

Sexual Boundaries for Singles

3 questions to help discern God's opinion Dr. Juli Slattery



When women ask their honest questions about sexuality, the most common ones typically relate to whether certain things are right or wrong for Christian women to engage in. They want to know where the boundaries are. Here are a few examples:

Is masturbation wrong?

Am I still a virgin if I've had oral sex?

Is it wrong to read erotic novels like *Fifty Shades of Grey*?

How far is too far to go in a dating relationship?

There are plenty of opinions available on each of these questions. Ask five people you know, and you will probably hear five drastically different answers. And let's be honest . . . we usually embrace the answer that most represents what we wanted to hear.

My opinion on these questions doesn't matter, nor does your best friend's. God is the one who created you as a sexual being. If you truly want your sexuality to be an expression of your love for Christ, the only opinion that matters is his.

As you navigate the practical implications of your sexual choices, you can ask yourself three important questions to help discern God's opinion on any question you might have. Are you ready?

Question #1 – What Does the Bible Say?

“I am a stranger on earth. Do not hide your commands from me. I wear myself out with desire for your law all the time” (Psalm 119:19–20, NCV).

If you are a child of God, you are a stranger on this earth. You will not (and should not) make decisions like the world does. The author of Psalm 119 understood this, and he was desperate for God's instruction. God's Word became his delight because it gave him the practical answers for how to live life as a child of God on earth.

God's Word can do the same for you today. It is meant to be “lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path” (Psalm 119:105).

While the Bible doesn't specifically address every sexual question you may have, it does clearly state that some sexual activity is not acceptable to God. Let's take a look at what those things may be.

Below is a list of the sexual practices that the Bible prohibits, some Old Testament and some New Testament. Some people question whether Old Testament references still apply for Christians today since it expressed the Jewish law. After all, we no longer follow rules about not eating shellfish or being ceremonially unclean during your period. A biblical scholar could give you a sophisticated answer, but here's a good way of thinking about it: biblical teaching on morality in the Old Testament was repeated and reinforced by Jesus in the New Testament while teachings about being “clean or unclean” were not. The death of Jesus on the cross made the sacrificial system obsolete; those who trust in Christ are “clean.” However, our actions can still be immoral and offensive to God.

These sexual practices are defined in Scripture as sexual immorality:

Fornication – This is a broad term for immoral sex and includes incest, sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage. (1 Corinthians 6:18–20, 7:2, Galatians 5:19–20, 1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Adultery – This refers to having sex with someone other than your spouse. It is prohibited in the 10 Commandments; Jesus broadened the definition by exposing “adultery of the heart.” (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:23, Matthew 5:28, Hebrews 13:4)

Homosexuality – Both Old Testament and New Testament references describe homosexual activity as a perversion of God's design. It is not a sin to have homosexual thoughts or feelings—we can't control what we are tempted by! But acting on that temptation is wrong in God's eyes (Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:27, 1 Corinthians 6:9).

Prostitution – The world’s oldest profession has never been okay with God. (Deuteronomy 23:17, Proverbs 7:4–27, 1 Corinthians 6:15).

Lustful Passions – This does not refer to the God-given sexual desire a married man or woman has for their spouse. It refers to unrestrained sexual desire for someone you are not married to (Mark 7:21–22, Ephesians 4:19).

Obscenity and Course Joking – God cares about more than what we do sexually. He wants our words to be respectful of the holy gift of sexuality (Ephesians 4:29, 5:4).

I’m sure you’ve noticed that some of these prohibitions are not politically correct. God’s Word doesn’t change with popular opinion, so it’s important to know what the Bible actually says rather than relying on cultural interpretations.

Question #2- Is It Consistent with God’s Design for Sexuality?

Have you ever wondered what God’s will for you life is? Whether or not he has marriage in your future or what job he wants you to take? There are very few verses that specifically tell you what God’s will for you is. This is one of them: 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, “This is God’s will for you, that you avoid sexual immorality.”

