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# accent

the resource for adventist youth leaders

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the resource for adventist youth leaders

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# PATHFINDERS



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## CONTENTS

- 3 editorial
- 4 seven tips for youth leaders
- 8 plugged-in
- 9 keeping it real
- 10 devotional
- 11 cover story
- 17 young adult bible study
- 21 junior youth bible study
- 27 ready-to-use programs
- 42 workshop

**cover:** *Jonatán Tejel*

### **IMPORTANT NOTICE:**

This issue is to be used for the 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters (April - September). This change was made after much thought and consideration in an effort to better serve you and provide the editorial staff enough time to implement decisions and changes made at the recently concluded Youth Advisory.

Marriage was the first institution established by God at creation. From the genesis of time God declared: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18).

Everything God has made for our good Satan has twisted and tries to deceive us by supplying a counterfeit that will substitute God's intentions, leading us down a different path. To be sure, there are only two powers in this world. And, we are either guided by one or the other. God or Satan. Good or evil. Resulting in blessings or curses.

Sexuality is a wonderful gift of God. All of us have been given this gift. We are all sexual people. And yet, the gift of sexuality has a timeline with it to offer maximum blessings to its recipients. It is like buying bananas in the market. One must wait until the bananas are fully ripe to truly enjoy its intended gift of sweetness.

In 1 Corinthians 7:2 and 5, God sets the parameters for this wonderful gift by declaring: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband... Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourself to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self control."

The context for enjoying the fullness of the gift of sexuality is made clear in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and joined to his wife, and they shall be ONE flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Because God means for sexuality to be a joyful blessing, we must watch out for the way Satan wants to make it into a curse. It is the reason 1 Corinthians 6:18 states: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

The truth is, the forbidden is often enticing, enchanting, and alluring. The evil one presents a package that is exciting to deceive us and take us to our ruin. In this context John 10:10 submits: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Because we are sinners we will naturally be inclined to do the wrong. However, the promise of success in Philippians 4:13 is that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

And if we have already fallen in this regard, we should always remember: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). ●

*Elaine (MA) and Willie Oliver (MA, PhD, CFLE) are directors of Family Ministries for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.*



**AS A MALE YOUTH LEADER, YOU NEED TO BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT ANY INTERACTIONS YOU HAVE WITH GIRLS. AS A RULE, YOU SHOULD NEVER SPEAK TO A GIRL ALONE WITHOUT BEING VISIBLE TO OTHERS; AND OF COURSE, NEVER BE ALONE WITH A GIRL IN A DARK OR PRIVATE PLACE.**

## QUESTION

**I'm a male youth leader in my local church and a 15 year old girl told me she had sex with her boyfriend on the weekend. She asked if she could talk about it with me. What should I do?**

“When dealing with sensitive youth issues, you can't replace professional qualifications and experience with an article in a magazine. It can be helpful however, to look at common situations and be reminded to act responsibly, even if you don't have the education or experience to act professionally.

‘Seven Tips’ is written for Christian listeners who come in contact with young people. Use these tips as a starting point to act with integrity, awareness and compassion in mentoring young people.”

## TIP #1 - TREAT HER WITH RESPECT.

It is most often either a brave or a scared (or both) person who will talk to you about sensitive issues related to sex. This girl has asked to talk to you because she trusts you. That trust implies that you will act in her best

interest, and that you will deal with her in a safe and appropriate manner. You will need to put aside your judgment of her actions and your own personal interest in this situation in order to honor the trust she has shown.

In counseling, like in first aid, your first goal is to ‘do no more harm’. Don't complicate her situation by dismissing her comment as a joke, putting her off because you don't believe her, giving her quick advice, or treating her with sarcasm or teasing. This is not a time to be funny or flippant. Take her request seriously and create an appropriate place (see tip #5) where you can sit down to listen carefully to what she has to say. Your first response to her question (by both your words and your actions) will tell her how much value her situation has with you.

## TIP #2 - GUARD HER REPUTATION (AND YOUR OWN)

As a male youth leader, you need to be very careful about any interactions you have with girls. As a rule, you should never speak to a girl alone without being visible to others; and of course, never be alone with a girl in a dark or private place. Physical contact – even a hug or a touch on the arm, is also a danger area and shouldn't occur in the course of a personal conversation. In a situation such as this, being careful in these areas helps keep the



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focus on her issues and protects you from becoming part of the problem. This doesn't mean you shouldn't talk to her – you may be the only adult she will speak to. At this point, it would be wise to have a third person involved in the conversation; either a friend of the person seeking counseling or another female counselor.

Reputations are important. Your role will be compromised if you are seen to be giving 'special' attention or favors to one person over another – or one gender over another. Ensure that your communication with this girl is transparent by keeping records of all conversations and copies of any electronic communication; share those with your supervisor\* so that you protect yourself from any appearance of misconduct.

*\*NOTE: As a youth leader (or any other helping profession) you should have a professional supervisor. This may be a qualified person within your organization or a professional you debrief with periodically. If you don't have one, seek advice to find options that will work for your situation.*

### **TIP #3 – GET THE FACTS, ACKNOWLEDGE THE FEELINGS**

Sensitive issues like sex are emotive topics for anyone – even more so for a young person. There will certainly

be more than one issue tied up in this story. Your first job is to unravel the relevant details of the story and with her permission, get them down on paper. As you're doing this, focus on getting the details correct; get times, dates, quotes and other facts.

There are at least two good reasons for being accurate in this listening process. The first is that you may discover the need to report to authorities, or the story could change, or an alternate story could emerge – and your accurate records may help to clarify or even save this girl from more harm. The second reason is that in the turmoil of emotions, the facts can be comforting (or confronting), and getting them out in the open and organized is most often the first step to dealing with the associated issues. Taking notes as you listen will help with this care and accuracy.

In the process, you will need to acknowledge the feelings that spill out with the story. It can be easy to avoid emotions such as anger, guilt, despair or frustration and the tears that come with them. But it is by staying with her *in the process* of expressing those feelings that you will earn the right to support her in dealing with her situation.

*NOTE: Be very careful not to 'interrogate' for information of a sexual nature. As a male, your job is to record what is offered as part of the story and let a female deal with the specific sexual details later if required.*

### **TIP #4 - GIVE INFORMATION, NOT ADVICE**

Once the facts of the story are unraveled and you have helped her process all the emotions that will be attached, you will need to help her outline the steps she will take from here. The temptation at this stage is to just tell her what to do. Giving advice is easy; it tells her how to fix her problem and it makes you feel important. The problem is that giving advice is a dangerous practice. When you give advice:

- You take responsibility for another person's problem
- You reinforce the belief that she cannot make her own decisions
- You open the potential for her to blame you for future outcomes
- You dis-empower her by taking away her opportunity for action

So rather than giving quick advice (or worse, becoming a rescuer by trying to fix it yourself), give her information that will help her make good decisions. Help her find out answers to the questions she is asking. Point her to brochures, books, or internet sites and find out where local medical help and information is. Try to empower her with useful information.

## TIP #5 - THINK LIKE A PARENT; ACT LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

The role of the parent is to protect the child. As a youth leader, you have been given the moral responsibility of acting on behalf of the parent whenever you are involved with the child in the capacity of youth leader. You are therefore a representative of the parent and you should act 'as a parent would' in regard to the protection of the child. This is a helpful point to remember when it comes to the issue of confidentiality – especially in this situation.

It is quite likely this girl has come to you instead of first speaking to her parents. She will probably not want her parents to know what has happened and may even have some good reasons not to tell her parents. Yet, if you neglect to inform the parents, you may betray your responsibility and inadvertently allow more harm by cutting her off from her most important support network (her family).

Confidentiality is your cornerstone of trust; break that, and you may damage the capacity of this girl to get help from you or anyone else, so consider (and consult) carefully before you do so. Sometimes the issue of reporting to parents or another authority is black and white. For instance, if a child has been abused or is in danger, the parents (and relevant

authorities) must be contacted. There are other times when it may be helpful for the child to initiate the contact with parents. There are still other situations where the parents might prove harmful to the child and other authorities will need to be contacted.

The key point is: You must consult with your supervisor or another professional when determining your responsibility to report. All helping professionals use supervisors to consult and debrief specific situations; you should act as a professional in this regard by consulting with a supervisor (see tip #2) and documenting your actions. This will help protect you as well as this girl.

## TIP #6 - EMPOWER HER TO ACT

There are eight very useful words to remember as a theme for helping young people with problems: *What Are You Going To Do About It?*

By using this phrase as a guide, you can step through the process of helping her find direction for the future. Here are some simple steps:

### Explore Options

Once you have helped her access and organize information, help her explore her options. Look at all options, even if you think they are poor choices, so that she feels she is able to make her own informed

decisions. ALWAYS encourage her to seek the advice from her family other professionals before making any decisions.

### Make a Plan

Don't let her leave you without some immediate plan of action – no matter how simple.

### Provide Support

Although you don't want to make her decisions for her, you definitely want to keep in touch with her as she moves ahead to deal with her situation. This may include having to support her to inform parents or other authorities (see tip #5). This follow-up part of the process needs to be transparent so that her parents and your supervisor know how and why you are supporting her.

## TIP #7 - REMEMBER THAT SATAN IS THE ACCUSER, GOD IS THE HEALER

It is easy to make judgments about young people and sex. It is common for us as helpers to 'catastrophize' the situation – to see it as a tragedy and the young person involved as either a perpetrator or a victim. However, even if the worst proves to be true, God is bigger than circumstance. He is able to redeem situations and restore people.



It is Satan's role to be the accuser of God's children (Zech 3:1, Rev 12:10). It is the nature of the devil to instill guilt and a sense of shame in all of us. Satan wants this child to believe that she is 'bad' and not worthy of love or forgiveness. But our God is a healer and a forgiver of sin who loves this young person regardless of her behavior, and has a place for her as a princess in His kingdom.

Your job is to help her understand this great truth – that God loves her despite her faults. Do this by being honest about her mistakes and encouraging about what she has done well. God has put this young person in your path – what a privilege to be His servant at such a crucial time as this. ●

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**check out the  
SEXUAL PURITY WORKSHOP  
on page 42**

# plugged in

with erica richards



Erica Richards is the Editor of *Plugged-In* and works as an editorial assistant in the General Conference Youth Ministries Department.

**facebook:**  
GC Youth Ministries

*This quarter, our Facebook discussion led us to a search to discover our reasoning for believing in the existence of God. In a world where many people reject the notion of a Supreme Creator, it is important to be reminded of why and what we believe in. The following is the discussion question and some of your answers:*

*A friend and I were talking about how we know that Christ exists, and my friend made an interesting comment: it's kind of unfair that the people in the Bible got to meet Jesus and see Him face to face. They witnessed miracles and heard Him speak. I wish we had that today. If someone today were performing miracles right in front of us, wouldn't we believe?*

*I thought about it for a while, and while I know that Christ came when He did for a reason, it would be a lot "easier" to accept Him if we could see and hear Him. But even some people in the Bible rejected Him while He was here.*

**facebook:** *What do you think? How do you know Christ exists even though you can't see Him? Why do you think Christ came to earth when He did? Would today's society be willing to accept a Messiah? Would you?*

**TC:** I am fascinated by the human body and how it works. Last year I completed a BS in Physical Activity and Health. The complexity

and intricacies of how the human body works, functions, maintains, recovers, etc. is utterly amazing. The design of the human body alone screams out that it was carefully and wonderfully made! We are not an accident of some big, cosmic boom!

**BH:** I know He is there because of the power of the Bible that transforms lives and the nature that speaks of a Creator. The Bible speaks of Him (John 5:39). The Bible is a book on everything. He answers my prayers and everything makes sense if you believe in Him.

**KB:** I know He is there because I have a real and living relationship with Him. When Jesus was baptized He received the Holy Spirit; He also said if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give us good gifts. He said to ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I believe by tapping into this gift we are connected to God. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, and how many times in the Bible were people led by the Spirit? As Adventists we believe in the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity, but how many of us ask for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit? We pray all the time, but how many of us stop after praying to be still and listen?

**"Man is made to adore and obey; but if you give him nothing to worship, he will fashion his own divinities and find a chieftain in his own passions."**

**—Benjamin Disraeli**



**PN:** If someone questions the existence of Christ, he is certainly questioning the existence of God as well, because both are indivisible. The Bible says that we must accept by faith. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). If God so desired, He could simply ask Christ to appear and prove to the whole world that He exists. But if He does, there would be no need for faith. “Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’” (John 20:29). So it takes one to believe that God is there for him to as well believe that Christ is there too, because both are indivisible. And to believe that God is there, nature alone can convince if the person really has an open mind to believe. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). Looking at the stars, understanding the vastness of the universe, observing the wonders of nature, seeing the beauty of a sunset—all of these things point to a Creator God. If these were not enough, there is also evidence of God in our own hearts.

What are your reasons for believing in God? Have you thought about it lately? Is it because of something you’ve seen Him do in your life? Something you’ve seen Him do in the lives of others? Do you see Him in nature? Maybe you’ve just always known. Whatever your reasons are, share them with those around you so that they also may know the love of our Father. ●

## THE DEVIL’S “MUSIC LIST”

Music plays a big part in a person’s life. It has an effect on a person’s emotions and actions. God created music for us to enjoy and for us to praise His name. Psalms 147:1 says: “Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely” (KJV). There is someone, however, who has for centuries been trying to turn the purpose of music away from the Creator by perverting it: Satan. Alarmingly, he’s doing quite a good job at it.

People these days are being subtly desensitized to the perversion of God’s word through the entertainment industry, particularly the music industry. The beats and melody in many songs are so alluring, and the lyrics boldly promote sexual immorality, murder, anger, drugs, violence, and even devil worship. Take some of the words in the song “Lucifer” in “The Black Album” (2003) by the very famous and successful rapper Jay-Z, which goes like this: “Lucifer, Dawn of the morning, I’m going to chase you out of Earth. Lucifer, Lucifer, Dawn of the morning. I’m from the murder capital, where we murder for capital.” Rapper Jay-Z knows and admits that he follows Lucifer. He and his “brother” Kanye West are occult followers, and their group uses their music to manipulate the youth and lead them under satanic control.

While some singers are blatant in proclaiming their hatred towards Jesus Christ, some, however, are so sneaky that their listeners, particularly young people, do not realize what they are listening to, or for that matter, what consequences it has. It is therefore very important for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the parents of young people to be pro-active in creating this awareness so that our youth will not fall into the devil’s trap. ●

# DEVOTIONAL: watch out for the power

by Debbonnaire Kovacs

## “NO ADULTERY.” (Exodus 20:14, *The Message*)

This devotional was taken from the book, *My Identity in Christ*, to be released soon. Visit [www.gcyyouthministries.org](http://www.gcyyouthministries.org) for updates.

**W**e are ready to look into the seventh commandment. Like the rest, it looks simple on the surface. Contemporary society generally defines adultery as sex with a person who is married to someone else, so as long as we don't do that, we're safe, right? That's what Jesus' disciples thought. Then He told them they could commit adultery with their minds alone, no one the wiser. Except God . . .

In fact, the sacredness of sexuality is one of the most major core values in the Christian life. There are only three heavenly things still left to us from before the gate to Eden was closed: Sabbath, work, and the marriage/family relationship. All three have redemptive power, and all three have been twisted and misused by the devil and our own wayward hearts, but perhaps the most instantly, inflammably dangerous of the three is sexuality.

Sex is sacred. It is meant to be one of the most powerful and deeply moving ways for us to recapture at least a glimpse of the kind of oneness the Godhead wanted to recreate in us and the kind of unity that God and humanity once enjoyed. Impurity and immorality of any kind is absolutely corrosive to the soul and must be fled as if it were the devil incarnate.

It's like electricity. That, too, is an almost supernatural power of nature. Without boundaries, kept with infinite care, it will kill on contact. People who deal with power lines and wires and volts and amps and all that know that a moment's carelessness can kill not only themselves, but others as well if electrical fires get started.

Yet, think of all the amazing blessings brought to your daily life by electricity, kept flowing within its insulated wires! It's possible to live without it. Millions of people do. It doesn't buy happiness. But it sure is nice to have, and we can thank God for it.

Think of God's commands as insulated wires, within which flow His best blessings, and outside of which is danger, even with intrinsically good things. For the next week and a little more, we'll dig into this commandment for some core values for life that you may never have considered as living within this simple conduit—"No adultery!"

Powerful God, You let us have a tiny spark of Your creative ability when You said, "multiply and fill the earth." We are deeply grateful for Your gift, but also a little nervous about its use, because we've seen so many wildfires started by it. Teach us to see sexuality issues as You do—as issues of love. Not hazy romantic fantasies, but true, strong, godly Love. ●



Debbonnaire Kovacs has been writing since she could hold a pencil, and sold her first story to Junior Guide when she was 11 years old. She speaks at camp meetings, women's retreats, and other events. She urges everyone to take their dreams to God and see whether they are more than just dreams.



