

Teaching About Sex

LEADERS & STAFF



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Practical Ministry Skills: Teaching about Sex

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TEACHING ABOUT SEX**Leader's Guide**

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme on teaching about sex is designed to help you address these difficult but essential topics in a sensitive but informed manner. You may either use these handouts for personal edification or for a group training session. Or you may choose to provide copies to the church board, staff members, or those involved with specific ministry teams at your church. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For insights on what to say about sex when speaking to single people in the church, read Harold Ivan Smith's "What to Say about Sex" (pp. 3-4). To discover three misleading pieces of information the church has been presenting and one lesson it needs to reveal, read Lauren Winner's "3 Fibs and a Truth about Sex" (pp. 5-7). Read an interview with psychologist Kevin Leman, "Talking about Sex" (pp. 19-20) to learn more about the discussions Christians should be having about sex.

If you or your church is increasing its understanding of how to teach about sex, we hope this training tool will guide your efforts and encourage you. And ultimately, we hope that your congregation, your ministry, and you will be blessed as you see God working through your ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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TEACHING ABOUT SEX**What to Say about Sex***How to talk about sex with single Christians.*

Proverbs 5:21-23

A cartoon shows a minister in the pulpit with a sack over his head. A single adult says to a fellow parishioner, “Well, I see the pastor is preaching from Song of Solomon today.”

That cartoon reflects the church’s uneasiness with sexuality and hints at the mixed signals it sends single adults. Addressing sexuality and singleness in the church isn’t easy.

“Why preach on that?” one pastor retorted. “It’s simple: No! End of discussion.” Unfortunately, such refusals to address this thorny issue neglect the needs of the 73 million adults who populate Singleland, USA.

One single asked what to do about his sexual temptations. “Have you tried talking to God about it?” I replied.

“To God!” he sputtered. “You can’t talk to God about stuff like *that!*”

But not talking to God about sex would be like not talking to Bill Gates about computers. Who knows more about sexuality than its Creator? If we do not talk about it, the silence forces single adults to look elsewhere for answers and support. As Jenell Williams Paris writes, “When Christians are silent and TV is loud, it’s obvious which message will be heard.”

Here’s where pastors can begin:

Encourage healthy relationships with members of both sexes.

I often point to Jesus’ having his feet anointed by a “sinful” woman. She “wet his feet with tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them” (Luke 7:37-38). Can you miss the sensuality here? When was the last time you had your feet washed, kissed, and massaged? Ever? What was the Holy Spirit thinking by including this in Scripture? Jesus, if he was uncomfortable, certainly did not act like it. He defended her against the Pharisees who criticized her.

Address the core loneliness and emptiness.

Many single adults sit in worship on Sunday after yet another Saturday night alone. When they go to work on Monday, coworkers probably won’t ask about the sermon. They’re more likely to inquire about whether or not they “hooked up” with someone. In this culture, sex is the remedy for almost every malady. It’s the great numb-er, and potentially more damaging than alcohol or drugs.

Marvel at the creation of our sexuality.

God could have made the world a simpler place if hormones were activated only after saying the password, “I do”—like accessing a computer program. That would have made for some brief wedding receptions, but it would have eliminated non-marital sexual temptation.

The Psalmist wasn’t exaggerating in confessing, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well” (Ps. 139:14). An awareness of the intricacies of the human body, particularly the animating forces of sexual arousal, can only lead to an “I praise you because I am wonderfully made.” But we get nervous if the doxologizing gets too specific.

Gratitude for our sexual makeup is a prerequisite for stewarding the good gift God has given.

Acknowledge the difficulty.

I have long admired one pastor who was speaking at a single adult gathering. He ended his talk by asking for questions. With ease he handled a series of “softball” questions like “How can I have a better quiet time?” Then a hardball: “How would you have any idea what we are struggling with when you have been married your whole adult life?”

“You’re right,” he said. I have been married all my adult life. Let me answer your question with a story. Soon after I married, I enlisted in the Marines and was sent to Korea. My wife stayed in the States. I was gone for twelve months. Twelve long months, and I was a full-blooded young man. In Korea, you didn’t have to look

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far for temptation. It was a quarter-mile up the road from our base. Many nights my buddies—even married guys—headed up the road for a ‘little company.’ Oh, they invited me, but I didn’t go. Then they began to taunt me, ‘Holy Joe.’ That was forced celibacy, but I came home pure. I could look my wife in the eye and say, ‘I have been faithful.’ Easy? No way! It was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. But the lessons I learned in obedience have been valuable ever since. I’ve never been single. But I hope that experience helps me understand your struggles a little bit more.”

By recognizing the difficulty, the pastor won a place in the hearts of the single adults in his congregation.

Uphold faithfulness.

I find strength in the Anglican confession, “Almighty God, to you *all* hearts are open, *all* desires known, and from you *no* secrets are hid” (Book of Common Prayer: 355). This prayer includes our sexuality. The prayer continues, “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.”

I also pray with singles: “We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone” (BCP: 836). I have heard some proud celibates boast, “I can do everything through him who gives *me* strength” (Phil. 4:13). The emphasis should be on Jesus’ model: “I can be celibate through *him* who gives me strength!”

— HAROLD IVAN SMITH; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2002 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this one, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Are we uncertain about how to talk to singles about sex?
2. How can we resist the temptation to tell singles, “Just don’t do it!” and leave it at that?
3. If you are single, do you think your church is doing a good job of addressing the sexual temptations you and your peers are facing? If you are not single, is your church addressing the sexual temptations you faced when you were single?

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Three Fibs and a Truth about Sex

Help for married pastors when talking to single adults.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-5

Something is going wrong in Christian communities. We say that we care very much about premarital chastity, and yet anecdotes and studies alike show that many Christians, even in churches that teach sex is only for marriage, have premarital sex.

