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FROM GLORY TO RUIN

by Jonatán Tejel

Hot news tells us that former Chicago Bulls Player Jason Caffey is being sought by the authorities because he owes his ex-girlfriend, one of the eight different women he fathered ten children with, about US\$200,000 in unpaid child support. In 2007 he was also detained for the same reason. He lives a very disorganized and shallow life, squandering his money. Unfortunately, his case is not uncommon; many sport stars become millionaires who throw away their fortunes through a lot of bad decisions.

RUIN IN THE NBA

It is believed that nearly 60% of the NBA players will have lost their money after five years of their retirement.

Perhaps the most scandalous case of bankruptcy is that of Scottie Pippen. Pippen, Caffey's colleague in the 90s, and one of the best players in the history of the game, ended up declaring bankruptcy. He almost lost it all.

BOXING: PIT OF THE FALLEN

While boxing is one of the best paid sports, its players are some of the worst at managing their earnings. Two great icons of the 80s and 90s, Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield, ended up ruined.

Throughout his career Mike Tyson collected about US\$300 million, but, through a series of incidents, kept losing it. His manager, Don King, was accused of cheating him \$100 million. In an extrajudicial agreement the lawsuit resolved in favor of "Iron Mike" for US\$14 million. Between 1995 and 1997 he spent about US\$9 million in lawyers and legal fees. However, the evidence



shows that it is impossible to waste that much money without doing the outrageous things Tyson did. He spent US\$400,000 for his birthday party and US\$8,000 feeding his pets, two Bengal tigers. In 2003, Tyson owed in excess of US\$27 million.

Let's look at what Jesus has to say about seeking only after money and the things of this world, "Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for? " (Mark 8:34-37, *Message*).

FOOTBALL AND SNOOKER

According to *Forbes* magazine in 2005, football player Michael Vick was number 33 on the list of rich celebrities. But today he is in jail. Just one year before this he became the best paid player of the NFL, with a \$130 million contract. He spent \$30,000 a month taking care of his friends. Now he is paid \$0.12/hour washing dishes in jail.

In the early 90s, Jack Clark, well-known Major League Baseball



Jonatán Tejel
Editor

player for the Boston Red Sox, was in financial trouble while still active. In 1992 he owed almost US\$7 million because of some bad decisions.

In other not so well-known sports there are a lot of people who are ruined. Snooker player (a type of billiards), Jimmy White spent £8 million (\$11.68 million) on drugs and betting. In 1994, the money he earned for being second in the world, more than £100,000 million (US\$146,000 million) he lost gambling, and making bets.

FROM GLORY TO RUIN

If we leave aside the sports world and go into the spiritual world, we find Lucifer. He didn't make \$300 million throughout his career, but he was made perfect. Ezekiel 28, verse 15 puts it this way "You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you" (NIV). He was created to

enjoy God's glory in heaven. However, because he made the wrong decision, he ended up ruined.

I was reading about society icons, the ones that set the social standards for young people in and out the church. Most of them are an example of nothing good. They waste their money and instead of building good examples for society, they show how despicable human beings can be.

We have the opportunity to live in the glory. God offers us the possibility to add to our checking account what money cannot buy. He offers us Salvation. And just like any of these sport icons, or Lucifer and a third of the angels in heaven, we have in front of us the possibility of making good decisions, decisions for Salvation, to stay in the glory that God offers to us.

But be careful, we too can fall into the pit. To be in the glory of God is reachable. God is offering it to you... what will be your decision?

Listen to what Ellen G. White says, "It is growth in knowledge of the character of Christ that sanctifies the soul. To discern and appreciate the wonderful work of the atonement transforms him [the person] who contemplates the plan of salvation. By beholding Christ he [the person] becomes changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. The beholding of Jesus becomes an ennobling, refining process. . . . The perfection of Christ's character is the Christian's inspiration. (*That I May Know Him*, p. 166.2) ●



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A graduate of Southern Adventist University's film school, **Scott Fogg** has been writing skits and plays since he was in seventh grade. He wrote the book *Power Skits for Youth & Young Adults*, and co-wrote the screenplay for the feature film *The Secret of the Cave*, as well as the feature-length play *Nighthawks*. He has a passion for writing and is always looking for new and interesting ways to get the gospel message to those who would rather sit in a movie seat than a church pew. [pp. 27-29]

Patti Emanuele is freelance writer and author of three books who has contributed to *Guide* magazine and many other Christian and non-Christian publications. [pp. 21, 22, 26, 30-32]



A person well worth knowing, **Geoffrey Marshall** is a fantasy basketball enthusiast—which he plays much better than real basketball. He is a Christian who loves the Lord, and is involved in the Adventist Youth leadership in his hometown, Kingston, Jamaica. A competent communicator, he is also involved in *Toastmasters International*. He turns 30 this year. You can contact him at marshallgeoff@gmail.com. [pp. 23-26]

Kimberley Tagert-Paul is free-lance writer and author working from Muskegon, Michigan. She has had the privilege of publishing over 350 articles/stories/ devotionals, but enjoys writing for young people the most. [pp. 38, 39]





BY KAREN AND RON FLOWERS

Sexuality is central to the development
of a person's capacity to give and
receive affection and to experience
sexual attraction and arousal.



Christmas morning was an exciting time in my [Ron's] childhood home in Eastern Canada. My parents had lived through the Great Depression of the 1920's and 30's when many families had barely enough food to eat, let alone money for Christmas

presents. Times were better when my sister and I grew up and, though our family had its share of economic challenges, Dad and Mum saw to it that we had at least a few gifts. We were very excited when every December 25 approached! Mum, in her usual frugal manner, would lay out her gifts without gift-wrap on Christmas Eve after we went to bed. Dad, though, liked wrapped presents. He would secretly set up his own gift-wrapping station somewhere in our farm buildings and, a day or two before Christmas, he'd bring in a burlap sack loaded with his wrapped presents. We could look at them and try to guess, but not lift them or shake them. "You have to wait," he said.

When the magic morning arrived, our impulse was to rip off the gift wrap and open everything at once. Our parents, however, would always admonish us to slow down! In retrospect, watching Dad unwrap the gifts we gave him should have helped us realize that, for him, every part of the gift was something to be savored and enjoyed. I can still see him slowly removing the bow, carefully slipping the ribbon off corner by corner, and finally peeling back the gift-wrap, his rough work-worn fingers trembling with anticipation until the final moment of revelation.

A created and redeemed gift.

Our Father God gave His human children a very special gift when He created us sexual beings. “Sexuality,” or its abbreviated form “sex,” are not biblical words. But it is this core dimension of the human person that the Bible speaks of when it says that God created humankind as “male” and “female” (Gen. 1:27). It follows, then, that sexuality is a part of the human creation that God declared “very good” in the final verse of Genesis 1 (vs. 31). It is from the creation account that Christians understand that their sexuality belongs to God—first because He is Creator. The New Testament adds the important truth that our sexuality belongs to Him twice because Christ is the Redeemer of every aspect of our humanity. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in

you, whom you have received from God?” writes Paul. “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Knowing that the biblical teachings regarding creation and redemption uplift sexuality as an integral part of being human can help us to be more relaxed about this dimension of our personhood, to talk more openly about human sexuality as Christians, and to find answers to the difficult dilemmas many face in this arena of their lives.