THEME: SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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# BREAKING POINT

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*One pastor's story of pain, porn, addiction, and redemption*  
by Darrell Brazell

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It's 1:45 p.m. on Tuesday, and I'm logging on the Internet to check my email, read a newspaper article, and begin research for Sunday's sermon.

Well, that's what I'm trying to convince myself.

But I know exactly what I'm doing. When my secretary leaves at two, I will be alone in the building. I will check my email, and I may read an article or two. But as soon as the door closes behind her, I will do what I have done more times than I care to count: I'll type "sex" or "porn" or something worse in the search engine and spend the next three or four hours in the pipen.

I will enter a trance that leads me to neglect important projects, ignore phone calls, and lose track of time. Eventually I will look at the clock and panic because my wife was expecting me home 15 minutes ago, and I have just started trashing files, clearing the search history, and doing what I can to put myself back together.

I'll use every minute of my drive home to create an excuse for being late. I'll try to put on a good face even though I know pornography makes real connection impossible. Usually, I fail miserably and end up in a fight with my wife in my first 30 minutes at home.

On Wednesday, I'll go to the office committed to not answer the siren call of the porn sites. I'll start the morning in prayer, confessing my sin and begging God to give me a fresh start. I'll return the phone calls I ignored on Tuesday and work diligently on my midweek lesson. I'll do fine all morning, but when the secretary leaves, the battle will rage again. Most Wednesdays I'll win, though I'll still feel the shame of Tuesday when I stand before my evening Bible class.

Thursday is usually a nightmare; Friday is repentance day. Time and again Friday begins with tearful prayers, begging for God's mercy and promising next week will be different. I then scramble to write my

sermon. Sunday mornings I arrive at the building early so I can beg God for a fresh start and finish my sermon. Standing in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday, I constantly hear the inner condemnation: Who are you to proclaim God's holy Word? and What would they think if they knew? One Sunday, Satan pounded me throughout the worship service so intensely that during the song before Communion, I seriously contemplated not partaking. Imagine what it would look like if the pastor on the second row refused the elements?

**What  
does it say when  
the "spiritual guide"  
is consumed by sin  
and shame?**

Thankfully, what I've described is now 12 years behind me. Its roots, however, go all the way back to my early childhood. I've heard alcoholics say they were addicted from the very first drink.

I understand that feeling. When I was introduced to pornography at about 10 years of age, it was like throwing gasoline on a fire. The dysfunctions and neglect in my family left me hurting and looking for ways to numb the pain. I learned very quickly that sex is a powerful drug.

## **THE ANATOMY OF ADDICTION**

At first, I shared magazines with friends, caught R-rated movies on cable, and occasionally acquired harder materials. My struggle escalated my senior year in high school when I realized I looked old enough to purchase porn. That's when I developed a binge/purge cycle. I would buy a magazine, use it once or twice, and then (the first time I was home alone) take it to our burning barrel and set it ablaze in a ritual of repentance.

The epitome of this cycle was the day I lit a magazine on fire and dropped it into the empty barrel. As it fell, the flame went out. I stared down into the barrel knowing I couldn't just leave it there. I finally changed into an old shirt, climbed halfway into the barrel and retrieved it so I could light it again. Unfortunately, in the time it took me to rescue the magazine, my conviction faded, and instead of burning the magazine, I devoured it some more.

This binge/purge cycle led to an incredible sense of guilt and shame. I wanted to tell somebody, but the terror of sharing my shame kept me silent. The whole time, I honestly loved God and begged him to take away my struggle. But I couldn't find freedom.

Graduation posed an important decision. I had felt a call to ministry since junior high. Some days I felt that my struggle with sexual addiction disqualified me from ministry. Other times I felt that if I made the commitment to pursue God's plan for my life, he would take the struggle away. Ultimately I went to Bible college to become a pastor. My addiction didn't disappear at school. But it did change shape. I rarely gave in to pornography, but masturbation became so ritualistic I couldn't go to sleep at night without it. The cycle was the same: guilt, shame, and repentance culminating with a promise to God to never do it again.

My junior year, I talked an incredible young woman into marrying me. I naively thought getting married and having marital sex would solve the problem. It actually made the problem worse, as the fear of being found out by the one I loved most drove me to deeper levels of hiding. Sex was good, but it was never good enough, because I was never really there. I was always hiding in my shame.

I kept the problem at a "maintenance level" for many years, only acting out with pornography when my wife was out of town. Even then, I didn't view what most would consider "porn," but R-rated movies with sexual

themes or content. However, when I got my first laptop with Internet access, the problem exploded. Suddenly I didn't have to risk someone recognizing me. I could download anything I wanted in the safety and anonymity of my home or office.

Twice I confessed my struggle to my wife. Both times it hurt her greatly, but she forgave me and believed my promise to change. But my resolve was always short-lived.

I wanted desperately to share my struggle with someone else. But whom? By now, I was a solo pastor. If I confessed to one of my elders or congregants, I could lose my job. More important, I was supposed to be the spiritual guide for my community of faith. What does it say when the "spiritual guide" is consumed by sin and shame?

On two occasions I mustered the courage to confess my struggle to a fellow pastor. One of them said, "You know it's wrong, so don't do it anymore." The other said, "I'm in it deeper than you. All we can do is depend on God to work in spite of our sin." Neither answer offered much hope.

In 1999, we moved to a different church. It was harder than I anticipated. We left a grace-oriented church for one that was struggling and had little understanding of real grace. External appearances were especially important there, so my wife and I both felt immense pressure to smile and project the "everything is wonderful" persona.

This heightened my insecurity. Worse yet, my marriage was in trouble. I had distanced myself so much from my wife and daughter that they chose to make life good without me. The way we ate our meals illustrated my isolation. We often sat at the breakfast bar with my daughter on one end, me on the other, and my wife in between, feeding our child with her back to me.

Despite all this, I felt I was gaining control of my struggle. I had vowed to go a year without viewing pornography.

I figured that once I had a year behind me, I could safely speak of my addiction in the past tense and everything would be fine.

So I white-knuckled it. However, one way I "controlled" it was by using masturbation as my drug. If my wife and I did not have sex, I simply took care of myself. I had heard Christian "experts" say that there is nothing inherently wrong with masturbation because it doesn't hurt anyone else. I didn't find any direct condemnation of the practice in the Bible, so I thought I was on the right track. In my addictive fog, it made sense.

A few months after the move, my wife went out of town, and I binged again. I was devastated beyond description. I contemplated suicide. I wondered if this was the end of my marriage and my ministry. I wanted desperately to tell someone. I felt ashamed, worthless, and trapped.

## HOPE FOR HEALING

For two months I fought for the courage to tell my wife. I needed her to change the password on the Internet filter, or I would return to the pigpen as soon as I was home alone. But I honestly feared that this time she would leave and not come back. By the grace of God, however, I told her and she didn't leave, but we knew we had to find an answer.

The next week, I went to a pastors' retreat where a man shared his struggle with pornography and described how he found freedom. I also picked up the book *Pure Desire*. Together with the testimony of someone who found a way out, this was the beginning of my recovery.

But I was still alone. After the retreat I began asking God to send someone to walk the journey with me, someone with whom I could safely confide, someone who was also determined to find victory.



Shortly thereafter, God sent a young man who confessed his struggle with pornography to me. I'm quite certain he received the last thing he expected when I replied, "I guess you are the one for whom I've been praying." He looked at me in shock as I continued: "I hope you are ready to see your pastor's feet of clay." I then told him my story and about the resources I had found. That morning we covenanted to meet weekly, talk on the phone, and work through materials together.

I  
waited  
for God, as I  
allowed myself to  
weep over my pain,  
I experienced his  
healing power flow  
through me.

What followed was the most painful year of my life. Many nights I was still awake at 3 a.m., sitting on the bottom step to our basement sobbing and asking God when the pain would subside. Most of the time I didn't have a clue what hurt; I just knew it was excruciating. My mind kept screaming to go online, turn on the TV, do something—anything—to numb it. But I learned that whenever I stood in the pain long enough, I always discovered God was enough. Meeting with him was worth the struggle.

My marriage continued to suffer. I wasn't looking at pornography or engaging in solo sex, but in my addicted core, I still believed sex was like oxygen, and that I could not survive without it. As a result, I put incredible pressure on my wife. The nights we didn't have sex, especially the nights we fought, often sent me to the steps crying out to God.

I danced on the edge many times, yet somehow, by God's grace, I refused to give in to the powerful pull. Even if it meant not sleeping all night, I refused to give in. God always found a way to see me through the battle. Day by day he taught me that he could get me through anything, that I was not defined by my sin but by my Savior. He revealed his delight in me even when I was a sobbing mess on my bottom step. He comforted me and showed me that what I really needed wasn't pornography, a sexual release, or even my wife's body, but him.

Because my primary confidant during this first year was a young, single man in my church, I held many things back. I experienced moments of grace through him when I shared what I could. But I too often allowed my role as his pastor to give me an excuse to not be fully transparent. Fortunately God began bringing other men into my life and giving me the courage to share more completely with them.

Eventually I told my story to a pastor in my community. He offered another glimpse of grace and a second point of accountability. A few months later, I told my story to a half dozen pastors at a luncheon. I found that every time I shared my real struggle with others, I grew stronger and more able to resist temptation.

I became a student of sexual addiction. I read everything I could find, both secular and Christian. I read all of Patrick Carnes's books. Other authors, including Mark Laaser, Harry Schaumburg, Douglas Weiss, Steve Arterburn, and Ted Roberts, put words to my feelings and helped me make sense of myself. Much of what they described went beyond my experience, but I identified with the people in their books nonetheless. I began to glean from them specific strategies for walking away from my addictive behaviors. Every book insisted that it is crucial to share this struggle with others, which confirmed my need for the community of men God was establishing around me.

Later in my journey, John Eldredge's *Wild At Heart* materials became like water to a thirsty soul. His Field Manual guided me to deep places in my heart, to wounds that were the core roots to my struggle. Finally, I stumbled onto Jim Wilder's *Life Model* and his other writings. In them I began to learn about real maturity, what it takes to move from being a child to being a man. He also introduced me to some powerful brain science that gave credence to what we were doing in our recovery groups.

I even started writing my own book, *New Hope for Sexual Integrity*. Because of God's miraculous work in my life, I can humbly proclaim that I have walked in freedom (no pornography or masturbation) for almost 11 years now. I now know I don't ever have to go back. My flesh is certainly capable of returning; but God has given me a redeemed heart that is stronger than my flesh. God continues to rebuild my marriage, as well. My wife and I enjoy being together, and God is showing us real intimacy and the kind of joy he intends for marriage. Thankfully, I am a living testimony to God's ability to transform, heal, and deliver.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A few of the important things God has taught me through this process:

1. God does not intend for us to be alone. The most important thing I did to start walking in freedom was the very thing I was most terrified to do—tell others the truth about my struggle. Sin, especially sexual bondage, is too powerful to fight through alone. We find our way to freedom when we start being honest with others.
2. We must allow God to use our external struggles to show us the wounded places in our heart. I learned that my addiction was a symptom of deeper

problems. I didn't enjoy my sexual sin; I used it as a drug to numb inner pain. When I stopped taking the pain medication, I had to face many painful things I had run from all my life. For example, I was forced to face painful memories about my father and see the ways I had allowed difficulties in that relationship to drive my addictive patterns.

I was forced to face the memory of an older boy asking me to perform oral sex on him and being propositioned by a grown man when I was seven. These encounters had a significant impact. Remembering the events and recognizing the wounds was intensely painful; I wanted to retreat to the comfort of pornography. However, as I waited for God, as I allowed myself to weep over my pain, I experienced his healing power flow through me. I heard him speak his truth in place of Satan's lies. I began to discover there was good in me, that God's Spirit was working in and through me, and that discovery gave me power and hope for each new day.

I also began renouncing vows of self-protection. I had convinced myself, *You're on your own; don't let anyone see your weakness*. Letting that go freed me to begin asking others for help rather than keeping them safely at a distance. I had vowed to myself, I will be seen as successful and significant. I let that go, too, which allowed me the freedom to fail and even to share my failures with others. It opened my heart to realize that even if I lost my job, even if my church imploded, even though I drove a vehicle that was falling apart, I was still a beloved son of the King of Kings. My worth was not connected to my performance. I discovered my identity in Christ.

3. We must be willing to see the true impact of our sin on others. Sexual bondage leaves a person emotionally numb and unavailable to those around him. Satan used my emotional disconnection to do incredible damage to my wife's heart and soul. I see this repeated over and over when I meet with new

couples. The pain a husband's sin brings on his wife is profound.

One wife shared her story of growing up with an alcoholic father and of being raped when she was a teenager. When she described the day she found her husband looking at porn on the computer, she broke down in tears saying, "This hurts so much more than being raped." My heart broke for her, for my wife, and for every wife that day.

Some men struggle to understand how this pain could compare to the trauma of rape. As I understand it, God designed sexual intimacy to create a primary relational attachment. In fact, the verb Paul uses in [Ephesians 5:31](#) for "unite" can literally be translated "glue together." Hearts glued together do not separate without great pain. Pornography detaches sex from love, and that separation causes the pain of betrayal and emotional distance.

The pain is also intense because any unhealed sexual and relational pain your wife might have prior to her finding out about your sin naturally comes flooding back in the moment of discovery. She feels the betrayal and the unprocessed pain of her past. In the moment, however, it is mingled together and all she can see is your betrayal. You have wounded her where she was already deeply wounded. Don't, however, use this as an excuse to not come clean with your wife. Disclosure will be painful; but the real source of pain is what you have done, not telling her the truth.

4. God can redeem our addiction to bring glory to himself, blessing in our lives, and encouragement to others. I will never forget hearing my wife pray, "Lord, thank you for his addiction and for the journey of healing it has put us on." There were many broken places in both our hearts that we would not have faced if my struggle had not been

so abhorrent to us. After all, in ministry, being a "workaholic" is generally rewarded. However, because I hated my particular sin and had a glimpse of how much it crushed my wife, I was willing to do whatever was necessary to find healing.

Thankfully, God also continues to use our healing journey to equip us to minister to individuals and couples on the road of recovery. We have seen lives transformed and marriages resurrected—first ours, and then many others. It puts [Romans 8:28](#) in an amazing new light.

No, the path of recovery and healing will not be easy. But I can honestly tell you there is no comparison between life in bondage and life in freedom. ●

### Resources for Recovery

1. *New Hope For Sexual Integrity* by Darrell Brazell, available at <http://www.newhope4si.com>
2. *Pure Desire* by Ted Roberts (Regal, 1999)
3. *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* by Mark Laaser (Zondervan, 2004)
4. *Restarting* by Ed Khouri & Jim Wilder [DVD series] available at [www.lifemodel.org](http://www.lifemodel.org)
5. *In the Shadows of the Net* by Patrick Carnes, David Delmonico, Elizabeth Griffin (Hazelden, 2007)

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# HOPE FULL

## *The Scope of Truth, The Hope of Life* Young Adult Bible Studies on the 28 Fundamental Beliefs

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is lesson #22 in the Bible Studies series that explore our 28 Fundamental Beliefs as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. The entire series will be available soon. Contact your local ABC, AdventSource or online at [www.gcyouthministries.org](http://www.gcyouthministries.org).

### CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

#### ENGAGE

Agree or disagree:

As we get closer to the end of time, God's people will appear more and more peculiar to the world.

Why do you think this might happen?

What qualities do you think will stand out in the coming age? In what ways might they look and behave like everyone else in the world?

Which of the following characterizations do you resonate with the most? Why?

- Salt
- Light
- Cup of cool water
- Children of God
- Strangers in a strange land

Are you there yet? If you ask most Christians if their behavior matches their convictions, you may find many who still long to live what they believe. How will this change happen? Consider the following illustrations.

A strange phenomenon is creeping into the medical world, one story at a time. It seems as though the organs that are donated and transplanted into people carry more than the opportunity of new life; in some cases they may transfer information. A heart transplant patient craves food and drink that they have never tasted. A liver transplant recipient all of a sudden has a love of the ocean, whereas prior to the surgery she was terrified of boats and repeatedly seasick. A kidney transplant patient surprisingly found jazz music irresistible after surgery. Upon visiting the family members of the organ donors, they discovered these attributes may have been transferred with the organ. Is it possible that the cells possess memory in a mysterious way?

In January 2008, a story made the rounds about a 15-year-old girl in Australia named Demi-Lee Brennan, who became the world's first transplant patient to change blood types from O-negative to O-positive. How is this possible? Apparently, as a result of her liver transplant, the stem cells in Brennan's new liver invaded her body's bone marrow. The result was a slow takeover of her entire immune system, which produced the adjusted blood type. At first the doctors assumed someone made a mistake, because it's always been assumed that a change like that can't happen. How might this internal change that makes external impact be an illustration of the transformation of people?

