believe?

Dr. Patrick Dixon, in his excellent book "The Rising Price of Love", points out the dangers of placing too much credence in some of the results of such surveys: "*... distorted results from previous surveys can put huge pressure on people to 'follow a crowd' that doesn't in reality exist. For example, because survey after survey has suggested that half of all British teenagers are sexually active by their sixteenth birthday, tens of thousands of self-respecting 17-year olds have felt that in order to be normal, they probably need to join in and 'do it' as well. Thus, there is the danger that such surveys result in a false self-fulfilling prophecy ... Many of these unscientific sex polls have been wrong. The much larger British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, carried out during 1990 and 1991, found that only 18.7% of 16-19 year-old women reported first intercourse before their sixteenth birthday, and only 27.6% of men.*"

With all these figures being bandied around by the various magazines, National Agencies and so-called sexperts, it is difficult to know the true picture. It is probably safest to come to the conclusion: "There's a lot of it about; maybe not as much as some people would like us to think, but still more than is good or desirable, either on an individual or a national basis." The picture may not be as black as it is popularised, but it is still extremely serious and sufficiently bad for us to be on "Red Alert!". We need to be very

aware of the pressure on our children, and - since the ultimate decision about whether to have sex or not will be theirs - to equip them to make biblically informed, positive choices *before* they find themselves in any potentially compromising situations. In the steamy heat of a passionate embrace, it is simply too late.

Chapter 2

Safe and Sound?

“So much for the world. But what about the church? Surely Christian teenagers and young people brought up in Christian families don’t exhibit the same behaviour?”

Unfortunately, this is a vain hope. While it is true that churched young people are not sexually active to the same degree as unchurched, it is also true that the sexual attitudes and behaviour of young people in the church follow the same pattern as that of the world. It is an undeniable fact that young people in our own fellowships, and possibly our own families, are or will become sexually involved. We cannot, like the proverbial ostrich, hide our heads in the philosophical sand of “it’s never going to happen to me.”

The Agape Survey

In 1991, the organisation *AGAPE* carried out research for the National Symposium on Teenage Sexuality. They surveyed over 1700 church-based young people in the United Kingdom, between the ages of 13-20, examining both their sexual attitudes and sexual practice. One in six of the overall number surveyed had had sexual intercourse, with some 43% of the 19 year-olds having had full intercourse (though for some this had taken place before they became Christians).

The *AGAPE* Survey concluded that, while 79% of the respondents believed that sexual intercourse is never or only sometimes acceptable between unmarried people, by the age of 19 almost half of them were no longer virgins. (Dr. James Dobson has suggested that the incidence of premarital sex at

Christian colleges in the USA is at about the same level as at secular institutions.) It also found that the attitude among church-based young people is that sexual intercourse and heavy petting is wrong for Christians (though 50% of those who consider it to be wrong still do it!). It was found that acceptance of Christ as Saviour had a major influence on sexual *attitude*, but less of an influence on sexual *behaviour*. The greatest influence on sexual behaviour was, in fact, found to be the amount of time spent together with a boyfriend or girlfriend, rather than an acceptance of Christ or a belief that the Bible is reliable.

These findings would seem to suggest that it is not so much *moral or spiritual convictions* which help Christian young people to stay sexually pure, but rather *lack of opportunity* or *fear of being found out*.

The Frog Principle

Of perhaps greater concern is the level of tolerance by Christian or church-based young people of the premarital sex engaged in by their non-Christian friends or peers. The general feeling tends to be: “It’s not on for me, because I’m a Christian; but it’s OK for others.” However, it is a comparatively short step from condoning to committing. And we have to beware of the Frog Principle:

The frog is a cold-blooded animal. This means that, unlike mammals, its body temperature is not kept at an even level; it varies according to the temperature of the outside environment. If, for some perverse reason, you were to put a frog into very hot water, it would immediately be able to detect that it was in a dangerous and hostile environment, and would do its best to escape. However, if you were to put the frog into cold water and then gradually raise the water’s temperature, the frog’s own internal temperature would rise correspondingly. The frog would not be able to sense the increase or detect the danger, and it would therefore be boiled alive without realising it.

The point, we trust, is obvious. We live in a society where the standards of sexual, moral and family life are in decline, mostly through a process of gradual attrition. It is probably true to say that we ignore, tolerate, accept or even condone standards and behaviour today which would never have been allowed ten or twenty years ago. If the change had happened overnight, we

would have noticed, dug in our heels, and spoken out; but because it has happened gradually, we, like the frog, have been lulled into a false sense of security, and our internal standards have followed the pattern of the outside world.

We are supposed to be the church in the world; the trouble is, there is too much of the world in the church. We live in a hostile environment. Therefore it is vital that we make sure that our standards do not follow the pattern of the world, but that they are rooted firmly in the Word of God, the Absolute in a relative world; everything else is just opinion. We must pass this on to our children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). We must also ensure that we bring up our children to love the Word and therefore to live by God's ways in God's world.

“I have found that most adolescents have not learned the Biblical basis for waiting until marriage to experience the joys of sex. Consequently, when they face the tremendous temptations to give in to the physical, they are without the foundational convictions that come with knowing why.” (Josh McDowell. Source: CITS Quotations)

“I don't think Christian teaching is terribly helpful. Anyone can restrain themselves, but you have to want to, and I'm not sure that people are taught why they should want to. It's all very well to say sex before marriage is wrong, but you need to understand why.” (25 year-old male. Source: CITS)

Ten Top Tips

CARE for the Family gives what it describes as ‘ten top tips’ for parents in talking with their children about sex. We have adapted these to produce ten top tips of our own. We present them, not as necessarily the final word on these matters, but as a useful framework to which you can add, and around which you can build, your own biblically-based convictions and approach:

- 1. Encourage young people to talk openly** about sex, love and relationships. Be honest about your own struggles and successes, without giving away any confidences.
- 2. Answer their questions honestly.** If you don't know the answer, say so, but then help them search for it; and make sure that the answers at which you arrive are firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

3. **Always talk to teenagers in an atmosphere of forgiveness and acceptance.** If you don't, they may not come and talk to you if things go wrong for fear of how you will react.
4. **Tell young people that they are loved and loveable.** Many are worried that no-one will love them, and so rush into a relationship to get what they perceive as love. Let them know that God loves them just as they are - even though he knows them better than anyone else and knows everything that needs to change!
5. **Take your time.** Young people need to be able to talk as questions arise - often at times when it isn't convenient to you. One 'big talk' on sex isn't enough!
6. **Be careful not to impose what are simply your personal tastes on your teenagers.** Not *everything* that's important to them is rubbish! Help them to *learn to discern* for themselves what is good and bad - especially in things such as magazines, music, clothing, and so on. Discuss the *content* and *spirit* of things with them, helping them to see the basic issues for themselves. Equally, don't be afraid of drawing a line over issues when things are obviously bad or not acceptable.
7. **Train your children to know what is good to watch, read and listen to.** Don't let them be pulled down to the world's standards of what is acceptable; take your responsibility for instructing them in things that are good and wholesome. Decide on family standards.
8. **Write letters of praise, as well as complaint, to TV, film and magazine companies.** We need to see the production of good, wholesome material in the media, and there is nothing like praise for what is good to ensure we get more of it.
9. **Take time to find out for yourself what God says about sex and relationships.** The Bible is very clear on these matters - there is nothing 'wishy-washy' about it! Then, when the time comes, be prepared to talk to your teenagers about it.
10. **Pray for your children daily.** They have free-will and you cannot live their lives for them. But God can use your prayers in a powerful way, as you teach, love and support them.

In chapters 4 to 6 we shall be considering what the Bible has to say about sex, and how we as parents can teach and encourage our children to value themselves and their sexuality from God's perspective. But first let us look at the sweet agony of adolescence.

Chapter 3

A Chemical Conspiracy?

“Help! - I’m being held prisoner against my will. I’m trapped inside my own body!” This could be a common cry for the majority of teenagers who find that the physical survival suit in which they have been secure and comfortable for over a decade, seems now to have developed a mind of its own, and all its component parts are conspiring against them. Adolescence strikes hard, and there is no real way in which we can warn our children or totally prepare them for the hormonal onslaught which will hit their bodies.