The statistics on unmarried Christians and sex are both hard to come by and not wholly reliable—people tend to fudge when talking to pollsters, presenting their lives as they wish they were, not as they actually are, so the single Christian talking to a pollster may pretty things up a bit. Still, a few snapshots from the field:

- Three surveys of single Christian adults conducted in the 1990s determined that approximately one third were virgins—meaning, of course, that two thirds were not.
- In 2003, researchers at Northern Kentucky University showed that 61 percent of students who signed sexual-abstinence commitment cards broke their pledges.
- Of the remaining 39 percent who kept their pledges, 55 percent said they'd had oral sex, and did not consider oral sex to be sex.

And yet, pastors (and Christian writers) spend a lot of time talking about sex. Indeed, the cultured despisers of Christianity often accuse us of being obsessed with regulating people's sex lives!

So what is going on?

There are, of course, many reasons that trying-to-be-faithful, believing Christians engage in sexual sin. (The number one reason is the Fall.) But I think pastors and writers and other Christian leaders bear part of the blame. We mean well. We desperately want to counter the decidedly un-Christian messages our surrounding society sends about sex. But in combating them, we often tell a few fibs ourselves. We say things about sex, and sexual sin, that are untrue and unhelpful.

Fib #1: Premarital sex makes you feel lousy.

Ask Christian teens what their youth pastor has told them about sex, and you'll probably hear "If I have premarital sex, I will feel bad."

To be sure, that is sometimes true. At times, after a one-night stand, or after sex with your girlfriend of two years, or after even kissing a guy you don't know very well, you feel lousy. Ashamed, or alienated, or lonely, or just plain down in the dumps.

But sometimes, it is not true. Sometimes, even after sinful sex, a person will feel fantastic. Or maybe blasé. You don't necessarily feel devastated.

When we tell our unmarried listeners that they'll feel bad if they have premarital sex, we are making two different mistakes. For starters, we are making a pastoral error. Let's imagine Jason, 27, who has heard since puberty that premarital sex will leave him feeling like trash. For years, he walks the chaste straight and narrow, but at some point he stumbles and has sex with his girlfriend.

Does he feel horrible the next morning? Maybe; maybe not. If he doesn't, he may find himself thinking "Hmmm. My pastor has been telling me for a decade that this would feel horrible, but it doesn't. Maybe he's wrong, too, that God wants sex only in marriage." If guilt is the only resource the church has given Jason for diagnosing sin and remaining chaste, in the absence of guilt, he will simply keep having sex; not to mention doubting the authority of the pastor.

What the church means to say, I think, is that premarital sex *is* bad for us, even if it happens to *feel* great. This is a harder teaching. It requires more nuance, more backdrop of the nature of sin and self-deception and ethics and the Fall. But it is also more pivotally responsible, more effective, and truer to Scripture.

Fib #2: Women don't really want to have sex.

Okay, I admit it: this is a fib that really ticks me off. Many folks in the church insist on perpetuating this false

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idea that women don't have libido. One example: in a chapter called "What Girls Need to Know Before They Start Dating," one Christian parenting book reminds readers that "From early childhood, [girls'] fantasies are of Prince Charming and motherhood, not sex." By high school "a boy's sex drive ... may be the strongest driving force in his mind. While girls may have an increase in libido, their thoughts are about nonsexual socialization, dating, fun, parties, holding hands, and maybe kissing. Every mother ... should teach her daughter what boys are like." The rest of the chapter details just that, telling us that "Boys are high-octane sexual creatures." Moms must tell their daughters "not [to] fall for a boy's lies or lines."

Apparently moms don't need to talk to daughters about how to control their own desires—just how to fend off the raging bundles of hormones that take their daughters to the movies.

The idea that women aren't that interested in sex is certainly not new; nor is it uncontested. For much of Western history, women were thought to be less rational, and therefore more likely to abandon themselves to passion, than men.

But beginning in the seventeenth-century, women (in particular, white women) came to be seen as less passionate, less interested in sex, and frankly, less carnal, than men. Women might dispense conjugal favors, but they didn't crave sex.

Current opinion—popular and social-scientific—suggests the opposite. In their study *The Good Marriage*, Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee found that in a quarter of marriages wives wanted more sex than their husbands, and in another quarter, men wanted more sex, and half "were evenly matched in desire."

The point is not to get into a debate about whether men or women are more interested in sex. The point is to recognize that when we follow the advice of the parenting guide I quoted above, we fail to prepare women for some of the real challenges and pressures they will meet as they try to live chastely—the pressures of their own desires.

Fib #3: Premarital sex leaves permanent scars.

Recently, a friend of mine—a 25-year-old single man whom I'll call M—wrote me an e-mail. M, a medical student who became a Christian a few years ago, recently met a woman at a coffee shop. They chatted, and then she scribbled her address on a napkin and said, "If you're not doing anything late-ish on Friday night, drop by." M knew this was a proposition. He e-mailed me to ask why he should pass up the opportunity:

I know that as a Christian I'm not supposed to have sex before marriage, but you and I both know I've already had sex before marriage. Why shouldn't I have sex if I'm already "used goods"? I've often heard that you should "save yourself" for your wife, that remaining a virgin will make you a better husband. I'm apparently already destined to be a lousy husband, so what does it matter if I have sex again a few more times?

M has picked up a message that is common in the church: sexual sin scars you forever. We hear that "sexual experiences don't ever go away totally. They live on, like ghosts, in all future relationships, and can do real damage there." We read that if we have premarital sex, then, on our wedding day, the images of the other people we've slept with will hover around our betrothed like specters.

This language suggests that sexual sin is worse than other sins, that its consequences stain us forever, that somehow, Jesus' saving work on the Cross does not cover this.

Those suggestions, of course, are false. As Scripture promises, "though our sins are scarlet, they can be made white as snow; and as far as the East is from the West, so far has the Lord removed our transgressions from us."