Make no mistake; God expects that our devotion to Him be holistic, integrated, and genuine. The term holistic in this sense means that there is no religious side of our lives versus the "other side." Everything in our life is connected to faith, somehow. And everything in our day is relevant to our salvation. They are integrated because you can't separate the experience of grace from the desire to obey. You can't focus on keeping the Sabbath and live in anger or prejudice with other members of the body of Christ. Finally, our walk with God is to be genuine, with no fakery or pretending. With transparency and humility we are who we are, and God would not have us any other way.

## DISCOVER

Read the statement of belief and examine the Bible verses given, reflecting on the aspects of Christian behavior you feel compelled to adopt.

## CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR

*We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the*

*discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness.*

As you read key passages from the Bible about Christian behavior, underline the portions that run counter to your culture. Highlight what might seem alien to the world but is a characteristic of God's kingdom.

### Romans 12:1, 2

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

### 1 John 2:6

"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

### Ephesians 5:1-21

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

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. 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. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms,

hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

### **Philippians 4:8**

“Finally, brothers, 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.”

### **2 Corinthians 10:5**

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

### **2 Corinthians 6:14**

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’

‘Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’”

### **2 Corinthians 7:1**

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

### **1 Peter 3:1-4**

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”

### **1 Corinthians 6:19, 20**

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

### 1 Corinthians 10:31

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

### 3 John 1:2

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

## RELATE

Throughout history, God’s people “walked as He walked,” and they eventually developed the qualities and characteristics of the Savior (1 John 2:6). Jesus said with a straight face, “A student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is rightly trained will become like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

The metaphor Jesus used in John 15 to describe our transformation has a patient, growing quality to it:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Nevertheless, in what we eat (Leviticus 11) and what we drink (Ephesians 5), in whatever activity we engage ourselves in (Philippians 4), we should make “every effort” to live to model the qualities of the Savior (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The apostle Peter, knowing his life would soon end, said, “But in keeping

with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:13, 14).

Like Daniel and his three friends, who remained true to the most elemental instructions about health (Daniel 1), God calls his people to do the same in every age.

When you consider how strange Noah looked building a boat, or how silly Gideon seemed facing off to fight with a torch and clay pot, you begin to see a trend. Joshua takes down a city with a song and David takes on Goliath with a sling. It looks crazy, strange, and abnormal. Enoch and Job were considered righteous people, but they were no different than people today. They simply found that they would rather be obedient to God and abnormal to the world than be anything else. What about you?

## EXPRESS

Who do you think has had the most influence on your lifestyle choices?

Why do you think choices about behavior are so hotly debated among Christians?

Why are salt and light perfect metaphors for the impact of the

Christian life?

If you had to choose three salt/light people in Scripture (other than Jesus), who would you choose? Why?

What passage spoke to you about your health habits and the kind of foods you should eat versus the foods that are unfit?

What portion of the Bible challenged you to aim higher in your desire to live as a witness to God’s amazing grace? Which Scripture called you to humbly put others before you?

How have you seen God bless unbelievers through the lifestyle of godly people?

Is it your desire to live in harmony with God’s will for your lifestyle as revealed in His Word? ●

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# PREMARITAL SEX

## *Loving Me the Way God Made Me*

**LEADERS NOTES:** *This is another of the hot topic Bible Studies. Depending on the age and maturity of your group, you can take this study to their level. Cover this study with prayer. But do not be afraid to define the word “sex” within your group. Kids are having a hard time with this issue because they do not see some forms of sex as sex. Abstinence is talked about but not often defined—so youth may think that anything outside of penetration is acceptable. Do not be afraid to define God’s plan for sexual relationship within the bounds of marriage—in all aspects.*

### **ICE BREAKER: Daredevils**

Everyone seems to love them—those who are willing to risk their lives for moments of thrill and entertainment. Whether it is jumping the Grand Canyon or free-falling from a great height, we are fascinated with watching people do things that resist the odds.

Jean Francois Gravelet-Blondin was one of those individuals. He was known as “The Great Blondin.” A French tightrope walker, he had a particular fascination with crossing the Niagara Falls Gorge on a tightrope. And on June 30, 1859 he did just that: suspended 160 feet above the water. The rope was only 3 inches in diameter. In 20 minutes he walked from the U.S. to the Canadian side of the falls. Then he repeated that same act eight times over that same summer. He did it blindfolded, in a sack, trundling a wheelbarrow, on stilts, and carrying his manager on his back. (I wonder if that was in his contract!) He also walked the line and sat down midway, cooked an omelet, and ate it before continuing on his way. He returned again in 1860 and performed the stunt with hundreds of

thousands looking on. Did he cheat death? He lived to the age of 73—not too bad for his time (and profession.)

Nikolas Wallenda is among the greatest tightrope walkers in recent history. Working for several circuses, Wallenda continues a long family history of feats on the tightrope. In 1999 he proposed to his future wife, Erendira. But no ordinary proposal would do for this courageous man! In front of a crowd of onlookers, he walked out on a wire suspended 30 feet in the air, and got down on bended knee and asked his then girlfriend to marry him! (I wonder what would have happened if she has said ‘no.’)

### **DIG-IN**

Today, many youth are also tightrope walkers. They may not do this 30 feet up in the air, but danger is still part of the walk. Youth may not do it in front of a crowd, or unfortunately, they may. And it is encouraged everywhere they turn. What is this rope that many are walking? It’s a line called premarital sex. Only many think it isn’t sex at all.

The problem is that sex has many different definitions. The media certainly likes to make you think so. Everywhere you turn today, someone is trying to tell you that sex is O.K. outside of marriage, or that what you are engaging in is not sex at all. The Postmodern way of thinking is that anything that feels right, is right. It claims that there is no absolute moral truth. Television, the Internet, magazines, billboards, even other teens want you to buy into this thinking. Why? So they can sell you what they want to sell you—even if it cuts into your dreams and goals and provides only instant gratification. Don't sell yourself short! God's moral truth is still valid, especially for today's world.

### **HOT POTATO: Satan's Lies**

As young people, you are bombarded with lies about sex that you have to sort through. Things like, "everyone is doing it." But are they? No. Not everyone. Studies show that only 25% of girls your age and less than 30% of boys are practicing any form of sex. While that number is way too high, if you are following God's plan for sexual relations (which means *within* marriage), then *you are* in the majority.

One of the lies you have to deal with is the new term "technical virginity." That's someone's interpretation of the letter of the law. It's an excuse used by many

teens for sexual activity. If you are "technically a virgin" (*meaning not having experienced penetration*), then other sexual activity (like oral sex) is acceptable.

Many think that oral sex is safer. It doesn't lead to teen pregnancy, and you are less likely to get a sexually transmitted disease. At least that's what they think. But that thinking is flawed. HIV, human papillomavirus, herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, Chlamydia and cancrroid can all be contracted during oral sex.

### **HOT POTATO QUESTIONS**

When President Clinton said that he had not had sex with Ms. Lewinsky, he told many youth that oral sex was not sex. If the president believes that, then why shouldn't you?

What do you think? Is oral sex, sex? How about other forms of sexual activity like masturbation or scarfing? Define sex. Many Christians feel that sex is any genital contact—whether it is hand to genital, mouth to genital, or genital to genital. What do you think of that definition?

### **APPLY IT/BIBLE TEXT DISCOVERY**

- **Genesis 2:24** What does it mean to become one flesh? Why do you think God created sexual union to bond two people? (*Leaders- remind the youth that*

*a bond means to unite - and the two become like blood relatives*) If sexual union bonds people, then wouldn't it make sense that it is to be saved for a marriage union—something you share with just one person? Notice the language used: "a man and his wife." Is this God's plan for sex—in the beauty of marriage?

### **Explain**

- **Song of Solomon 4:2** Song of Solomon is a beautiful description of love within a marriage. Some think it should come with a warning because it is so explicit. But do you think God wanted to share what His plan was for the beauty of a sexual relationship in a loving marriage? Why does this verse refer to the bride as being a sealed fountain, or a locked garden? Are fountains and gardens good things? Are they best when they are meant to be shared? Do you ever fear that you will be alone? Does that ever tempt you to participate in things that should be saved for marriage? Do you think God understands this?
- **Matthew 5:28** What does Jesus tell us here about the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law? Define the word *lust*. If lustful thoughts are sin, then why wouldn't lustful acts be sin?

Can you perform any sexual act outside of marriage without lust being involved?

- **Romans 12:12** What does the media tell you about sexual behavior for teens? If you buy into this, are you conforming to the pattern of the world? How is God's pattern different? What do you think "the renewing of your mind" means? How can you make sure that you follow this? Have you found God's will to be good and pleasant? If not, what's holding you back from trying it?
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** Can sexual sin be forgiven? What assurance do you have of that? Many use the excuse that it is too late, so you might as well keep on doing what you are doing. But is it ever too late with Jesus? Does this verse give you hope if you have been caught in the trap of sexual sin? It should. God promises that you *will be* a new creation—the old is gone, which to Jesus means forgotten. God offers hope that is a sure promise and He is always faithful! (See also James 1:17).

### EXTRA GEM

Ellen White understood about tightrope walking. Read what she wrote in a compilation called *Letters to Young Lovers* . . .

"Do not see how close you can walk upon the brink of a precipice, and be safe. Avoid the first approach to danger. The soul's interests cannot be trifled with. Your capital is your character. Cherish it as you would a golden treasure. Moral purity, self-respect, a strong power of resistance, must be firmly and constantly cherished" {LYL 63.5}.

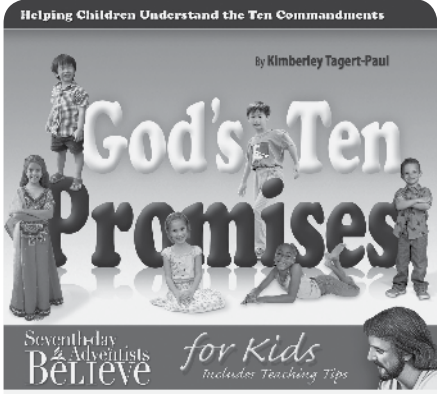
### SHARING TIME

Many young people say that the reason they give in to sexual feelings is because they feel alone, and they hope that sex will help them feel less lonely. Do you know anyone like this? This week, think about your friends and seek out those who seem the loneliest. Build a friendship with them that will give them someone to talk with when they are troubled. Besides making a new friend, you may be giving them a chance to make a choice that will change their lives for the better. Be bold—Jesus will help you!

### THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

This week, memorize the following verse and say it often. It will give you help if you fall into temptation. **1 Corinthians 6:18-19:** **"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 have received from God? You are not your own."*** ●



**GOD'S TEN PROMISES**  
by Kimberley Tagert-Paul  
[HTTP://WWW.ADVENTISTBOOKCENTER.COM](http://www.adventistbookcenter.com)

In *Gods Ten Promises* you will find a refreshingly different approach to learning about this important topic. Join twins Cameron and Kaitlynn as they discover something exciting—the commandments are not a list of dos and donts. Rather, they are promises. In them, God is saying, "If you let Me, Ill make you into someone who wouldnt even think of stealing."



# FORGIVENESS

## Accepting God's forgiveness and forgiving yourself

### LEADERS NOTES:

*Research has shown that youth have a very hard time forgiving themselves than they do forgiving others. The results can be very detrimental, and can include behaviors involving low self-esteem and self-worth issues resulting from guilt, shame, blame, perfectionism, anxiety, and sometimes even suicide. As a result of these findings this Bible study will focus more on forgiving ourselves and accepting God's amazing grace and His atonement, than it will on forgiving others.*

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### ICE BREAKER:

#### **The Hamsters Wheel**

Can you believe that someone has taken the time to measure how far hamsters run in their wheels at night. And the record is . . . about 6 miles. But statistics say that some rodents will run much further. In 24 hours, a rat can run 26 miles (43km). Now, if you are a field mouse - those little legs can propel you about 18.5 miles (31 km). Don't ever underestimate the power of little things!

Scientists have also studied why hamsters run in their wheels, and what kinds of wheels they like. As to why - the most likely reason is for exercise. They haven't actually been able to ask one of the little fellows yet - but that seems the most likely answer. Some theorize that animals get a high off of running - like some people do who run for fun. And

it seems the bigger the wheel, the happier the rodent. So remember that the next time you visit your local pet store.

Humans have their own version of the hamster wheel. The treadmill - and it dates back much earlier than its rodent counterpart. The first treadmill appeared around 1875 - but it wasn't built for humans. It was designed for animal power. The energy harnessed was used to operate things like butter churns and spinning wheels. The largest of these was run by horses and used to operate threshing machines. In the 1920's - the technology came to factories, where it cut the cost of labor so much, it made previously unattainable luxuries affordable to more of society. (Hint - think automobiles.) Then in 1952 a physician by the name of Robert

Bruce took the technology and began using it for stress tests. By the 60's - the treadmill became a standard in gyms and home use, and still is today (At least before it is banished to the attic or as a clothes rack in a corner of the bedroom).

### DIG-IN

Ever feel like you were a hamster in a wheel - or on an endless treadmill. Do you feel like sometimes you're taking two steps forward for every three steps back? If you do - you are certainly among the human race. We seem to like being part of the perpetual cycle of frustration.

Man seems to have invented a whole new lifestyle out of chasing his own tail, much like the hamster. And we seem to bring that tail-chasing activity into too many areas of our lives. Like . . . forgiveness.

## **HOT POTATO:**

### **Warning! Danger Ahead!**

Did you know that there are dangers for the little creatures forced to run in their hamster wheels? Yep - that's been documented too, and it isn't pretty. Vets see many injuries to these animals every year. It is estimated that a hamster has about a 70% chance of sustaining an injury due to their wheel running in its lifetime. These injuries include such things as broken feet, legs, tails, and toes. Or even worse - they can be crushed between the cage and the wheel.

What happens when a pet rodent is injured? There are really only three choices; let it die slowly (we won't talk about how painful this is), euthanize your pet, or pay for it to have surgery. But be forewarned - a hamster foot amputation runs about \$1500!

We run risks, too, when it comes to chasing our tails. Besides wearing ourselves out - when we bring tail-chasing into other areas of our lives, we have a huge chance of causing painful damage. Especially when it comes to forgiveness. The Bible tells us to forgive others. That sometimes isn't so easy to do. But the hardest part of forgiving doesn't even involve someone else - it's between you and God. And quite often, asking for forgiveness leads

to asking for forgiveness again and again because we don't feel like we are worthy of accepting it.

We are human - God is not. It is hard for us to believe that He can forgive and forget because that is very difficult for *us* to do. But He can and does! When we ask for forgiveness, He forgives. It's really that simple. Jesus' death on the cross assures us of that. The problem lies in accepting that forgiveness - a task that often puts us back on the treadmill of life chasing our tails. It's much easier to forgive someone for what they have done - but very difficult to accept that we have been forgiven,

Why is it so hard for some to accept God's forgiveness? Some people have never experienced forgiveness in their earthly lives from their parents, friends, family. Others may have experienced conditional forgiveness - forgiveness that depends on an "if" or constant reminders of the past. Still others have a difficult time because they don't see they need to be forgiven.

## **HOT POTATO QUESTION**

*So why do you think it is so hard for us to accept God's forgiveness? Ask yourself - how do my attitudes and beliefs contribute to this cycle of frustration?*

## **APPLY IT/BIBLE TEXT DISCOVERY**

**I John 1:8-9** It is human nature to want to deny our wrongdoing. But the Bible makes it clear that we are all sinners - and that we all need to seek forgiveness. God is love - and in that love He doesn't force anything on anyone. We are free to choose. Do you think you need to ask and accept His forgiveness? Is there a part of this you find difficult to do?

**Romans 5:8** Wait a minute! What did that verse say? When did God accept us? He loved us while we were still sinners. Hard to accept? He did! Accepting His forgiveness must come from our hearts. How do you feel about this?

**Isaiah 59:1-2** Unforgiven sin separates us from God. It hurts our relationship with Him. We need to ask for forgiveness and accept it if we want to have a relationship with the Father that loves us beyond our understanding! Do you agree with this?

**Mathew 6:12-15** We are told in these familiar verses that we **MUST** forgive others. Is it a matter of choice? If we want to be forgiven - do we have to forgive? It may not be easy - but God will help us if we ask. That

is a promise. Do you know that God keeps His promises? Is it easy for you to forgive others? (See also Ephesians 4:32 and 1 Corinthians 13:5)

**Psalms 32:1-2. Isaiah 43:25, Ps. 103:12** What happens when we forgive and are forgiven? Will we be blessed and have true happiness? God says that He won't remember our sins, and He says that He will remove them from us. No more sin! Our job is to not do any deep sea diving! Can you trust God to forgive and forget?

**Philippians 3:13-14** We know we must forgive others, and that God forgives us. So what is the last step? Is it learning to accept God's forgiveness? Paul understood this challenge. He held the coats of those stoning Stephen. So - he had some weighty things to be forgiven for. It is our choice - to accept God's unmerited favor. We may not deserve it - but God offers it. It is a gift. Like any gift, doesn't it have to be opened to enjoy it? God loves you! Can you learn to accept this? Do you think it can help you find freedom?

