

Sex. It is a topic that frequents our thoughts. It is a topic that permeates our society. It is a theme that runs throughout popular music and media. And, not surprisingly, it is an issue that is at the forefront of teenagers' minds. One *U.S. News and World Report* poll of teens in 59 countries discovered that 99% of our world's teens said that sex is the most important issue facing today's youth.¹ It is a multifaceted issue that warrants attention on a variety of fronts if we hope to help our teens preserve their purity.

The Problem Facing Our Teens

Perceptions about Sex

There was a day in American culture when talk about sex was taboo. Sex itself was not, as an entire generation got their thrills "on blueberry hill," but sex did not permeate the cultural landscape like it does today. Times have changed. Sex has been brought "out of the closet" and not only is promiscuity made public but sexual choices once considered deviant are now touted as alternative lifestyles. The sixties and seventies were known as the decade of free love. But the eighties and nineties saw a sexual revolution that makes the sixties look tame in comparison.

Sexual activity is no longer an option for teenagers, it is a right. One pamphlet apparently distributed to public school students in New York City presented a "Teenager's Bill of Rights" which stated on behalf of teens everywhere:

- I have the right to think for myself.
- I have the right to decide whether to have sex and who to have it with.
- I have the right to use protection when I have sex.
- I have the right to buy and use condoms.
- I have the right to express myself.²

Given this climate of thought regarding teenage sexuality, is it any wonder that so many teens are choosing promiscuity?

But it's not just a pamphlet promoting these loose attitudes toward sexuality. America's youth are echoing back their agreement. In 1987, 78% of 19 to 29 year olds said there is nothing wrong with premarital sex, and a 1991 *Seventeen* Magazine survey of 14 to 21 year-olds found that only 21% of girls and 19% of guys were willing to say that premarital sex is a "bad idea" for everyone.³ Moral relativism has become so entrenched in our society that around 80% of our youth agree that sex outside marriage is not always wrong.

¹ Walt Mueller, *Understanding Today's Youth Culture*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 212.

² Ibid, 211; Midge Decter, "Homosexuality and the Schools", March 1993, Online Article: <http://www.ocf.org/ca3/HomosexualityAndSchools.html>, accessed 12/13/00; James Dobson, Letter, February 13, 1992, Online article: http://associate.com/ministry_files/The_Reading_Room/Christian_Ethics_n_Issues_1/Growing_Up_In_The_Age_Of_AIDS_.shtml, accessed 12/13/00.

³ Mueller, 218.

Society is also redefining the definitions of sexual contact. In the wake of the impeachment controversy, the definition of "sex" has become hazy. In another recent *Seventeen* survey, 40% of respondents indicated that they did not consider oral sex to be "sex."⁴

Teens seem to be confused about the reasons for having sex as well. One recent *YM* magazine survey discovered that among girls aged 13-20, 96% of those who had never had sex say that it is important to be "in love" with a guy before having sex with him. 76% of the non-virgins agreed. And yet the same survey revealed that among those who had engaged in intercourse, only 56% claimed to have been in love with their partner when they lost their virginity and only 45% said their partner was in love with them. What's more, while the overwhelming majority said being in love was important, love was not the top reason for having sex. 58% cited "curiosity" as the foremost reason for having sex, followed by "love" (47%), "attraction" (40%), "to lose their virginity" (24%) and "feeling pressure" (20%).⁵ That's right, forget about "love;" almost one in four teens were willing to have sex for no other reason than losing their virginity.

Teenage Sexual Activity

It shouldn't surprise us, then, that teens are engaging in sex in alarming numbers. The overwhelming majority of America's teens will likely have sex before they reach the age 20. In fact, 86% of unmarried 19-year-old males and 75% of unmarried 19-year-old females report having had intercourse. Nationwide, 40% of our ninth graders, 48% of our tenth graders, 57% of our eleventh graders and 72% of our twelfth graders have had sex.⁶ Not only will most Americans have sex in their teen years, but also they will lose their virginity at an average of eight years before they marry.⁷

Furthermore, teens are becoming increasingly younger when they experience sex for the first time. Most studies show that the average age for first time intercourse is currently 15 for American girls and 14 for American boys. That number includes those students who abstain during their teen years. Among sexually active high school students, the average age for onset of sexual activity is 13.2 for boys and 14.6 for girls.⁸ Is it any wonder that 83% of respondents in a *Seventeen* poll indicated that sex education in school should start by age 13?⁹ Most frightening, given the tendency for younger and younger teens to have sex, studies show that the younger a student is the more likely that first sexual experience is forced or unwanted. While 93% of teenage women report that their

⁴ *Youthworker Journal*, "Youth Culture Update Excerpts 2000," May/June 2000, Online article: www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/mj00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

⁵ *Youthworker Journal*, "Youth Culture Update Excerpts 2000," March/April 2000, Online article: www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/ma00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

⁶ Mueller, 213.