This is not to say that sexual sin, like other kinds of sin, doesn't form us. Sinful sexual behavior can, indeed, teach us some false and destructive lessons about bodies and sexuality. Using pornography, to take just one example, teaches people that sex is autoerotic, that it is about instant gratification. It teaches people to see other people as objects. It removes sex from the context of a relationship and places it in the context of the laptop. These are serious lessons, and simply confessing sin does not unlearn them. But they are not *scars* that defy healing. Jesus' blood, not to mention the discipleship of church community, is big enough to, over time, unlearn these lessons. We distort the gospel when we focus on the long-term effects of sin at the expense of forgiveness.

So ... that's what *not* to say. What, then, should we say when teaching about chastity?

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What TO Say

Speaking honestly about sex and sexual sin is difficult and scary. It's scary because it requires more than sound bites. It requires us to take on the big themes of the Christian story.

What might honest, helpful talk about sex look like? For starters, it might begin with a rich theological context. Rather than simply quoting a verse from Paul on fornication, we can begin with Genesis. For Paul's familiar injunctions against *porneia* were not innovations—they were riffs on the basic sexual vision laid out in Genesis 1 and 2. God created sex, and he created it for marriage. Indeed, chastity invites good, basic teaching about how to read Paul—not as a first-century killjoy, but rather as a saint who sought to preserve God's intent for creation.

Honest, helpful talk about sex also involves honest, helpful talk about the way sin works, and a recognition of just how fallen we are. Most American Christians don't really believe that the effects of sin mark us in our daily lives; most of us, I think, believe we are basically able to make good decisions—that our reason and perceptions are basically intact. Teaching about sexual sin necessitates teaching about just how distorted we really are.

Honest, helpful talk about sex involves speaking not only about the will (as in, “Just keep your pants zipped up,” or “Just walk away from that Internet porn,” or “Just go for a run or take a cold shower when you feel like masturbating”), but also about grace.

Disciplining strong bodily urges like sexual desire is never possible simply through the will; it is possible only through the overflowing of God's grace.

And honest, helpful talk about sex involves not cheap scare tactics, but rather a presentation of Christ's offer of salvation, and of the joy that is possible through repentance and forgiveness. So rather than talk primarily about the ways sinful sexual acts might mark us, we can talk about the kind of people God wants us to be. We can retell the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. What is miraculous about that story is not merely that Christ knows and forgives the sinful woman, but that his forgiveness makes it possible for her to go forth and sin no more.

Pastoral talk about sex is scary, yes, but it is also an opportunity, for good pastoral talk about sex invites us not only to teach people chastity but also the essentials of the gospel. Robust teaching on sex will lead us inevitably into the great themes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption; of repentance and forgiveness; of formation and discipleship; indeed, of Christ's saving work on the Cross.

— LAUREN F. WINNER is the author of *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Brazos), from which this article is adapted; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2005 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this one, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Have we been guilty of communicating one of these fibs? More than one?
2. How can we do a better job of engaging in honest, helpful talk about sex?
3. How might focusing on the creation story alter the way we talk about sex?

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The Joy of Preaching about Sex

For better intimacy at home, we need more sex in the pulpit.

1 Corinthians 6:13

One Friday night my wife and I were in the mood for a romantic comedy, so we went to see a highly touted movie with a cast of classy British actors. About 45 minutes later, we scooped up our coats and walked out of the theater. This was no Jane Austen romance! It wasn't merely the offensive language or the flashes of nudity that drove us out. It was the trashing of love, the trivializing of sex, and the trifling with people's deep longings. We just couldn't take any more of it.

I was angry, and not only because we'd blown \$18 and a night out. I was angry that the film purported to be about love, when in fact it was about flirtation, lust, adultery, and betrayal. It bothered me that people all over the country were sitting in theaters subliminally surrendering to this counterfeit notion.

That night I realized we need more sex in the pulpit.

I channeled my anger into a sermon series and was quickly reminded why so few pastors preach on sex. It's a homiletical minefield. What was I going to say beyond "Thou shalt not"? How could I remain biblically faithful and modest without appearing totally pale compared to the sizzle and glamour our culture serves up every day? Who was I going to offend, overlook, or alienate in a congregation as diverse as mine?

To further complicate matters, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and our town in particular, was the epicenter of the gay marriage movement. How could I uphold a biblical vision for sexuality and marriage and at the same time preserve a welcoming atmosphere for those sympathetic to same-sex lifestyles?

Trolling through a Christian bookstore, I happened upon Tommy Nelson's *The Book of Romance*. It inspired me to spend time studying a book of the Bible I hadn't preached in over 20 years of ministry. In Song of Songs I found the sizzle I was looking for, along with fresh and candid insights into love and sex.

God Declared It Good

From courtship to consummation, Song of Songs revels in the ecstasies of romantic love. The language is so explicit, and the intimacy so transcendent, that many interpreters have concluded that it can only be understood allegorically—a metaphor depicting the relationship between God and his beloved people. (Bernard of Clairvaux preached 86 sermons on the book without ever mentioning sex.) But, as usual, the simplest reading is best—two lovers who passionately desire, pursue, marry, and satisfy one another.

What we must say first and loudest from the pulpit is that sex is great, and that it was God's idea! Adam and Eve didn't emerge from the bushes one day, flushed and breathless, and announce, "Hey, Lord, you'll never guess what we just came up with!" God blessed Adam and Eve's union apart from any mention of childbearing. Sex is one of many "good and perfect gifts from above, coming down from the Father" (James 1:17).

After introducing the Song of Songs, I invited the congregation to send in any questions or issues they wanted me to address in the series. I couldn't believe the volume of mail I received, mostly the old-fashioned kind, handwritten and confidential. One married man wrote, "The Christian culture I grew up in teaches us to feel ashamed and guilty every time we experience sexual desire. To this day I feel like I have to keep God and sex separate, as though I need to turn off the God mode whenever I turn on the sex mode."

