

Is the Church Speaking about Sex Effectively?

Matthew Paul Turner is the author of more than ten books, including *Churched: One Kid's Journey Toward God Despite a Holy Mess*, his newest book *Hear No Evil: My Story of Innocence, Music, and the Holy Ghost*, and *What You Didn't Learn from Your Parents About: Sex: A Guide to a Touchy Subject*. Tyler Charles spoke with him about how the church deals with the difficult topic of sex.

Do you think the church is doing an adequate job of talking about sex?

I think some churches are engaging the conversation about sex in good ways. But I don't think the core issue is "talking" about sex. I think the core problem between churches and the topic of sex is creating an environment where people feel welcomed and safe to discuss issues of a sexual nature. People don't feel comfortable discussing sex at church or confessing addictions to sex at church or to a church leader.

But sex is a difficult topic to discuss in most environments. It's not only the church's fault. I think it's the nature of the topic and how the topic makes us feel. Many of us aren't all that comfortable talking about sex with our spouses or friends; well, we'll joke about it or talk about it in past tense, but few of us feel comfortable engaging the conversation as it relates to the here and now.

Is there one message pertaining to sex that the church is communicating well?

Not in my opinion. If "sex" is discussed at all, it's often downsized to one week in a sermon series, or it's brought up in a particular church's conversations about sins. Sometimes it's joked about at weddings. And that's sad, I believe. But sex is a difficult topic to engage for many. And I get that. People feel a lot of emotion—good and bad emotions—in relationship to the topic of sex. When it comes to sexual topics, the church is seen as archaic and out of touch with society. Some of the church's core teachings and values that we claim are "biblical," aren't biblical at all—at least, not absolutes. Most are biblical assumptions. So not only are our messages often "out of touch" with those of the culture, but we also often have very shaky theology supporting those messages.

Is the church a place where people *should* raise questions about sex?

Sure. Again, I think the church's core problem is its failure to be a safe and trusted environment where people can engage the topic of sex on a number of levels—as questions, confess their addictions, etc.

Should churches train their leaders to talk about sexual issues?

Yes. However, I think in some instances, this depends on an individual church as well as the type of "church leader." I think having one individual on staff who is trained in counseling people about sex and sex-related issues is important.

Are there specific issues church leaders should be prepared for?

To name a few: sex addiction, sexual abuse issues, and Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender training (as it relates to "coming out" and finding acceptance).

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