### EXTRA GEM

Ellen White shares what God showed her about forgiving in the

following quote, "**We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive.** The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matt. 7:2. COL 251.4

### SHARING TIME

Many people wonder about just what Blaspheme of the Holy Spirit is. Probably your friends have talked about it before. The Holy Spirit's job is to convict us of sin. When He works with us - our consciences can be convicted of sin. But if we continually push Him away - how will we be reminded of sin and the need to ask for forgiveness? This week, help your friends understand what the Holy Spirit's job is and why He is so important in our lives. Remind them of God's grace, and the need to forgive as we are forgiven. (See John 16:7 - 10)

### THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

David understood the need for forgiveness of sins. Read Psalms 51:10-12. Can you ask God, like David did, for a pure heart. When we are right with God, we too will be filled with the joy that salvation brings. ●

# IDEAPAC



## INSIDE THIS KIT

**DRAMA**, PP.29-35

*Integrity, Forgiveness, Character*, by Patti Emanuele, 29

*The Night Before*  
by Kimberley Tagert-Paul, 32

**SKITS** by Kimberley Tagert-Paul,

*The Three Rs*, 36

*Who Is Responsible*, 37

**PROGRAM PLANNERS**

by Kimberley Tagert-Paul

*Beginning a Relationship with God*, 38

*Obedience*, 40

*Self-Control*, 41-42

*Renewal*, 43



► **LIFE ISSUE:** Integrity, Forgiveness, Character Building

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To remind youth that God expects our character to be blameless and upright. Integrity and forgiveness become character building traits.

**CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH:** Our character is built upon our reputation for integrity and our ability to forgive through Jesus Christ. We are His representatives to others.

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Kings 12:15, “They did not require an accounting from those to whom they had given the money to pay the workers because they acted with complete honesty.”

**SETTING:** A college classroom. It’s final exams time. The Student Union. Jamie’s dorm room.

**CHARACTERS:** Jamie, Nora, Daniel, Mr. Benson, a group of girlfriends and a girl who owns a wallet.

*It’s exam time. Jamie and Daniel are sitting next to each other. The room is crowded. Jamie and Daniel have been friends for a long time.*

**Daniel whispers:** “Jamie, hey Jamie.”

**Jamie:** “Be quiet,”

*Jamie glances to the front of the lecture hall. Mr. Benson, the instructor, is absorbed in a paperback novel.*

**Daniel:** “Jamie. I need help.”

**Jamie:** “Stop it.”

**Daniel:** “I mean it. Come on.”

*Daniel glances furtively at the front of the classroom. Mr. Benson is still reading.*

**Daniel:** “What’s the answer for number 10?”

*Jamie ignores Daniel.*

**Daniel:** “Jamie...”

**Classmates:** “Ssh”

*Jamie continues to ignore Daniel.*

*Later after the exam.*

**Jamie:** “Are you crazy? We could have both been thrown out of the exam. I don’t need an “F” in that class.

*Daniel chuckles.*

**Daniel:** “You are making such a big deal out of it. It’s so easy to cheat. Mr. Benson doesn’t even pay attention.”

**Jamie:** “Well, you know that I am a Christian, and you are too. It’s wrong Daniel.

Whatever our grades, we have to just accept it.”

*Daniel is quiet.*

**Daniel:** “I’ve got to go to English Literature. See you later.”

*Daniel and Jamie part ways.*

## SCENE II

*Jamie knocks on Mr. Benson’s office door. Her hand is shaking. In her other hand she clutches a note from Mr. Benson.*

The note reads, “**Please see me about your exam.**”

*Jamie has no idea why Mr. Benson gave her the note.*

**Mr. Benson:** “Come in Jamie.”

*Jamie wonders how Mr. Benson knows it is her. She opens the door.*

**Jamie:** “Mr. Benson I got your note and...”

*Jamie sees Daniel sitting in a chair in front of Mr. Benson.*

*Daniel does not look at her. He squirms in his seat.*

**Mr. Benson:** “I am sorry to say that I am certain that one of you cheated off of the other person’s exam paper today.

*For the next few minutes Mr. Benson asks them each questions similar to the questions on their exam.*

**Mr. Benson:** “You can go Jamie. Daniel and I need to talk.”

*Jamie realizes that Daniel copied answers off of her paper.*

*It’s a long walk back to Jamie’s dorm. Her roommate, Nora is studying there.*

*Nora glances up from her books and watches Jamie with a puzzled look on her face.*

**Nora:** “What’s wrong Jamie?”

**Jamie:** “I can’t believe it. Daniel’s supposed to be my friend, but he cheated off of my paper. He could have gotten me into trouble.”

*Nora shakes her head.*

**Nora:** “Wow. That’s rough.”

*Nora gathers her books and puts her coat on.*

**Nora:** “You know he probably just had a weak moment. After all, he is just human like all of us. I can relate.”

**Jamie:** “But he cheated. I could have gotten into trouble...”

**Nora:** quietly: “At times like this I try and remember that Jesus forgives me all the time, so I have to forgive others. When I forgive someone, I am a better person for it.”

*Jamie sits alone in the room. She opens her Bible and prays. It grows dark outside her window.*

*The next day Jamie seeks out Daniel.*

**Jamie:** “Daniel, I was hurt and angry when you used me to get a good grade on that exam.”

**Daniel:** “I’m sorry Jamie. I’m ashamed. I don’t know why I did it.”

**Daniel quietly:** “Please forgive me.”

*Jamie is silent. She looks into Daniel’s eyes.*

*Daniel waits. His rubs his stomach.*

**Jamie:** “I’m sorry Daniel, I just can’t let this go. You’ve really disappointed me.”

**Daniel:** “Please Jamie. I don’t want to lose your friendship.”

*Jamie shakes her head and walks away from Daniel.*

*Jamie meets a group of friends in the Student Union.*

**Jamie:** “I can’t believe Daniel did this to me. I would never treat anyone like that.”

*Jamie’s friends murmur in agreement.*

**Girlfriend:** “What are you going to do Jamie? Are you ever going to speak to Daniel again?”

**Jamie speaks quickly:** “I really have no interest in spending time with him again. He was willing to cause me to flunk that class. Actually, he would have let me take the blame. That is so low. I couldn’t do that to anyone.”

*The girls talk among themselves. They break up and head back to their dorms.*

*As Jamie approaches her dorm, a girl stops her.*

**Girl:** “Are you Jamie?”

*Jamie is startled.*

**Jamie:** “Why yes. What’s up?”

**Girl:** “Uh, this is awkward. I think you may have picked up my wallet at the Union the other day.”

*Jamie feels her stomach lurch.*

**Girl:** “I was there with some friends, and you wait tables there. When I left the Union I noticed that my wallet was missing. I couldn’t find it anywhere. I figured that I must have dropped it on the floor. One of my friends thought she had seen you pick something up from the floor. She suggested that I ask at the restaurant if someone had turned it in. They told me that you had taken it and assured them that you would return it to me. They said that you were honest and had good character.”

*Jamie swallowed. She had tried to return the wallet. Every day she had meant to return it. It was sitting in the second*

drawer of her desk. She had looked inside of course. She did need to know the person's identity, right? There was a lot of money. More than she made all week waiting on tables in tips.

**Jamie:** "Uh, yeah. Your wallet is upstairs in my room. I kept meaning to call you. Why don't you follow me up to my room?"

*As the two girls climbed the stairway to Jamie's room, they talked.*

**Girl:** "I appreciate it that you didn't keep my wallet. I knew that you would not take my money. Everyone where you work told me that you have good character and could be trusted."

*Jamie opened her desk drawer. She quickly drew out the missing wallet and handed it to the girl.*

**Girl smiles:** "Ok then, thanks."

*The girl counts her money.*

**Girl:** "They told me that you were honest. They were right."

*Nora walks in as the girl leaves.*

**Nora:** "So that's the owner of the wallet."

*Jamie nods yes.*

**Nora:** "Guess it's good she forgave you for keeping it so long, right?"

*Nora flops on her bed.*

**Nora comments:** "I guess we all make mistakes."

*Jamie has trouble sleeping that night.*

*She glances over at Nora. She's sleeping hard in her bed. Jamie turns on a small light and reaches for her Bible lying on her night table.*

**Jamie:** "Oh God, I am so sorry. Please forgive me."

*Jamie's eyes grow heavy. She is forgiven. She knows as she closes the light that tomorrow she has something important to do.*

### SCENE III

*Jamie spots Daniel walking across campus. He sees her and starts walking away faster.*

**Jamie calls out:** "Daniel wait. Slow down. I can't catch up with you."

*Daniel stops walking. He waits for Jamie to catch up to him. He shifts his weight from one foot to the other.*

**Daniel:** "I don't know what to say Jamie except that I am sorry."

*Jamie hangs her head. When she looks up at him her cheeks are red.*

**Jamie:** "I forgive you Daniel because Jesus forgives me."

*Daniel's face brightens with relief.*

**Daniel:** "Jamie, you are a true example for Christ. Thank you."

*As Jamie walks away from Daniel her heart feels light. She has learned that she also can be tempted to do wrong things and Jesus has forgiven her for it. Now Jamie has been able to forgive Daniel and that makes her feel good inside. Jamie pulls her coat closer around her and smiles. It's going to be a good day. ●*

## TIPS FOR LEADERS

- You are not an entertainment center.
- The youth don't have to be entertained all the time. Plan service projects and mission trips.
- Treat everyone as you would want to be treated.
- Treat the youth with confidence and trust.
- Never, never, never make a young person the butt of a joke. YOUTH GROUP IS A NO-SHAME ZONE.





## THE NIGHT BEFORE

**PROGRAM TARGET:** Don't exchange the truth of God for the lie that sex is what you are missing. It is easy to get hooked on things that deal with our feelings.

**CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH:** God has a plan for your life, and following His plan will bring you the happiness you seek. Anything outside of His plan will bring sadness and guilt, and that is hard to live with. Choices can often be forgiven, but consequences can't always be undone.

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Corinthians 6:12, Romans 1:25

**CAST:** The Bride, Ali. Her bridesmaids, Steph, Lilly, and Sophie.

**SETTING:** The setting is the night before the wedding. The bride and her bridesmaids have gathered for a sleep-over. They can be in her bedroom, or just on a couch and some chairs.

*The bride and her bridesmaids are making themselves comfortable, either in a bedroom setting, or in a sitting room, they are snacking on popcorn, and could have can of soda.*

**Steph:** I can't believe you are getting married tomorrow. It seems like it's been so long.

**Ali:** I know. (She laughs) We dated all through high-school, so it does seem like a long time. Can you believe it? Five years of dating, and now, finally . . . (She sighs).

**Lilly:** (Putting her arm around Ali) What's wrong, Ali?

**Ali:** It's just, you know. People say that we are too young. That we can't possibly know what love is, we're barely 20. But I've been in love with Sheldon for years. I know I have.

**Sophie:** Of course you love him. That's easy to see. Don't worry, Ali. It's the night before your wedding. You are supposed to be thinking about other things.

**Lilly:** Yeah, like the flowers, and the cake. That's what you mean, right Sophie? (She giggles.)

**Sophie:** Right. (She laughs)

**Steph:** You guys are silly. Ali doesn't have to worry about what you're talking about, do you Ali?

**Ali:** Huh? I guess I wasn't following so closely.

**Sophie:** Exactly my point. (They all laugh)

**Ali:** (She throws a pillow at Sophie) I get your point, now. And for your information, I am worried, a little.

**Lilly:** You mean . . . about being . . . you know, with Sheldon?

**Ali:** Yeah, about that.

**Steph:** Why? You two have . . . haven't you?

**Ali:** Not exactly. No. Not . . . you know. . . not really.

**Steph:** What does not exactly mean?

**Ali:** Well we've kissed and all. But, not . . .

**Steph:** You're a virgin?

**Ali:** Well . . . technically, I guess.

**Lilly:** Of course she's a virgin. She goes to church and loves Jesus. What were you thinking, Steph?

**Sophie:** What does going to church have to do with anything. I go to church with you and Ali. That doesn't mean you can't fool around a little and still be a virgin. Everyone says that. You know, as long as you don't go all the way . . .

**Ali:** Yeah, we haven't done that. Just, you know, touched and stuff.

**Steph:** I can't believe you guys. What's the big deal if you did do anything. Does God stop loving you or something? You were going to get married. You knew that a long time ago. So . . .

**Lilly:** God tells us to wait until we are married to . . . do . . . those kind of things.

**Sophie:** Oh, Lilly. Pure, sweet, Lilly.

**Ali:** Hey. Leave Lilly alone. Everyone has a right to their own opinion, right?

**Steph:** Sure. But do we have to be so old fashioned about it?

**Lilly:** Old fashioned?

**Steph:** Yeah, Lilly. I bet you haven't done more than kiss a guy, right?

**Lilly:** As a matter of fact, I haven't kissed anyone. Yet.

>>>

**Steph:** (Shocked) And when were you planning on doing that? At your wedding.

**Lilly:** For your information, yes. Michael and I don't even hold hands. You know the Bible tells us to protect our minds and our bodies. We are just trying to do that. I don't think there is anything old fashioned about it at all.

**Steph:** You've got to be kidding. You really are waiting until your wedding for your first kiss?

**Ali:** I think it is sweet. I kinda wish that Sheldon and I had waited for that.

**Sophie:** Really You really wish you hadn't even kissed Sheldon until your wedding? Wouldn't that be worse than worrying about. . .you know, what you are going to do tomorrow night?

**Ali:** I don't know. Sometimes, I think about what we have done and it seems we just got carried away by our passions, not that we really wanted to do anything displeasing to God. I think I would be less worried if. . .if we hadn't done anything at all. Then it would have been. . .sweeter, more like opening a special present.

**Lilly:** That's what I mean. Like opening a special present and being so surprised.

**Steph:** Yeah, surprised when it all got messy and. . . (Ali, Sophie and Lilly all look at Steph with questions on their faces.)

**Ali:** What are you talking about, Steph.

**Steph:** Nothing. Never mind. Let's just think good things about tomorrow. It is your wedding day, isn't it?

**Ali:** Steph, you are one of my best friends. There are things I thought I knew about you, but, maybe there are some I don't. I think you need to talk about this.

**Steph:** No, I don't!

**Lilly:** It's O.K. Steph. You know all of us - we aren't going to tell anyone or anything.

**Steph:** Lilly, you are so sweet. Too sweet. You just don't understand what it is really like out there. There is so much pressure. So many guys know just what to say to get a girl to. . .do things. And sometimes. . .

**Ali:** Go ahead, Steph. You can talk to us.

**Steph:** You wouldn't understand.

**Sophie:** We can try. (All the other girls add their encouragement.)

**Steph:** (With her head down, she says. . .) I didn't wait, O.K. I gave in, and . . .

**Ali:** (She goes over and puts her arm around Steph.) It's O.K. Step you say, we are all with you.

**Steph:** Not when you hear the rest. . . I listened when my boyfriend said it was O.K. to mess around, as long as we didn't go all the way. That's what the new virginity is all about, right? (She gives a sarcastic laugh. I thought it would be safe. But then, he got. . .excited, and I couldn't tell him no, and then. . .

**Ali:** You went all the way?

**Steph:** I got pregnant!

*(All the girls are shocked, after recovering, they try to comfort Steph.)*

**Ali:** But. . .I never saw you pregnant. . . (She thinks for a second.) Oh, no!

**Steph:** (She looks up and her face is a mask of torture.) I had. . .I had an. . .abortion.

**Lilly:** I'm so sorry you had to go through that, Steph. (The other girls answer, "Me too," and try to comfort her)

**Ali:** That's when you and Ben broke up. . . and you got sick. . .I remember that.

**Steph:** Yeah, he dumped me quick.

**Ali:** I wish I had known. I would have helped you Steph. I understand a lot more, now.

**Sophie:** Yeah, I wish I could have been there for you. Jake has talked me into doing more than I'm comfortable with. I think I will be more careful now.

**Steph:** You still want me to be in your wedding, Ali.

**Ali:** Of course. I'm not as innocent as I should be. That's what I mean. If Sheldon and I had waited, like Lilly said, then maybe it would all be even more sweeter. But we can't go back now.

**Sophie:** So, do you think God will forgive us? You know, for doing the things we have done?

**Lilly:** Of course He does. That's what "grace" is all about. You can start all over again, and remain faithful to Him.

**Steph:** We won't be able to forget the memories, though, will we? *(She says this with much pain, and looks down)* >>>

**Lilly:** The memories?

**Steph:** (She looks off into space.) Every time I go into a store, and see a baby. . . (She puts her head down and cries quietly)

**Ali:** Oh, Steph. I'm so sorry that you had to go through that all alone. I wish I could have been there for you, I should have been there.