That man needs more sex in the pulpit, and so do a lot of others sitting in our pews. By our silence and timidity, the church has allowed the culture to snatch this God-given gift right out of our hands and wave it around as if it belongs only to them. Something is wrong when church is the only place in our culture people don't hear about sex, and it's doubly wrong when the only thing they do hear from us is "No!"

God's Word on sex is "Yes!" When we preach on this subject, our tone and content should be positive and grateful. Preach it with a smile.

The weight of all the negative sex talk people hear from the pulpit creates a gravitational pull toward the dark side. How much more appealing to cast vision for a life of purity, self-mastery, and ultimate fulfillment. Why

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not describe sexual fulfillment in such vivid, compelling, and believable terms that people won't settle for anything less?

The Best Sex Ever

Most interpreters of Song of Songs understand the book's centerpiece to be the description of the lovers' wedding night (4:1-5:1), where they are beholding and enjoying one another, with abandon, for the first time. "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. . . . You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon." This image is far different from the furtive and fumbling first-time experiences that often leave people feeling used, ashamed, and disappointed. Passages like this help people visualize the delight and satisfaction of experiencing sex according to God's design.

Instead of warning people about the dangers of internet pornography, help them imagine the sexual empowerment, the liberation from lust, that follows every time you click the "delete" button on a salacious email or pop-up.

Instead of defending marriage, let's celebrate marriage by showing the world how wonderful it is for a man and woman to enter into the most intimate and intense of all human relationships with faithfulness and passion.

Instead of merely condemning homosexuality, let's help people understand how a same-sex partnership falls tragically short of the level of mystical intimacy experienced when two different kinds of beings—male and female—come together to form one new and wondrous entity.

Instead of constantly telling singles that sex is off-limits to them, remind them that they don't have to be sexually active to be a sexual being. A person is male or female whether they are in bed together or enjoying a deep friendship. Jesus was a whole person, who enjoyed intimate relationships with men and women, without ever engaging in sex.

Such a life is possible!

Balancing Honesty and Safety

If we're going to gain a hearing in today's culture, we not only have to speak positively but also frankly. Song of Songs sets the pace from the opening line: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine."

This doesn't mean we have to use street language. Neither should we be coldly clinical in our terminology. Most people aren't interested in hearing about "intercourse" from the pulpit. Some words are too graphic or voyeuristic. But people need to hear about "sexual intimacy," "lovemaking," and "satisfaction" in church.

With sexual messages filling our culture, we can't hide behind church jargon and simplistic stereotypes any longer. People need to hear straight talk on real issues. Erwin McManus tells his largely single congregation, "If there's anything lonelier than being in bed alone, it's waking up next to someone who doesn't love you, and who just had sex with you."

One way to keep it real is by making connections to contemporary culture. Before you start poring over commentaries, spend an evening watching TV. Tune your car radio to the pop music stations. Read the magazine covers while you're at the checkout counter.

In preparation for one of my sermons, I tuned in to the final episode of "Friends," where Rachel suggests to Ross that "sleeping together is the perfect way to say good-bye." I was terrified by how plausible that sounds in the relational Neverland that TV has created. When I quoted that line in a message, everybody was paying attention.

A few cautions are in order. One of the letters I received after that sermon said, "It appears you are very familiar with reality TV and suggestive shows and movies. Do you really watch this stuff!?" I learned not to assume that people understand I use discretion in my "selective sampling" of media consumption, and I explained my practices and offered some reasonable guidelines for them.

Keeping it real also means making sex an ongoing part of our conversation from the pulpit, not just an infrequent topic. Let's not make the mistake many parents do by having the obligatory "sex talk" with their

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child once. Messages on holiness, relationships, obedience, and commitment abound with opportunities to make application to the sexual dimensions of our lives.

Along with openness and authenticity, we also need to preserve an atmosphere of safety in our services. We don't want people to be on edge when we speak about sex, always fearing we'll cross a line. I found that parents appreciate a heads-up when we're moving into sensitive territory.

I usually say something like, "We're going to have some frank conversation next week (or this morning). If you haven't talked about these things with your children, some of the things we'll discuss may be over their heads, or may be more than you want them to hear." They then have the option of slipping out if they prefer.

We also need to create a safe setting for those who may not share our convictions and lifestyle, and for people who are struggling sexually. If speaking on homosexual issues, imagine a gay friend sitting in the front row. Would they feel welcomed, respected, and fairly represented?

When referring to living together outside of marriage, keep in mind that a significant percentage of our listeners, believers as well as seekers, may be doing that, or did before they were married. Harsh words are not likely to win them to the truth.

Finally, keeping it safe means being sensitive to one's own family before speaking on these subjects. After the first Song of Songs messages, my wife got more than a few sideways glances from people in the hallways. I've found that running things by her first not only saves her from embarrassing moments, but often alerts me to aspects of the message that might offend or disturb others as well.

Speaking to the Pain

After I gave two messages celebrating the mystery of romance and the joy of sex, the mail from wounded and disillusioned people couldn't be ignored:

"Please preach on God's direction to the abused wife."

"How can men and women be challenged toward commitment instead of always looking for something better—the size 6 bombshell or the investment banker?"

"Please touch on what spouses of divorce do."

Not surprisingly, Song of Songs reveals the heartache that men and women often experience in the pursuit of intimacy.

In chapter 3 the woman, not yet married, is fearful that she might lose her beloved, that her longing for love might never be satisfied: "All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves. I looked for him but did not find him."

And there can be disappointment in marriage too. By chapter 5 the honeymoon is over. "I opened for my lover, but my lover had left, he was gone. My heart had gone out to him ... but he did not answer."

Those of us who have enjoyed sexual health and fulfillment need to remember that many in the congregation will have been wounded, betrayed, and abused. As we describe God's gift of sex, some will be dealing with guilt, shame, and chronic failure. They aren't expecting easy answers and quick fixes. But they need to know someone understands their pain, that they can be forgiven, and that they can find healing.