Sexual immorality is anything that twists and abuses sexuality and the holy expression of it. In our thinking, we have “acceptable” ways of distorting sex. For example, some women who would never watch pornography are perfectly fine with reading a pornographic love story like *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

When you wonder if a certain sexual act or thought is right or wrong, ask yourself this question: “Is this thought or action consistent with God’s design for sexuality as a beautiful expression of love between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage?”

Question #3 – Is It Beneficial?

Not every sexual action or thought is listed in the Bible with a “yes” or “no” beside it. Some things just appear to be gray areas. For example, we know from Scripture that the full expression of sexuality is to be reserved for marriage, but what about everything leading up to it? Is it okay with God for a couple to kiss, touch each other, and fantasize about what they might do if they were married?

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul gave us some great standards to help us discern what to do when the Bible isn’t clear:

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. (1 Corinthians 10:23–24, NIV)

While you may not be breaking the rules with your boyfriend, some things you choose to do together may be harmful for one or both of you. I'm guessing you've probably done things with a guy in the past and regretted giving so much of yourself to him, even if you didn't go all the way. Even if something isn't specifically prohibited, it can still be harmful, selfish, or unloving. Passionate kissing may not tempt you, but if it tempts your boyfriend to go further and causes his mind to wander, these actions are not beneficial to him.

God is not about us simply following a list of rules. He wants us to seek his wisdom and honor him in every choice we make. His desire is for you to make wise choices to keep yourself and others from emotional and spiritual harm.

As much as we dislike rules, it is hard for us not to have specific guidelines in this area. A big piece of yielding your sexuality to the Lord is asking for his wisdom in these very personal questions. When God has been clear in his Word, obey him even if you don't understand his reasoning. When God hasn't been clear, ask him to guide you!

Here are some thoughts from my friend, Chelsey Nugteren about her journey in seeking God's boundaries in her dating relationships:

I was the young Christian woman who embraced the answers that I wanted to hear. Deep down, I knew my choices were wrong, but honestly, it was just easier to listen to my peers. My shallow understanding of God's love for me kept me from fully grasping the fact that his truth was created to protect me. I traded fulfilling purity for momentary pleasure.

Instead of seeing God's boundaries as created to protect me, I saw them as a means to keep me from experiencing life. I've learned that God's love for me is so much bigger than I can ever imagine, and he truly wants good for my life. I now understand that God puts boundaries in place to protect and keep me from pain, not to be a fun-hater and to make my life difficult. In reality, following God's truth brings freedom from the pain sexual sin brings.

How many married people have you met that are thankful they slept around before marriage? How many singles have honestly said porn has benefited their life? Or how many engaged couples have expressed their thankfulness for going "too far"? Most likely none. The Enemy is clearly doing his job of deceiving—leading us to believe these things are harmless and fun, but we will always look back with regret, wishing we had made different choices.

I honestly believe I would have made wiser decisions in my dating life if I had accountability—someone to remind me of God's truth and to hold me to it. I tried for years to uphold sexual purity on my own and failed. I just kept silent about this area of my life. My shame and guilt isolated me. I became convinced that I was the only one struggling with these issues.

The purpose of this article isn't to make you feel guilty for past mistakes but to help you make better choices moving forward. The Enemy will always try to convince you it is too late to be pure. Have you heard his deceptive whispers? "You already had sex; it's too late to be pure in God's eyes." "Your future marriage is going to suffer because of your past sexual sins." "God can't forgive what you have done." "You have already gone this far; one step further won't

hurt.” See these whispers for what they are—lies—and let God’s truth about you sink in instead. You are forgiven. It is not too late.

You are not alone. No matter what you are struggling with, there are other Christians in the same boat. You may feel like the only one who cares about what God thinks, but there are other Christian women around you wanting to honor God in their sexuality. Be bold and find other believers with whom you can pursue purity. You may feel like a stranger in this world, but there are other “strangers” who are committed to God’s Word as the foundation of practical, daily truth!