⁷ *The Allen Guttmacher Institute*, "Teen Sex and Pregnancy", November 1999, Online article: http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html; accessed 12/11/00

⁸ Mueller, 213.

⁹ www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/mj00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

"first time" was voluntary, 25% say it was unwanted. Furthermore, seven of ten girls who had sex before age 13 said that sex was unwanted or involuntary.¹⁰

It may also be surprising where our teens are having sex. Gone are the steamy windows on a country road or a car parked on lover's lane. But this shouldn't be surprising; most teens begin having sex before driving is an option. Is it any wonder that 57.2% of sexually active teens indicate that their first sexual experience occurred either at their own home or their partners?¹¹ Or that 78% of sexually active teens admit that they have, at some time, had sex in their own or their partner's bedroom.¹² But even more shocking that where is with whom. Not only are our teens having sex, many are having sex with multiple partners. 19% of high schoolers admit to having sex with four or more partners, and among high school seniors that number rises to 28.6%.¹³

Thank goodness our teens attend church, right? After all, being active in a youth group will shield our teens from the sexualization of our society right? Well, while church involvement does

Activity	All	Age 11-12	Age 13-14	Age 15-16	Age 17-18
Held hands	89%	74%	84%	92%	95%
Embracing and some kissing	73%	39%	65%	80%	86%
Heavy "French" Kissing	53%	15%	38%	61%	74%
Fondling of Breasts	34%	4%	20%	41%	55%
Fondling of Genitals	26%	2%	14%	30%	44%
Sexual Intercourse	15%	1%	8%	18%	27%

Table 1; Sexual Activity With Persons of the Opposite Sex, By Age Group, Churched Youth

appear to contribute to "more restrictive attitudes concerning premarital sex and less sexual experience"¹⁴ church involvement is no guarantee our teens will be spared from

adolescent sexual activity. A study conducted by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler for their book Right from Wrong examined sexual activity among churched youth. While the percent of churched youth who engaged in sexual intercourse is considerably lower than the national average, still, one in four of teens that attend church regularly will have sex before they reach age 19. And furthermore, while intercourse occurs at a lower rate, almost half engage in inappropriate sexual contact such as the fondling of breasts and genitals by age 19.¹⁵ Table 1 shows the full results of this study. The simple fact is, church attendance alone is not enough to ensure our teens aren't lured into the dangerous world of promiscuity.

¹⁰ www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html; accessed 12/11/00

¹¹ Josh McDowell, Why True Love Waits, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), 10.

¹² Mueller, 214.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Arland Thornton and Donald Camburn, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes," Journal of Marriage and Family, August 1989, 651.

¹⁵ Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, Josh McDowell's Handbook on Counselling Youth: A comprehensive guide for equipping youth workers, pastors, teachers, parents, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 281.

Teen Pregnancy and Abortion

Probably the most obvious result of this cultural climate of teenage sexuality is pregnancy. The Allen Guttmacher institute reports that a sexually active teen that does not use contraceptives has a 90% chance of becoming pregnant in the first year of sexual activity.¹⁶ Furthermore, by the age 18, one in four teens will become pregnant and by age 21 that number rises to one in two.¹⁷ In other words, there are more than 1 million teen pregnancies in America¹⁸ and every day 1,000 American unmarried teenage girls become mothers.¹⁹ Most teen pregnancies occur within three months of the onset of sexual activity.²⁰ And one in every four teenage mothers will have a second child within 2 years.²¹

One response to the teen pregnancy crisis has been the promotion of contraceptives. And while contraceptive use is highly effective in preventing pregnancy, it is not foolproof. Many teens choose not to use contraceptives. In 1995, one study showed that 78% of teens did not use any contraceptives the first time they had sex.²² What is more in a *Seventeen* poll, only 46% of sexually active teens claimed to use a condom every time they had sex.²³