Discovering the blueprint.

Human sexuality is splayed continuously across screen, Internet and print media. More often than not, sexuality is presented in cheap, superficial, and gaudy—even lewd and pornographic—ways. Almost always the emphasis is on the erotic; sexual fantasy is aroused. The media appeal relies on the seductive lure of that which is off-limits or on voyeuristic exposure to that which is private and personal. The excitement inherent in God’s design for human sexuality is further exploited commercially on every hand, with sexual excitement and pleasure linked to every conceivable commodity. The prevailing social view continues to reflect the values of the sexual revolution—you are sexual, so use your sexuality to bring you as much stimulation and pleasure as you can—whenever, however, and with whomever you please. It should come as no surprise to Christians that, in the secular world, a full understanding and appreciation of this beautiful gift

from God has been lost. Neither can an authentic blueprint be found for how to relate to one’s sexuality as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Christians discern from the Word of God that sexuality was God’s idea from the beginning. As we might expect, the Creator gives His followers important instruction for the development and use of His precious gift, and He provides general principles for a healthy attitude and approach to sexuality that can be applied in every time and place. Chief among these is “Honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Along with the time, talent, and material resources given us, we are to manage this precious gift under the direction of the divine Owner of all. He intends that our own sexuality and that of others be respected and treated with dignity.

Sexuality shapes our lives in many ways. It sets up the intricate chemistry that brings maleness and femaleness into full maturity and creates the distinctive physical and emotional components of manhood and womanhood. Sexuality is central to the development of a person’s capacity to give and receive affection and to experience sexual attraction and arousal. The ability to bond intimately in marriage for a lifetime and to produce children are identified early in Scripture as over-arching purposes for human sexuality in the divine design. Like Dad Flowers’ burlap sack brimming with presents, human sexuality is really a plethora of delights that give color and flavor to life from infancy to old age.

Sexuality unfolds for human beings from the beginning of life until death. We are sexual creatures at every age, but in the progression toward mature sexuality, puberty represents a major series of development events. Once the physical and emotional changes set in motion by puberty begin, it is particularly important to stay on God's timetable. In His design, sexuality's gifts are to be opened slowly. Every stage of the experience is to be enjoyed to the full, important psychosocial tasks are to be completed, and the sexual intimacies that propel a couple toward intercourse are to be reserved for marriage.

Marriage is God's general plan for humankind. In Scripture, marriage and a sexual relationship go hand in hand. Those who want to enjoy God's gift to the full, will find safety in deferring sexual gratification until they are ready—not only physically, but emotionally. There is protection in waiting until the relationship is safeguarded from easy dissolution by a marriage covenant that is recognized by God, family, and the social community. Even within marriage, sexual expression is bounded by principles of loving, honoring, and mutually submitting to one another (John 13:34; Heb. 13:4; Eph. 5:21). While it can be challenging, those, who by choice or circumstances, do not marry can nevertheless find grace and strength to enjoy their maleness and femaleness, even as they trust in God to help them live in harmony with His plan for abstinence outside of marriage.

Two examples of the merits of such patient unwrapping of sexuality loom large in the wisdom literature

of the Old Testament. Speaking from within their covenant of marriage in which she and her husband revel in their sexual pleasure, Shulamith—the wife in the biblical poem *Song of Songs*—makes the point several times to her women friends about the importance of reserving the intimate pleasures of couple lovemaking for marriage: “Do not awaken love before it is ready” (Songs of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4, Contemporary English); “until the time is right” (New Living), she tells them. Using the metaphors of a locked garden and an enclosed fountain, her husband affirms her virginity on the night following their wedding (Songs of Solomon 4:12). Later, in a section of the poem in which she reflects on the concerns of her brothers regarding her sexual development and emergence from childhood into young womanhood (Songs of Solomon 8:8, 9), Shulamith herself testifies to her virginity. She declares herself a “wall,” as opposed to a promiscuous, swinging “door” that offered young men easy sexual access. She has come to her husband, she tells us with appropriate satisfaction, “unspoiled.” [In Songs of Solomon 8:10, the Hebrew *shalom* with its basic meaning of “completeness,” “soundness,” is the original word that has been translated “favour” (KJV), “peace” (NKJV), or “contentment” (NIV).

Similarly, the wise father of Proverbs 5 urges his son to preserve his sexual forces for marriage. The implied answer to the delicately-worded rhetorical question about male sexual expression, “Should your springs overflow in the streets ...?” (verse 16) is a resounding

“NO!” The sexual powers are meant to bring pleasure and satisfaction in union with one's marriage partner (verses 17-19). It is unthinkable in the biblical understanding that God's gift should be indiscriminately spilled on the street!

We knew a young boy who sought to encourage the tiger lilies around his home to bloom before they were ready. He split their long delicate buds along their seams and peeled them back. Sadly, they blackened and withered. Like these lilies, sexuality flourishes best on the developmental timetable that God the Designer intended. A drama does not make sense if actors miss their lines or act their parts out of sequence. Likewise, sexual development cannot be tampered with or rushed.

God's perfect design will be put at great risk by adults who perpetrate insensitive, manipulative or abusive sexual behaviors upon the young entrusted to their care and protection.

The risk is no less for youths who themselves choose to engage in promiscuous sexual behaviors in a misguided effort to find pleasure or to demonstrate their independence or disdain for family or religious values.

Sexual pleasure.

The genitalia and certain other erogenous parts of the body respond to stimulation and produce pleasurable sensations. Once again, the Creator's handiwork is evident

in outfitting humankind with delightful feelings to accompany the attraction, pair-bonding, and sexual union of marriage partners. Pleasurable sensations, particularly in the genital region, are experienced early, intensify at puberty, and continue throughout life. Youth need a proper understanding of the care and protection of their bodies and instruction regarding how to manage their sexual desires and preserve their sexual functioning for its God-ordained purpose in marriage. Often, however, the presence of sexual taboo restricts or prohibits communication on this delicate subject between parents and their children.

Touching one's genitals in childhood and in adolescence usually represents normal exploration and a growing awareness of one's body and its developing sexual capacities. However, repeated indulgence in sexual pleasure-seeking through masturbation should raise concern. The child may have an irritation or infection that needs attention. Such behavior may also be an early warning sign of sexual abuse. When these possibilities have been ruled out, there is also a concern that the temporary distraction, the perceived soothing or relief from sexual tension, and the sexual "high" and release of orgasm can become compulsive, even a type of addiction. Such behavior often signals deep emotional longings or distress for which comfort is sought through self-touch, but which masturbation cannot really alleviate long-term. As with other compulsive

behaviors, a preoccupation with masturbation is not without consequence. To the extent that this behavior is an attempt to compensate for unfulfilled emotional and relational needs, these real needs are likely to go unaddressed and not be resolved in healthy ways.

