



Also Available for Bible Grades 6-8



From the Author to Parents

I would imagine that a book entitled *How Far Can You Go?* and dealing with the topic of sex could very well create some anxiety in the heart of a parent. You may ask: *What will my child be taught? Is this a how-to guide on sexual behavior? Is it an instruction manual on practicing “safe sex”?* To alleviate some of those concerns, I thought it necessary to share with you my aims in writing this book.

1. I want to provide sound biblical instruction on an important but often neglected topic. This book grew out of a five-hour conversation with a group of Christian teenagers who wanted to know “how far is too far?” They expressed fear of their parents’ judgment and frustration with the silence of their churches and the overall lack of “straight talk” to them about the issues they were struggling with. These teens asked me to write down what I shared with them. *How Far Can You Go?* is the result.
2. I want to offer principles for purity rather than rules for abstinence. It is my conviction that abstinence teaching—“just say no” to sex—is not enough. In fact, I believe that teaching only on abstinence is setting your child up to fail. Abstinence asks people to change their behavior without giving them the power to do so. It asks them not to engage in an activity that nearly everyone and everything around them exalts as fun, exciting, pleasurable, and necessary. *How Far Can You Go?* stresses purity because God is not just interested in what you *do* but in who you *are*. Purity requires character development—becoming more like Christ—rather than behavior modification. It is possible to change your behavior without changing your character, but it is impossible to change your character without changing your behavior. I want to give my readers principles that can be applied to their lives regardless of the circumstances, setting, or social climate and values.
3. I want to give parents a vocabulary and a tool they can use to open the door to discussion with their children. Several parents, after reading and studying *How Far Can You Go?* with their child, have told me that the book says what they wanted to say but did not have the words or did not know how to bring up the subject. One parent said, “The book becomes the heavy, and I can be there to answer questions that may arise from it.”

The book’s straight-to-the-point approach deals specifically but not graphically with the subject matter. If I have learned anything in my 20 years of youth ministry, it is that young people have usually been exposed to far more than most adults presume. Therefore, it is vital that we deal with them honestly, frankly, and fairly in addressing the topics that matter to them.

I share your desire to see your child live a life of purity that pleases God.

Humbled by His grace,

Jason L. Perry

INTRODUCTION

In my conversations with teenagers concerning sex, most of them say their information about sex doesn't come from the church or their parents but from friends. And even their conversation with friends is more rumor and whisper than informed discussion. They express a desire to have more straightforward, detailed teaching on the topic of sexuality and the whys of God's commands. This book is an effort toward that end.

Although it was the questions of teenagers that prompted this book, it is clear that God expects all Christians to adhere to His principles regarding sex. Years ago, one of my students asked, "How many children do you have?"

"None," I answered.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Well, for one thing, I'm not married yet," I said with a smile, thinking that would close the subject.

With a puzzled look on her face, she persisted: "What does that have to do with anything? You're grown."

This young woman had concluded that because I was an adult, the rules concerning sex no longer applied to me. She was wrong! God's laws apply to all His children, regardless of age. Although the examples I use are slanted more toward the teen population, all age groups will benefit from the principles.

I think most Christians know it's wrong to have sex before they are married. That doesn't mean that they adhere to this standard, only that they know it exists. The more frequently asked question is, When it comes to a physical relationship with the opposite sex, how far can you go before it's wrong? This question places the issue of sexual behavior in a much larger context. It's one thing to say you're not having sex; it's quite another thing to

say you're staying sexually pure. Having sexual intercourse is simply the culmination, the final step in a process of sexual activity. While we may be obsessed with the final step, God is concerned with the whole process.

Jesus speaks of sexual purity in Matthew 5:27–28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” God zeroes in on the most important aspect that determines our sexual behavior—our hearts. At the same time, He broadens the scope of what is considered “pure” behavior. Purity is more than avoiding “the act.” It is maintaining a lifestyle that is pleasing to God in every way. When we adopt purity (and not just abstinence) as the standard for our behavior, we take our relationship with God to a higher level. It's my firm conviction that if you embrace the principles outlined in this book, you will experience the power to live a life free of guilt, shame, and bondage to the destructive desires of your flesh.

The desired outcomes of this study are that you will:

1. Rethink your attitudes and actions concerning your sexual behavior, focusing more on character development than behavior modification (1 Peter 1:17–18)
2. Have a better understanding of how God wants you to live (1 Peter 5:15–16)
3. Adopt a biblical worldview, learning to evaluate your life according to what Scripture, not society, says is acceptable (Romans 12:1–2)
4. Be set free from harmful attitudes and actions that weaken your faith and threaten your life (John 8:32)
5. Begin to experience fully the power, victory, and joy that come from walking in obedience to God's plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11, Galatians 5:16)

The lessons at the end of the chapters are designed to further stimulate your thinking on the topic of purity. They will reiterate some points, expand on others, and introduce new issues. Each lesson is written with the assumption that you have done the preparatory reading. Through the use of thought-provoking questions, Scripture, case studies, and “homework” assignments, the lessons will seek to give thorough treatment to the focal topic.