Additionally, contraceptives fail. While contraceptives are considered medical devices, which must meet FDA requirements, there is room in FDA standards for method failure (i.e. failure of the contraceptive itself). Even more important to prevention of teen pregnancy, however, is the prevalence of user failure that contributes to unplanned pregnancies. A Planned Parenthood report cited by McDowell and Hostetler indicates that due to method and user failure, teens that use contraceptives experience an unplanned pregnancy in the first year of contraceptive use at a frightening rate. In one year, 11% teens using the birth control pill got pregnant. 10.5% of teens using an IUD got pregnant in the first year; those using the "rhythm" method: 33.9%; Condoms: 18.4% Diaphragm: 31.6%; Spermicides: 34%.²⁴ Contraceptive use, while it may be effective in preventing some pregnancies, is, by itself, not enough to stem the tide.

What happens to those teenage girls who find themselves pregnant? One study shows that 48% will carry the baby to term. 11% will miscarry. 41% will choose to have an abortion.²⁵ Since 1973, the year of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, 26% of reported abortions have been performed on

¹⁶ www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html; accessed 12/11/00

¹⁷ McDowell and Hostetler, 293.

¹⁸ Mueller, 214.

¹⁹ McDowell and Hostetler, 293.

²⁰ Mueller, 214.

²¹ www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html; accessed 12/11/00

²² *Ibid.*

²³ www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/mj00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

²⁴ McDowell and Hostetler, 294.

²⁵ Mueller, 214.

teenagers.²⁶ The reported abortion rate for 18-19 year olds is 2 times that of the national average. And Planned Parenthood estimates that 15-19 year olds only report 33% of the abortions they have obtained.²⁷

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Teen pregnancy isn't the only result of teen sexual activity. Since the 1980's the American public has become increasingly aware of the STD crisis. The CDC reports that well over 30,000 people contract a STD every day and 2.5 million teens will contract a STD each year.²⁸ And while it's hard to translate those numbers into probabilities, a conservative estimate states that 1 in 5 teens will contract an STD during their teenage years.²⁹

While condoms help protect against STD's, in order to do so effectively condoms must be used *correctly* in *every* sexual encounter. The Allan Guttemacher Institute reports that after just one act of unprotected sex, a teenage woman has a 1% chance of contracting HIV, a 30% risk of genital herpes and a 50% risk of contracting gonorrhea.³⁰ And remember, only 46% of sexually active teens claim to use condoms every time they have sex.³¹ Add to that the number of times condoms fail due to method and user failure and our teens are placing themselves at high risk for contracting an STD. Clearly the CDC is right. Education promoting condom use alone is not enough to prevent STD's effectively. Such education must be coupled with instruction that focuses on delaying sexual behavior until marriage.³²

Pornography

Yet another destructive aspect of the sexual revolution of recent years is the prevalence of pornography in our society. Langly Lonford has defined pornography as "That which exploits and dehumanizes sex so that human beings are treated as things and women in particular as sex objects."³³ Pornography often leads to a sexual addiction, which Patrick Carnes describes as the "athlete's foot of

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ McDowell and Hostetler, 303.

²⁸ McDowell and Hostetler, 333; Mueller, 215.

²⁹ Mueller, 215.

³⁰ www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_teen_sex.html; accessed 12/11/2000

³¹ www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/mj00.html; accessed 12/11/2000

³² Center for Disease Control, National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention, "Young People at Risk:HIV/AIDS Among America's Youth," November 14, 2000, Online article: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/youth.htm>; accessed 12/13/2000.