Walter and Ingrid Trobisch, in their classic book *My Beautiful Feeling*, write, "Sexuality is language. It is supposed to be a means of communication, addressed to another person. . . . A relationship, however, is never established through masturbation"* Instead, sexual pleasuring directed toward oneself takes the place of relationship. Within marriage, a spouse will no doubt suffer from the loss of emotional and physical intimacy to the extent that it is diminished by their partner's self-absorbed habit.

Young people need to be made aware of the sexual arousal that often accompanies the changes related to the onset of puberty. It is not a sin to have sexual drives or to experience sexual attraction. However, youth need to know that the alleviation of sexual tension is never an emergency. The divine Designer has built into the human body safe and effective means for the release of this tension. Contrary to popular myth, self-stimulation or participation in sexual intimacies with another are not necessary for healthy sexual development. Further, when a person is feeling in need of comfort, there are many ways to lift the spirits. We can share our feelings with God in prayer. We can read encouraging passages of Scripture or listen to uplifting music. We can join a group of friends for an evening of fun. We can talk openly about things that trouble us with supportive family members, friends, or a trusted teacher or pastor. Involvement in exercise, sports, or service for others has a proven positive effect on the emotions.

God is calling us to a greater spiritual intelligence—to become acquainted with Him as our loving Creator who always knows what's best for us, and to know Him as our compassionate Redeemer who forgives our sins, lifts us up from our mistakes, and provides new beginnings. God is also calling us to greater sexual intelligence. Teens and young adults—people of all ages—face the challenge of choosing a framework of sexual values that will serve them well in managing their sexuality, protecting them from risk-filled behaviors, and enabling them to develop in healthy, wholistic ways across life. When we understand that our bodies, with all their capacities, are gifts God has given to us, and when we are determined to stay on His timetable in opening His priceless gift of sexuality, we are well on our way. ●

* Trobisch, Walter and Ingrid (1976/2003). *My Beautiful Feeling*, pp. 24-25). Bolivar, MO: Quiet Waters Publications.

A PREGNANT PAUSE

by Gina Wahlen

Marta was 16 and planned to get pregnant. That way, she thought, her boyfriend would love her forever. Jessica, 17, thought for sure that once she was a mother herself she could escape the abuse in her own home. Joelle, 18, wanted to show her boyfriend how much she loved him by having sex, and ended up with an unplanned pregnancy.

There are many reasons that teens have sexual intercourse and get pregnant—not the least of which is the simple fact that sex feels good. Young men crave the release that it brings, young women crave the perceived love, joy and warmth that they feel. But all too often, momentary pleasure brings lifelong responsibility and heartache for those who are just on the threshold of their future.

Debora Kent, a maternity nurse who spends her days helping deliver babies at a large hospital on the edge of Washington, D.C., describes what it's like when a teen comes in to give birth:

“Caring for these teens in labor is usually always the same. The father is often not present, or is sitting in the corner looking scared—not very involved. The girl's mother is usually the dominant support person who the teen girl clings to and relies on.

“Teens have trouble seeing the long-term consequences and do not imagine what it will be like raising a teenager as a single mother, or even coping with an active toddler,” says Kent. “They think only about caring for a newborn baby, and have no concept of the costs involved in raising a child.”

Sometimes young mothers aren't even in their teens yet. Sherilyn Gibbs, a certified nurse midwife working the night shift in an urban hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, remembers a young patient who was just 11 years old and in active labor. “She was crying for mommy, sucking her thumb, and holding her favorite doll,” recalls Gibbs. When the moment of birth came, “she was shocked to see what came out of her . . .

This wet, bloody, wrinkled, crying baby was what had caused her so much pain. Initially she didn't want to touch him. She had to take it all in for a moment. Will she bond with this innocent new life that is in desperate need of love and security? Where is the baby's daddy? Will this baby grow up on the streets? What will be this child's story when he is 11 years old? These are questions that only time will answer," says Gibbs.

The Facts

Teen pregnancy is a fact of life around the world. The incidence of adolescent pregnancy is highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 143 per 1,000 girls between 15-19 years. In Europe, it is well over 20 per 1,000.ⁱ

In the Caribbean islands, teenagers account for almost 60 percent of all first births, and half of these are to girls 17 or younger.ⁱⁱ Teenage pregnancy seems to more often occur in low-income families where "visiting unions and common-law liaisons predominate early and premarital pregnancies are the norm."ⁱⁱⁱ

The five countries with the lowest teenage birth rates are Korea (with just 2.9 per 1,000), Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden—all with teen birth rates of fewer than 7 per 1,000.^{iv}

Among economically developed countries, the United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth—with 3 in 10 girls becoming pregnant by age 20—and over 750,000 teen pregnancies annually.^v

Furthermore, nearly half (46%) of all 15-19-year-olds in the U.S. have had sex at least once,^{vi} and studies have shown that a sexually active teen who does not use contraceptives has a *90% chance of becoming pregnant within a year*.^{vii} Even those who do use some type of contraception can end up pregnant since no contraceptive is 100% effective—except abstinence or sterilization.

In addition to unplanned pregnancy, teens who engage in sex put themselves at a high risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Of the 18.9 million new cases of STIs each year, 9.1 million (48%) occur among 15-24-year-olds.^{viii} It's

sobering to notice that although this age group represents only one-quarter of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half of all new STIs each year. Unfortunately, STIs—also known as Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)—are serious health problems that these young people often carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Not only does teen pregnancy affect the persons immediately involved—the ripple effects are felt throughout their community as well as society. Studies have shown that teen pregnancy is directly related to poverty and income disparity, educational levels, child welfare and crime.^{ix}

The Choices

Pregnant teens face the difficult reality of having to make some very painful choices:

1) keep the baby and care for it (with or without the support of family); 2) give the baby to someone else through adoption; or 3) have an abortion.

With the first option, young mothers learn in a hurry that once the baby showers are over, caring for an infant is an all-absorbing responsibility. While their friends are enjoying school and social activities, the young mother is feeding, changing, and rocking a baby that doesn't care what time of night or day it cries. Even if the young mother returns to school (as some do), she quickly learns that life is different than before she had a child.

While adoption can have many positive aspects, it too can present heavy heartaches for life—as evidenced by the story of a teenage father whose daughter was adopted out:

"I am the birth father of a now 19-year-old girl named Tavia. I was 17 (her mom was 17 also) when she was born. I wanted to be in her life, but the birth mom did not let me. I wanted to get married and support my daughter. I have lived 19 years wondering—Is she okay or is she sick? Is she well-behaved? Does she look like me or her mother? ... I wonder, does she hate me? Is she curious about me? I don't know. I wonder if she will ever want to see me. Every time my phone rings I jump and hope that it is her wanting to

talk or see me. . . . My wounds are too deep to open and I don't know how to express what I feel. Tavia has been a part of my life from conception and she still is.”^x

Probably one of the most hotly debated issues of the last three decades has been the topic of abortion. 50% of U.S. women obtaining abortions are younger than 25; women aged 20-24 obtain 33% of all abortions, and teenagers obtain 17%.^{xi}

Reams of paper have been printed, numerous Websites posted, and thousands of speeches given on this heart-wrenching topic. Through all of the heated discussion, at least one thing is clear—choosing to have an abortion is a painful and risky choice to make—especially for teens.