**Lilly:** I'm sorry, too, Steph. I know you hurt. But I do know that God forgives us! It says in Psalms 103:12 . . ."As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Now, you have to work on accepting that forgiveness. The memories. . .

**Steph:** Those happen every day. Do you think that will ever change.

**Lilly:** I believe God will help with that, too, Steph. He is an awesome God.

**Ali:** I think Lilly is right. God will help you, Steph. How about your parents? What did they say? Was your mom. . .

**Steph:** They didn't know! And they can't. They'd be so hurt. Please don't tell anyone. (She is almost in a panic.)

**Sophie:** Don't worry Steph. We'd never say a word. That's what friends are for, right?

**Steph:** I didn't mean to ruin the night before your wedding. I never thought I'd tell anyone about it. (She is still very upset.) It's just, I hate living with the guilt. I think about. . .you know. . .him or her, what she would have looked like, and it makes me so sad.

**Lilly:** I'll pray for you, Steph. God is the one that can bring healing to your heart.

**Steph:** Lilly, you just don't get it. I don't think God can forgive that. It's too big.

**Lilly:** You are wrong, Steph. God can and He will. You just have to choose to let Him.

**Steph:** (She looks up at Lilly with pleading eyes) Do you really think so? Really Lilly?

**Ali:** I do, Steph. And maybe it is time we all ask for His forgiveness. I want tomorrow to be really special. Sheldon and I should have waited, like Lilly said, but we didn't. I can't take that back now, but I can promise to make wiser choices in the future.

**Sophie:** Isn't that a little too easy, since you are going to be married tomorrow. The pressure won't be the same for you anymore like it is for us single girls.

**Ali:** I guess that's true. I still think Lilly has something there, though. Protecting our thoughts and our bodies is taught in the Bible. Maybe we have failed in the past, but it doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Right?

**Sophie:** No. But, I kind of enjoy kissing and . . .

**Lilly:** Everyone does.

**Steph:** What? That—coming from you?

**Lilly:** Look, just because I make the choice not to give in to things doesn't mean I don't have passion and desires like everyone else. I decided on my

personal boundaries ahead of time, and made a choice to honor God through them. It's not easy to do either. I love Michael. I can't wait for our wedding, or our wedding night. Yes, it's a little scary, but we love each other, and I know things will work out. God planned it that way, that we wait until marriage. I'm just trying to trust Him.

**Steph:** I'm happy for you, Lilly. You are making hard choices, but I'm sure God is helping you. He would have helped me, too, if I had asked. But I was so afraid. I just wonder if it's too late for me.

**Sophie:** I think He can forgive, Steph. It's not too late. Lilly is right. God is pretty awesome. I know He still loves you. He forgave David, why not you? Why not all of us? (She looks around at all of the girls)

**Steph:** Maybe you're right, Sophie. (She stops and thinks for a second.) Hey, can I ask a favor. Can we all pray together now and ask God to help me. . .and all of us . . .to make wise choices and to help heal the hurt. I'd love the chance to start out fresh, and God is the only way that is going to happen, right?

**Ali:** I think that's a great idea. Then, I guess we better get some rest. Tomorrow is going to be a big day.

**Lilly:** (Smiling) And an even longer night. . .

(The girls laugh, hug each other, and gather in a circle to pray together.)

*End of skit, session ending on next page*



## DEBRIEFING SESSION

**Leaders:** It is very important that you spend time with the your youth in a debriefing session after this drama. Several areas that are especially important to youth have been addressed.

*Research shows that youth have a hard time forgiving themselves for mistakes that they have made. It is often easier to forgive others rather than themselves. (See the Bible study on forgiveness in this issue.) Not being able to forgive themselves can lead to behavior such as low self-esteem, guilt, shame, anxiety, and even suicide.*

### Some questions that you might want to ask are,

*How do you think God feels when we make mistakes?*

*Does He have a problem forgiving us if we ask sincerely?*

*Will we always be spared from the consequences of sin?*

*Can He forgive us if we aren't willing to forgive others? (Such as the guy that got Steph pregnant.)*

*What are our responsibilities in forgiveness?*

*Abortion is the end of a life. Can God forgive all parties involved in an abortion?*

*Do you ever think that abortion is an option in God's plan?*

*Is it harder for God to forgive those who choose abortion? Is the forgiveness He offers different in each situation?*

*Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves? ●*

## PROGRAM PLANNER

### ▶ FOCUS : Integrity

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To stimulate thinking about “integrity” and what it means in the life of the young Christian

**WHAT TO DO:** Clear a large open space in the middle of your meeting area and roll out a large sheet of newsprint or butcher's paper—the larger, the better. Have group members copy out the Ellen G. White quote below in large letters so that it covers much of the paper:

*“The greatest want of the world is the want of men— men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”*

Provide a large supply of current newspapers and magazines representing a variety of different interests, along with scissors and glue. Have your group create a mural illustrating the quote with images that speak to them about the idea of “integrity” (they could also select images that suggest the opposite—for example, a newspaper picture of a corrupt politician could be placed on the poster with a large red X through it!). Allow about an hour to complete this mural. As the youth work, guide the conversation to focus on why they're choosing these images and what “integrity” means to them.

Large group option: If you have too large a group to do this all together, have several large sheets of paper with a portion of the quote on each one. Then have smaller groups work on each section.

When the mural is done, find a place in your church or meeting hall to display it.

**PREPARATION TIME:** Take time to collect the materials, including a large variety of visual images for people to choose from while making their mural/ collage. Select some appropriate Christian music to play in the background as they work.

**BIBLE TEXT:** Psalm 119:9, 10

**VESPER OR CLOSING THOUGHT:** When the mural collage is completed and hung in place, gather your group around it and read the quote aloud. Challenge them with the idea that this is God's goal for each of them—young men and young women. Kneel together to pray and commit your group to God as men and women of integrity who will live for Him in this world.

**FOCUS : Sexual Purity**

**READ THIS FIRST**

## THE THREE R'S

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To provide a forum where youth can discuss the responsibilities and problems that can arise in a relationship with the opposite sex.

**CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH:**

God's choice for our lives is abstinence until marriage.

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:13, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Acts 13: 38,39.

**TO DO:** Have paper and pen for three different groups. Make sure there is area for these three groups to discuss their topic without being overheard by the other groups. Have a large enough area so that when the groups are gathered back together, there can be two circles drawn on the floor—and label these areas, Agree/Disagree. The youth will have to stand in the circle that fits their answer to the statements each group will read. Prepare a sheet with suggested questions for each key word that will get them started with their discussion.

(On a separate sheet of paper, copy each of the following. These are questions to get them talking.)

**FIRST COPY: Responsibilities—** Who has responsibility in a relationship where sexual decisions are being made? Should the girl make all the “no” decisions? If someone goes too far, who should take responsibility?

**SECOND COPY: Rights:—** Who has more rights in a relationship? Who has the right to say “no”? The girl only? Are rights different in a relationship between Christians?

**THIRD COPY: Respect—** Is respect a right or a responsibility, or is it something else? Is respect something that is automatic, or is it earned? How can you gain or lose respect?

**Introduction:** Youth at all stages suffer from pressures to give in to many things, and sexuality can be one of the biggest areas of stress. They may know what the Bible says about abstinence, but hormones may tempt them away from obeying Bible truths. Sometimes, girls feel very differently about certain areas than boys, and vice versa. It's time to get them communicating so that they can understand how each feels about areas within sexuality as Christian youth.

**LEADER:**

(After the skit on next page is performed) Tonight we are going to look at three areas involved with sexuality. Sometimes gender plays a role in how you may feel about this subject, so it's time we started communicating our feelings so that we can understand each other, as well as our rights and responsibilities.

(Number off the group to divide them into three teams. If you count them off,

1, 2, 3, you will split up friends, and help the group to be more diversified. Send each group to their assigned area and allow them 15 minutes to write five statements dealing with teen sexuality, with their “key” word as the focus. Give them the prepared sheets that go with their word to get them talking. They may need less time, but you want them to discuss before writing their statements.)

After the allotted time, call the groups back into the area where you have made the circles, Agree/Disagree in. You are to read off the first statement from each group and have the youth stand in the circle that is their response to that statement. Allow for short discussion about why they have made the decision to choose that circle. It is your responsibility as a leader to keep the discussions free from argument. Remind them about the Bible's perspective on that statement. After all 15 statements have been read, have the youth gather in a circle and continue discussion on the topic. Were there any surprises in the choices that the youth made? Why might there be differences of opinions, even knowing what the Bible says on the topic? Is sexuality a harder topic for one sex over the other? Why? Is there more pressure on the guys or the girls to respect what the Bible says about abstinence? Where can the youth turn if they have questions about sexuality? Does God understand how they feel? How can you prove this?

End with prayer. This is a good time to play a fun game—like Red Rover. ●



**FOCUS : Sexual Purity**

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To help youth think about the responsibility they hold in how they treat others in regards to sexuality.

**LIFE ISSUE:** Responsibility for behavior is everyone's duty.

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** 1 Cor. 6:18, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body" NIV.

**CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH:** God asks us to be responsible with our bodies.

**SETTING:** Boys room, a television and a gaming system (Or just the controllers), chairs.

**CHARACTERS:** Dusty, Cam, Austin (Boys)

(Dusty and Cam are pretending to be playing a video game on the television. Austin is cheering them on. The television's back is to the audience.)

**Austin:** Watch out! Get the guy on the right.

**Cam:** Ohhhhhh. (He's upset and he throws the controller on his chair and stands.) I can't believe he got me. Sometimes I hate this game. (He picks up a can of soda and takes a drink.)

**Dusty:** Yeah, you only like it when you're winning. (He stretches.) Ready to take me on, Austin?

**Austin:** Yeah, bring it on. (He settles into Cam's empty chair.) Hey, Cam, how did your date go the other night?

**Cam:** I have a no ask, no tell policy.

**Dusty:** Since when?

**Cam:** I just think it's more responsible.

**Austin:** Oh, I get it. He didn't even get to first base.

**Dusty:** Uh, huh. Sorry you struck out, buddy.

**Cam:** I didn't say that. I just don't think it's right to talk about a date.

**Dusty:** Come on. You know we live vicariously through you.

**Austin:** So, did you get to first base?

**Dusty:** I told you—don't ask, don't tell.

**Dusty:** Well, Austin got further than you then with Jessica. Didn't you?

**Cam:** Jessica? From church? I didn't know you were dating her.

**Dusty:** Well, not exactly dating. Just . . . having some fun. You know. (He smiles.)

**Cam:** What are you talking about? A girl like Jessica is just playing around? I don't think so. That's not respecting her at all.

**Austin:** What's got you so righteous all of a sudden?

**Cam:** I don't know . . . I just think . . . you know, maybe it's time we show a little respect, that's all. We are older now, and it wouldn't hurt us to treat the fairer sex with a little respect.

**Dusty:** Ha. Who are you and what did you do with Cam?

**Cam:** Funny.

**Austin:** What respect? It's not our job. Everyone knows what guys want . . . whether we go to church or not. You know, hormones. It's not our responsibility to worry about those things. We're the guys. It's up to the girls to say how far things go . . .

**Cam:** What's that supposed to mean?

**Austin:** Oh, come on. It's the girl's responsibility to say "no." Everybody knows that, right?

(Dusty and Cam look at each other and shrug . . . and start a new game on the television.) ●

### TIP

**Design a safety net for emergencies by asking professionals in the church to be available for your group members if needed.**




**FOCUS : BEGINNING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**
**PROGRAM TARGET:**

To help each young person think about either starting his or her relationship with God, or moving that relationship to a higher level.

**WHAT TO DO:**

Give the “Character Sketches” below to four members of your youth group ahead of time and ask them to prepare to give that person’s “testimony” at your meeting, and be ready to answer questions.

**CHARACTER SKETCH: THIEF ON THE CROSS**

He was only fighting for what he believed was right. In a society where the oppressive foreign government reduced many of the people to homeless poverty, the only way to fight back was to live outside the law. Stealing from the rich, keeping it for the poor—i.e. himself. He joined a band of rebel bandits and learned not only theft but violence. But what’s wrong with violence when you’re living under military rule and you have no rights? Eventually his lifestyle led where that kind of lifestyle always ended up—brutal torture and a painful and humiliating public execution. But in the moments before he died, he caught a glimpse of a Man who lived a different kind of life: someone who fought evil with the power of love

instead of violence. He wanted to be part of this Man’s kingdom, and with his dying words he asked for mercy—and received it. He didn’t have time to change his life or clean up his act—just to ask for help.

**BIBLE TEXTS:**

***Thief on the cross:*** Luke 23:39-43

**CHARACTER SKETCH: MARY MAGDALENE**

She was possessed by seven demons—maybe all at once, or maybe one after another. Some Bible students also believe she was a woman who lived a life of loose morals—perhaps as a prostitute. We know for sure that by the time she met Jesus, she was outcast and desperate. She had reached the end of her rope. All she could do was throw herself on His mercy—but

it was good enough. He cast out her demons. She responded by becoming one of His followers, giving up her old life to go wherever He led.

**BIBLE TEXTS:**

***Mary Magdalene:*** Luke 8:1-3; John 20:1-18

**CHARACTER SKETCH: PETER**

He wasn’t a bad guy. Maybe not too religious, but he lived a good life and went to the synagogue regularly. When this travelling preacher named Jesus burst onto the scene, Peter was curious. Intrigued. He was drawn by Jesus’ powerful personality and, in his impulsive way, Peter committed himself to following Jesus all the way, even though it meant giving up his business and leaving his family with no means of support. He wasn’t

perfect. He kept messing up, making mistakes, misunderstanding Jesus. But he was growing. Then, suddenly, everything shattered around him. His faith was put to the test, and he flunked. He denied he even knew Jesus—a slap in the face to his Lord on the worst night of Jesus' life. Peter was torn apart by his own failure—but when Jesus came back from the dead, he took Peter aside and let him know he was forgiven, and He gave him a special mission.

#### **BIBLE TEXTS:**

**Peter:** Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 26:69-75; Acts 2:36-41

#### **CHARACTER SKETCH: THOMAS**

We don't know where or how he met Jesus. But somehow he got drawn into Jesus' inner circle—the disciples who went with Him everywhere, worked with Him, knew Him best. It was a strange life—following a travelling preacher around from town to town—strange for a man who usually didn't commit himself too deeply to anything. Thomas was cautious. Thomas thought things threw. He held back. Even as he followed Jesus around, his naturally pessimistic nature made him wonder when it was all going to come crashing down. On the day Jesus was crucified, it seemed Thomas' worst fears had been realized, and his caution had been justified. When

Jesus appeared to them again, it was only natural for Thomas to think his eyes were playing tricks on him. How could a man rise from the dead? Thomas asked for hard evidence—and Jesus gave it to him.

#### **BIBLE TEXTS:**

**Thomas:** John 20:24-29

#### **WHAT TO DO:**

Set up your meeting as a testimony meeting, with plenty of singing and perhaps some Bible readings. Have your four characters sitting in the audience, but perhaps wearing a token Bible-times costume item (e.g. a headdress or something similar) to indicate that they are playing a role and not speaking as themselves. When you invite people to share what God has done in their lives, have each of the characters stand up in turn and tell his/her story. If others in your group follow with genuine testimonies of their own, that's great! After all four characters have told their stories, lead the group in a discussion of how each of these people came to Jesus, what kinds of Christians in modern life they might resemble, and how their experiences can apply to us today.

#### **PREPARATION TIME:**

Give the character sketches to your four actors well ahead of time, a week or two in advance, and encourage them to also look up

relevant Bible passages about that character. Choose people who can speak well in public and have some acting ability so they can really bring the character to life.

#### **SONG SERVICE:**

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

#### **VESPERS OR CLOSING THOUGHT:**

Wrap up tonight's meeting with an appeal, along these lines: "Each of these Bible characters came from different backgrounds, had different needs and different problems. Yet each of them came to a point where they admitted they needed Jesus and wanted to follow Him. The story was different for each one, but they all followed Jesus. It's the same for us. We have different backgrounds, different needs, and different problems. But every one of us needs Jesus, and every one of us can have a relationship with Him. All we need to do is what these people did—admit we need Him, and let Him into our lives. We'll still have problems. We'll still have doubts. But everything will change. If you've never taken that step to let Jesus into your life, now's the time to do it. And if you have a relationship with Jesus but you know that He's calling you to go farther, to take a new step in following and serving Him, maybe it's the time to do that too. Let's pray." ●

**FOCUS : OBEDIENCE****PROGRAM TARGET:**

To stimulate young people's thinking about the role of obedience in the Christian's life.

**WHAT TO DO:**

Invite a guest speaker with a military or police background to speak to your group for about half an hour about his or her experiences with basic training—what kinds of things they are expected to do in training and how the experience of practicing “blind obedience” to superior officers prepares them for the kinds of situations they will face later. After the talk, lead your youth through a half an hour discussion about obedience in the Christian life, using the discussion questions below.