Five Areas of Change

Puberty brings major changes in 5 areas of life:

Physical

An internal switch spontaneously turns on sometime (on average) between the ages of 10 and 15, and previously unknown and apparently hostile hormones are pumped into the body. These produce growth spurts, the development and maturation of sex organs, the development of breasts and the onset of the menstrual cycle in girls, enlargement of the penis and sperm production in boys, growth of pubic and auxiliary hair in both cases, a whole host of secondary sexual characteristics - and ZITS!

Emotional

This hormonal onslaught also produces major emotional changes, giving rise to the characteristic yo-yo behaviour of adolescents. There is a new

intensity of feelings and a tendency to get things out of perspective. This can cause problems between children and parents, as well as leading to extremes of tiredness and feeling washed out, chiefly because they are emotionally rather than physically drained. It is a time of great vulnerability and insecurity. Sexual attractions begin to develop and sexual desire is aroused. With the new intensity of emotions there is a danger of ‘falling in love with love’ - going for the emotional high, and living in a self-perpetuating world of fantasy.

Intellectual

As if the physical changes weren't bad enough, there is a rapid expansion on the intellectual side as well, with greater demands and expectations being placed on them. For the majority of young people there is a change of school and of learning style to cope with. They are bombarded with new information and stimuli, and (hopefully) are stretched and have their horizons enlarged. They have to handle the pressures of exams and major life-decisions for the future, which increase their insecurity. All this leads to a questioning of all that they previously took for granted, particularly the attitudes, standards and beliefs of parents or church. As parents, we need to see this as a positive feature and not a threat, and to learn to talk and debate issues with our children. We can no longer take refuge in “Because I say so!”

Social

As young people grow older, there is greater freedom, independence and responsibility. Most of them will have more money and more time available than when they were younger (and hence they are prime targets for advertising and commercial interests). Peer group approval and peer pressure becomes a major issue, if not *the* controlling influence. There is also a tremendous amount of creative energy and compassionate care (more often in short bursts rather than sustained), often frustrated by a lack of leadership, incentive or opportunity. As stated before, it can be a time of great insecurity, and feelings of rejection, self-rejection and confusion with personal identity may prevail.

Spiritual

All too often, young people's spiritual development is way behind the other four areas (hence the alarming fall-off rate of people from the church

between the ages of 12-15). It is vital that their spiritual development not only keeps pace, but actually sets the lead for all the other changes. As parents, youth and church leaders we must be pro-active in the way we teach, train and encourage our young people. In particular, we need to help them in their personal relationship with God - their parents' faith, a second-hand relationship, or a child's relationship, will not be sufficient for a teenager. We need to teach them understanding, reliance and skill in handling the Bible. We need to create areas for them to participate in all aspects of church life. We need to lead them out to encounter God in action as they proclaim his truth and serve others in the community. Perhaps we even need some form of 'Bar-Mitzvah', whereby parents and church could affirm them at this vulnerable time, letting them know they are loved and valued by us, and that they have new opportunities and responsibilities which we want to help them fulfil.

Insecurity and the Search for Love and Meaning

The teenage years can be times of overwhelming insecurity when things which would seem small to an adult can loom large beyond all proportion. Among some of the questions which haunt a typical teenager are these:

Are all these changes supposed to be happening? Am I abnormal or different? Will I be laughed at or rejected? Will I be able to have sex, or am I impotent or frigid? Am I homosexual? Will God punish me for my thoughts? Will something terrible happen to me if I masturbate? Can I get pregnant or develop AIDS without intercourse? What if I die before I 'do it'?

There is a tremendous need for love and acceptance, and in trying to satisfy this need, many young people attempt to find solace in sexual relationships.

Unholy Hormones?

The average age for the onset of puberty today is significantly lower than in the past. Boys and girls are coming into sexual maturity at an earlier age than their grandparents and the preceding generations. In some areas we have prolonged childhood and postponed responsibility. For example, 60 or 70 years ago, most youngsters began to take their place in the adult world at

the age of 13, when they started work. In other areas, we seem determined to rush them into adulthood while they are still in Junior School. Take a look at the fashions and the articles in magazines aimed at 8-10 year old girls. 'Agony Aunt' columnist Clare Rayner has commented: "When I was their age, we were playing with toys and reading adventure stories. Now, all they want is slushy romance and sex." Let's not forget that the whole concept of 'teenagers' is a man-made invention, dreamed up during the 1950's, chiefly as a means of creating a culture in order to make money out of them.

Today's young people are *physically* ready for sex and have the capability of producing children before they have the emotional and intellectual maturity - and the common sense - to handle all that is involved in a sexual relationship. But, comes the challenge to us, isn't it unrealistic, and perhaps unfair, to expect them to refrain from sex when they have both the desire and the ability; when inside them there is an ever increasing hormonal pressure to 'just do it' - particularly in the current 'condom culture' which promises sexual satisfaction without any fear of 'side effects'? I have heard it argued from Christian teenagers that it is unfair of God to create us with the capacity and the desire for sexual relationships, but then to condemn us if we give in to them.

As parents, we need to take hold of our God-given responsibility to teach our children about sex from God's perspective - to value and to follow the maker's handbook. We need to teach them the value of self control and to hold celibacy in high esteem - it could save their life! We need to teach them to appreciate the restriction and safety factors that God has placed on sex, and to understand that God gave us limits, not to stop us *enjoying ourselves*, but to stop us *destroying ourselves*.

But what if we have messed up sexually in the past? Can we ask for higher standards of behaviour from our children than we ourselves exhibited? Just because we may have made mistakes does not mean that our children have to make them as well. In fact, it is vital that we warn them so that they can not only escape from going the same way, but even surpass us in what they achieve in the Kingdom of God - including in the area of standards of godliness.

Chapter 4

Intended for Pleasure

All our children learn sexual values and sexual behaviour. The only question is - who is teaching them most? They will learn from toilet walls, from playgrounds, from print, from TV and music. And children in Christian education are not immune either. We stress this because of the alarming complacency among some parents. It's as if they believe that Christian schools will somehow miraculously inoculate their children from sexual temptation or encounters. Let's not be so naive.

Our children need to understand for themselves what the Bible teaches and why. We parents must meet our responsibility to find it out and communicate it. They need to have God's blueprint laid out for them; they need to know what choices are available to them within that blueprint, and what the consequences are if they choose to go outside of it.

What Does the Bible Teach?

- *The Bible is full of instructions, guidelines, promises, warnings, consequences and blessings all related to sex.* For example, Song of Songs (sometimes called Song of Solomon) - whatever its alternative theological significance may or may not be - is erotic poetry at its finest. What a loving God, who includes, at the very heart of Scripture, poetry that can raise the act of physical love to the level of inspired writing! That fact alone, with no other evidence, should show us that God views human lovemaking as a holy and beautiful part of his creation, something clean and pure enough to

include in his handbook of the revelation of his plan and purpose for humanity.

- *The Bible talks freely about intimacy.* For example, Proverbs 5:19, in the context of describing ways to avoid immorality, encourages men to find intimate satisfaction from their wife's breasts, and talks about being "captivated by her love". The Bible shows clearly that sex and sexual intimacy is part of God's divine purpose for husband and wife. God designed our bodies to receive and to give intense pleasure during the act of lovemaking, so it is clearly meant to be enjoyed.
- *Sexual activity is not hidden in Scriptures.* It is not taboo or regarded as embarrassing or smutty. God himself is not embarrassed by sex, since he himself created this gift for mankind. Therefore the Bible does not hide its comments, both positive and negative, on this whole area. It talks freely about loving relationships in all its different aspects; but it also spells out unequivocally what the boundaries are in these areas, and the consequences of crossing them.

Sexual Intimacy - God's Intention from the Beginning

On one occasion, when asked about the issue of divorce, Jesus referred back to the book of Genesis and the reasons why God gave marriage to mankind. "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female'. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mark 10:6-9)

Jesus makes it clear that both Old and New Covenants alike are blessed with physical oneness at the heart of marriage. While the sexual act is certainly for procreation (Genesis 1:28), it is also there to be enjoyed in its own right (Genesis 2:24-25). This latter aspect is brought out in Song of Songs, which sees sex as something to be enjoyed as an expression of love within God's divine design of the marriage relationship.