According to an article in the medical journal *The Lancet*, “Teenage abortion patients are up to twice as likely to experience cervical lacerations during abortion compared to older women.”^{xiv} Teens are also at higher risk for post-abortion infections such as pelvic inflammatory disease and endometritis as well as subsequent miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, rupture of the uterus and even death.^{xiii}

Studies have shown there are many psychological risks as well. Compared to women who have abortions in adulthood, teens who abort are two to four times more likely to commit suicide,^{xiv} more likely to develop psychological problems, have troubled relationships, and are *nearly three times*

more likely to be admitted to mental health hospitals than women in general.^{iv}

The Answers

Clearly, there are no easy choices for pregnant teens, and there are no easy answers. However, one thing is certain—with all the physical and emotional turmoil that pregnant teens face, the last thing they need is condemnation.

The Bible is clear about those who commit fornication and/or adultery—“Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). *None will enter the kingdom of heaven without repentance and the cleansing blood of Jesus.

Before we start pointing fingers, however, it is important to realize that we all have sinned and everyone is in need of repentance and a Savior. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23,24).

So what to do? How did Jesus treat those who were caught in sexual sins? With mercy, kindness, forgiveness, and hope (see John 8:3-11). And so should we. We should find ways to be supportive as well as redemptive.

In addition, we should not be afraid to talk about and take a stand on moral issues—including sexuality and what the Bible has to say about it. An important principle to keep in mind is that “the blessing of the Lord, it makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22). In His word He gives us instructions of how to avoid the heartache and sorrow that sin always brings.

And we should learn the art of delayed gratification of wants and desires. Too many of us whine, like Veruca Salt in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, “I want it and I want it now!”

Teens learn by example. When they see parents and other adults lacking in self-control, they are more tempted by forbidden indulgences. The recent financial crisis illustrates a world gone amuck for instant gratification. “Why wait?” went the popular mantra. “You can have it all...now” as financial institutions, governments, and individuals alike went on a giant (credit) spending spree. Now it's pay back time.

Money and sex have a lot in common. When there's money in the bank, accessing it is a pleasure. When a man and a woman are in a marital relationship, sex can be all that God intended it to be. But when the bank is broke and there are no funds to draw on, when sex takes place without the protective Biblical framework, sadness and sorrow prevail.

The Bible is filled with wisdom about waiting until the right time:

“There is an appointed time for everything... He has made everything appropriate in its time.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11)
“Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14). ●

*All Bible texts used in this article are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

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Lesbianism & Homosexuality

This is a serious issue that Christian youth need to be aware of, and informed about.

Real Life, Part One: *Heather sat alone in her room, stereo on full-blast, trying to drown out the conflicting thoughts tumbling around in her brain. Her parents were always on her case about something. Now, her mother was saying Heather should get out more, have more of a social life, date some guys, have a boyfriend. Heather knew her mom was worried she wasn't "normal."*

What's normal? Heather wondered. All she knew was that ever since she had been old enough to learn about sex and think about dating, she'd never been attracted to guys. For a long time she'd told herself she just wasn't ready for all that. Now, at seventeen, she was starting to admit she felt strongly attracted to other girls. But she knew that had to be wrong. Everyone said it was wrong!

She thought she was so good at keeping her secret, but some kids at school had her figured out. "Get out of my way, you weirdo dyke," a girl had said to her just the other day, shoving Heather against the locker as she pushed past. The cruel comments cut Heather to the heart. She felt so alone. Her parents, her friends, her pastor—none of them would understand. Everyone would tell her something was wrong with her.

What was the point in even praying? She'd heard TV preachers say that God hated homosexuals—and that seemed to be what she was.

Maybe it would be better if she wasn't here at all. Maybe, Heather thought, maybe I should just end it all.



what's the problem?

For you, homosexuality may be a joke, an issue you debate in class, or the life-style of some distant acquaintance or relative you don't know very well. For thousands of teenagers like Heather, it's their day-to-day reality. They need to figure out how to deal with their feelings and their sexual orientation in a world where both society and the church send conflicting messages about what they should be and do.

On some controversial issues, it's easy to pull out a "fact sheet" and say "These are the statistics. This is what is happening." That's not so easy when we talk about homosexuality.

- No-one can accurately say how many people in society are homosexual, partly because the term is difficult to define. When we say "homosexual" (or "gay" or "lesbian"), do we mean people who are attracted to the same sex? People who are having sexual relationships with people of the same sex? What about people who seem to be attracted to both sexes ("bisexuals")?

- Another reason it's hard to know for sure how many people are gay or lesbian is that many homosexual people aren't willing to admit their sexual orientation. They're afraid of the kind of treatment they'll receive if others know, so they keep it secret,

sometimes dating and even marrying members of the opposite sex to try to “cover up” their sexual identity.

- Statistics suggest that anywhere from two to ten percent of the total population may be homosexual—but again, those numbers are very broad and the term “homosexual” defined in many different ways, depending on who’s doing the study. What we do know is that in every society, since the beginning of human history, there has always been a small minority of people who were sexually attracted to people of their own gender rather than to the opposite sex. Generally, more men tend to be homosexual than women, but again, it’s hard to be sure.

- **One statistic we can be pretty sure of is that gay young people are two-to-three times as likely to commit suicide as heterosexual youth.** Heather’s story is not unique. Many young people who feel attracted to people of the same sex are so torn by confusion, guilt, and self-hatred that they would rather die than face life.

- Another thing we can’t answer for certain is: “What causes people to be homosexual?” Some research suggests that people with a homosexual orientation are different from heterosexuals even from birth—that they may have genetic differences that cause them to be attracted to people of the same sex. Most homosexuals do not feel that they “chose” their sexual orientation or that something happened to “make” them gay.

what you need to know

This is a serious issue that Christian youth need to be aware of, and informed about. While you may not be attracted to people of the same sex yourself, you will certainly meet people in your life who are homosexual, and you need to know how to treat them in a way that is consistent with what the Bible teaches.

In some ways, twenty-first-century society is more open and accepting of homosexuality than at almost anytime in

the past. Yet, for many heterosexual, or “straight,” people, homosexuality is still frightening and threatening, to the point where a person can be beaten to death for his sexual orientation. It’s a confusing, difficult issue in our society today, especially for young Christians. On the one hand, the Bible clearly outlines God’s original plan for sex and marriage: one man and one woman, for life. On the other hand, the Bible just as clearly teaches love and acceptance toward everyone—even those who are different from us.

How should we respond to the challenging issue of homosexuality?

what the Bible says

The Bible outlines God’s plan for human relationships: “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, NIV). One man and one woman for life—that was the ideal God instituted at Creation.