**DISCUSSION:**

1. Why are police and members of the military put through such rigorous training when they first enlist?
2. Why is unquestioning obedience important in a career like this?
3. Is this the kind of obedience God expects from Christians?
4. Some skeptics say that if we put the emphasis on “obeying” God, we are downplaying the importance of using our own reason or intelligence. What do you think?
5. Is there ever a time when it's OK to question God's commands? Are we always required to obey without questioning?
6. What kind of “basic training” do we need in our spiritual lives to help us learn to obey?

**PREPARATION TIME:**

Invite your guest speaker at least a month in advance. Choose someone who will be comfortable speaking in front of a group and make the objectives of the program clear so that your speaker will know what to focus on. If possible, choose someone who is a member of your congregation or is active in another Christian church, so that he/she will understand the parallels you are drawing to obedience in the Christian life, and will be able to participate in the discussion afterwards.

**BIBLE TEXT:** I Samuel 15:22

**SONG SERVICE:** Make me a Servant; Trust and Obey

**VESPER OR CLOSING THOUGHT:**

God gave us intelligence and the ability to reason—but He also knows there are situations where our own understanding cannot carry us, because we can't see the “big picture.” Obedience requires trust—we need to believe that God knows what's best for us. God doesn't always require “blind obedience;” in many situations we have enough information to make an informed, godly decision. But when the path ahead isn't clear, God asks us to trust Him enough to obey even when the outcome isn't clear to us. ●



## I-PAGE PROGRAM PLANNER

### ▶ FOCUS : SELF-CONTROL

#### PROGRAM TARGET:

To help youth recognize the value of self-control.

#### WHAT TO DO:

- Set up four “stations” around your meeting room, place poster board, magazines, newspapers, glue, markers and scissors at each.
- Label according to the “Areas of Self-Control” listed. (See next page).

*Food*

*Entertainment*

*Drugs/Alcohol*

*Education*

Divide the group into four smaller groups—one for each station.

Have each group follow the instructions at their station.

#### DEBRIEFING:

Allow about 40 minutes for this activity, then bring the groups back together to present their collages, and talk through the discussion questions together.

#### PREPARATION TIME:

Get a large selection of current and recent magazines (a variety of types: sports, women’s magazines, teen magazines, etc), newspapers and catalogues. You may want to recruit youth group members in advance to bring in magazines to make sure you have enough.

- Provide poster board, scissors, markers and glue.
- Divide into groups of eight.
- Set up four stations.
- Depending on the size of your group, divide into sets of 8 and combine sets, equally, at stations.
- If your total group is less than than twelve, drop one or more of the categories and set up only two or three stations instead of four.

#### BIBLE TEXT:

*“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time” (Hebrews 11:24-25, NIV).*

#### VESPERS OR CLOSING THOUGHT:

We live in a culture that tells us: “Life is short; grab what you want right away!” We don’t often hear the message of patience, delayed gratification, self-denial. Yet these are the principles not just of Christian living, but of all successful living: learning to use self-control to put off short-term pleasure in pursuit of long-term goals. Help youth to focus on the “big picture” – not on rules and regulations, but on what they want to accomplish in life through God’s power, and what kind of self-control they’ll need to achieve those goals. ●

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## 1. FOOD

**Use words and pictures from the magazines to create a collage illustrating why it's important to exercise self control in this area of your life. As you work, discuss:**

1. What kinds of problems do people have exercising self-control with food?
2. What kinds of messages do we get from society and the media about food?
3. What does God's Word have to say about it?
4. How does a lack of self-control in this area affect our lives?
5. What are some tips to help people be more self-controlled in this area?

## 2. ENTERTAINMENT

**Use words and pictures from the magazines to create a collage illustrating why it's important to exercise self control in this area of your life. As you work, discuss:**

1. Is it really necessary to have self-control over what kinds of entertainment we choose?
2. How does the entertainment we choose affect us?
3. What does the Bible have to say about our choice of entertainment?
4. What are some principles Christian youth can apply to help them exercise self-control in this area of our lives?

## 3. DRUGS/ALCOHOL

**Use words and pictures from the magazines to create a collage illustrating why it's important to exercise self control in this area of your life. As you work, discuss:**

1. What kinds of problems arise when people don't exercise self-control in this area?
2. What kinds of messages do we get from society and the media about drugs and alcohol?  
What messages do we get from church? Parents? Friends?
3. What does God's Word have to say on this topic?
4. Does self-control in this area mean "just saying no" or exercising moderation?

## 4. EDUCATION

**Use words and pictures from the magazines to create a collage illustrating why it's important to exercise self control in this area of your life. As you work, discuss:**

1. Why does it take self control to get an education?
2. What are some of the messages we get from others that might keep us from exercising self-control in this area?
3. Why is it so important to be self-controlled about our education?
4. How can the Bible help us in this area?



### FOCUS : RENEWAL

#### PROGRAM TARGET:

To encourage youth to keep the fire of renewal alive in their lives after a revival experience has ended. This program is best used after a Week of Prayer, youth retreat, crusade, or other experience where many of our youth have made commitments or re-commitments to Jesus.

### THIS IS GOOD FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM TO THE WEEK OF PRAYER MEETINGS

#### WHAT TO DO:

**Show the video** *After the Fire*, by Steve Case. (See Resources). After the video, move into some discussion time, exploring with your group their own feelings about “revival” experiences, the ideas presented in the video, and ideas for how to turn a one-time revival into an ongoing renewal of your relationship with Jesus. When discussion ends, hand out the “My Commitment” sheet to each person in the group. Allow 5-10 minutes for people to quietly fill it out, then encourage them to take it home, place it in their Bibles or another meaningful place to continue referring to in the weeks and months ahead.

#### PREPARATION TIME:

Obtain a copy of the video and preview it. Copy the “My Commitment” handout for everyone in your group.

#### BIBLE TEXT:

1 Kings 19:1-12

#### SONG SERVICE:

Change my Heart, O God

#### VESPER OR CLOSING THOUGHT:

Revivals, crusades, youth rallies, Weeks of Prayer—they can all be “mountain-top” experiences. Or, maybe your own mountain-top was a quiet, private encounter between you and God. Whatever kind of experience it was, every mountaintop has something in common—it’s followed by a valley. As Christians we have to learn to move from the emotional “high” of an experience with God, through the “lows” of everyday life—and keep our faith strong. God promises to be there in the still, small voice that speaks to us even in the valleys.

**RESOURCES:** *After the Fire* is available from Piece of the Pie ministries ([www.piecofthepie.org](http://www.piecofthepie.org)) for \$9.99 US. ●



# SEXUAL PURITY?

## ***Let's Get Real!***

by Calvin N. Roberson, M.Div.

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### **LOVE IS A WONDERFUL THING!**

The Garden of Eden must have been incredible! Imagine the brilliant, pastel colors of flowers, crystal clear rivers, majestic animals frolicking in the plush grasses, and exotic, luscious fruit, just waiting to be eaten. Even the most skilled writer couldn't quite describe the splendor of the garden. And in the middle of all this beauty, God created man. It must have been incredible to have every possible divine joy at your disposal; to be able to experience tastes and fragrances that we today cannot even imagine.

You would think Adam would be happy beyond belief, but he was still incomplete. God said it was not good for Adam to be alone. So God put him to sleep, detached a rib from his side, and built, around that rib, one of the crowning works of his creation. He created woman. Not that woman was an afterthought; she couldn't have been, because God never makes mistakes. She was in the plan from the beginning. Now man was complete. He had a mate that was suitable for him, and it was really good.

Since creation, couples have yearned to be close. Every man wants a woman who is suitable to himself and every woman wants a man to be the same. Friends are great, but they do not fulfill the desire to have a spiritually and physically intimate mate, designed just for you. No other relationship could ever replace the union God intended when He created Adam and Eve. Is it any wonder there is such a clamor to connect among men and women?

Christian dating sites, chat rooms, and even speed dating are all evidences of the desire to find that *special someone* with whom we can share our innermost thoughts and feelings. God designed us with those desires; however, in this maze of technology and social interaction, sometimes a young man or woman may get lost or confused. Even in those times, God can help us find our way.

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## WHAT HAPPENED TO LOVE?

Melrose Place, Gossip Girl, Skins, The Game, and 90210, to name a few, are some of the shows that keep youth glued to the television. The conversation is seductive, the situations are compromising, and the interest is unparalleled. From the brash discussions on sexual topics to the wide acceptance of “alternate lifestyles,” there is a full-on blitz of morally questionable stimuli. When you include reading material, Internet, and music, the question has to be asked, “Is it even possible to be a young, moral Christian in today’s indulgent society?”

By their 19th birthday, seven in ten teens of both sexes have had intercourse.<sup>1</sup> On average, young people have sex for the first time at about age 17,<sup>2,3</sup> but they do not marry until their mid-20s.<sup>4</sup> This means that young adults are at increased risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for nearly a decade. In 2006–2008, the most common reason that sexually inexperienced teens gave for not having had sex was that it was “against religion or morals” (42% among females and 35% among males). The second and third most common reasons for females were “don’t want to get pregnant” and “haven’t found the right person yet.”<sup>1</sup>

These statistics bear out that while the desire for intimacy and relationship remains constant, those cravings often lead to immoral behavior if there are no spiritual guidelines. The values that God gave us in the Garden of Eden seem to have been ignored by some and maybe forgotten by others.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once told a parable about two thieves who broke into a jewelry store, but instead of stealing the jewels they simply switched the price tags. They put high-priced tags on cheap jewelry and low-priced tags on valuable gems. For several weeks no one noticed. People bought cheap jewelry for exorbitant prices and rare jewels for spare change.

**God gave us sexual feelings and desires.** They are valuable and costly because God Himself made them and placed them inside us. They are to be used in their proper context, but often many choose to switch the price tags. Illicit sexual encounters, pornography, and other immoral practices devalue the holy purpose that God intended for our sexuality.

***This workshop can be presented in a small or large group setting. It is designed to give a reasonable, yet spiritually sound framework by which youth may be able to navigate the sometimes complex waters of sexuality and find joy, fulfillment, and spiritual satisfaction.***

1. Abma JC et al., Teenagers in the United States: sexual activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, National Survey of Family Growth 2006–2008, Vital and Health Statistics, 2010, Series 23, No. 30.
2. Chandra A et al., Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, Vital and Health Statistics, 2005, Series 23, No. 25
3. Martinez GM et al., Fertility, contraception, and fatherhood: data on men and women from Cycle 6 (2002) of the National Survey of Family Growth, Vital and Health Statistics, 2006, Series 23, No. 26.
4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, America’s Families and Living Arrangements, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009

# MODULE I

## FRIENEFITS: *friends with benefits*

### THE REAL DEAL

With the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, some have devised an alternative to falling prey to these situations: just find someone you know, who is a good “clean” friend, and fulfill your intimate needs without all the strings attached. Media has fueled this moral inferno through popular movies and TV shows that seem to give the green light on sexual intimacy without marriage. Since the current divorce rate is at an all-time high, this seems like a plausible solution, because your “needs” are met without the requirement of a lifelong binding relationship. However, this type of relationship always causes major complications.

#### Power Question

**Can males and females really be close friends anyway, or does the issue of sex always come up?**

While it may be possible to have friends of the opposite sex, there is one very important reality that should not be missed: Male and female were created to be attracted

to one another. This attraction is embedded within our being. If male and female are to be friends, there are boundaries that must be established. It is important not to fool yourselves into thinking that you can be best friends with someone to whom you are physically or sexually attracted.

### Negative Effects of Friendefits:

When we really think about what a friend is and what Scripture says about friendship, we must change our attitudes. The word for friend in the New Testament is *phileo*. This is what we call filial love or brotherly/sisterly love.

The Biblical meaning of the word “friend” is much deeper than our modern usage. We should replace the word “friend” in our minds with the word ‘covenant friend,’ ‘covenant companion,’ or ‘faithful partner.’

I Samuel 18:3 says, “*Then Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul.*” “One of the benefits of having a covenant commitment with a friend is that each party is able to relax and not suffer a fear that the other one might reject him. The strength of a covenantal bond produces a freedom from anxiety over the future of the relationship” (Keith Intraer, *Covenant Relationships*, p. 37; Destiny Image Press).

This kind of spiritual commitment is rare. A friend is a holy concept. It is

a spiritual relationship, which poses a serious problem for friendefits. When friends have sexual relationships, they are dirtying the fabric of the friendship. Once the boundary of intimacy has been crossed, it changes the make-up of the friendship. Sex and all of its emotional accessories become the focus of the relationship.

### ⇒⇒ Scenario:

Chad and Ally have known each other since fifth grade. They even live in the same neighborhood. You could even say they are best friends. Their parents are even great friends. Now that they are in high school they spend a lot of time talking about college, the prom, and dating. Ally, however, is not the little girl she used to be. She has developed into a beautiful young woman and Chad knows it. He often jokes with her and calls her ugly and they will wrestle and chase each other. Their parents call them “brother and sister,” even though Chad sometimes has fantasies about her and Ally gets secretly jealous of his girlfriends. She calls it “protecting her brother.”

### ◀▶ Let’s talk about it

#### Are there any potential dangers in this relationship?

Sexual relationships are represented in the Greek as *eros*, where the word *erotic* comes from. Erotic love, which is exhibited between husband and wife, begs for deep emotional attachment, which often results in physical intimacy. One cannot be

in a state of *phileo*, or friendship, and have the pleasures of erotic intimacy without the commitment. Sex is not designed that way.

When supposed friends (*phileos*) become physically intimate (*eros*), the result is emotional confusion. It is not God's design that "eros" should exist outside of marriage. If one cannot have a distinct boundary between friends and lovers, then that person will not be able to have stable relationships with either.

Youth and adults alike make a mistake when they believe they can separate the sexual act from an emotional attachment. Friends are objective; however, lovers may not be because of the obsession with the physical. The ideal relationship is a married lover who is your friend. The marriage covenant is the contract that binds the parties to the relationship.

### ◀▶ **Honest Answer Please**

Be objective for a moment. Are there any benefits to "frienefts"? Discuss this openly and don't just give the politically and spiritually correct answer, but honestly see if you can find any benefits to this kind of arrangement.

## **No Casual Pre-marital sex in Scripture**

*This distinction is made clear in the text of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). When the Torah speaks of sexual relations between a husband and wife, it uses the term "Yadah," which means "to know." The use of that term suggests a deep intimacy and love between the two partners. When the Torah speaks of sexual relations that are conducted outside of that bond, other terms are used: The term "Yavo," "to come," tends to be used in cases of prostitution (Judah and Tamar), and when a man takes a concubine (Abram and Hagar); while the term "Shachav," "to lie with," tends to be used in cases of idolatrous practice (such as occurred with ancient fertility rites), improper relations between relatives (the story of Lot and his daughters and Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20) and cases of rape (rape of Dina).*

*Therefore the ideal sexual relationship is one conducted in the spirit of "Yadah," of two people who intimately know and love one another. For Judaism, the best way*

*to create that sense of intimacy is through the vehicle of marriage (whether state sanctioned or not).*

*[Rabbi Daniel Plotkin, Jewish Values: Perspectives on Morals and Ethics,]*

## **WHAT DO WE DO NOW?**

Don't fool yourself; *frienefts* is simply another name for fornication. Let friends be platonic friends; you will need them without the complications of erotic entanglements. "Don't be immoral in matters of sex. That is a sin against your own body in a way that no other sin is" (1 Corinthians 6:18 CEV). Set up friendship boundaries. If you have a friend of the opposite sex, joking and hinting at sexual issues most times will lead you in the wrong direction. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Learn to appreciate the gift of friendship. The idea of lovers outside of marriage goes against God's plan for relationships. "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24).

"A little time spent in sowing your wild oats, dear young friends, will produce a crop that will embitter your whole life; an hour of thoughtlessness, once yielding to temptation, may turn the whole current of your life in the wrong direction. You can have but one youth; make that useful. When once you have passed over the ground, you can never return to rectify your mistakes. He who refuses to connect with God, and puts himself in the way of temptation will surely fall. God is testing every youth."

—Ellen White, Letters to Young Lovers, p. 63



## TIPS FOR LEADERS

- Recruit spiritually strong, youth-loving leaders for your group.
- Pay attention to the story. If you understand your teen's life experiences you will understand their behavior.
- Be sure to give your spouse space and a choice. The church may expect your spouse to co-minister, and they may want to, however, it should not be an expectation.
- Tend to your flock at home. Be careful not to neglect your relationships at home.
- Remember to be a team player. Always pray to project a team spirit no matter how hard the work is or if you have invested more time and effort than another leader. Seek to honor those who work beside you.
- In all things guard your reputation because you are a representative of Him.

**Setting:** Several young adults are having a picnic at a park. A blanket is down on the stage and various containers of food and drink are scattered around, with the young people lounging around after the meal.