The Only Place for Sex

God makes it very clear that the only place for sexual activity is within the marriage relationship. The seventh commandment strictly forbids adultery (Exodus 20:14). In many other places in the Bible “fornication” (KJV) or “sexual immorality” (NIV) is forbidden. The word means, quite simply, *any sexual activity with someone other than your spouse*. This was one of very few specific instructions that were given to the Gentile early church (for whom it particularly needed to be underlined because of the background from which they came) at the Council of Jerusalem: “... abstain ... from sexual immorality.” (Acts 15:19-20)

Paul likewise wrote to the Thessalonians: “It is God’s will that ... you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4) And to the Ephesian church he said: “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. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” (Ephesians 5:3-4) Note that even jokes about sexual issues are completely inappropriate for God’s people!

Sexual Intimacy is to be Heterosexual, not Homosexual

Both Old Testament and New Testament are one in their approach to the issue of homosexual sex. For example, to the church at Rome, a city where homosexuality was rife, Paul wrote this:

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual *impurity* for the *degrading* of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever praised. Amen.

“Because of this, God gave them over to *shameful* lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed *indecent* acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their *perversion*.

“Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a *depraved* mind, to do what ought not to be done.” (Romans 1:24-28; our emphases)

It is clear from this passage that God views heterosexual desires as ‘natural’ and anything else as impure, degrading, shameful, indecent, perverted and depraved. This same view is found in other passages (e.g., Genesis 19:1-25; Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). (See chapter 7.)

Specific Consequences of Breaking God’s Limits

Our Kingdom inheritance is affected

“For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any *inheritance* in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Ephesians 5:5)

“See that no-one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his *inheritance* rights as the oldest son.” (Hebrews 12:17)

From such passages, it can be seen that sexual immorality affects our *inheritance*. We are not suggesting that one sin will lead to loss of *salvation*; but protracted sexual immorality means we are living outside of God and in defiance of his ways; therefore, by implication, outside of his kingdom.

Our inheritance of ministry and function is affected

Adultery and other forms of immorality also affect the inheritance of ministry or function. Eli’s inability to curb the sexual activity of his sons led to the inheritance of priesthood being withdrawn from his family (1 Samuel 2:22; 3:13-14). Of course, this does not mean there can be no forgiveness or restoration; there always can be! But there must be total repentance and proof of a life that is bearing the fruit of it.

Our bodies and minds are damaged

Sexual sin damages both our *bodies*, whether we can see it or not, and our minds (1 Cor 6:18-21). Romans chapter 1 tells us that immorality is the degrading of our *bodies* and that we will receive in our *bodies* a penalty for this abuse. In other words our bodies are not designed to handle sexual immorality, and when we engage in it there are *bodily* consequences.

From all of this we can see that God views sexual immorality seriously, and the consequences demonstrate it. In 1 Cor 10:8, looking back to an incident in Israel's history, Paul writes: "We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died." But he then goes on to give them hope too: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 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 Cor 10:11-13)

Practical Guidelines for Handling Temptation

Over many years of extensive travelling, Dave has always made a habit of sharing any temptation over the telephone with his pastor or a mature friend. It halves its power! Probably the single biggest key to handling sexual temptation with victory is to *share it*. Of course, the devil will try to convince us how embarrassing it will be; even if it *were* embarrassing (which it isn't really, because we all face the same things), it is better to be embarrassed than to fall!

Specific Techniques for Handling Temptation

Here are some of the principles that we can train ourselves in, so that we can pass them on with life and reality to our children too:

- *Get away fast!* 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "*Flee* from sexual immorality." If you delay and start thinking about things, you will lose! Remember what happened to even as godly a man as King David (2 Samuel 11).
- *Guard your mind.* Romans 13:13-14 says, "... *do not think* about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Guard what you allow to get into, and go around, your mind! Be ruthless with what you look at and what you read.
- *Be radical with what you know is wrong.* Paul says in Colossians 3:5, "*Put to death*, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Be

radical about rooting out and ‘killing off’ those things you know are wrong! Do not make friends or peace with them.

- *Fill your mind with good and wholesome things.* Paul tells the Philippian believers, “... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - *think about such things.*” (Philippians 4:8) Fill your mind with good and wholesome stuff!

Parental Responsibility

Our role as parents in all these areas is fundamental. Whether we like it or not, we are responsible for the education of our own children, and this includes sex education. It is our job to think through the values by which we live, the values by which we want our children to be enriched, and the values upon which we want them to build their own family units.

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many ...” (Deuteronomy 11:18-21).

This passage makes it clear that the process of teaching is to be handled primarily by the parents. It is seen as a natural process - when sitting in the lounge, out walking the dog, playing in the park, or at the meal table. In other words, we are not to create artificial environments in which to train our children, but we are to seize the day when it comes. However we do it, we must ensure that we know what we believe and that we have actively communicated that to our children.

Chapter 5

Parents First

The title for this chapter isn't original! It has been taken from an excellent course produced by CARE for Education, entitled *Parents First - Sex Education within the Home*. This course is designed to be followed by small groups of parents, and gives training in how to teach your children Sex Education. Regional co-ordinators are available to give advice or to lead a course. (Rob & Gill Buckeridge and Gill Oliver are all trained co-ordinators. For further information, contact them or CARE for Education, 53, Romney Street, London, SW1P 3RF)

So, where do we begin?

Prayer

Whatever else we do, prayer is always the key. We never cease to be amazed at how quickly and thoroughly God responds to prayer for our children. A number of parents we know fast occasionally or regularly - one day per week - for their children. Issues at home certainly force us very quickly to our knees and rightly so. All the ideas in this little booklet are only as useful as the prayer that will go into their implementation.

Knowing what to say, to which child, at what time - all require prayer. Prayer for their spouses, prayer for the fulfilment of prophetic words in their lives, prayer for their current situations. Prayer for wisdom, prayer for patience, prayer for understanding. Drawing others - carefully - into praying with us can be so valuable - people with specific gifting or time for intercession. Grandparents are a brilliant source of prayer - and they have a vested interest.

Sexuality Starts at Conception

All education starts the moment we are born; in fact there are those who claim it actually starts in the womb. The same is true of sexual education. How we respond to our new baby lays the foundations for life. Small children will soon discover how we feel about naked bodies, theirs and their siblings. Indeed they will soon discover how we view sexuality generally. For example, do we have strong feelings about whether small children should be wearing swimming costumes on the beach, or is it perfectly acceptable for them to paddle around naked? Small babies are often bathed by their mother or father; but at what age do you feel that it becomes inappropriate for the opposite sex to be in the bathroom with them? All these things need to be discussed ahead of time; parents need to know *what* they will do, *why* they will do it and *how* Biblical principles are going to be outworked by them.

What Information at What Age?

The information that we give to our children will obviously be carefully adapted to suit their age and circumstances. If you are alone with your child in a private place, you will be able to talk freely; if you are being questioned by your child in a public place, you may need to be a little more discreet! Remember too that the *way* in which you answer their question can be just as important as the information you give!

The first natural and easy opportunities for talking about bodies often come around bathtime. This usually allows one to one private conversation to come naturally. Sometimes the differences between male and female are noticed when younger children are sharing a bath with another sibling. Even at three or four years old it is possible to steer the conversations in a way which enables you to highlight differences.

Sharing bedtime stories introducing baby animals or simple stories where a pet gives birth can often bring up the subject of reproduction in a very natural way. At these times it is so important to be relaxed and natural and, in a secure environment, to allow your child to ask whatever they want. A pregnant friend or a pregnant lady in the church may also bring questions to the surface. So from a very young age we can talk about male and female physical differences.

Before talking to our children about their bodies it's helpful for partners to agree about the names you will use with them for parts of their body. Your own chosen names can be used instead of the correct medical terminology if you prefer, so long as by the age of about six or seven you are beginning to interchange these with the correct words. You never know when your child may need the language commonly used on a children's ward!

By the ages of eight or nine children will gradually become more interested in detailed discussion about sex. In fact, if they are attending secular schools, the majority of children will know most of the details about biological sex by the age of seven. We therefore need to be opening out the subject for them. If *we* don't teach our children somebody else will! If our children learn from their peers, it won't have our Christian perspective or our insights. It may also contain their own gleaned false information, mixed with an older brother's unhelpful language and old wives tales - a dangerous cocktail!