The following is an overview of the structure of each lesson:

On Your Mark lists text you will need to read to prepare for the study.

Get Ready introduces the topic and gets you thinking.

Get Set explores the scriptural principles on the topic.

Go provides opportunity to determine how you will apply the lesson to your life. It asks you to consider what changes you will make in your life as a result of the study.

You will see that the Bible is considered the final authority on issues regarding life, lifestyle, and your sexuality. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17, NASB). Though the Bible was written centuries ago, it still speaks in a fresh way to today’s issues because, like its author, God, it is eternal and relevant. “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword...” (Hebrews 4:12).

Ordering one’s steps according to the Word of God is the only assurance of a successful life. A friend of mine once said, “The Bible is like someone went through life and found all the potholes, and then came back and wrote a book about it.” Psalm 119 has this to say about God’s Word: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (verse 9); “Great peace have they who love your law and nothing can make them stumble” (verse 165).

You can get the most out of this study if you:

DO Prepare. Before doing the lesson, read the chapter and the Scripture. You will get out of this study what you put into it.

DO Participate. Your thoughts are valued.

DON'T Pretend. Be real.

Chapter 1

WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT SEX?

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother,
and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.
The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*
Genesis 2:24-25

Contrary to popular belief, man did not create sex; God did. In the first chapter of Genesis, when God created man and woman, He gave them the responsibility to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28). This command can only be carried out through the sexual act. Therefore, if God created sex, we must consult Him as to what purpose He had in mind for it. Let’s see what He has to say. Read Genesis 1.

Sex is good

Of everything that God created, including sex, Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good....” Sex was not an afterthought to God. It was not added later but was a part of His original, perfect creation.

Sex is good in its proper place

But it is important to understand that sex, like every other part of creation, is good only as long as it is used for the purpose for which it was created. Sex is good as long as it stays within its God-prescribed boundary of marriage. Look at Figure 1.

Figure 1



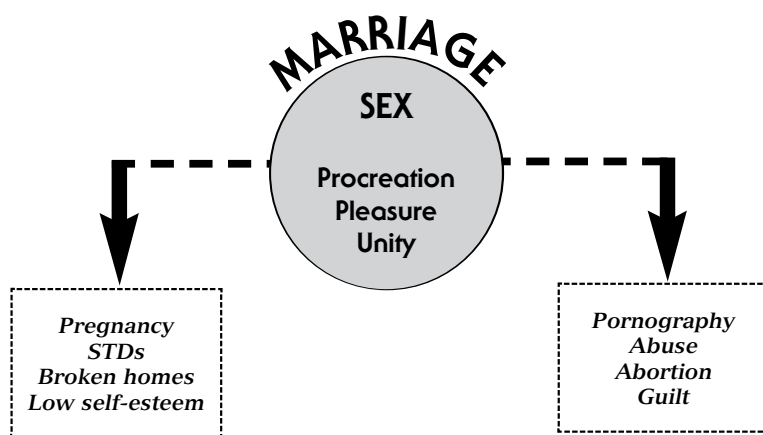
Let's take a closer look at Genesis 2:24–25 to see God's purpose for sex. When God brought the man and the woman together in the Garden, the Bible says:

1. ***"They will become one flesh."*** This phrase is used to indicate how sex bonds two people together in marriage; it creates unity, oneness. God designed sex to act as the "glue" of a relationship between two people who have committed themselves to each other for life.
2. ***"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."*** When sex is kept within its prescribed boundaries, there is no shame. It is an act of love between spouses, an expression of commitment meant to bring joy and pleasure. Within marriage, there is no need to be embarrassed about sex. The Bible calls men "liars" who teach that marriage (and therefore sex) is forbidden for spiritual reasons: "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4–5).

Sex is bad out of its proper place

When sex is removed from the boundaries in which God placed it, many problems arise. Look at Figure 2.

Figure 2



Depending on the student's age, it may be necessary to define *procreation* (which means "reproduction" or "having children").

The consequences of out-of-bounds sexual activity are numerous, varying from serious to tragic. Let's look at a few:

Physical consequences

AIDS is growing at almost epidemic proportions. The more that people are involved in sexual activity with multiple partners, the more this disease spreads. Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are still on the rise among teens. Of course, there is always the threat of pregnancy.

Sociological consequences

In the United States, 33 percent of all children are born outside of marriage. Research shows that children growing up in single-parent homes are more likely to be involved in crime, drop out of school, and live in poverty. Over 1.8 million abortions are performed each year. That is more than 4,900 per day!