But we’re no longer living in the Garden of Eden—we’re living in a world of sin, where attitudes, practices, and even people’s inborn desires differ greatly from what God originally designed. Do the Bible’s standards still apply in today’s society?

They certainly applied in the time of Jesus—a world in many ways as sinful and confusing as our own, and a world where homosexuality and sexual immorality were common. Jesus said:

“Haven’t you read...that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one” (Matthew 19:4-6, NIV).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that God’s standards *do* still apply, and that the only sexual relationship acceptable to God is a lifelong commitment between man and woman. That rules out homosexual marriage, just as it rules out casual sex between unmarried people of any gender or heterosexual couples living together outside of marriage.

The Bible makes it clear that homosexuality is not part of God's plan for human sexuality.

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9,10, NIV).

Speaking of the pagan societies of his day, the apostle Paul writes:

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another....Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.... They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Romans 1:24-31, NIV).

Some things should be clear from these texts. Homosexuality is one of the sinful acts of which God disapproves. It is not part of His plan for human happiness. (Some Christian homosexual groups teach that these verses refer only to promiscuous and immoral acts between homosexuals and that a committed marriage between homosexuals is just as pleasing to God as a heterosexual marriage. However, there are no examples in the Bible to support this interpretation).

Something else the Bible makes clear, though, is that homosexual activity is a sin just like any other—no better, no worse. Many Christians treat homosexuality as if it were the very worst sin, something unspeakably disgusting and degrading. In fact, in these two passages, the apostle Paul puts homosexual sex in the same category with “straight” sex outside of marriage, as well as other sins like

greed, drunkenness, slander (gossip), deceit (lying), and even disobeying your parents! Remember that in God's eyes, a person involved in a homosexual relationship is no worse a sinner than someone who lies and disobeys his or her parents.

One more thing is clear from God's word: as Christians, we are called to love everyone and treat everyone with respect, no matter what their actions are.

“‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:43-45, NIV).

Even if we consider someone else to be “unrighteous” or even our “enemy,” our duty is clear—to love them and treat them well, just as God Himself does. Any act of “gay bashing,” hatred, or cruelty to someone because of their sexual orientation is just as displeasing to God as mistreating someone because of the color of their skin.

what the church says

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statement on homosexuality states that “sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman....The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden.... Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices.”²

what the world says

Switch on the television and you'll see Gay Pride Week parades, gay and lesbian couples on TV sitcoms, and homosexuals visiting schools to make children more aware of "alternative lifestyles." Yet, at the same time you'll see news reports of young gay men being beaten and even murdered because of their sexual orientation and conservative Christians protesting that homosexuals shouldn't be allowed the same legal rights as others in society.

Many gay-rights groups are encouraging society as a whole to accept and approve of homosexuality as an acceptable "alternative life-style." Efforts to do this include educating children through books and public-school curriculum programs which teach that homosexuality is normal and homosexuals should not be discriminated against. In many countries, gay-rights groups are also working towards getting same-sex marriages recognized so that homosexual couples will receive the same rights and benefits under the law as do heterosexual couples.

In response to this, many conservative Christians are speaking out against "gay rights" and insisting that homosexuals should not receive any special rights or protection, because they are not living in accordance with God's plan for marriage. Many Christian groups have become quite vocal about this, and some have been accused of encouraging hatred and even violence against homosexuals.

As a heterosexual Christian, what should your role in this debate be? You may decide that it's simply none of your business, and that your only biblical calling is to show Christian love and acceptance to any gay people you do encounter. If you feel inclined to become more actively involved in society's debate over the gay-rights issue, here are some questions you might want to ask yourself:

- Do I believe it's my duty as a Christian to change the way non-Christians in society act?

- Should our governments have laws that support Christian beliefs and values?

- If homosexual couples deserve fewer legal rights because they're not obeying God's law, should those rights also be taken away from straight couples who are living together without being married?

- Is it appropriate for schoolchildren to learn to be tolerant and accepting of everyone, regardless of their differences?

- Is it appropriate for schoolchildren to learn that life-styles other than God's biblical plan for marriage are acceptable?

what can I do?

As the discussion above clearly shows, this is a tough issue even for straight youth to deal with and decide about. One thing is clear: there is no room in the Christian's life for hatred against any group of people, or for treating people badly because of their life-style. "Gay-bashing" is totally unacceptable to the follower of Jesus. We are called to treat everyone with love and respect.

it's my problem?

Perhaps you are reading this article because the issue of homosexuality is of personal concern to you. You may feel attracted to people of the same sex and wonder if this makes you gay or lesbian. Or you may have a close friend or family member who is gay and wonder how you can help this person.

Here are a few key ideas for you to think about:

- **Feeling attracted to people of the same sex does not necessarily mean you are a homosexual.** Adolescence is a confusing and complex time, when young people are awakening to their sexual identity.

It is not unusual for teenagers to experience some feelings of attraction to people of the same sex, such as a “crush” on a same-sex friend or teacher, dreams about being attracted to someone of the same sex, or curiosity about what it would be like to have sex with someone of the same sex. These occasional feelings and questions do not mean that you have a homosexual orientation.

Young people who have been victims of sexual abuse are likely to have particularly confused and conflicting feelings about their growing sexuality and should see a professional counselor to help them deal with these issues.

While the fact that you are sometimes attracted to or curious about people of the same sex does not mean you are gay or lesbian, if you consistently feel attracted *only* to people of the same sex and have little or no interest in the opposite sex, then some of the points below may be of interest to you.

• **Can homosexuals change their orientation?**

Some Christian ministries, such as Exodus International, teach that homosexuals can change their orientation through the grace of God, just as Christians can overcome any other sin through God's power. Many people have shared glowing testimonies of

their experience as “former homosexuals.”³

Others, however, have had very disappointing experiences with “change ministries” and have returned to being practicing homosexuals. Most psychologists and doctors believe it is not possible to truly change a person's sexual orientation. People can, of course, change their behavior, but most experts think that a person's basic orientation will always stay the same.

• **Is my orientation a sin?**

Sin is what you do, not who you are. While the Bible condemns homosexual activity, it does not say that it is wrong to be attracted to someone. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus condemns lust between a man and a woman, but this does not mean it is a sin to be attracted to someone else—only to entertain lustful sexual fantasies about that person. If you are strongly and consistently attracted to people of the same sex, your homosexual orientation is a part of who you are. What you do about it is a choice you make.

• **Isn't God being unfair to gay people?** If homosexual orientation is something you can't help, why should God say that it's sinful to act on your attractions? This may seem harsh, but in this sinful world, we human beings are born with all kinds of tendencies to do things

that are not part of God's plan. Heterosexual people are born with strong sexual urges, too, which cannot be fulfilled unless that person is in a committed marriage relationships. Children born to alcoholic and drug-addicted parents may have an inborn tendency to become addicts themselves. We are all born with natural desires that could lead us to sin, but our desires don't *have* to lead to sin if we choose to follow God's plan.