Physical Changes

Details of the anatomical changes of which we need to be aware are fully discussed in Dr. Trevor Stammers' excellent book "The Family Guide to Sex and Intimacy". We need to be adequately preparing our children for changes that will occur in their bodies. It is helpful for fathers to prepare boys for 'wet dreams' (night time inadvertent emissions of semen) long before they take place. Some boys have been known to wake up and think, "My penis is broken!" Boys need to be prepared between the ages of ten and thirteen - a useful guide is around the time facial hair starts to appear, the voice deepens, or dramatic mood swings occur. (Parents need to be aware that in Western secular schools the issue of wet dreams is discussed even earlier than ten by children.) Masturbation also needs to be discussed, without embarrassment, clearly communicating your values. (See chapter 7.)

Girls need adequate preparation for menstruation. One girl I heard about stood screaming in the games shower at school, thinking she was haemorrhaging and afraid she was going to die! What a scandal, when they can so easily be prepared. Some girls begin their periods as young as ten years old, but most between eleven and fifteen.

We must always tell the truth about sex and be willing to be totally open. One winter evening David and Gill had a wonderful time with three of their children, relaxing by a crackling log fire. The children started discussing sex, browsing through books that had bought for them some time before. As they talked, nothing was taboo; they talked about anything and everything. They laughed at some of the illustrations in the younger books. David and Gill didn't ask the children personal questions but did keep the helpful discussions going from time to time with things like "How would you feel about ...?" The children also wanted to know things like when mum and dad started to go out with one another, and how they knew they wanted to marry each other.

Special times like this do occur naturally from time to time. However, we must also be continuously educating our children - not just waiting for the special moments. As they grow more mature, conversations about sex will increase. Sex education is not an occasional one-off that is done and then left, but rather a continuous process of openness and discussion within the home. The Oliver family has never forgotten that evening; it is a warm and positive memory for each of them. More particularly it was an evening where significant truths and values were communicated and absorbed.

Guidelines to Prevent Abuse

During these early years we also need to teach our children guidelines to prevent sexual abuse of them by adults. "We Can Say No!" is an excellent book for children aged 3 - 7 and deals with saying 'No!' to treats, secrets, going with a stranger, allowing someone to touch them, offering them a lift, or buying them something. The NSPCC in Britain deals with a total of more than 6,700 new cases of child sex abuse each year. By the age of sixteen, one in four girls and one in twelve boys will have been abused. 18% of these are under five years of age.

A Parental Check List

Here is a list of some of the issues about which you as parents should have a *biblically based* conviction. Some of them have direct Bible teaching

about them; others need a Biblical viewpoint establishing from wider Biblical principles.

We recommend you talk all these through together as husband and wife and find:-

- your own belief, in the light of the Scripture's teaching;
- your view on how much to communicate with your children;
- your thoughts on what you will communicate about the following, and at what age? -

nakedness in the home; privacy; bathtime; body changes (including preparing for them in good time); menstruation (periods); wet dreams (involuntary ejaculation during sleep); dating; kissing; petting; masturbation; homosexuality & lesbianism; contraception (Pill, Femidom, Cap, Coil, Condom); sexually transmitted diseases (STD's); AIDS.

There may have been a few raised eyebrows amongst some parents reading this list! But our experience is that your children will know all these words, or most of them at least. What they believe, what they have learnt, and from whom they have learnt it, will vary. Many children will know far more words than these! It can help them if you draw out *their* knowledge without recrimination. In other words, provide a safe environment where they can tell you the words they know. It is often an utter relief that you are not shocked and that you even know what the words mean!

Positively Speaking

“... I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

Traditionally, this is the moment after which all those things which have previously been prohibited are now suddenly expected! Having spent the previous years saying “DON'T!”, the instruction is now “DO!”; and the unreal expectation on the newly married couple is that they should now be sexual experts. As parents, we do a great disservice to our children if our sex education is all made up of “Thou shalt not's”, without preparing them positively, at the appropriate time, for married sexual life.

Let's be honest here: the skills involved in being a constantly joyful, generous, gentle, but exciting, sexual partner do not appear miraculously as a by-product of the exchange of wedding rings! It is a fascinating thought that the Bible records that Esther had to be trained for a year to know how to please the king - and it is unlikely to have been training in cookery or ironing! In a world where the media-driven expectation is that every sexual encounter must be 100% smouldering ecstasy, we need to talk to our children about the reality. Areas which may need to be mentioned include:

Putting your partner first (“preferring one another”); the importance of communication between husband and wife; giving and receiving pleasure; foreplay and taking your time; not sulking when the partner says “Not tonight”; times of diminished desire; impotence; infertility; faithfulness (sexual temptation doesn't end at the marriage service!).

If we can ensure that we have covered these important areas, we will give our children a good basis for going into their marriage relationship and the exciting journey that lies ahead of them.

Chapter 6

Say “No!”

As we raise our children we need to be communicating clearly our Bible-based values to them. We need to bring all that they say, hear, and especially watch, against God’s plumb-line and ask, “What does the Bible say about each situation?” We need to be talking to them about social and moral issues in the news, asking them about their own views and how these relate to Biblical standards. If we raise our children in this way they will be in no doubt about what we believe and why we set limits. Our heart should always be that we want them to grasp for themselves what **God** says about these matters, and for them to have such a love for his Word and truth that they *want* what he wants - yet at the same time recognising that, without faith and throwing themselves completely on the grace of God, it will be impossible to please him or live as he wants. (Failure to understand this will only lead to endless efforts that fail!)

By and large teenagers tend to make decisions on an emotional basis; therefore they need our help and training to see beyond the immediate circumstances, and to learn to think consequentially and biblically. We need to be challenging them to find answers in Scripture and to share them with us.

Give Them Vision

We need to be constantly reinforcing and re-envisioning our children with the hope that God has for their lives and future. We need to keep their vision held high. Often teenagers have a view of their feet, and a few inches

in front of them. This encourages them to be introspective and to live only for the moment. Teenagers need constant and consistent affirmation, praise and encouragement. We can help them to see how to make good choices, alongside the plan and purpose that God has for their lives. (Reviewing key prophetic words with them can play an important part in this.)

All the statistics show that the incidence of premarital sex among teenagers is inversely proportional to their closeness with their parents; the closer their relationship is with their parents, the less likely they are to become sexually involved. Children need to be encouraged to value themselves for who they are, not for how well they succeed or how popular they may be. To do this, they need to be sure of God's unconditional love and value for each of them, and to know that we love and value them in the same way. If they value themselves, they will respect themselves, will be more likely to respect others, and less likely to become involved in casual sexual relationships.

Role Models

It may be helpful for some of our children if they can relate (in addition to their own parents) to another person within the church, someone outside of the family, who can become one of their role models. Two of Dave and Gill's older teenagers now relate to mature young people who are actively participating in the church. They are free to share anything and everything they want to and they respect their confidentiality. These wonderful people care for them, take an interest in them and spend time with them one to one. Because they are nearer in age they also have another perspective on situations and can readily identify with them.

Such role-modelling can also be particularly helpful in one-parent families, where a single mother may be bringing up a boy or a single father a girl. Clearly in such cases the single parent cannot adequately model the role of the opposite sex. Appropriate input can therefore be brought in to complement the work of the lone parent.

Dating

It is probably a shock to most western readers to discover that 'dating' is not a Biblical concept! In fact dating is both a western and relatively modern

creation. Biblically, partners were generally found for young people by their parents; and this practice of ‘arranged marriages’ still works very successfully in many parts of the world (generally with a lower divorce rate than in the West!) Having said this, Kingdom principles do find a variety of expressions in different times and cultures, and this may well be such a case. However, the basic principles need to be adhered to. So, what are they?