**Cast:** Two young women, Lauren and Karen. Two young men, Jordan and Austin.

**Lauren:** That was sure good, Karen. Thanks for making those veggie chicken sandwiches. You'll have to show me how to make that salad someday.

**Jordan:** Yeah, like before she gets married. She's going to have to know how to cook something... or her poor hubby will starve to death.

**Austin:** You mean Lauren is going to have a husband? Who would want to marry her? (He laughs and tickles Lauren.)

**Lauren:** Hey. Cut it out. (She playfully pushes Austin away.) Don't touch the merchandise.

**Karen:** Yeah. You guys should respect us.

**Jordan:** Why's that? Because we are friends? Tickling isn't

respecting you? (He holds his hands up like he is about to tickle Karen.)

**Karen:** Don't you dare. (She scoots away pretending she is afraid.) Isn't that what friends are for? To respect each other and help each other?

**Lauren:** Yeah, that's why we can depend on you guys. You help us out—you know, with things like what to wear on dates, if we are wearing too much makeup, who to trust—things like that. We help you out with what to say to a girl, who likes you, inside stuff like that. It's a mutual relationship.

**Austin:** Strictly platonic. (He sighs.)

**Lauren:** Yeah. (She looks at Austin.) Something wrong with that?

**Austin:** Not a thing. (He tries to laugh.) What do you think, Jordan?

**Jordan:** I think it is easier for some of us than for others.

*(Jordan looks pointedly at Austin who looks embarrassed. Lauren and Karen look confused.)*

# MODULE 2

## THIRD BASE versus a “NO HITTER”

### THE REAL DEAL

The idea of sexual purity seems unreasonable to some and unattainable to others. The goal for every parent and every young Christian is to live a virginal (single) life. But today many are starting to question just what that means.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *virginity*: *a person who has not had sexual intercourse; a person who is inexperienced in a usually specified sphere of activity.*

A great number of young people are viewing virginity only as the absence of the act of sex. While this is a part of the total picture, could it be that there is a deeper meaning to sexual purity? Are there grey areas of physical intimacy that are acceptable in pre-marital relationships?

### Power Question

**How close can we come to a “home run” in dating without going all the way?**

There is a difference between sexual purity and virginity. Often our parents and churches put the emphasis on not having sex. While this is the ultimate goal, there are

many other acts preceding sexual intercourse that must be addressed. Sometimes young people feel it may be okay to go to these “bases,” stopping short of hitting a home run.

Prolonged kissing, intimate touching, fondling and *outercourse*, are often seen as acceptable forms of physical expressions. These, however, are simply the prelude to the main event. So then we must ask ourselves this question: What is the goal here? Is it to get as close to the edge of the cliff without falling over, or, is it to stay away from the cliff altogether?

### ⇒⇒ Scenario:

Carlos and Eva are young Christians just entering their second year of public college and have been dating since ninth grade. They say they really love each other and want to wait until they get married before they go “all the way,” but sometimes it’s really difficult. They kiss, hug, and even sleep in the same bed sometimes, but have not gone “all the way.” Lately, their physical expressions have included intimate touching. They know God wants them to wait and they have to finish school before they get married, but their desires have been getting really strong.

### ▶ LET’S TALK ABOUT IT

In the previous scenario, what are these young Christians to do?

### ◀▶ Honest Answer Please

Are we asking questions about how far we can go because we are looking for a means of escape from doing what is morally pure?

Many young people have said, “Hey, we didn’t have intercourse, so we should get some credit.” The truth of the matter is that when certain boundaries are crossed, it weakens the ability to resist. This is why the boundaries surrounding the act have to be respected. Very few youth who are bursting with hormonal excitement can keep going to third base and never have the temptation to “steal home.” The best answer? Don’t get up to bat.

### What does Scripture say?

According to the Bible, sex is good. It was created as a wonderful gift between Adam and Eve long before sin. It was also designed with all the trimmings that lead up to the act.

Understand that God really does know everything. He knows that prolonged kissing, hugging, and all other forms of physical intimacy are designed as an introduction to the *main event*. The body is created to respond and prepare itself whenever these preliminary actions take place. So in response, God has done something that only an all-knowing God could do. He raised the bar to keep us from destroying the beautiful thing He created.



Matthew 5:20 says: *You must obey God's commands better than the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law obey them. If you don't, I promise you that you will never get into the kingdom of heaven (CEV).*

What is being said here is that we must go beyond just doing the basics. We have to raise the standards. Jesus went further in explaining this.

27, *You know the commandment which says, "Be faithful in marriage." 28 But I tell you that if you look at another woman and want her, you are already unfaithful in your thoughts.*

Wow! So it is not enough to just avoid adultery, we must also guard the mind and not even think about it. God is trying to make sure we understand that the *letter of the law* is not good enough. We cannot just say we didn't have sex; we have to avoid the things that lead to it as well.

## WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Understand boundaries in your relationships. Boundaries do not naturally appear, they have to be built. Decide on your boundaries ahead of time. Just as in the physical world, boundaries are designed to show you where your property lines are. Without this knowledge, you would never know if someone is entering your private space. The same is true with our spiritual boundaries. If we know what God requires and establish those limits before time, we will know when someone is going beyond what is allowed.

*"The heart knows its own bitterness, and no one shares its joy" (Proverbs 14:10).* We have to deal with what is in our soul and boundaries help us to define what that is. If we are not shown the parameters, or are taught wrong parameters, we are in for much pain" [Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries*, p. 30; Zondervan Press, 1992].

**"Do not see how close you can walk upon the brink of a precipice, and be safe. Avoid the first approach to danger. The soul's interests cannot be trifled with."**

—Ellen White, *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 63

## YOUR GUIDE FOR SETTING UP BOUNDARIES

If you don't want to play ball, don't get up to bat! Which means don't spend private time together where no one can see you. *"Run from temptations that capture young people. Always do the right thing. Be faithful, loving, and easy to get along with. Worship with people whose hearts are pure"* (2 Timothy 2:22).

- Make sure you have someone whom you can be accountable to. If there is a parent or friend you can be honest with about your decision to remain sexually pure, have them to hold you responsible, and call them when you feel tempted. *"Just as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen the minds of each other"* (Proverbs 27:17).
- Raise the bar for yourself! Understand that emotional excitement is not recreational. While it is a beautiful thing to feel those emotions, God designed them for a specific purpose. *"Above all else, guard your heart [mind, inner being], for it is the wellspring of life"* (Proverbs 4:23).
- Know that whatever you surround yourself with is what will influence you the most. What you watch, read, or listen to can lead you to struggle in the area of sexuality. The concept is simple, whatever you allow to enter your heart and mind will come out in action. *"Out of your heart come evil thoughts, murder, unfaithfulness in marriage, vulgar deeds, stealing, telling lies, and insulting others"* (Matthew 15:19).
- Develop a sincere prayer life. Practice praying more, regardless of whether you feel like it. Your relationship with God is not based on how you feel, but rather the fact that you *know* He loves you and wants the best for you. *"Always be joyful and never stop praying. Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do"* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

**Cast:** A young woman, Angie. A young man, Kyle. A waiter.

**Setting:** Both are seated in a chair at a table at a restaurant on a date. Have a candle or some flowers and two place settings. They are looking at menus.

**Kyle:** Have you decided what you want yet? (Putting his menu down and staring at Angie.)

**Angie:** It's hard. So many things sound good. How about you? I hear they have really good pasta. (She sets her menu down and looks up at Kyle.)

**Kyle:** I'm not sure I'm hungry. It's just good being here with you, Angie.

**Angie:** (Smiling) You're so sweet, Kyle. You always know what to say to make me feel good.

**Kyle:** Well, I mean it, Angie. I always enjoy your company. How about after dinner, we go back to my place and watch a movie. . .or something.

**Angie:** I don't know, Kyle. (She looks uncomfortable.) I don't think it's a good idea that we are all alone. . . that's something I try to avoid.

**Kyle:** Why? It could be kind of fun.

**Angie:** Um. . . Kyle, I've made some choices when it comes to dating. . . and they don't include me setting myself up for. . . you know. . . temptations.

**Kyle:** Aw. Where's the fun in that? (Smiling.)

**Angie:** Kyle, I'm serious. I thought you knew that I was different. I'm only trying to honor God. It's something I pray about often. . . and try to follow

His leading. It's not always easy. I really like you, Kyle, but, well. . . you'll have to respect me on this if we are going to date.

**Kyle:** You're serious, aren't you? (He looks disappointed.) I don't know. . . I'm not sure if I can live with that. Maybe we want two different things.

**Angie:** (She looks sad but determined.) Kyle, I have to honor God. It's not always easy, but I've thought about it, and. . . I have my boundaries. I'm sorry if you can't live with that. But, I have to.

**Waiter:** (Enters from off stage with a small notepad to write down their order.) Have you figured out what you'd like tonight?

**Kyle:** Evidently one of us has. (He looks pointedly at Angie. The waiter looks confused.)

**Waiter:** Do you need another minute? (Kyle nods at the waiter who leaves.)

**Angie:** Actually, I'm not hungry anymore. But thanks. (She stands and looks at Kyle.) I'm sorry, Kyle. I really enjoy being with you. But, I don't think things will work out for us.

**Kyle:** (Stand and grabs her hand and caresses it.) Don't go Angie.

**Angie:** (She pulls her hand back.) Sorry, Kyle. Sometimes choices are tough. (She pulls away from him.) I don't want to make a choice I can't live with. Sorry. . . (She walks off the stage.)

**Kyle:** Wow. She's really incredible. (He thinks for a moment.) I may have just lost the perfect woman. One with morals. I kind of like that. . . (He stands and walks off stage.)

# MODULE 3

## DATING VOWS

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In the complicated world of dating, singles are finding it more difficult to live a life of holiness and dignity. With social networking sites becoming increasingly prolific each day, singles are connecting to each other in greater numbers than ever before. But this can open the door to a great deal of abuse, stalking, and bad choices. So what do you do if you are single and want to be married? First you must be faithful to your “Dating Vows.” These are designed to keep you focused on what is important as you tread the volatile waters of the “dating scene.”

### TO HAVE OR WITHHOLD

#### *A Vow of Abstinence*

Merriam/Webster’s definition of “To Have”: “[To] maintain as a possession, privilege, or entitlement; to hold in one’s use, service, regard, or at one’s disposal; to acquire or get possession of; to feel obligation in regard to; to stand in a certain relationship to (has three fine children; we will have the wind at our backs).”

When we use this meaning in regards to relationships, to some it may resemble slavery. But a closer look at Scripture puts the entire idea of “having” in perspective. Concerning marriage, Ephesians 7:4 says, “*For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise*

*the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”*

This gives us the distinct message that when two people are married, they must give up themselves to their spouse. This involves totally mutual commitment. The man must give himself completely to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. This may sound like a difficult task for some, but this is how God, the Creator, designed marriage.

Problems may arise in a relationship if the commitment is not mutual, if it is not total or if it is not Godly. In all of these cases, the outcome may be abuse or neglect.

When we consider dating, should youth bother with such a serious commitment, or is dating really not that serious? Is there ever a time when this kind of spiritual authority or “having” should be exercised over another person, outside the confines of marriage?

Many youth enter into puberty with the hope of going on their “first date.” While I understand that this is a teen tradition, the question has to be asked, “What is the reason for a first date? Is this the training ground for relationships? Are we to learn how to be married? When a young person goes out on a date, what are they looking for? If asked, you will get ten different answers depending on age, gender, spirituality, etc. Dating, without the intention of marriage, creates a scenario where there is a perceived ownership or authority over a boyfriend or girlfriend, without a legitimate title or right to that authority.

Abuse is inevitable when God is not in control of the relationship. Many young people who enter into relationships without godly counsel or spiritual guidance may find themselves in situations where abusive control is being exerted over them. Consider these statistics:

1. One in ten teen girls and one in eleven teen boys admits to having experienced physical violence in a dating relationship in the past year. One in three teens say they know someone who has been physically assaulted or hurt by a dating partner.
2. One in five teens ages 13 and 14 who have been in a relationship say that they know someone who has been hit in anger by a boyfriend or girlfriend.
3. One in five teens admits to being emotionally abused in the past year.
4. Among 11 to 14 year-olds who have been in relationships, 62% of them know friends who have been verbally abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend.
5. Approximately one in five teen girls have been physically or sexually abused by their partner.  
—*Dating Abuse Statistics. Centers for Disease Control. March 15, 2009.*

“Having” as cited in this dating vow has to have purpose. It should be a prelude to a serious committed relationship that has marriage in view; otherwise you are figuratively operating without a license.

## So Can We Date?

True dating should lead to courtship and hence to marriage. With this in mind, there is no reason for people who are not mature enough to be married to go out on exclusive dates.

Scripturally, there are no scenarios where people *dated*, just to go out and *chill*. People were “betrothed” to one another (Exodus 22:16). The word “betrothed” literally means to be engaged or to be waiting for marriage.

The idea of exclusive dating without any real purpose is a relatively modern thing. Ask your grandparents or great grandparents and they will tell you that a young man would come by and ask the parents if he could “court” his daughter. It was understood that courting was to lead to marriage. Even today in some cultures, this practice is still followed. For example,

- In India, marriages between a young man and woman were arranged by their parents, usually when the children were just newborn babies. The couple was not allowed to see each other until the day of the wedding. Parents would use astrology, family reputation, and social standing, financial stability, and dowry considerations to find a suitable groom or bride for their child. Once the match between the parents was made, the wedding would be planned and the families

would look forward to the day when they would all be joined as one.

- The Bemba tribe in Africa practices a different courting ritual. A young girl is chosen to become the wife of the tribesman. She has no say in the matter whatsoever to whom she becomes engaged to. Once her future husband and parents have agreed on a bride price, she is expected to visit him at his home, bearing gifts. After that, they will speak and she will do everything for him, including cooking and cleaning until the day of the wedding. If she does not bring him gifts the first time she goes to see him, she is not allowed to speak to him or enter his home.
- Oriental cultures have their own set of traditions when it comes to dating and marriage practices. Omiai is the practice of Japanese parents – or even the prospective bride or groom – looking for a suitable marriage match. They can do this by asking for help from their friends and family or even hire a matchmaker. Once one is found, the couple meets formally in the presence of both families and if the match is suitable, they court and then wed. If it is not, the search continues.

—Dieter Schneider, *Courting Rituals Around the World*, [dating2day.org](http://dating2day.org); 2007

Today, because our modern understanding of dating is embedded

in our society, youth have a tendency to “go out” without supervision and regardless of whether there is a purpose. For the Christian young person, however, there should be a standard. So if they do date, there are some basic rules to follow:

Have fun and get to know people through group interactions without the exclusivity. This type of “group dating” allows the young person the opportunity to interact with the opposite sex without the added pressure of having to generate conversation, impress a particular person, or feel awkward. It also provides a safer environment for young people who might otherwise be taken advantage of.

Understand that *dating* should not be the training ground for marriage. Observing the Godly marriage of your parents or other successful marriages is where you learn.

Listen to good counsel. Many wise adults have gone down the dating road before and may have valuable lessons to give.

Understand that the terms boy-friend and girl-friend should be taken literally, with emphasis on the word “friend.” Be sure to keep your friendship in proper perspective. Knowing your value and your God given worth will help you to maintain your boundaries, and avoid getting drawn into an emotional vortex, which may take you beyond your comfort zone.

**SETTING**

A young woman's bedroom where she can sit texting on her phone, or a desk and chair that look like she is someplace comfortable. A hand held mirror needs to be available.

**CAST**

Sophie, a young woman who is texting on her cell phone. She is having a conversation with God on her phone, texting Him and reading His responses.

**Sophie**

*(She reads aloud.)* O.K. I got that. You want me to keep myself until I'm married. But what do you mean by "keep"? *(She texts and waits for a response, reading it out loud.)*

Oh, I understand. Keep, like in a treasure. Something special that you don't want to let go of. That's so cool. *(She texts on her phone.)*

I never thought of myself as a treasure before. *(She stands and goes to a mirror and looks closely at herself.)* With my wide eyes and big nose—I'm really a treasure? *(She continues to look at herself.)* Well, maybe my nose isn't soooo big. But a treasure? *(She texts.)* Am I really that special?

*(She reads a text.)* Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. You did do that for me, didn't you? *(She smiles.)* Thanks again. *(She texts this, then waits for a response. She smiles, reading.)* You're most welcome. *(She smiles.)*

So, can I tell you what I'm waiting for? *(She texts this.)* I hope he is handsome, handsome is good. With dark eyes, like deep pools. . . And he has to be kind, and patient. Sometimes, well you know me, I get carried away and he'll have to be patient. . . and kind, did I mention that? A good sense of humor is a must. You know that. . . Um, he could cook. . . but. . . cleaning would be good, too. Helpful, yeah, that's better. And, he needs to wait. . . you know, for those things that are for marriage. I've come too far to give in now. What do you think? Is that a good list?