³³ Quoted in Les Parrott III, Helping the Struggling Adolescent: A Guide to Thirty Common Problems for Parents, Counselors and Youth Workers, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 234.

the mind" which never goes away. Instead it itches constantly, asking to be scratched. But scratching only causes pain and intensifies the itch.³⁴

Pornography has become a widespread problem in America. A US Senate Judiciary Committee report states that so-called "adult" bookstores in America outnumber McDonald's Restaurants by a ratio of at least three to one.³⁵ And now it is more than just the glossy images of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. The nineties have seen pornography become increasingly explicit and deviant. Furthermore, this cultural problem is affecting our teens. One study of Junior High students found that 91% of males and 82% of females had been exposed to X-rated, hardcore pornography.³⁶ In fact, a 1987 report estimates that as much as 70% of America's pornography ends up in the possession of minors³⁷—and that was before the explosion of online pornography brought about by the World Wide Web. And before you take solace in the fact that our teens go to church, the Right from Wrong study discovered that one in every six (16%) Christian teens admitted to watching an X-rated movie in the 3 months prior to the survey.³⁸ Obviously, any faith-based purity that fails to address this prevalent problem misses a major source of problems for today's teens.

The Causes of This Problem

God's Design

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is right for him." From the ground God formed every wild animal and every bird in the sky, and he brought them to the man so the man could name them. Whatever the man called each living thing, that became its name. The man gave names to all the tame animals, to the birds in the sky, and to all the wild animals. But Adam did not find a helper that was right for him. So the LORD God caused the man to sleep very deeply, and while he was asleep, God removed one of the man's ribs. Then God closed up the man's skin at the place where he took the rib. The LORD God used the rib from the man to make a woman, and then he brought the woman to the man.

And the man said,

*"Now, this is someone whose bones came from my bones,
whose body came from my body.*

*I will call her 'woman,'
because she was taken out of man."*

So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body (Genesis 2:18-24; NCV).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ McDowell and Hostetler, 271.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Parrott, 233.

³⁸ McDowell and Hostetler, 271.

So God created human beings in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female. God blessed them and said, "Have many children and grow in number. Fill the earth and be its master (Genesis 1:27-28a; NCV)."

The Bible is clear. God created man and woman for each other. Sexual attraction was part of his design. The physical and psychological attraction that teenagers feel towards members of the opposite gender was in His plan all along. However, as with the rest of humanity's appetites, God also intended for these hungers to be satisfied within guidelines—specifically, within the commitment of marriage. It is when teens' natural attraction and curiosity are not guided by the limits of the divine plan that we encounter problems.

Relational Needs

Not only were teens designed by God to be attracted to members of the opposite gender, teens were also created with a need for meaningful relationships. As humans we were destined for love. And teenagers know this. They understand what it means to hunger affection. They experience the thirst for affirmation. They desperately need to be loved.

Throughout the childhood years the family structure often provides the needed love. Usually, parents and children interact according to accepted relational guidelines. Each knows their place and is comfortable with the other. But with the advent of adolescence all that is thrown into confusion. As teens navigate the confusing waters between childhood and adulthood, relational roles are strained. Guidelines for interaction become confused. The transition from relating to a parent as their child to relating as an adult is often uncomfortable and bewildering for parents and children alike. Because the relationship is strained as parent and child alike seek to "learn the ropes" of their new relational roles, often expressions of love and affection fall by the wayside. Yet the need for love remains.

Is it any wonder that in a recent survey of several thousand high school students, 50% of students questioned said the one question they wished their parents would answer truthfully was "Do you really love me?"³⁹ Our teens are craving love and many times this drives them into sexual relationships for which they are not prepared. A study in the journal *Adolescence* found that intercourse can become a means of coping with the absence of love teens experience at home.⁴⁰ The simple truth is, for many of our teenage girls especially; the issue isn't sex, but affection. In a *Seventeen* survey only 1.1% of girls surveyed said sex is more important than affection.⁴¹ But sex is seen as an avenue for satisfying their real need, a need for love.

Peer Pressure

³⁹ McDowell and Hostetler, 283.

⁴⁰ Sharon White and Richard DeBlassie, "Adolescent Sexual Behavior" *Adolescence*, Spring 1992, 189.

⁴¹ Parrott, 244.

Whether they want to admit it or not, our teens desire for love and acceptance makes them vulnerable to peer pressure as well. Not only do they seek the satisfaction for their relational needs from their parents, but from their friends and romantic interests as well. The need to be accepted often leads them to give in to sex simply to fit in with the crowd. And the need to be loved makes them susceptible to the age old "if you love me you will do it" argument.