First, ‘courtship’ (to use an old term, but one which we might do well to go back to!) is *with a view to marriage*. The western practice of ‘dating’ seems to be more with a view to gaining experience, trying things out, and having sexual encounters. The Bible calls us to *seek God* for our life-time partner, not to work our way through a list until we find one that feels right! Such an approach may seem so old-fashioned; and so it did to one young girl from Oxfordshire, until she spent a year in Argentina and found herself in a revival situation. This is a quote from one of her letters:

“It was their teaching about relationships that bothered me at first. Boys and girls, within the rules of the church, aren’t allowed to start dating until they are 18! Then, if two people like each other, they must pray, separately and alone, for three months before going together and declaring it to the youth pastor. Then they are allowed to spend time praying together for another three months before they go places together. From the day they are 18 they begin to pray for a future partner. I was horrified and asked why they had to leap straight into a relationship; surely experience should be valued too? The girls with me answered that experience in relationships only led to pain, sin and temptation. In these conditions the Holy Spirit cannot work. I now began to understand - also everyone is very happy with this arrangement. It means that members of the opposite sex are friends, not constantly trying to impress each other.”

The principles expressed in this letter will seem totally foreign to most western readers, and will probably be greeted with cries of shock, horror and possibly derision from many of our young people, whose attitudes to dating are most likely to have been shaped by culture rather than by Scripture. However, the Kingdom of God is radical, and it needs to challenge our contemporary culture. We all know by experience that Kingdom principles work in other situations; so why not here too?

Dating is Dominating

For the majority of young people aged 10-18, much of their conversation has to do with who is going out with whom, how far they went, which relationships have finished, who would like to date whom - yes, even in our church schools! And this casual approach to dating is continually fuelled by the media. A young person's thought life, both waking and sleeping, can be taken over by dating dreams, whether real or unrequited. This saps them of emotional, mental and spiritual energy, wastes so much time, distracts them from academic study, and gets in the way of Kingdom activities.

Dating is Destructive

We have seen too many individual lives and relationships tarnished, and in some cases entire youth groups damaged, by dating. This may be as a result of the exclusive nature of the dating relationship, or because of possible jealousy between dating rivals. It is most often caused by the broken friendships and feelings of insecurity, awkwardness or even bitterness when such a relationship ends - as most of them inevitably do.

Dating is Dangerous

If the above weren't reason enough, there is also the danger that dating may lead to premarital sex. Evidence, from both church and secular research, shows that the factor which most affects the sexual behaviour of young people is the amount of time spent alone together. Therefore, the simple step of cutting out 'dating' would greatly reduce the incidence of premarital or under-age sex at a stroke. In his book "Why Wait?" Josh McDowell notes the following startling statistics:

Age at which young people started dating	Percentage of these who will have had sex by age of 18
12 years old	91%
13 years old	56%
14 years old	53%
15 years old	40%
16 years old	20%

Put simply: the earlier young people get into ‘dating’, the more pressure there will be upon them to have premarital sex as the boundaries are pushed back; the later they start, the less pressure there is and the more maturity to make wiser decisions. Cut out dating completely, and the incidence should be pretty close to zero!

A Shift of Mindset?

To adopt a new attitude towards ‘dating’ needs a major shift of mindset for parents, let alone for our children, in the West. We need to recognise that our own attitude to dating has been strongly influenced and determined by our culture and our upbringing. Maybe it’s time that we took a fresh look at what the Bible has to say, and realigned ourselves with scripture. Yes, young people do need to learn to interact with the opposite sex, but this does not have to be in one-to-one relationships. It is far healthier to concentrate on and encourage good relationships within a group. And even when a couple do begin to develop a relationship, it should be for the most part within a group context - for safety’s sake.

So what *are* we encouraging as the positive way forward in this area? Put simply, that ‘dating’ should be abandoned and that ‘courtship’ be promoted. By courtship we mean a relationship where both parties are mature enough for the relationship to lead to marriage, where they have both been seeking the will of God concerning one another, where parents and church leaders are involved in the process, and where the sole goal of ‘going out’ together is with a view to a permanent relationship in marriage, not to a casual and passing one. This does indeed need a shift of mindset on the part of many of us - parents as well as children; but we believe it is something God is calling us back to in these days.

However, if your teenagers have started dating, it is still not too late to correct the situation - it will just make you more unpopular! Remember, setting boundaries and safety factors is part of your divinely-ordained duty. So, ignore the accusations of unfairness or unreasonable behaviour, and the cries of “You’ve ruined my life!”, and, with much prayer and talking it through with your children, go for it! You might find it easier if a group of parents with children of a similar age get together and determine to work this one through. If one set of parents do it alone, it will be seen as unreasonable; if a

few do it, it will be regarded as a conspiracy; but if an entire group does it, it will be seen as a movement - and that's what it needs to be!

Friendships

Relationships that our children have with peers are very important to them, and this is why they can be so easily pressurised. Training in choosing their friends should not be left until the teenage years, but should begin as soon as they start socialising with groups of children. 'Mother and Toddler' groups are useful here because you can observe your child's interaction with others from a distance and give helpful guidance. Our own listening skills become trained during these early years - ready for those late-night teenage communication sessions! We will often need to talk to our children about the company that they choose to keep, since our choice of friends determines what we become.

Purity Rings

Ever heard of purity rings? These are worn on the wedding-ring finger as a demonstration of commitment to God to keep oneself sexually pure and solely for one's future life-partner. In this way, on their wedding day a young man or woman can give their partner the very best gift possible, completely unspoiled. A girls' discipleship group in Basingstoke recently took this step, responding to the prompting of God. They went out and bought a ring, and at their next discipleship group put their rings on together as they made their pledge to keep themselves for the man of God's choice for them.

Persuasive Arguments

We must have the ability to clearly reason with our teenagers. As we have seen earlier, God made sex to be enjoyed, but only within the marriage relationship. But as well as understanding the Biblical principles involved, our children need to understand and be equipped with logical and pragmatic arguments and reasons, in order to be able to argue their own case in the moral field.

Here are some useful facts and thoughts for you and them:

- In 1994 33% of live births were to women outside of marriage.
- Sexual intercourse where either of the partners is under 16 years of age is illegal in the UK.
- Our virginity is something we can only give once. Once it is lost, it is permanent. Girls normally have a sense of loss or guilt after losing their virginity, however willing they were at the time. It is the one gift that our children can give in their marriage that is unique.
- Abortion is currently running at 55 million a year worldwide. It is epidemic, and it is perceived in society as a right.
- In the UK there are 20,000 cases of sexually transmitted disease (STD) among teenagers. Some of these are curable: others, such as herpes, are not. All are unpleasant and can lead to complications such as infertility. Some contribute to cancer of the cervix. Many have complicated symptoms including a great deal of discomfort and pain, as well as the embarrassment of the doctor's frequent examinations.
- The age that a girl becomes sexually active has bearing on the risks of cancer of the cervix. The number of partners that a husband had previously has the direct effect of increasing his wife's risk of cancer of the cervix.
- AIDS is a heterosexual problem, and the AIDS virus is actually smaller than the molecular holes in condom latex. The only way to avoid the risk of AIDS entirely, is for both partners to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage, and for both partners to remain totally faithful to each other after marriage. Any other way involves risk.
- The condom failure rate amongst teenagers is higher than 15%.
- Teenagers often say that sex with each other isn't hurting anyone else. Bear in mind the emotional and spiritual bonding that occurs, and the damage that this can do to future relationships.
- Teenage pregnancy is a risk to the mother's health and that of her baby. Many teenagers give birth to their babies prematurely increasing the risk of complications for the baby.
- You don't have to 'go all the way' to know whether you are compatible as partners for life. If everything has been 'done' before marriage, what is

there to look forward to?! In fact, just because sex feels good before marriage does not *guarantee* it will be so afterwards.

- Sex is precious. Nobody ever really forgets the first time; so let it be special, not furtive. Let it be a good memory, not a bad or cheap one. Let it be one which husband and wife can share with real joy and a clean conscience.

(Many of the above points are drawn from: "A Family Guide to Sex and Intimacy" by Dr Trevor Stammers)

How Far?

When asked by teenagers, "How far can I go?" Rob's usual response is, "You're asking the wrong question. You're asking how near to the edge you can go before you fall off. If you take that attitude, you will always be trying to go just one little bit further, and the likelihood is that, one day, you'll fall, and take someone else with you. What you need to be asking yourself is, 'How close to the centre can I stay?'"