*(She waits for a text.)* Wow. You've got him picked out already? Does

he fit my list? *(She texts this.)*

Oh, I never thought of that. *(She reads text out loud.)* You want me to be the right person if I'm to have the right person. So, I have work too? Is that what the waiting is about? For me to have time to

become the best person I can be for him? That's a great thought. Will you help me with that? *(She texts.)*

*(She receives a text back and reads aloud.)* My pleasure. *(She smiles.)*

Thanks for working with me. *(She texts back.)* I guess I better get to bed.

Goodnight, God.

*(She receives a text and reads out loud.)* Good night my precious daughter.

*(She smiles and gets ready for bed.)*

**HAVE A GREAT IDEA YOU  
ARE NOT READY TO USE?**

**File away your ideas.  
Mark stories, quotes, sta-  
tistics for future reference.  
Copy them on 3x5 cards  
and file them by topic.**



## FOR BETTER NOT WORSE

### *A Vow of Understanding*

In marriage, the vow “For Better or Worse” alerts the newlyweds that problems will come, but your commitment to God and each other will overcome any obstacles. This, however, is in a marriage. In courtship, the vow is For Better, Not Worse. It should be understood that problems in a courtship may be a signal that the relationship needs to be severed.

## How to Avoid the Worse

### *Beware of Short Term Focus*

No one has to have someone “now!” Sometimes, urgency is the reason for bad or abusive relationships. Take your time and get to know the person before you commit to being in a serious relationship, which is intended for marriage.

*Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way (Proverbs 19:2).*

### *Have Realistic Expectations*

Beware of your “gotta haves.” Often we want the prettiest, most handsome, most popular, and the list goes on. But our media inspired list of “needs” may blind us to the real value of people. Realize that what you see in a person today may not be what you will see twenty years from now.

*“All wisdom comes from the LORD, and so do common sense and understanding. God gives helpful advice to everyone who obeys him and protects all of those who live as they should” (Proverbs 2:6,7 C.E.V.).*

### *Never Accept Abuse*

Whether verbal or physical, understand that you don’t deserve it. Many youth will make excuses for an abusive friend. *He only pushed me, He’s not always like that, or Things will get better,* may be some of the excuses. Don’t be deceived. If someone is revealed as an abuser, believe it. What’s inside will always come out.

The truth is, God made you for a higher purpose than that. Domestic

violence is degrading and it gnaws at your self-esteem. Always run from abusive situations. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and no one has a right to abuse it, either in dating or in marriage.

*Don’t make friends with anyone who has a bad temper. You might turn out like them and get caught in a trap (Proverbs 22:24,25).*

*You surely know that your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you and is a gift from God. You are no longer your own. God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God (1 Corinthians 6:19,20 CEV).*

### *Listen to Counsel*

Listen to people who love and care for you. If everyone is saying he or she is “no good,” then something is probably wrong. Never feel you know more than everyone who is giving you advice. Often times, dating couples are blinded by their emotions and other people are able to see problems better than they can. Insecurities in many young people have caused them to ignore sound advice because

“To trifle with hearts is a crime of no small magnitude in the sight of a holy God. And yet some will show preference for young ladies and call out their affections, and then go their way and forget all about the words they have spoken and their effect. A new face attracts them, and they repeat the same words, devote to another the same attentions.

This disposition will reveal itself in the married life. The marriage relation does not always make the fickle mind firm, the wavering steadfast and true to principle. They tire of constancy, and unholy thoughts will manifest themselves in unholy actions. How essential it is, then, that the youth so gird up the loins of their mind and guard their conduct that Satan cannot beguile them from the path of uprightness.”

—Ellen White, *Adventist Home*, p. 57



of their need to feel wanted. The voice of modern media is sometimes stronger than the voice of parents when it comes to dating.

“A study done by the RAND Corporation shows that teens are twice as likely to have sex or engage in sexual acts if they see similar sexual behavior in the media. Many objects in the media that involve sex target teens. Reality TV shows and teen dramas often portray the “cool kids” as the ones who are having sex.” [Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 2011.]

*For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome (Jeremiah 29:1 Amp).*

## FOR RICHER NOT POORER

### *A Vow of Personal Success*

Before you seriously get involved in a dating situation, make sure you understand the important role of finances. Is your potential marriage partner financially responsible? Has he or she been taught by his or her parents how to budget or financially support a family? It is a mistake to think that because someone is popular in college or high school that they would be the perfect provider. Find out that person’s work ethic. A person who can’t be disciplined enough to keep up with school work, or who cheats on exams, has not learned the basics that are necessary to be a financial success—discipline. *No matter how much you want, laziness won’t help a bit, but hard work will reward you with more than enough (Proverbs 13:4).*

## HERE ARE SOME FINANCIAL DATING RULES TO FOLLOW

***Have your own finances:*** Make sure you have your financial picture together before you require financial success in someone else. We often expect what we cannot produce. You are never too young to budget. Remember, if you are still living at home, you are only financially responsible for yourself.

*Do you see a man diligent and skillful in his business? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men (Proverbs 22:29).*

***Know Where You are Going:*** Let your potential spouse know you have a financial plan for your life. If you don’t have a plan, get one. *Get your fields ready and plant your crops, before starting a home (Proverbs 24:27 CEV).*

***Money is not Everything:*** Do not judge your date by his or her occupation. People are more than what they do. Know the intrinsic worth. Anyone who has real personal value and purpose will be on the road to success, and that road may be different to the one you are traveling on.

***Don’t Reveal Your Cards Too Soon:*** Never reveal your finances up front. Give your date a chance to know who you are before he or she knows what you make. You want to be liked or loved for the right reasons.

*He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity (Eccl. 5:10).*

***God Controls the Cash:*** Ultimately God is the source of all our finances. If your date is not giving God glory in their finances, you should consider moving on. *You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:18 ESV).*

## IN SICKNESS OR IN HEALTH

### *A Vow of Wellness*

The physical and mental health of your date is more important than you think. In youth and adults alike, sometimes compassion disguises itself as love. It is not wise to date or indulge someone with a health issue simply because you *feel sorry for him or her*, or you *don't know how to say no*. You are not being heartless, but rather honest, if dealing with that particular issue is beyond what God has given you strength to do. Understand that you are not married yet, so make your decisions sure. Health issues may last for a lifetime.

## Here are Some Steps to Making Good Decisions

### *Open Your Eyes*

Choose wisely and make sure you fully understand the health of your date. Often singles don't ask questions about health issues, genetic illnesses, STD's, fitness habits, etc., but it is your right to know this information if that person wants to date you. If someone has serious

marriage potential and that person has been sexually active in their past, it is wise to ask them to be tested for any sexually transmitted diseases. Then sit down and review the tests together. This is vital as you plan to marry and have children. It is not wise to just take someone's word that they are in good health.

*Don't be stupid and believe all you hear; be smart and know where you are headed (Proverbs 14:15 CEV).*

### **Know What You're Getting Into**

If you choose to date a person who has an illness, understand the potential financial and emotional obligation if you choose to marry. Get sound counsel from your parents and from his or her parents as well. Never *downplay* or minimize the effects a health challenge may have on your future.

When someone is hurting, the first response of the Christian is to feel compassion for that person. But is it possible to confuse compassion with love? Indeed it is. Remember, love and compassion are emotions that are expressed by heart felt giving to the other party. Know why you are in the relationship.

Both parties, the healthy and the challenged, must truly experience God's love in order to love each other through an illness. If the love of God is not the guide, neither party will benefit from the relationship. A relationship built on anything except agape love will fall short of God's ideal.

It is possible to love someone in spite of their sickness or their disease. But this is not a shallow love, but one that has been tested and has proven to stand. This is true Godly (agape) love.

*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends... (1 Corinthians 13:8a).*

### **Talk the Talk**

Be a healthy person if you want to date a healthy person. Look good for your date, but most importantly for yourself. Remember, dating is the time when you are putting your best foot forward. But, do not start something that you may not be able to continue when married.

*Honesty will keep you safe, but everyone who is crooked will suddenly fall (Proverbs 28:18 CEV).*

“Those who would preserve physical health, a vigorous intellect, and sound morals must “flee . . . youthful lusts.” Those who will put forth zealous and decided efforts to check the wickedness that lifts its bold, presumptuous head in our midst are hated and maligned by all wrongdoers, but they will be honored and recompensed of God.”

—Ellen White, *Adventist Home*, p. 59

## FORSAKING ALL OTHERS

### *A Vow of Fidelity*

Often singles don't consider fidelity or faithfulness as important an issue when dating. We mostly think of fidelity and being sexually honest, but the word also includes keeping a promise and being true to a vow. When a vow is made to commit to someone emotionally, God honors it and expects fidelity whether dating or married. Remember, the habits you form in dating will carry you through marriage. A promise or a covenant is not dependent on the status of the human relationship; it is dependent on the person's relationship with God. A promise to another person is, in reality, a promise to God in spirituality.



### **Power Question**

#### **Should dating couples expect to be as faithful as married people?**

Since the Bible does not mention dating, but rather only betrothal and marriage, the standard of fidelity or faithfulness is consistent. When Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit, Joseph thought to "put her away" or to separate himself from her because he thought she had been with another man before they had officially married. The angel of the Lord had to tell him that the Holy Spirit had overshadowed her. From this we see that fidelity, even before marriage, was taken very seriously.

Unfortunately, in modern dating, youth go from boyfriend to girlfriend at a moment's notice. This sets a pattern of infidelity in the minds of youth. They are learning through this behavior that if there is a problem, just find someone else, with or without notification. When there are multiple partners through infidelity, there is a corresponding spiritual destruction that takes place. You are creating ties to many people, which may be difficult to break.

*Paul's counsel to the Corinthian church:*

*Don't you know that your bodies are part of the body of Christ? Is it right for me to join part of the body of Christ to a prostitute? No, it isn't! Don't you know that a man who does that becomes part of her body? The Scriptures say, "The two of them will be like one person." But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one in spirit with him. (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)*

Sexual intimacy is a spiritual issue. The Bible uses the term "one flesh," which shows that a physical and spiritual union has occurred. This is why in Scripture, a couple was considered married when a man slept with a woman. The act of consummation was the thing that unified them, because they had become "one flesh." When a young man or woman enters into a soul tie, they are connected to that person and that tie is carried over into the next relationship and then to the next, and so on. This is why there is often a lack of stability in youthful relationships. It is because their soul is attached to other relationships.

### **Here are Some Rules to Follow:**

- An unfaithful *boyfriend or girlfriend* is setting the stage to be unfaithful in marriage. Avoid those relationships.
- Do not excuse unfaithfulness because you are just dating and there is no real commitment yet.
- Serious courtship is the prelude to marriage.
- When you first consider marriage, think God! Dating around or sleeping around to "find" the right person is not a successful practice. Rather, seek God and He will guide you in the right way and to the right person.
- Unlike in marriage, when dating you are not to leave father and mother and be joined to your boy or girl friend. Always consult with your parents or other responsible adults who love you. They often can see what you cannot!

## TIL MARRIAGE DO WE JOIN

### *A Vow of Commitment*

There is a different mindset when finding a “dating” partner as opposed to a “marriage” partner. I was once told by a single young person that Christians don’t know how to date. I asked, “What do you mean?”

The answer was astonishing. “Christians feel that every time you go out, it’s a potential marriage partner.”

My response was simple. “Shouldn’t it be? If not, what’s the purpose?” Anything outside of the idea of a marriage partner is just hanging out with friends.

The attitude about dating and courtship has to shift. No one is saying that young people should not *hang out*. There should, however, be a clear objective when mature youth decide to become exclusive, and that objective is marriage.

## Power Question

**When people decide to “settle down” and get married after a promiscuous single life, do you think their marriages will be affected?**

A Brigham Young University study found that,

“Being premaritally promiscuous may skew one’s view of equality... [it] could foster a self-centered approach to sexual encounters rather than one of mutual pleasure since promiscuous people are more likely to see their partners as sex objects...”

“Premarital sex has been shown to be negatively correlated with marital stability (Janus & Janus, 1993; Kahn & London, 1991; Larson & Holman, 1994; Teachman, 2003). In their study of women, Kahn and London found that premaritally sexually active women “faced a

considerably higher risk of marital disruption than women who were virgin brides” (1991, p. 845)... The risk of divorce for women engaging in premarital sex with someone other than their husband increased 114%, compared to those who only had premarital sex with their husband.”

To explain this, when one engages in premarital sex, there is a great tendency to put focus on themselves and only see the other person as a sex object. In addition, virgin brides have a greater chance of marital satisfaction and stability.

The fact is, when one is planning to marry, there must be a clean break from the past. Past ties must be mended and past hurts must be healed. Often a person will go into a marriage with many unresolved issues and feelings. These emotional ties most likely will be carried over into the marriage and can hinder the success of the new union.

March 2011



Brandon Davies, 19, a student at Brigham Young University and star basketball player, was dismissed for violating the school’s honor code by admitting to having pre-marital sex with his girlfriend. The honor code states that students must be “honest, live a chaste and virtuous life, use clean language, and abstain from alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and drugs” (<http://saas.byu.edu/catalog/2010-2011ucat/GeneralInfo/HonorCode.php>).

According to an article featured on abcnews.com, Mormon students don’t think the college’s values concerning sex are outdated. “It’s a commandment in the religion. We believe that our bodies are sacred,” said student Spencer Anderson.

Other students seconded this opinion, also stating that Davies did the right thing by coming forward about his mistake.

## How do I Break the Ties Before I Get Married?

See the past relationships for what they were...PAST RELATIONSHIPS. Take no pleasure in their memories and never boast of their existence. A spouse is dishonored when he/she is compared with previous relationships.

- Through sincere prayer renounce those relationships and ask God to remove them from your memory. *“How far has the LORD taken our sins from us? Farther than the distance from east to west!” (Psalm 103:12).*
- Please, LORD, remember, you have always been patient and kind. Forget each wrong I did when I was young. Show how truly kind you are and remember me. You are honest

*and merciful, and you teach sinners how to follow your path (Psalm 25:6-8).*

- Remember this saying: Sow a thought, reap an action; Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. *“You cannot fool God, so don’t make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest destruction, but if you follow the Spirit, you will harvest eternal life” (Galatians 6:7,8).*
- Be honest about your past, especially if it is recent. Do not deprive your potential mate of the right to make decisions for him or herself, as to whether they choose to be with you.

- *If you have sinned, you should tell each other what you have done. Then you can pray for one another and be healed. The prayer of an innocent person is powerful, and it can help a lot (James 5:16).*

**Once you are cleansed from your past, never revisit it. When God forgives and cleanses, he does it completely. Irrespective of what critics may say, your cleansing is sure.**

*My friends, I don’t feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done. All of us who are mature should think in this same way. And if any of you think differently, God will make it clear to you (Phillipians 3:13-15). ●*



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Calvin began pastoring at the age of 24, and went on to successfully pastor nine churches in the Allegheny West Conference. His congregations have had exceptional growth. Calvin has always been actively involved in family ministry; he and his wife currently serve as Family Life directors of the Allegheny West Conference, and they are actively involved in ministering to families around the country through Marriage Vows Ministries. In 1986 he got involved in youth ministry when he instituted student mentoring and programs in the public schools in Charlottesville, VA. That passion for youth ministry has also been expressed through numerous youth arts and witnessing initiatives.

Calvin and Wendy are the pastor and first lady of Bethel SDA church, a thriving and dynamic congregation located in Akron, Ohio. They have three children and live in Fairlawn Ohio with their ten year old daughter, Khloe.

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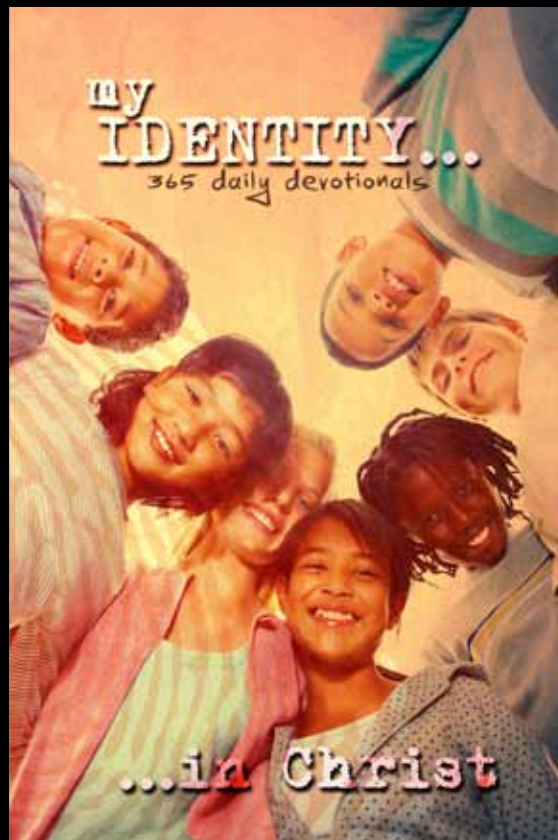


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