• **Singleness is a positive choice.** Our society is so focused on romantic love and relationships that we sometimes forget that being single is a positive, healthy life-style—no matter what a person's sexual orientation. Choosing to live as a single person and not engaging in sex (this is called “celibacy”) is not repressed or twisted. This is how Jesus lived. This is how the apostle Paul lived. He wrote to the church in Corinth:

“It is good for a man not to marry....Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.... An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her

aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:1, 8, 32-35, NIV).

For a Christian with a homosexual orientation, celibacy can be a powerful and positive choice.

• **Help is available.** If you are struggling with the possibility that you may be homosexual, please find someone to talk to—someone who will help, not judge or condemn. Ask a pastor, teacher or other mature Christian you trust to help you find a Christian counsellor who will have experience in dealing with this issue and will be able to help you make choices.

• **God loves you.** God created you; God loves you exactly as you are. God loves you as His child no matter who you are or what you have done. Do not allow anyone to tell you that you are not valuable to God; you are “the apple of his eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10).

Real Life, Part Two:

Heather’s eyes fell on a bookmark lying on her desk. “Smile, God Loves You,” it read. Heather almost laughed. Everything was so simple back when she was little. Smile, God loves you—that was all she needed to know, back then.

Suddenly, a thought struck her: It’s still true. No matter what else had changed, no matter what conflicting feelings she was having, God still loved her. Heather was suddenly as certain of that as she had been when she was five years old, singing “Jesus Loves Me” in Sabbath School.

She went to the window and opened it, looking out at the beautiful sunset sky outside. “I don’t know why I have these feelings, Lord,” she prayed aloud. “Is this the way you created me? There’s so much I don’t understand, so much I don’t know. But I do believe you love me, and I’m sorry I thought my life wasn’t worth living. You must have a plan for me.”

As she continued to look out at the sunset, Heather knew she needed to do more than just brood about the feelings she was having. She needed some information. Was she really a lesbian? What did that mean? What did God expect from her? She was sure that she could find some more information and maybe someone to talk to. A counselor or someone. As long as she was sure God loved her, she could keep going. ●

¹ Homosexuality: Common Questions and Statements Addressed. Online: <http://hcqsa.virtualave.net/youth.html>

² “Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality.” *Statements, Guidelines and Other Documents: A Compilation*. General Conference 2000.

³ For more information about Exodus International, see www.exodusintl.org

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► Focus: Relationships

MORAL OBLIGATIONS by Pattie Emanuele

Life Issue: Seeing others as Christ sees them.

Bible Passage: Mark 10: 13–15

Central Bible Truth: Loving as Christ would have us love.

Teaching Aim: God's love should motivate us to live as Christ lives. Sometimes that means that we will suffer ridicule for being like Jesus Christ and loving the unlovable.

Setting: Picking players for a school game.

Characters: John, Nathan, Joshua, Carrie, Laura, Charlie

Joshua, Carrie and Laura sit on the bleachers and watch as John picks his team for baseball.

Joshua: It's pretty crowded for a practice game isn't it?

Carrie: I didn't realize that many kids wanted to play on the team.

Laura: You know that means a lot of these kids will not make the list. How come you didn't try out Josh?

Joshua: Football's my sport. I never liked to play baseball much. I like to watch it though. I'll let John be the big sports hero.

Carrie: John sure is the big guy. Every girl here has her eye on him.

Laura laughs.

Laura: Guess I'll have to resist that temptation.

John: Okay guys. We've only got so many positions to be filled. Coach told me to start picking out teammates.

John: You, Paul. Gary, you're next. Ralph, get behind Gary.

Laura: Everyone he's picking so far is no surprise they're all good.

Joshua: There are only two places left to fill.

Excitement ruffles through the crowd.

Crowd: John should pick Clark. No Devin.

John's eyes scan the crowd of raised hands.

John: Brian, come on over.

Crowd: Just one spot left. Who's the last player?

At the edge of the crowd Charlie silently raises his hand. He is used to waiting. He is last to finish class work, last to understand the teacher's directions, last to get in line for lunch.

Charlie shouts out: John don't forget me.

John glances toward Charlie. He raises his finger to point toward someone else.

Crowd: Can you believe that Charlie wants to play?

Crowd murmurs: Charlie is a special needs student.

Laura prays: John, choose Charlie. Do the right thing.

John hesitates then quickly points at Charlie.

John: Charlie you're in.

Joshua: Charlie isn't able to play well. We're going to lose games with Charlie on the team.

Laura: John is doing the right thing. He's seeing Charlie as Jesus sees him, valuable and somebody who deserves respect and love. He is making a godly choice!

The crowd settles down, and the skirmish begins. ●

LIFE IN THE WORLD AS A CHRISTIAN by Pattie Emanuele

Life Issue: How to live our life according to God's instruction in a godless world

Bible Passage: I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct according to what his deeds deserve.

Central Bible Truth: God knows what's in our hearts and will give us his gifts depending on how we have lived our lives.

Teaching Aim: Youth need to strive to live as Christ would have us to live even in a hostile world.

Setting: Walking back from school

Characters: Johnny, Andrew, Bart, Mark, Jimmy and Drew

Johnny, Andrew and Bart are walking home from school.

Johnny: Wow I am so glad school is over today. Biology was so boring.

Andrew: Yeah, I can't sit through another of Mr. Hurley's lectures.

Bart: I like all the dissecting. I mean you get to see the heart, the brains and all.

Andrew: Yeah, enjoy that Bart.

Johnny laughs. He adjusts his backpack.

Johnny: I have so much homework tonight. I feel like I'm carrying bricks.

Andrew: Me too.

Bart: Hey there's Mark, Jimmy and Drew. I wonder where they're going. They watch the boys ahead of them veer off into the woods.

Andrew: Let's catch up and see what they're up to.

Johnny: Okay but I have to get home. I can't hang out today.

The three boys walk faster and enter a clutch of trees.

Bart: Hi guys, whatcha doin' in here?

Drew turns around. He's holding a cigarette.

Drew: We're just taking a smoke. Want a drag?

Andrew: Okay let me try some.

Andrew takes the cigarette from Drew and takes a long drag of smoke from it. Andrew coughs.

Andrew: Wow.

Bart: Hey let me have some guys. Jimmy hands Bart a cigarette.

Bart: Do you guys come here every day?

Jimmy: Almost every day.

Jimmy: Johnny, you want some too? Jimmy offers Johnny a cigarette.

Johnny: Uh, no thanks. I've got to get home.

Jimmy: What's the matter are you chicken?

Johnny doesn't reply.

Johnny: Actually, no, but I don't want to put that poison in my body. Frankly, I'm a Christian and I view my body as a temple for God.

Mark: You're kidding right?

Andrew starts violently coughing.

Andrew red faced: You might be right about that body is a temple idea. I'm gonna go home too. This isn't any fun.

Mark: Yeah, you guys go. You're gonna miss a lot of fun.

Andrew and Johnny leave to walk home. Behind them each of the boys is heard violently coughing.