He usually follows this up by asking the question, "Who wants to do God's will?" If it is a Christian group, the majority of hands will shoot up. "Well, it is God's will that you should avoid sexual immorality - which means no sex outside marriage - and that you keep your body under control." (See 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6) In fact, Paul takes it even further in 1 Cor 6:18 where he tells us not just to *avoid* immorality, but to positively *flee from it*. As Christians, we are called to be different - called to be holy, special, set apart for God. Romans 12:1-2 tells us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; not to follow the pattern of the world, but to be transformed by having our minds made new - getting a whole new way of thinking, seeing things from God's perspective. Then we will know what God wants and will have the power to do it. If we are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives in us; so don't do anything with your body to dishonour him.

There is much talk nowadays about 'Safe Sex'. Well, God got there first! Safe Sex is exactly what we were created to enjoy - in the sexual intimacy of marriage, between a husband and wife who have kept themselves, and continue to keep themselves, for their marriage partner, in an atmosphere of

love and trust. Anything less or anything else is going to hurt us, if not in the short-term then certainly in the long-term.

If young people do want a list of guidelines to follow in their ‘courtship’, then we would suggest the following:

- *Don't* underestimate the strength of sexual desire, nor your weakness and lack of self-control in the face of it; don't feed it and don't arouse it before its time. (Song of Songs 3:5, 8:4)
- *Don't* undress one another, or yourself in the other's presence.
- *Don't* lie down together.
- *Don't* touch what you haven't got! In fact, the safest thing is not to touch at all, since touch is one of the greatest arousers of the emotions.
- *Don't* spend unduly long periods alone together.
- *Do* develop a Christ-centred relationship, especially through prayer.
- *Do* find someone older and wiser who can give advice and to whom you can be accountable.
- *Do* develop a positive view of singleness. It is a gift of God, a time for opportunity, not just a phase to be passed through as quickly as possible. Invest in a wide range of interests and friendships.

‘Missionary’ Dating

There will be very few of our young people who will not face the temptation to get involved emotionally with someone who isn't a Christian. Some may try to bury their heads in the sand about what God's Word says about ‘mixed relationships’; others may try to convince themselves that they are ‘missionary’ dating so they can witness for Jesus and help them! Help them to see that it's never worth it. While there may be the odd exception, the usual inevitable consequence of ‘missionary’ dating is, at best, a temporary neutralisation of their relationship with God, perhaps thereby missing their destiny; at worst, a complete abandonment of the faith. It is always easier to drag someone down than to pull someone up!

Some young people have been known to take the attitude that going out with a non-Christian is okay as long as marriage is not in mind, and that it is later that one should start to look for a Christian partner. This viewpoint

needs soundly demolishing: if marriage is not in mind, what are they doing going out with that person in the first place? Furthermore, our young people must not underestimate the difference in standards and morality between Christians and most non-Christians, for whom sex is likely to be seen as an incidental, if not an expected, part of a relationship (even a casual one), and the pressure to comply can be intense.

Clare and Mandy were both keen Christians, Spirit-filled and all-out for God; they were active in evangelism, stars of the youth group, with tremendous potential and destinies before them. On separate occasions and in differing circumstances they both met, 'fell for', and started going out with non-Christians, despite much counsel to the contrary. Of course, it was easy to rationalise: "There are so few dynamic Christian young men around." In Clare's case, the result was that within a short space of time she had totally abandoned her faith and had moved in with her boyfriend. Mandy's case was more long-term. Her boyfriend started coming to the youth events, eventually becoming a Christian. This might be viewed as a success, vindicating the idea of 'missionary' dating. However, the true picture is that they were not "equally yoked". Mandy's boyfriend was a nice lad but was never her spiritual equal, and rather than him rising to her level, she came down to his. They got married, eventually dropped out of the Fellowship, drifted through one or two other churches, and are now nowhere with God. Mandy seemed destined for great things in God's Kingdom. She is now totally neutralised, passively giving occasional lip-service to her faith.

Such tragic waste is all too common. We appeal to you parents: *put your foot down!* It is *your* responsibility to decide with whom your children may or may not go out; and they need to know that an unsaved pagan is totally off-limits.

The Scriptural principles in this whole area are constantly repeated and absolutely clear. Some of the key relevant Bible passages we would encourage you to look at are: Genesis 24:3-4, 1 Kings 11:1-4 and 2 Cor 6:14-16. (Other passages you might want to look at include: Deut 7:1-4; Joshua 23:12-13; Judges 14:1-3; Nehemiah 10:28-30; 1 Kings 16:30-33; Malachi 2:11-12; 1 Cor 7:39.)

The challenge of all this is simple: how can you have a God-centred relationship with someone who does not themselves have a relationship with God?

Chapter 7

Hot Potatoes

In this chapter we want to look at three issues which parents might be tempted to skate around - either through embarrassment and thoughts that such things should not be talked about, or because it might seem that such topics would not be a problem or concern for children brought up in a Christian environment. Well, be assured that these topics are of great concern, and we need to help our children get God's right perspective on them.

Let's start with one about which, if we are honest, equally-committed Christians may have some slightly different views.

Masturbation

Masturbation is perhaps one of the biggest sources of guilt among Christian teenagers, particularly boys. (Even after a 'wet dream', which is basically a natural biological safety mechanism, some boys suffer from immense false guilt and a sense of feeling dirty and unworthy.) It has been estimated that 95% of males and 50% of females masturbate at some stage in their lives. These figures are identical for both Christians and non-Christians.

Of course, there are the horror stories, handed down over the generations - "Doing it makes you go blind"; "You will waste all your semen and be unable to father children." - all told to frighten. There is also the opposite and equally unhelpful approach: that masturbation is an essential part of preparation for adult life and that a person is not normal without it. Between these two extremes lies a middle-of-the-road attitude, even among many

Christians, that masturbation is ‘just one of those things’ that you have to ‘live with’; not God’s best perhaps, but not the end of the world.

What does the Bible Say?

We need to be honest enough to acknowledge that the Bible does not have obvious ‘proof texts’ which speak against masturbation. One supposed traditional proof text - the account of God’s judgement on Onan (Genesis 38:6-10) - has nothing to say about masturbation at all, but is to do with God’s judgement on Onan for refusing to fulfil Israelite law by providing offspring for his deceased brother’s wife.

Some people would say that since the Bible is normally very specific about things which God says are wrong, the fact that it seems to be silent about masturbation indicates that it is of relative unimportance in God’s eyes, and that therefore it is not a sin, or at least not as major a sin as some would like to make it. Others would draw out *implications* of Bible teaching on related topics. For example, when God gave Moses his laws for Israel, this one found a place among them: “When a man has an emission of semen, he must bathe his whole body with water, and he will be *unclean* till evening. Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be *unclean* till evening.” (Leviticus 15:16-17) “If one of your men is unclean because of a nocturnal emission, he is to go outside the camp and stay there. But as evening approaches he is to wash himself, and at sunset he may return to the camp.” (Deuteronomy 23:10-11) While no sacrifice is demanded - which would be the case if this were a matter of outright sin - the need for ritual cleansing at least indicates something that spoils fellowship.

The New Testament too has references that may well include such sexual ‘uncleanness’. For example, in Eph 5:3 Paul writes: “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity ...” The *impurity* is clearly linked with *sexual immorality* (fornication, adultery etc.), yet is distinct from it. Other sexual thoughts or actions of some kind are clearly in mind, therefore, and may well include such things as masturbation.

What Lies behind It?

Whether the actual *act* of masturbation is in itself a sin or not, we must determine for ourselves before God. But what does seem clear is that the

attitude that lies behind the act is, almost invariably, sinful. We need to remember that masturbation is *not a neutral issue*. For while it is self-evidently a *bodily* activity, it is also, and just as importantly, a *spiritual* and *mental* activity.

From a *spiritual* point of view, it is an expression of the selfishness and self-centredness that lies at the heart of all our problems. It says, “*I need* to find sexual release; *I deserve* to get satisfaction; *I want* to have pleasure. And anyway, I’m not hurting anyone else.” (A popular excuse for many things!) As Christians we need to be clear that anything that ministers to the “*I*” element within me will always have profound and long-lasting spiritual impact - whether it appears to affect others or not. God has designed sexual intercourse to be an expression of deepest intimacy between a husband and wife. Masturbation, while it may be a temporary release of sexual tension, can never satisfy this desire for love and intimacy. It is, at best, ‘solo sex’, frustrating the very instinct it gratifies.