The media has clearly made "virgin" a dirty word. In fact, one episode of the hugely popular sitcom *Seinfeld* built an entire show around the premise that to mention virginity to a virgin would be an insult. It is estimated that in a single year the average American viewer will see over 14,000 sexual scenes on television.⁴² And the media's message of "everybody's doing it" is being heard loud and clear by America's youth. Sexual activity is increasingly becoming the norm in American high schools and our teens are feeling the pressure to fit it. Remember the survey cited earlier. Almost one in four teen (24%) listed simply losing their virginity was a reason for having sex.⁴³

Add to that the pressure from a boyfriend or girlfriend who insists, "If you love me you will do it." Teens are pressured into sex to keep the love they have found in their romantic relationships. In a *Seventeen* poll 21% of boys and 12% of girls admitted that "fear of being dumped" was the reason for their sexual activity.⁴⁴ Teens feel vulnerable and sometimes use sex to secure the love and affection they fear losing. Between the pressure of friends and the pressure of their romantic interests, our children face incredible pressure to give into sexual temptation.

Idealized Self

Sex Education in America has done an excellent job teaching our teens the dangers of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases associated with sexual activity. Yet alarming numbers of teens still have sex—many, if not most, without protection. Why doesn't the knowledge of the dangers prevent the activity that causes them? Simply put, our teens have a sense of invulnerability. They do not recognize the logical disconnect between knowledge of the risks and the impression that this can't happen to me. And so ignoring the dangers they engage in the very behaviors that put them at risk often with disastrous results.

Family Factors

Several family factors influence teenage sexuality including divorce, role modeling, permissiveness and parental absence. The fact is, our teens are in part the products of the homes in which they are raised.

Divorce profoundly impacts teenage sexuality. Boys raised in homes without a father have no male role model in the home and often turn to the male stereotypes of television and movies for their role models. And single mothers sometimes unknowingly role model multiple short-term

⁴² Mueller, 132.

⁴³ www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/ma00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

⁴⁴ www.youthspecialties.com/free/stats/mj00.html; accessed 12/11/2000.

relationships for their children rather than stable committed relationships. Perhaps as a result, one study of college students with divorced parents showed that they had a higher chance of being sexually active, of having multiple (four or more partners) and of favoring "recreational" sex (as opposed to committed relationships) in their high school years than were children from intact families.⁴⁵

Parental permissiveness also plays a role in teenage sexuality. All too often parents fail to provide clear and direct guidelines for their teens behavior. We fail to establish the parameters of what is acceptable and what is not. In fact, all too many parents never broach the subject of sexuality at all. One study showed that while 80% of mothers with daughters aged 11-14 had discussed menstruation with their daughters; only four percent had ever explained the relationship between menstruation and sexuality.⁴⁶

One area where parental permissiveness plays a role is in the onset of dating. Studies have shown that the earlier teens start dating, the more likely they are to have sex during their teenage years. One study, performed by Brent Miller of Utah State University and Terrence Olsen of Brigham Young University studied 2,400 teens. They concluded that of girls who began dating at age 12, 91% had sex before graduation, compared to 56% who began dating at 13, 53% at 14, and 40% at 15. Conversely, only 20% of those girls who started dating at 16 had sex before graduation. Similarly, of those boys who claimed to have a "steady" girlfriend in ninth grade, 70% said they had engaged in intercourse. Likewise, 60% of girls with a ninth grade steady admitted to intercourse. However, of those boys who said they dated only occasionally as freshmen, only 52% had intercourse by graduation and only 35% of similar girls said the same.⁴⁷ Clearly, setting age limits for dating improves our teens' chances for making it through adolescence without surrendering themselves to sexual pressures, yet many parents do no such thing.

A similar dilemma, that of parental absence, also plays a role in teenage sexuality. Earlier we discussed the fact that most teen sexual activity occurs at home, often after school before parents arrive home from work. Empty houses and a lack of accountability provides ample opportunity for sexual experimentation. In order to avoid sexual immorality, teens need their parents help—specifically they need parental direction, supervision and affection if they are going to succeed.

Substance Abuse

One final factor affecting teenage sexual activity that must be addressed is substance abuse. Studies have demonstrated that students who abuse drugs or alcohol are at a significantly higher risk for succumbing to sexual temptation.⁴⁸ Consider the story of one 15-year-old girl who learned this lesson the hard way. She reports:

⁴⁵ McDowell and Hostetler, 205.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 283.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 283-284.