Andrew sarcastically: Sure is a lot of fun we're missing. Johnny laughs and nods yes. ●

WHAT'S IN YOUR HEART by Geoffrey Marshall

Life Issue: Masturbation

Bible Passage: Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Central Bible Truth: God's ideal for sexual activity is for a husband and wife; anything else falls short of this ideal.

Teaching Aim/Program Target: True pleasure comes from giving, establishing, and maintaining respect—not from selfish desires.

Setting: Scene open with Pastor sitting in his office, and knocking on the door.

Characters: Bruce, age 17-18, Pastor Malcolm, early-mid 30's

Someone knocks on the door.

Pastor: Who is it?

Bruce: Hey, Pastor Malcolm! It's me, Bruce...

Pastor: Oh, okay! Hold on a second, I'm in the kitchen...

Bruce: All right, I'm out here...

Door opens.

Pastor: Hey, Bruce, what's up?

Bruce: Umm, not much, u know. Ahm, listen. I, I wanted to ask you about... something, if you're not too busy.

Pastor: Sure, just let me put these pots away before Arlene gets in. I don't want her to come home from the women's ministry meeting and see the kitchen still messy. You can take a seat in the meantime.

Pastor: So, what's on your mind Bruce?

Bruce: Well...ummm...boy, this is really embarrassing...

Pastor: You can talk about it, how embarrassing can it be?

Bruce: REALLY embarrassing man, trust me. I mean, I don't even know why I came to you about it, I guess because you seem kinda alright for a youth pastor, and I don't think you would have had a problem with it.

Pastor: With what?

Bruce: (whispers) playing with yourself.

Pastor: Playing with...oh. OOOOOOH.

Bruce: Yeh, that.

Pastor: You mean masturbation.

Bruce: EASY NUH MAN! You don't have to say it so loud!

Pastor: What? Why not? It's just a word.

Bruce: Yeah, right. It all sound perverted, is a pervert thing, right?

Pastor: Are you asking me or telling me?

Bruce: ...I don't know...okay, I don't know! I am so confused right now. I mean...boy, this is embarrassing...but I can't take it anymore. I have an issue pastor, I like to look at stuff, u know?

Pastor: Stuff like...

Bruce: STUFF man, STUFF.

Pastor: Relax, Bruce, relax! I'll make a deal with you, okay? I promise not to judge you, but you are going to have to speak plainly about what your

issue is. I have an idea, but you can't go around calling things by other names. Just let it out. I will listen.

Bruce: (Sighs). Ok, I will try...um... I like to look at pornography on the internet and masturbate to it but I like doing it and I don't think anything is wrong with it. But I still feel bad whenever I do it and I think I'm a pervert but I don't know what I should do or why I feel this way.

Pastor:...All right then.

Bruce: Never mind. You've never had a problem with it, I'll bet. I mean, you're married and all, I shouldn't have come.

Pastor: Hold on, Bruce, hold on. Don't give up so quickly! I am glad you decided to talk about it, because it is a serious issue. I've had struggles with it myself.

Bruce:WHAT???

Pastor: Believe me Bruce, you are not alone.

Bruce: WHAT?

Pastor: What?

Bruce: But...but...you're a pastor! You're married! You're supposed to be a man of God!

Pastor: Hold that thought right there, Bruce. Before we discuss anything more, let's pray. "Lord Jesus, please be with us in this discussion that Bruce and I will have, in Jesus name I pray, amen." Now Bruce, tell me what you know or think about masturbation.

Bruce: ummm...it's a nasty habit, only perverts do it, it's a sin, Ellen White said that those who do it are going to hell...um, and God hates sin.

Pastor: Are you a pervert?

Bruce: No!

Pastor: Am I a pervert?

Bruce: No, not from what I know.

Pastor: Yet you have masturbated, and I've admitted to having that struggle too.

Bruce: Yes.

Pastor: So, I would conclude that just because you masturbate, it doesn't make you a pervert. Do you agree?

Bruce: I guess...but does that mean it's ok?

Pastor: Not necessarily, but we need to establish that masturbation does not equal perversion. Are you with me so far?

Bruce: Yes...

Pastor: Good! Now, let's go a bit deeper. Why do you think people masturbate?

Bruce: Um...well, because they are um, sexually aroused and, um...good grief, I'm talking to the youth pastor about sexual arousal!

Pastor: Never mind that, Bruce, go on with your thoughts.

Bruce: Okay, it's just weird! Umm... yeah, so they're aroused and they want to, you know, get off...but because they are by themselves, they umm, just do it themselves.

Pastor: That's a fair description. Masturbation is the self-stimulation of the sexual organs in an attempt to achieve orgasm. I read a study that said about 65% of women and 90% of men masturbate from time to time.

Bruce: What? So many?!

Pastor: Yes. Personally, I think those other 10% of men are liars, but that's another story.

Bruce: But...if so many people do it, what's the big deal?

Pastor: You tell me. Why do you feel bad about it?

Bruce: Well, I just feel, I don't know...empty after I, um, finish, u know? I don't feel as nice as I thought I would have...

Pastor: I understand. You see, the sexual desire that God gave us is a really powerful thing, but He gave it to us to use in a very special and specific situation—in a loving, married relationship with our spouses. To use the gift of sex and sexual attraction in any other setting is to invite trouble and negativity into our lives.

Bruce: Yeah, but you can say that because you're married. You can do it whenever you want, how do you know what I'm feeling?

Pastor: Really! That's just a myth. You don't do it when you feel like it. It has to be a mutual feeling. You are always seeking to please the other person—not just yourself. Plus, I wasn't always married you know, and a man of God is still a man. It is natural to be sexually excited even if you're not married. It's not a sin to have an erection or to be "turned on", or to be attracted to someone.

Bruce: Isn't that lust?

Pastor: No, no, no no. Let me see...If you see a beautiful woman walking down the street and your

brain processes the info and says “Wow! That girl is hot!”—that’s a natural reaction. If you start to say “I wonder how she’d look without that suit. I know what I’d be doing with that body, I’d do this and feel that” and encourage sexual fantasies and thoughts of her, then THAT’s lust.

Bruce: Yeah, but what should you do about it if you have a random sexual attraction like that?

Pastor: Nothing.

Bruce: Nothing?

Pastor: Yes, nothing. You have an erection, so what? Think about something else; get your mind off of the fast train to lust and back on the reality train. Focus on who the girl really is, not just the fact that she is sexy or attractive.

Bruce: I guess...but it’s so hard! Once you’re turned on, you feel like you need to reach the, um, “finish line” if you know what I mean...what’s wrong with getting there? It’s not as if I’m committing adultery!

Pastor: Right! Your erection is not an emergency. It will go away and you will not be harmed for “not finishing it off”, as you said. Remember what Jesus said about lusting in your heart. You mentioned pornography earlier, and usually those go hand in hand—porn and masturbation. Do you really think that those things you see in porn is what God intended?

Bruce: Well, sex shouldn’t be boring...