As far as the *mental* dimension of masturbation is concerned, it is an activity that invariably involves the imagination. It is fed by, and then in turn feeds, lustful thoughts involving other people, real or imaginary, about whom we have no right to be having sexual thoughts. Such thoughts are illegal from God’s viewpoint, clearly contradicting Jesus’ teaching about sexual purity (e.g., Matthew 5:27-30). And not only are these thoughts illegal, they are also polluting. They spoil the cleanness of God’s temple and, like weeds in an untended garden, simply grow and grow. The guilt and the loneliness that so often follow masturbation are powerful indicators that here is something that is spoiling what God has made.

The Danger of Addiction

Giving oneself endlessly to masturbation may lead a person to become a compulsive masturbator, and so end up addicted to it and controlled by it. If masturbation becomes an enslaving habit, it may encourage the person involved to become isolated and withdrawn, reinforcing their feelings of anxiety, guilt and rejection. It may also hinder their ability to relate to people, particularly to the opposite sex. It may be difficult for someone, once under its control, to break the cycle without outside counsel and prayer, and even

prayer for deliverance. If we think that we observe such symptoms in our children, we should gently and lovingly make ourselves available to talk.

So, finally ...

It is important that we discuss masturbation with our children. If we don't, someone else will - probably inaccurately and unhelpfully. The specific approach we take as parents must be determined on our knees before God. Whatever approach we do take - whether we see the actual *act* itself as sinful or the *attitude* that lies behind the act as the sin - our young people must know that masturbation does not separate us from God's love and that is not the unforgivable sin (although endless is the list of young people over the years who have felt it may have been!). But equally they need to know that God does consider the thoughts and attitudes that lie behind it to be wrong, and that he calls upon us to exercise self-control in this area of our life just as much as in other areas too. These thoughts, attitudes and lack of self-control need to be faced up to, repented of, and left behind. Accountability to continue walking clean can then be tremendously helpful.

Pornography

Once considered an exclusively male preserve, pornographic material is now aimed at both men and women. It is readily available at newsagents and is easily accessible to young people. It is not just what are often called 'the top shelf' magazines (those kept supposedly out of reach of children) which are the problem. Some of the more popular daily newspapers in Britain regularly have prominent pictures of bare-breasted women and articles on sexual relationships, which may serve as appetisers for the meatier stuff. Pornographic magazines, videos and computer software often get passed around at school. (There have been instances of children as young as seven becoming involved.) This, sadly, is now the world in which we live.

Despite spurious claims by some sex therapists that pornographic material has a positive therapeutic value for some people, and can even assist couples in their sex life, the fact that the purpose of pornography is to titillate or sexually arouse and to encourage sexual fantasy means that it contravenes Jesus' clear teaching on mental sexual purity in Matt 5:27-28, and is clearly in opposition to Paul's instruction to flee from immorality in

1 Corinthians 6:18. By portraying women (and men) as mere sex objects, there for the gratification of the voyeur, pornography degrades humanity, the pinnacle of God's perfect creation, and insults its Creator.

As well as having the obvious effect of feeding lust, pornography has other, perhaps more long-term, detrimental results:

No Reality

Pornography is a fantasy world in which all women are large-breasted and extremely beautiful, all men are powerfully-chested and amazingly potent, and everyone is always available for anything. No real-life partner can ever match up to such 'perfection', and the reality of marital sexuality may therefore prove to be a profound disappointment to someone whose expectations and appetites have been fashioned by a myth that carries no reality to it.

No Respect

Pornography promotes an irresponsible attitude to sex, in that it encourages experience and gratification without any responsibility for the well-being of the partner, and all that is involved in true intimacy. Any implied relationship is focused on the purely physical, and ignores all the other essential aspects of true love. It fosters a mind-set that the sole purpose of the partner is to sexually satisfy the user, which in marriage will inevitably lead to dissatisfaction and loss of love.

No Restraint

Rapid technological development in the world of computing has already brought pornography to the Internet. It is only a matter of time before it is available as 'virtual reality', allowing an individual to engage in simulated sex with a computerised image. Even now, pornography could be classed as 'Virtual Adultery'. It runs counter to marital fidelity, because it fosters the attitude that what you don't have is much better than what you do have. A person reared on such a diet will have an unreal appetite which they are likely to satisfy outside of the marriage. Pornography is also exponentially addictive; its users will always be looking for new thrills, and are therefore likely to move into areas of violence and deviant sex in their search for greater stimulation and excitement.

Help! I've Found them Reading It!

So what do you do if you find your own child with pornographic material? As with everything else, it is important not to over-react or jump to wrong conclusions. Try to find out why it is in their possession: it may have been planted in their bag by some school friend who wants them to get into trouble; it may have been that they took it from a friend who has problems in this area; or, it may be for their own use. If this is the case, it is worth trying to establish whether this is a one-off occasion (in which case, be thankful to God for a timely intervention), or whether they are regular consumers. Talk through with them why it is that they want to look at pornography. Try to express lovingly why God sees it as impure, and why it is unhelpful, destructive and potentially dangerous. If they are willing, pray with them for cleansing of the mind and the memories, as well as of the heart. Bearing in mind the potentially addictive nature of pornography, on-going accountability is important. If this is hard for them to receive from you as parents, then encourage them to share honestly in a discipling relationship with another mature Christian, whom you trust to act on your behalf - and then release them into that.

Homosexuality

The homosexual lobby, an increasingly militant, proud and vocal minority in this age of political correctness and equal opportunities, has largely succeeded in persuading officialdom in western society to comply with its demands that homosexuality be recognised as a valid lifestyle with equal status with heterosexuality. Homosexuality and bisexuality is rampant in the media; "Gaytime TV" is now prime-time viewing in Britain; there are homosexual 'marriages'; and homosexual couples are trying to adopt children. Various "Gay Christian Movements" have infiltrated the church and several of the established denominations appear to be unwilling or unable to hold fast to Biblical principles, but instead follow the path of compromise. Recent reports reveal the ordination of practising homosexuals into the ministry of various denominational groups, both in the UK and abroad.

Confusion All Around

Much has been said about the factors which may or may not cause or contribute to homosexuality, and the debate will no doubt continue. (Trevor Stammers has an excellent review of the current debate in his book “The Family Guide to Sex and Intimacy”.) Young people may be confused about the Scriptural teaching and even its ‘reasonableness’; they may even be uncertain as to their own sexual orientation. But anxiety about homosexual feelings is quite common among adolescents, many of whom may pass through a phase of feeling strong attractions towards members of their own sex, but who then grow out of it. It is therefore essential that we are able to talk through these issues with our children in order to dispel the confusion.

Our Approach

When we approach this very emotive topic, we need to be aware of our own reactions and prejudices. It is important that we avoid homophobia (a hatred of, prejudice against, reaction to, or distrust of homosexuals, usually motivated by fear or ignorance). This is an accusation which is commonly, but mistakenly, levelled against evangelical Christians who hold to Biblical principles. For us, the issue is not homophobia, but righteousness. At the same time, we must pray for and exercise the same love and compassion towards people as God, who loves the homosexual sinner as much as the heterosexual sinner. Within much of everyday society, homosexuals are still an ostracised and rejected sub-culture who need the love, support and acceptance of the church of Christ before they can respond to his message of forgiveness, healing and restoration.

What does the Bible Say?

As we have already seen in chapter four, the Bible is clear that sexual intercourse or sexual involvement of any sort between male and male or female and female is *sin*. However, homosexuality is not the unforgivable sin! Nor is homosexual *temptation or attraction* sin, any more than heterosexual temptation or attraction is. It is homosexual *activity* that the Bible uncompromisingly condemns; and, drawing from Jesus’ teaching on sexual purity, homosexual lustful *thoughts* - just as much as heterosexual lustful thoughts.

“I think I’m Homosexual”

So what do you do if your son or daughter confesses to you that they think they are homosexual? This is an extremely complex and sensitive issue, and beyond the scope of this booklet. However, we would advise that, as parents, the first response should be as in other areas of sexual sin: do not withdraw, isolate or condemn, but assure your child of unconditional love and prayerful support. Analyse your own feelings and do not give in to anger, fear or shame. Take time to talk with them about their feelings, and remember that it has probably taken them hours of agonising to pluck up the courage to come to you about it.