When we addressed the homosexuality question, at the height of the local controversy, I began the message by introducing the listeners to friends and Christ-followers struggling in this area: a member who battled same-sex desires but continues to serve Christ and seek wholeness, a divorced father who shared with me the fear and shame associated with his forays into the gay scene, a new believer trying to extricate herself from a partnership with another woman, godly parents who have seen their child walk away from the church and pursue a homosexual lifestyle.

Acknowledging these complex and painful realities creates an atmosphere of understanding and grace for those who are hurting.

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Is God Enough?

Toward the end of the series, I invited one of our pastoral staff members to share her story. She is a fun, fashionable woman who has served our church for many years. She has never been married. She joined me on the platform for a frank conversation about young loves, a broken engagement, matchmaking friends, and lonely nights.

After acknowledging the difficulties, she joyfully looked out at the congregation with life in her eyes and said, “God is enough.” Her journey toward contentment brought hope to every longing heart.

Sexuality is one way we experience love, but it’s not the only one, and it’s certainly not the highest. Sooner or later every human love will disappoint us, every lover’s touch will fail to satisfy. We all thirst for Living Water. We desire the Lover of our Souls.

G. K. Chesterton famously said, “Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.” I may not begin a series on sex with that quote, but it’s a good place to end.

As wonderful as it is to love and be loved by another person, it is more wonderful to love and be loved by God. We need more of that in the pulpit.

— BRYAN WILKERSON; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2006 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this one, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Have we shied away from helpful discussions/teachings about sex?
2. Is it necessary to be familiar with the culture’s messages about sex (through TV shows, movies, etc)?
3. What do we need to take into consideration before talking about sex? How can we be positive about this subject in our teaching, rather than just telling people what not to do?

TEACHING ABOUT SEX**Is the Church Speaking about Sex Effectively?**

An interview with Matthew Paul Turner.

Matthew 5:27-28

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).

—TYLER CHARLES; © 2010 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com

Discuss

1. Why might people not feel safe to discuss issues surrounding sex in our church? How could we help them feel safer?
2. What are we teaching about sex? Can we point to its foundation in Scripture? Or is it just an assumption?
3. What topics about sex most directly affect our congregation? Have we been talking about them? How could we address these issues better?

TEACHING ABOUT SEX**Sexual Training...***In righteousness, that is.*

John 17:17

During my first year as youth pastor, I was invited to guest preach for a man who was a hero in his denomination. He had come to Christ at the age of 47, put himself through Bible college, and followed a call to buy a tent and evangelize South Australia. He and his wife planted a string of churches across the Outback, including the vibrant church where I spoke.

A few months after my visit, I learned this man was no longer in ministry; he was involved sexually with women in his congregation. I was shocked.

First, he was a hero of the faith—the churches planted through his sacrificial ministry bore testimony to his love for Jesus.

Second, he was nearly 70 years old. Even at that age, his sexual appetite had brought him down.

Just 30 years old at the time, I wondered, *Doesn't sexual temptation ever let up?*

A few years later, I found myself attracted to another woman in our congregation. To this day I can't explain why. My wife is vivacious, gorgeous, and passionate. Yet nothing I did would make the attraction cease. I survived because the fear of God moved me to ask for help before I fell.

My first step was to tell my wife. It was risky, but I knew the attraction had become so relentless I was in danger of doing something inappropriate. Helen was wonderful. She said, "This is an attack on both of us, and we are going to fight it together."

The distressing attraction still didn't go away, so I very reluctantly took a second step: I told my senior pastor what I was going through. He drew near me like a father and coached me like a son.

Still, for all that, the attraction stuck to me like glue for a year before it cracked and dissipated. Today I couldn't muster those feelings for that woman if I tried. I am in love with my own wife, still serving God. I am a survivor.

Then I was called to be pastor of Careforce Church (formerly Mount Evelyn Christian Fellowship). Founded in 1947, it was a small, white-painted, wooden chapel designed to serve about 50 people. In the late 1970s, the charismatic renewal touched this church and it grew to 350. They purchased eight acres, planned a new worship center, and sensed God moving, when their minister fell in adultery. For nearly a year, the elders guided the church without a pastor until, in late 1982, they called me to join them.

I realized that the very year I'd been going through my terrible experience of attraction was the same time that the man whose ministry I would take was destroying his own marriage and ministry in adultery.

Sexual Discipleship

Developing and maintaining a healthy sexuality is a challenge for every man. We live in a highly provocative and eroticized world, thus the potential for men to develop distortions in their sexuality is great. Learning to handle the pressure of male sexuality is one of the skills a man must acquire if he is to be successful in his personal life, in his home life, and in his spiritual calling.

In 1992 my wife and I founded a new ministry, delivering pastoral care and discipleship to wounded people using a small group model and structured teaching process. It quickly became a potent tool for evangelism and church health. Deciding to address the issue of men's sexual discipleship was not difficult.

The first time we offered a "For Men Only" support group, 13 men showed up. Listening to these men share their despair over sexual passions convinced me the need was real. One man drove nearly 500 miles every Thursday night just to be in that group.

Eventually the ministry became known as "Valiant Men," a 10-session program for the sexual discipleship of men. It involves a teaching session followed by small group processing and personal application. It also includes 65 days of morning and evening devotions focusing on rebuilding and restoring moral and spiritual purity.

I was moved by 1 Thessalonians 5:14, in which, in a list of some 17 elements of a healthy church environment, Paul says to "help the weak." The word used is *astheneia*, which denotes weakness of all kinds, including "moral weakness" of such magnitude as to render a person disabled or powerless. What an apt word to

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describe the pain-filled struggle of the addict, impotent or strengthless, disabled to the point of being powerless.

There are some in the church who would deny that any believer in Christ could ever be considered powerless. Yet Paul knew it was a reality, at least in Thessalonica, and something should be done about it. And he did not want them discarded or ignored.