⁴⁸ McDowell and Hostetler, 284, 406

I had a party . . . in my house—my mother goes away every weekend and so I have a lot of parties—and so all of us were there, and all our mutual friends and stuff. And four or five people slept over that night, and we were pretty drunk and sort of just fell asleep together and got more involved as the night went on. I don't think he made the first move; I'm pretty sure *I* did.⁴⁹

Alcohol severely limits teens' decision-making abilities and as a result lowers their resistance to sexual temptation. And once again parental permissiveness plays a role. Parents must set clear boundaries regarding the sorts of parties their children can attend.

Sex Education, Cause or Cure?

Many proponents for abstinence-based sex education and many writers for the Christian market argue that comprehensive sex education (i.e., sex education that not only teaches teens the dangers of sexual activity and the need for delaying the onset of such activity, but also the importance for sexually active individuals to use contraception both for birth control and for protection from STD's) actually contributes to the high rate of teenage sexual activity. Clearly some aspects of the modern sex education in public schools teach values that contradict Christian values and teachings. Take for example the pamphlet "Teens have the right . . ." which we discussed earlier. The idea that teens have the right to decide for themselves "whether to have sex [with no mention of the converse option] and who to have it with" explicitly champions the idea that premarital sexual activity and even the possibility of multiple partners is a matter of choice not morality.

However, others fault sex education for contributing to teen sexual activity by teaching about contraceptive methods and say a sex education curriculum should be rejected by concerned parents for no other reason than the fact it contains instructions on contraceptive use and information about its availability. For such critics of comprehensive sex education, it is not enough that the curriculum teaches that abstinence until marriage is the only way to completely safeguard oneself against pregnancy and STD's. They argue that the instruction in contraceptive use sends a dangerous contradictory message that actually undermines the message of abstinence.

The evidence seems to indicate otherwise, however. The preponderance of research on sex education indicates that instruction on the use of contraceptives does not, in fact, lead to increased teenage sexuality. One such CDC report cites 24 studies which demonstrate that education about the efficacy of condoms does not increase, and in some instances even delays the onset of, sexual activity.⁵⁰ Teaching about condoms may, in fact, send conflicting messages about abstinence, but the research demonstrates that such messages do not contribute to teen sexual activity.

This poses a difficult question for those involved in faith-based, abstinence-centered sex education. Should responsible Christian educators and parents include information about

⁴⁹ McDowell and Hostetler, 284.

⁵⁰ Center for Disease Control, National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention, "Condoms and Their Use in Preventing HIV Infection and other STDs," Online Article:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/condoms.htm>, accessed 12/12/2000.

contraceptives in what they teach their teens? Does teaching about condoms and their proper use subvert the message of abstinence with the message, "We know you'll do it anyway?" Given the fact that such a message does not appear to influence teens to have sex, should it matter? Conversely, research indicates that as many as one in four churched teens will engage in intercourse before they reach age 19, despite the faith-based education they may receive. Given the extent to which our best efforts at promoting abstinence fail, is it not the responsible thing to seek to protect those teens that will have sex regardless? Especially since it appears reaching out to those who will choose sex over abstinence with a message of safer sex does not actually convince others to do the same?

When struggling with this dilemma, I am reminded of Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 19:3-9:

Some Pharisees came to Jesus and tried to trick him. They asked, "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife for any reason he chooses?"

Jesus answered, "Surely you have read in the Scriptures: When God made the world, 'he made them male and female.' And God said, 'So a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one body.' So there are not two, but one. God has joined the two together, so no one should separate them."

The Pharisees asked, "Why then did Moses give a command for a man to divorce his wife by giving her divorce papers?"

Jesus answered, "Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because you refused to accept God's teaching, but divorce was not allowed in the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman is guilty of adultery. The only reason for a man to divorce his wife is if his wife has sexual relations with another man (NCV)."

When asked "Is it permissible to divorce your wife for any reason whatsoever?" Jesus clearly indicated that divorce was not part of God's design for humanity. But the Pharisee's were confused. A provision of Jewish law allowed for divorce on any grounds, provided that a certificate of divorce was given to the wife. Wasn't this a conflicting message? Wasn't God sending two different signals, saying on one had that divorce was wrong and then on the other making provision for those who wanted to do it anyway?