As we have said above, let them know that the homosexual *temptation* is not itself sin, any more than heterosexual temptation is. Equally, help them to understand that homosexual *activity* of whatever sort clearly lies outside of God’s permitted boundaries for us, just like heterosexual activity before or outside of marriage does. Let them also know that God does not simply tell us what is wrong; he gives us the power to change and do what is right. Prayer (and, where necessary, prayer for deliverance or healing from issues from the past) is a powerful tool. Accountability to walk right and clean is also an important factor, though this may well be established with another mature Christian rather than with parents. Even if, after much prayer and counselling, someone is still convinced they remain with a homosexual *orientation*, celibacy is still a valid and godly lifestyle option for them, as it is for many single heterosexual people, and God can come in powerfully to help them live it.

Chapter 8

Picking up the Pieces

But what if the unthinkable happens? What if your own son or daughter becomes sexually involved? Even worse, what if there is pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease as a consequence?

Reaction or Response?

First of all, analyse your own reaction. You're probably shocked, horrified, dismayed; there may be feelings of anger or failure or betrayal. But for whom are you feeling most sorry? Is it for the young people involved, because of the inevitable consequences of the mess into which they have fallen? Or is it for yourself, because of the potential shame which there might be for you and your family? Unless these reactions are identified, there will be the tendency to withdraw from, or to isolate, those who have fallen, or to approach them judgementally and with condemnation. This is particularly true in cases of sexual sin, where there are likely to be deeper feelings of guilt and shame (and possibly self-righteousness and envy!) involved.

Remorse or Repentance?

There is also the need to assess the response of those who have fallen. Are they truly repentant, or are they merely sorry for being found out? Or, in the case of pregnancy or disease, are they sorry for the personal consequences?

Once a situation of sexual sin has been exposed, there will inevitably be feelings of guilt and shame for those involved. *“Sexuality is probably the*

biggest source of guilt, failure and condemnation,” writes J. John. However, these feelings should not be confused with conviction of sin, or with any idea of punishment from God. On their own, such feelings will not lead to repentance, but rather to a desire to cover up or make excuses - consider the behaviour of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Satan, the Accuser, will also try to feed such feelings of guilt and failure, since he knows that they will lead to withdrawal from the presence of God, and a misapprehension that God will not forgive in this particular instance. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (2 Cor 7:10)

The feelings of those involved are in fact likely to be mixed, but the ideal way forward is to work with them so that they come to a place of true repentance, with the assurance that where there is such repentance, there is always forgiveness. At the same time, particularly for us parents, it is vital that we continue to show them our unconditional love - whether or not they satisfy our present ideas or conditions of repentance. To deprive them of such love will inevitably result in isolation, rejection and resentment, and may drive them further away from God and his re-creative forgiveness. Loving discipline may be appropriate, but that is something which individual parents need to determine in the sight of God and in the light of all the circumstances.

Perhaps at this point we should ask the question, “Is sexual sin worse than any other?” Sexual sin is certainly seen as a very serious issue in the Bible. It makes clear that sexual sin affects the person’s own body, as well as the other person involved. Paul writes: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you received from God?” (1 Cor 6:18-19) We should not treat sexual sin lightly therefore. But equally we need to remember that because it is serious does not mean it cannot be forgiven. We would also suggest that young people who have fallen sexually need to be treated more gently than we would treat adults.

An infamous event described with great honesty in the Bible concerns King David’s adultery with Bathsheba. (See 2 Samuel 11:1-5.) David at first attempted to cover up the truth, even going so far as to plot the murder of Bathsheba’s husband. But when he was faced up with his sin by Nathan the

Prophet, he was wise enough to admit it, and to confess and repent of it. While he had to live with the consequences, God forgave him completely and gave him a chance for a fresh start. Later, from this position of forgiveness and restoration, he was able to write one of the most beautiful and hope-filled psalms in the Bible - Psalm 51.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge ... Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you ... You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:1-4, 9-13, 16-17)

The way in which God forgave David, and later went on to make a covenant with Bathsheba’s second son, Solomon, is an example with which we can comfort those who have sinned sexually and who may be feeling that God can never forgive them. We have his promise that not only will he forgive those who acknowledge and confess their sins, he will make them clean from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-10). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). Let us make sure that we are as forgiving and compassionate as God himself.

Recrimination or Restoration?

In John 8:3-11 there is a beautiful example of the compassion of Jesus in the story of the woman caught in adultery. At no time does he condone or encourage her immorality; in fact, he is very direct in ordering her to cut it out. But at the same time, he does not condemn, humiliate or isolate her; rather, he forgives and encourages, leaving her with *hope for the future*. We need to follow this example when dealing with young people who have fallen

into sexual sin, remembering Jesus' comment about sinless stone throwers, and mindful of the saying that "there, but for the grace of God, go I." As Paul says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (Gal 6:1)

Repetition or Renewal?

Once a young person has had intercourse for the first time and has therefore lost their virginity, there may be the tendency to think: "I've done it, so it doesn't matter any more", or even to see further sexual activity as inevitable. There is certainly more pressure or expectation on teenage girls to have sex once it is known that they have had a previous sexual experience. However, like any sin, just because a person has committed it once, it does not mean that they are unable to stop. Even the teenage magazine 'problem pages' give the advice that anybody can decide to start again, and that celibacy is still a valid choice for anybody who has had previous sexual partners. While we could not go along with those counsellors who pray for a restoration of virginity, we are convinced that in Christ we are a new creation, and that God's forgiveness always enables us to make a fresh start.

Finally - Nobody's Perfect!

This booklet describes the ideal of how parents should communicate with their children from an early age on the whole matter of Biblically-based sexuality. Having read it, you may be cowering in a state of self-condemnation, convinced that you are a total failure as a parent and that your children have been scarred for life! Be assured, the Super-Parent does not exist; and if there is such a superior being, it is probably only in detached retrospect! The first (and last) rule of parenting is: ***DON'T PANIC!*** Children are remarkably resilient and value and appreciate our well-meant mistakes as much as our accidental successes. In fact, what we regard as successful times and what they regard as successful times are often very different events. The most important thing that we can do is to introduce them to God, the Father of all fatherhood, and to entrust them to his safe-keeping, everlasting arms.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Books:

The Family Guide to Sex and Intimacy Dr. Trevor Stammers

Hodder & Stoughton ISBN 0-340-60816-1 (*Highly recommended*)

Parents First - Sex Education within the Home

CARE for Education ISBN 0-905195-02-7 (*An excellent course designed for group participation and discussion*)

Positive Parenting - Packs 1,2 & 3, Portsmouth Area Family Concern

Who made me? Malcolm & Meryl Doney

Marshall Pickering ISBN0-551-01476-8 (*For children aged 3-7*)

Preparing for Adolescence Dr. James Dobson

Kingsway ISBN 0-86065-167-3 (*For 10-13 year-olds*)

It's Always on my Mind J. John

Word Books ISBN 1-86024-023-2 (*Highly recommended - 13+*)

Why Wait? - What you need to know about the Teen Sexuality Crisis Josh

McDowell, Thomas Nelson ISBN 0-8407-4282-7

Purity under pressure Neil Anderson & Dave Park

Harvest House ISBN 1-56507-292-8

The Seduction Paul Francis, Marshall Pickering ISBN 0-551-03896-3

The Rising Price of Love Dr. Patrick Dixon

Hodder & Stoughton ISBN 0-340-62772-7

The Truth About Aids Dr. Patrick Dixon, Kingsway ISBN 0-86065-880-5

Sex Matters Steve Chalke & Nick Page

Hodder & Stoughton ISBN 0-340-65661-1

Sexuality David Robotham, Basingstoke Community Church

Videos:

Make Love Last, CARE (*Best used with a youth group*)

Lessons in Love, CARE for the Family (*for group or family use*)

Learn To Discern, Focus On The Family

Books on homosexual issues:

The Broken Image Leanne Payne, Kingsway ISBN 0-86065-641-1

Homosexuality - what does the Bible say? David Field

IVP ISBN 0-94642-223-0

Editor's note:

Inclusion of resources in this list does not necessarily mean that Salt & Light Ministries endorses everything found within them.