Mental consequences

One of the unavoidable consequences of out-of-bounds sex is what it does to us mentally. It develops in us an improper concept of what sex is all about. Rather than being "good" as God has designed it, sex becomes cheap and common. One example of this is the practice of pornography. Through this medium, man has taken something beautiful and made it into something selfish, exploitative, degrading, and destructive. In pornography, sex becomes dirty and nasty.

Spiritual consequences

The letter to the Hebrews gives the following command: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4). Because God prohibits sex outside of marriage, we are in direct defiance and disobedience if we engage in premarital or extramarital sex. Even if we never catch an STD, pose for or purchase a pornographic magazine, get pregnant, or have an abortion, we will still have to answer to God for violating His standard of behavior. "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

It is important to point out that Satan creates nothing; he only perverts the good that God creates. Satan's sole purpose is to destroy people's lives (John

This is an important point to stress. The current mentality about sexual behavior is simply "don't get caught," in which getting caught means STDs or pregnancy.

10:10), and he will use any available means to do so. From the beginning, the enemy has lied to deceive us into believing that God doesn't have our best interest at heart and that living in obedience to His principles will make our lives miserable. Just the opposite is true. Only when we pattern our lives according to God's Word can we be assured of having the best life possible (read Psalm 1 and Isaiah 48:17-18).

When we use sex for the wrong reasons and place it in the wrong contexts, we won't succeed. My pastor uses the following illustration: Suppose I have two instruments—a hammer and a pen. If I try to use the hammer for writing and the pen for driving nails, I will be frustrated and will probably damage the hammer and pen. However, if I use the hammer for driving nails and the pen for writing, not only will I achieve my desired goal, but I will also eliminate my frustration—not to mention saving the hammer and pen. The problem never was the instruments; it was my use of them. In the same way, when we try to use sex in any manner outside of its intended boundaries and purposes, we will be frustrated and risk emotional, physical, social, and spiritual damage to ourselves and to those around us.

Lesson 1

Lesson 1 *WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT SEX?*

ON YOUR MARK Preparatory Reading

Chapter 1
Scripture: Genesis 1, 2

GET READY Getting Into It

The focus of this lesson is to gain an understanding of God's viewpoint concerning sex.

1 What are your sources of information about sex?	• friends
	• movies/videos
	• tv
	• magazines

2 What did you learn from your parents? from church?	• be safe
	• be careful
	• be abstinent

← Don't ignore or be surprised by the negative lessons learned as well, such as promiscuity, no commitment, sex is bad and should be avoided, or sex is not something you talk about.

Sex between people who are married to each other is nothing to be ashamed of.

3 How has this shaped your attitude about sex?

GET SET Exploring Scripture

1 Read Genesis 2:24–25. What is God’s view of sex?

2 How does the world’s view of sex differ from God’s view?

Ask students to tell you what message the world gives them about sex. [World’s view: People should be free to have sex whenever and with whomever they desire, whether they are married or not.] It is also important to learn the students’ views about what the Bible says about sex. People from all age groups have told me that the Bible says nothing about sex.

3

Read Hebrews 13:4.
What does this verse say about sex?

God designed sex to be a beautiful act between two married people. When we engage in sex outside of marriage, we dishonor both God and what marriage stands for.

4

Review the consequences of “out-of-bounds sex” given in figure 2.

- a. Do you agree or disagree with this list?
- b. Are there additions or subtractions you would make?

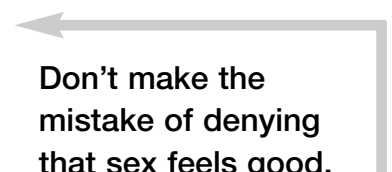
a.

b.

5

If God designed sex to be good, why should we abstain from it? Isn't this a contradiction?

- **out of obedience to God**
- **for protection from harmful consequences (Hebrews 10:26–27)**



Don't make the mistake of denying that sex feels good. Sin can *feel* pleasurable. But emphasize that our decision making must be built on something greater than our feelings.

The message that young people hear about sex tends to be negative—as something we should avoid or shouldn't do rather than something of great value to be protected and treasured in marriage.

Challenge the students to take this seriously and really consider what adjustments they need to make in their attitudes and actions. Knowledge without application has no power to transform you.

6 Read John 10:10.
How does this verse apply to our attitudes and actions concerning our sexual behavior?

90 Making It Real

1 How does reading about God's view of sex affect your own attitude about sex?

2 What is the most important truth you learned from this lesson?

3

Are there changes God wants you to make?

4

What practical steps will you take to make these changes a reality?

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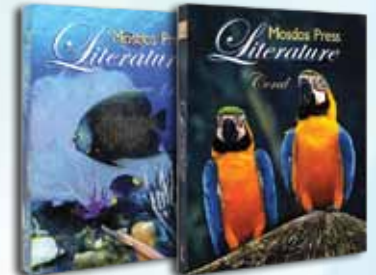
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