Paul advises that they receive *antechw*. Thayer defines this word: “to keep one’s self directly opposite to anyone, hold to him firmly, cleave to, paying heed to him.” Thayer in the same reference adds that the ideas, “to aid,” “to care,” “to hold to,” and “to hold fast” are all appropriate ideas inherent in the word *antechw*. Thus, as Christians, we bear the burdens of the weak by joining with them in an intensely accountable, face-to-face, continuing relationship of caring support, until such time as they find the strength to stand.

This is sexual discipleship. Those falling to sexual passions, thoughts, emotions, and biochemistry often have no strength to stand alone. Paul suggests that people in this condition should not be left to handle their crisis in isolation. It could be said of this situation “it is not good that man should be alone.”

Thus the ones with strength must set themselves alongside the needy. They must courageously make a decision to firmly stick to the task, pay close attention to the needy individual, aiding, caring, and holding fast.

This is nothing less than a prescription for a healthy accountability group: a level of love and service from the strong, willing to form a relationship that stays close, holds on, and is not easily discouraged by failure or slowness to respond.

As 1 Thessalonians 5:14 concludes, “Be patient with everyone.” The process may not be rapid for those involved. Restoration for sexual addiction is not likely to be instantaneous or attainable through a single act of repentance, prayer, teaching, or spiritual ministry of some kind.

My experience is that a teaching process, supported by a small group experience focusing on the needs of participants, in an atmosphere of support and accountability, fulfills the counsel of the apostle Paul admirably.

So we’ve expanded the “Valiant Man” program. In October 2004, 122 men from all walks of life, some Christians, some not, filled a room at Careforce Church for the first session of Valiant Man and then broke up into 13 small groups led by 26 facilitators, all of whom had participated in an earlier program. For the next ten weeks men listened, shared, journaled, cried, prayed together, and pursued the restoration of their moral and spiritual purity.

How did it go? We’ve posted a detailed assessment, with pre-test and post-test statistics, on the Careforce Lifekeys website. From the very first night, the facilitators reported men exhibiting astounding levels of transparency and honesty. Some weeks into the program, a woman came up to me at church, took me by the hand with tears in her eyes and simply said, “Thank you,” and walked away. Marriages were being redeemed.

After the program was over, one of the facilitators came to see me. He told me, with voice trembling, that God had met with him in prayer and showed him how masturbation commencing at the age of 11 had contributed to his drug addiction commencing at the age of 15. The revelation and the healing that followed for him that day were profound.

The stories of healing and restored dignity are prolific. Men have fallen in love with their wives all over again, destructive habits have been broken, and men have found a closer walk with Jesus.

— ALLAN MEYER; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2006 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this one, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Is there a need for a ministry like this in our church? Why or why not?
2. Have we worked to create an environment where people can safely confess their struggles and ask for assistance? Should we do more to create this type of environment?
3. How can we do more to foster accountability?

TEACHING ABOUT SEX**The Terror of Sex**

How aging changes one's perspective on sex.

Ephesians 5:25-28

You know that book, *The Joy of Sex*? Think of this as The Terror of Sex. What could be more frightening for an old man than the cold realization that your sexual desire is less now than it once was? And you see a definite trajectory.

Unsettling Decline

I led a Bible study made up of men from 23 to 64. Sometimes we older men would swap stories about the indignities we suffer at our yearly physical exams.

We would laugh uproariously as we watched the color drain from the faces of the younger men. They had no idea! Neither did we at their age.

But one thing we never joked about was the fact that our sex drive was considerably less than theirs. Then the color might have drained from our faces.

Do most men feel this fear? The boom in Viagra sales, along with the proliferation of potency and penile enhancement clinics strongly suggests that they do. There has to be a better way to get old than this, to find out what it means “to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). A good start would be to let diminishing sexual desire do its proper work of humiliation, especially if we have worshiped sex, as so many of us have in this culture.

Toppling the Idol of Sexual Performance

Though painful, it's good to be stripped of an idol, to find out that the growing bald spot on our heads really isn't a solar panel for a sex machine, after all. It was good for the false god Dagon to topple when set next to the Ark of the Covenant.

Prop up the idol all we want, with drugs and surgery and psychotherapy, we will be better off to just let it fall over—if its demise leads us to worship the Creator instead of the creation. Jesus said the humble would inherit the earth.

I don't want Viagra! Finally, at long last, my errant desires are more manageable. Why would I want to go back to the raging hormonal myopia of adolescence?

Rediscovered Intimacy

Frankly, I think I see my beloved wife—and all women—more clearly now, more appreciatively. She and I used to joke that sex makes kids and then kids kill sex. We were referring to the exhaustion many couples feel when caring for little ones.

Then we discovered that sex rises back up again, better, stronger, wiser. Maybe the urge dropped a bit, but the meaning soared, and meaning is a powerful aphrodisiac. It horrifies my young adult kids to hear us say this, but sex now is paradoxically better than ever.

How do old people make love? Very carefully, says the theologically perceptive joke. We are careful because making love with one foot closer to the grave, and the other on a banana peel, is a dangerous thing. But hope makes it safe, and fun.

Like Job, we can thank God for what he gave instead of cursing him for what he took away. More important, we can thank God that we now see that sex was always less, and more, than we thought. It is not a stairway to heaven, or heaven itself. It's a signpost to the God of heaven.

If we like sex, it's because it is a little bit like the God who made it. In ways our shrunken imaginations can only guess at, our bodies were not made for sex, but for the God who made sex.

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What can that possibly mean? The only way to find out is when sex ends and what is sown in weakness is raised in strength, and we say, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

— BEN PATTERSON; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2002 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this one, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What does the phenomenon of sexual decline change the way we approach this topic??
2. Have we considered how aging might impact our church members’ attitudes (or struggles) regarding sex?
3. How does the age of the audience alter our message when it comes to sex?