Jesus simply explained that there were no conflicting messages here. The fact is that divorce opposes God's design for humanity and as such it is a sin. But, given the fact that the people of Israel were stubborn in their insistence on rejecting God's design, God made a provision for divorce to protect the divorced woman from the realities of a patriarchal society where she had no rights and no protection. The provision for divorce was made for the protection of those affected by divorce, not to lift the ban on divorce. And Jesus points out, just because it's lawful doesn't mean it's right.

What does that mean in practical terms? First, I think it means that we do not need to lie about condoms to scare our teens out of having sex because, quite frankly, that is not going to work. We do not need to resort to statistical manipulation to create large failure rates for condoms used as protection against HIV based on statistical projections from published failure rates of condoms used as birth control—especially in light of the overwhelming research based on serodiscordant couples (i.e., couples in which one partner is HIV positive and the other HIV negative) which demonstrate failure rates under 5%, some as low as 0%, when condoms are used consistently and correctly.⁵¹ Just

⁵¹ Ibid.

because we tell our teens the truth about condoms doesn't mean they are going to go out and have sex—the evidence simply does not support such a position.

Secondly, I think that it means that we do not need to lie about condoms to make "safe sex" seem safer than it is. For while condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are very effective in preventing HIV and other STDs, the fact remains condoms are seldom used consistently and correctly. The incidence of user failure puts the notion of "safe sex" in a precarious position. Furthermore, the fact remains that there is method failure associated with condom usage—even when used consistently and correctly, condoms do occasionally, albeit rarely, fail.

More important, however, than the efficacy of condoms in preventing pregnancy and STDs, is their total inefficacy in preventing the social and psychological damage associated with premarital sex. No condom can protect a teen from the devastating effect premarital sex can have on their relationships and their future marriages. No condom can shield a teen from the pain and grief that comes when one with whom they have bonded sexually decides to leave a relationship.

But most importantly, the lesson we learn from Jesus' teaching is that protection does not imply permission. We must look to the teaching of Jesus to point out that there is no conflicting message here. While condoms can protect you from some of the physical dangers associated with sexual activity with varying degrees of effectiveness, this does nothing to change the fact that premarital sex is a violation of God's design for sexuality. Just as no condom can protect the mind and the emotions, no condom can protect the heart.

In light of this, the CDC's advocacy of sex education that combines the message of abstinence until marriage with instruction regarding methods of protection against the effects caused by failure to abstain⁵² does not appear to be at odds with Biblical teaching. It is when such instruction goes on to say that because protection is available, the decision in favor of sexual activity is morally justifiable that Godly parents are rightly concerned. What is more, parents must acknowledge that even some churched teens will decide to engage in sexual intercourse. Given that danger, parents must provide their teenagers with clear guidelines reflecting the Biblical standard for sex while at the same time deciding if instruction regarding condoms is needed with their child.

True Love Waits 2008, A Solution

Given the reality of teenage sexuality and the dangers it brings, what can responsible, concerned Christians do to lead teens into lives of sexual purity? Various people in various roles have given several answers to this question, but Water's Edge Youth Ministries has a plan in place to seek to do just this. Our True Love Waits 2008 (TLW) campaign is designed to lead our teens into a life, not only of virginity, but also of chastity. It is our hope that you will become involved in this plan on behalf of our teens. Our TLW campaign has a variety of emphases.

⁵² <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/youth.htm>; accessed 12/13/2000.

Parental Involvement

One thing is certain; the central role in teaching teens lives of purity can only be played by parents. The church stands to supplement, not supplant, the parent's vital role. Understanding this reality, TLW 2008 seeks to educate and encourage not only teens, but also parents. Parents are encouraged to address the issues of teen sexuality with their teenage children. What is more, we seek to equip parents for doing just that. We will hold a parents meeting to give parents a forum for seeking help for this task and to equip them with practical advice on creating a climate at home that will decrease the likelihood of their children making the wrong choices. And having begun with parents we will end with parents. On Sunday, March 9, we will culminate the TLW campaign with a special ring ceremony in which teens, together with their parents, can celebrate and cement their decisions for purity.

TLW Lessons

The central focus of our TLW campaign will be a four-week lesson series designed to teach our teens the beauty and importance of God's design for our sexuality. There will be different lessons for the Junior High (The Shore) and Senior High (Water's Edge) services.