TEACHING ABOUT SEX**Unwrapping the Authentic Self**

Finding help and healing from sexual wounds through the support of fellow believers.

Psalm 141:4

The authentic self does not carefully edit its offering in the hopes that others see only its strength and beauty. It knows too well that wounds and weakness can devolve into ugliness if not named and voiced. Raised with Christ, blessed and built up by others, the authentic self seeks trustworthy members of the community who can help remove the grave clothes that she or he still bears. Those grave clothes have names. It may be a profound area of wounding that one accepts as a healing in progress. What a gift to find those to whom one can submit the abuse, the abandonment, the betrayal.

Opened to the light of others' care, the wound heals more readily, and one is less apt to express the pain of it in destructive ways. We all have wounds, some that take a lot of time to heal. How blessed to be raised with Christ, his wounds yet visible. He thus frees us in turn to make visible our historic wounds to one another.

How difficult this can be! Yet the authentic self knows better than to suppress such wounds. What we won't express in the light will express itself darkly.

Hurt and Healing

Rick grew up in a climate where a male homosexual (or anyone suspected of being one) was ridiculed, even threatened with violence. He learned to hide his same-sex attraction and his perceived weakness from anyone. When others surmised his "weakness," he felt exposed and went to lengths to deny their taunts.

He began to make efforts to relate openly with a few members of his community. He could tell one leader purposely avoided him and resisted calling him into further involvement. When Rick mishandled his short-lived friendship with a young woman, that leader was unusually harsh with him, and asked him to go to another small group. He accused Rick of being effeminate and not serious about God.

In truth, that leader had the problem—he was biased toward anyone who struggled with homosexuality. For Rick, it reopened a historic wound of rejection for his "difference." It apparently did not matter how hard he tried to live out God's will; to some like this man, he was still a flawed and perverse man. His wound tempted Rick to throw away his progress. He thought, *Why try? If the church just mirrors a biased world, then why not just go back to those who understand me and accept me?* One night, he drank too much wine. He felt like calling that old lover.

Then he thought about the good, hard progress he had made, and of those trustworthy ones who stood with him in the process. He called the man walking with him in the healing process; he wept with Rick as Rick recounted the familiar accusing voice of the male leader. Rick wept. Therein lay his healing. He felt the real pain of living among cruel and biased people. Another suffered with him. He heard the words of a brother who reminded him of his true and solid masculine self, the real self Jesus had reclaimed in him, and how that self was stronger and more authoritative than the mere words of a man.

Related to our wounds are our weaknesses. The authentic self knows it is weak; it has no illusion about strength apart from the merciful God. So the authentic self is quick to name that weakness so that the greater power may rest upon him or her. For some of us, that weakness can turn to wickedness unless it is named in a timely manner. That could have happened to Rick. Instead of pressing into the Body of Christ, he could have descended down the broad path of sexual immorality.

Learning from Failure

Only a few months later, he made such a descent. The next time I saw Rick, he was a mess. Ashamed and downcast, he could barely look at me. After holding strong for awhile, he admitted that he fell back into a one-time sexual relation with his former "mentor." He explained it all, and I could see he was sick about his sin. He had been seduced by an older brother in Christ who was not ready or willing to face his own homosexuality; in truth, he had formed a relationship with Rick based on sexual desire in the name of "discipleship." Rick saw the trouble only in part until the relationship became explicitly sexual.

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It was a wake-up call for Rick. Having danced around the edges of a homosexual union, he fell in. But now he had tools—people who knew him and who stood with him in the truth of who he was and what he was committed to working out. He set a clear boundary with this man, and realized that they could go no further in any type of relationship. (The other was unrepentant and unwilling to submit to any process of restoration.)

Rick needed help to see that as terrible as this failure was, it was not the end of the healing process. Rather, it was a chance for his true self to rise and to shine. He now had new authority to see the dangers outside himself and the weakness within; he could now make level paths for his feet. He was broken and humbled, but it was an opportunity for Jesus, not the devil.

His sexual failure was a wake-up call for him to enter into a new phase of his authentic self. He could shed some illusions about his own righteousness. Having sinned boldly, he could also apprehend the greater grace that rested upon him. Jesus was inviting him into a more genuine reliance upon himself and the community. To be weakened by hard knocks is human and invites us into deeper fellowship with him who became weak on our behalf.

In communion with him and his Body, love strengthens us where we are most in need of it. We make decisions in our weakness. We can submit humbly to help, or turn away to our own devices for coping with the weakness at hand. The latter constitutes wickedness—it is destructive to us and our most important relationships.

So to recap: the real self is the true, substantial self that Jesus has raised up from the dead of sin and separation from himself. That self requires that the community around us peel off the “grave clothes” we still wear upon emerging from the tomb (John 11:43–44). Like Lazarus, we need those disciples around us who obey Jesus’ call to “unwrap” the newly raised self.

—ANDREW COMISKEY; adapted from *Naked Surrender* (InterVarsity Press, 2010). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Have we done a good job of coming alongside—loving and supporting—those struggling with sexual sin? What about some of the “taboo sins” such as homosexuality?
2. How would our church respond to Rick’s situation?
3. How can we be more aware of the wounds people in our congregation might bear?

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Talking about Sex*An interview with Kevin Leman.*

Mark 10:6-9

For his book, Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage (Tyndale), psychologist Kevin Leman researched the sex lives of married Christians to find trends, concerns, and questions in a subject that Leman says Christians don't talk about enough.

Leman is author of The Birth Order Book and How to Make Your Children Mind without Losing Yours.

What difference do you see in how Christians treat sex compared to those outside the church?

When was the last time you heard a pastor get up and say, "I've got a 12-week series starting next Sunday on Song of Solomon"? You don't hear that because we have allowed the world to pervert the word *sex*.