The Shore series will include the lessons we repeat every two years to ensure that every Junior Higher has the opportunity to hear these lessons. The four lessons will include:

- *Beyond Virginity, Chastity*; A lesson designed to demonstrate that even more than virginity, or refraining for sexual intercourse, God desires chastity from his people — sexual purity and moral uprightness.
- *Truth and Consequences* will expose some of the myths surrounding sexuality and present a real and honest look at the results of teenage sexual activity. We will talk about God's beautiful design for sex and how deviating from that design destroys it. A major emphasis will be placed on the fact that no condom can protect the mind, heart and soul.
- *Chastity begins between the ears, not between the sheets*. This lesson will examine the prevalence and damaging effects of pornography on teenage consumers, encouraging teens to move beyond technical virginity and guard their thoughts as well.
- *The True Love Waits Pledge* says simply "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate and my future children, to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until I enter a Biblical marriage relationship." Our final lesson will explain the meaning of that pledge and challenge teens to make that commitment.

The Water's Edge series will include teaching on the importance of sexual purity but will approach the subject from the perspective of understanding God's design for life-long love. These lessons will include:

- *Created for Love* will examine God's plan for marriage. We all long to be loved, accepted, wanted, valued and connected. This lesson will teach teens that as much as we desire these things for ourselves, God wants them for us even more.
- *The Pitfall of Profanity*. Hebrews 12:16 warns us about following the example of Esau, who the author calls profane because "for one morsel of meat [he] sold his birthright." If our birthright as God's creation is to know the awesome love described in the first lesson, why do so many sell out that birthright for a morsel of pleasure. This lesson will seek to answer that question.
- *The Poison of Pornography* will look at the second danger to discovering the gift of life-long love, pornography. It will reveal that pornography is *not* a harmless habit which doesn't hurt anyone, but it can be an insidious addiction that damages our chances of having healthy relationships with our future spouses.
- *The Purpose of Dating* will turn the tables on the typical approach to sexual purity, which so often focuses on the "do not's" of abstinence. In this lesson we will seek to help students understand the purpose of their dating relationships and focus on the "do's" of making their dating years as healthy and helpful as possible.

The TLW Ring Ceremony

On March 9, 2008, during the 10:30 am main sanctuary service, we will have a special ring ceremony for teens and their parents. During the ceremony teens will be reminded of the True Love Waits pledge they made to their families, both present and future. Their parents will be given the opportunity to give their teens a ring to symbolize that commitment and remind them of their promise. Teens will be encouraged to wear the purity ring until their marriage at which time they can give the ring to their spouse as a symbol of their faithfulness to the purity pledge.

How can you be involved?

First and foremost, regardless of who you are, you can support the TLW 2008 campaign by beginning now to pray for our teens and their parents. Pray that the parents will have the courage and insight to address the important issue of sexual purity with their teens. Pray that the teens will be open to instruction and strong to make, and keep, their commitments to purity. Pray for our leaders that they might have wisdom to address the important issues facing our teens with wisdom and guidance from God's word. And pray that the TLW 2008 campaign will reach teens with the redemptive love of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, if you are a parent, become involved in the lives of your teens. We spoke earlier about the fact that teens are hungry for affection. Don't let the strains and struggles of their transition through adolescence keep you from expressing your love and affirmation. Also love your teens by setting clear guidelines for your teens behavior, helping them understand right from wrong in the confusing world of sexual temptation. Model for them a life of sexual purity and integrity. Broach

the subject of sexuality with them. And don't let the subject drop. Remain involved in their lives and stay aware of the sexual pressures and temptations facing your teens. Furthermore, consider using our Submerge Devotional guides, available every week for free, as material for family devotions during the series. It will provide a framework for having focused, Bible-centered discussions with your teens on this important topic.

Thirdly, we feel that sexual purity is important enough to deserve our very best. And our very best requires a financial commitment. Projected expenses include promotional materials, education materials (including this parents' information packet), ring ceremony expenses (we want to make sure that every teen and parent who wish to participate in the ring ceremony can do so, regardless of their ability to pay for a ring), and rally expenses. Any contribution to the Water's Edge Youth Ministries Fund to help offset these expenses would be appreciated.

The need is real. The opportunity is now. The call is clear.

Will you become involved?