By not talking about sex to our kids and not honoring it the way we should in marriage, everybody ends up paying. The average marriage today lasts seven years. It's been sort of fun to watch support build in the Christian community for *Sheet Music*. People are saying, "It's about time somebody tells people the truth."

With sex being so polluted by the world, how do we take it back as something pure and beautiful in marriage?

The way you do it is to make sure that you are each other's lover. You should go out of your way to entice your lover. Ladies, when was the last time you seduced your husband? When was the last time you met him at the door? When was the last time you took him on an overnight?

Gentlemen, when's the last time you set something up for your wife to go away by herself? I wrote an article years ago called "How to make love to your wife without ever setting foot in the bedroom." When you're at the store and you call and you say, "Honey, I'm at the store. Is there anything you want me to bring home?" or when you take out the garbage, that's foreplay.

Now, if you're getting off into kinkyville, and think you've got to go get pornography and all that kind of stuff to enhance your marriage, you're barking up the wrong tree. I take a hard line on that in this book, because pornography, as you know, is a devastating force in society, costing us marriages and millions of dollars.

How did you conduct your research into married couples' sex lives?

I interviewed tons of couples from the Northwest. I wanted couples who didn't know me. We set up telephone interviews so it wasn't face-to-face. I was astounded at the honest and forthright way in which they described their sex life.

All of the people I talked to were in Bible study on a weekly basis. I was astounded at how active and how hip their sex life was. It was certainly different than mine was 36 years ago, when I married.

If there is a problem in the sex life of a couple, how does the conversation to approach it begin?

For many people there won't even be a conversation. But, for some spouses, it might start with taking the time to write a love note in the truest sense of the word to convey those types of feelings. Sex needs to be a part of your life. If it's not a part of your life, the chances of you staying married, quite frankly, are not real high.

What counts are the little things you do to try to communicate the idea that "I love you as you are." A tough part in marriage is realizing you're two different people who have come from two different backgrounds. We're commanded to become one. It's not just a good suggestion or a grand idea—it's a commandment.

I go to bed at 10 at night and what does God give me as a lifetime partner? He gives me a raccoon. My wife stays up until 1:30 in the morning, goes out and tips over garbage cans, and then comes to bed. So we're different. And the fact that we're different gives us a shot at becoming a couple.

Obviously, all couples have differences like that. But there are big differences inherent just between men and women. How do those differences manifest themselves?

What I've tried to do in this book is to tell women that their husband wants to be your hero. He'd take a bullet

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for you. St. Paul in Ephesians 5 said that we should love our wives as Christ loved the church, which means I gave up my life so the woman could live.

Women are relational by their nature. They have a lot of women friends. But men don't have a lot of male friends and we don't talk or share with anybody. So, in whose life do we want to be a hero? In our wife's. A lot of women don't get that.

What advice do you have for newlyweds?

I had a young newly married kid in my office years ago. I handed him a violin and said, "Here, play this." He said, "I can't play that." Again, I told him: "I want you to play it." Finally on the third time, he grabs the bow and he pulls it across the string. It makes the most ungodly sound you ever heard.

"That's good," I said.

"Good? That was terrible," he said.

But no, it was good. He made noise. That was good. Then, you just have to learn to make music. It is a journey. Practice is really important. There are people who practice with multiple partners. But if you've been sexually active with 12 people, and that person was sexually active with 12 people, then on your first night together, you just had sex with 4,095 people.

How should parents handle talking about sex with their kids? Or even oral sex that often is not talked about?

Teenagers today, since the President Clinton incident, have decided that oral sex is not really sex. Parents have to realize that [some] children in middle school are giving and receiving oral sex to classmates at school, on the bus, and in secluded places in schools. It's a real phenomenon today. Parents have got to get their head out of the sand.

Parents have to talk turkey to kids about sex, and don't tell your kids that sex is bad. Tell them it's the greatest thing in the world—but within the confines of marriage.

—DICK STAUB; adapted from our sister publication *Christianity Today*, © 2004 by the author or Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. Did any of Leman's comments or statistics surprise you? If so, which ones?
2. Should the church concern itself with the sex lives of married people? How might a healthy sex life (among married couples) lead to a healthier church?
3. Should the church play a role in educating kids about sex? What about educating parents about how to educate kids about sex?

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Further Exploration

Books and other resources to help guide your church's discussion about sex.

📖 **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

📖 **LeadershipJournal.net**: Our sister website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Breaking Free: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Healing Power of Jesus by Russell Willingham. This book is a great resource for educating people about struggles with sexual addiction, including why Jesus is the answer. (IVP Books, 1999; ISBN 978-0830817913)

The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment by Clifford L. Penner and Joyce J. Penner. This book focuses on God's design for sexuality and intimacy within the context of marriage. (Thomas Nelson, 2003; ISBN 978-0849944155)

Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage by Kevin Leman. Dr. Leman offers a practical guide to sex according to God's plan. This frank and practical book is a perfect resource for married and engaged couples. (Tyndale, 2003; ISBN 978-0842360241)

Real Questions, Real Answers about Sex: The Complete Guide to Intimacy as God Intended by Melissa McBurney. With signature humor and authentic husband-wife dialogue, Louis and Melissa McBurney tackle the issues that need to be talked about, all within a solid spiritual, psychological, and therapeutic context. With its unique, easy, quick-reference format, this comprehensive guide is an ideal reference for all couples, whether newly engaged, recently married or married for decades. (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 9780310256588)

God on Sex: The Creator's Ideas about Love, Intimacy, and Marriage by Daniel L. Akin. Akin sets the many and varied misconceptions about sex alongside God's design to reveal His intention and blessing for this vital dimension of life. (B&H, 2003; ISBN 9780805425963)

A Lily among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Spirituality by Miguel A. De La Torre. The author shows how the church's traditionally negative attitudes toward sex in general---and toward women, people of color, and gays in particular---have made it difficult, if not impossible, to create a biblically based and just sexual ethic. (Jossey-Bass, 2007; ISBN 9780787981464)