Pastor: As a married man, I can tell you that sex with the woman you love is definitely not boring. I told you

that I had struggles with porn myself even before I was married, but I thank God that He helped me to overcome those struggles and led me to meet Arlene. Those movies are presenting a warped image of the gift that God gave Adam and Eve, Bruce. Sex is a wonderful thing that God gives to a husband and wife for pleasure—not for pain, domination, and perversion.

Bruce: I guess that’s true.

Pastor: I know it is true, Bruce. You see, that is the true problem with masturbation. It is not the act itself that should be the issue, but the thoughts and motives behind the act. If masturbation has become a habit for you, what need is this habit trying to fulfill? Why do you feel you must achieve this sexual high simply because you are sexually aroused?

Bruce: Yeah...well, it just seems as though once you’re on, you need to just go and finish it off somehow.

Pastor: Hmmm. So, if you were in an exam and you randomly get an erection, you’re going to tell the examiner, “Excuse me, sir, I need to, aaahh, go to the bathroom and “finish it off?”

Bruce: (laughs), I guess not.

Pastor: And what about women, Bruce? Do you think that all women are like those women in porn movies?

Bruce: No!

Pastor: That’s right. A woman is a human being just like you and me, Bruce. She’s not a sex object there solely for your pleasure. She has her own wants, needs and desires, and

she deserves to have them met just as much as you do. Another danger with masturbation and porn is that you may start to view a woman only in terms of you, “what can I get out of her” and how can she please you. You cannot build a stable relationship with a view like that—looking at “what’s in it for me.” The true pleasure of sex is in giving yourself to the other person and pleasing them, not taking from them what pleases you. Masturbation is all about you, and that is the danger of it.

Bruce: That’s deep Pastor Malcolm, but I can’t just give myself to any and every girl like that!

Pastor: Exactly.

Bruce: What?

Pastor: You are right: you can’t just give yourself to any and every girl. You do it only to your wife.

Bruce: AAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!! I think I get the picture now...

Pastor: Good! I’m happy that you are seeing it.

Bruce: So, is masturbation right or wrong?

Pastor: Well, let’s look at it this way. Every time you are sexually aroused you have a choice. If you choose to masturbate you form habit patterns that are negative and counter-productive to God’s plan for your healthy spiritual experience. Every time you give in, it makes it easier to do it again. What you really need to do is to give your sexuality to God. Sex begins in the mind. That’s where you need to gain control. Don’t settle

for eating crackers and cheese when God has promised a “full course meal” for you further down the road.

Bruce: Ok...(pauses briefly and reflects)...A “full course meal”.... I guess by that you mean a wife...but what if I never get married? What if I choose to live a single life?

Pastor: Well, whether or not you get married, you still need to turn your sexuality over to God. He needs to be in full control of every area of our lives.

Bruce: Okay...one more thing. What was Ellen White talking about when she talked about self-abuse?

Pastor: I would say she’s talking about habitual masturbation, where someone is addicted to it. Whatever conclusions you may draw from our conversation Bruce, remember this: What matters is what is in your heart, and what motivates you to do something. When Jesus is in your heart, He will lead you into what is true, good, and holy. God’s ideal in regard to sexuality is the loving relationship that exists in marriage between husband and wife. Anything else, including masturbation, falls far short of God’s ideal.

Bruce: Thanks for your advice and for being here to listen to me, Pastor Malcolm. I feel a lot better knowing I’m not the only one out there struggling with this issue.

Pastor: You’re welcome, Bruce. Keep accountable, and pray. God will help you to overcome temptation when it reaches you. He won’t let the devil tempt you beyond what you can bear. See you on Sabbath! ●

► Focus: Peer Pressure

MORAL OBLIGATIONS by Pattie Emanuele

Life Issue: Doing the Right Thing

Bible Passage: Isaiah 7:15,16 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Central Bible Truth: Sometimes we make a choice to do what is right only after we experience the result of choosing to do wrong.

Teaching Aim: Youth must learn to choose right over wrong even if it only seems like an obligation.

Setting: Home at night

Characters: Barb and her mother, Marie, a friend

Barb opens the can of Spaghetti-O’s, dumps it into a bowl, places it in the microwave and sighs. She sets the timer and watches the bowl turn in circles through the glass door of the microwave. The phone rings.

Barb: Hello?

Mom: Barb? I’m going to have to work late tonight. I’m sorry I don’t have any choice.

Barb sighs.

Barb: It’s okay mom. I understand. I’ll do my homework until you get home.

After dinner Barb opens her Facebook account.

Marie: You’re home alone?

Barb types: Yes, mom’s working.

Marie: You are so lucky. I never get to be alone

Barb: I don’t like it much.

Just then a new person signs on.

Stranger: What’s your name?

Barb stares at the screen.

Stranger: How old are you? Where do you live?

Barb stops typing. She remembers what her mom has told her.

Mom: Don’t communicate with strangers it could be dangerous. Sometimes people pretend to be kids and they’re not. They want to meet young people.

Marie: Why did you stop typing? What’s going on?

Barb tells her about the stranger.

Marie: How exciting. You should answer him. He could be cute. Your mom isn’t there who’s going to know what you do?

Barb thinks about her choices.

Barb: No, I’m not answering him. Even though my mom’s not here I know what God would want me to do. I can’t disobey my mom just because I can get away with it. ●

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR by Scott Fogg

Life Issue: Sexuality, Homosexuality

Bible Passage: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

Central Bible Truth: Romans 3:20-24:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Teaching Aim/Program Target: The teaching aim of “Unacceptable Behavior” is two-fold: 1.) Elicit conversation on the topic. 2.) Remind the audience that we are *all* sinners and that our focus should not be on the faults of others, but on He who can save us.

Setting: Office with desk, two chairs, letter of resignation. Scene open with Pastor sitting in his office, and knocking on the door. The desk is set up just stage left of center stage. There is one chair behind the desk and one in front of it. JESUS enters reading the letter of resignation. The more He reads, the more disappointed He becomes. He drops the letter onto his desk and leans against it.

Characters: Voice of Jesus; Robert; Gabby.

Jesus: Gabby!

GABBY, one of Jesus’s many angelic personal assistants, rushes in from stage right.

Gabby: Yes, Jesus?

Jesus: Robert hasn’t left the building yet, has he?

Gabby: No, sir.

Jesus: Could you please send for him?

Gabby: Right away, sir.

Jesus: Thank you.

Gabby flits away, exiting stage right. Jesus sighs wearily and sits down behind his desk. As soon as he sits Robert enters from stage right.

Robert: You sent for me?

Jesus jumps to his feet.

Jesus: Yes! Robert! Please, come in! Have a seat. Can I get you anything?

Robert sits.

Robert: No, I’m fine.

Jesus sits back down.

Jesus: Well that’s just not true, is it?

Robert: I beg your pardon?

Jesus: You know what I’m talking about.

Robert: Jesus, I can honestly say that I’m not so sure I do.

Jesus holds up the letter of resignation.

Jesus: What's this?

Robert: Ah.

Jesus: Ah? Is that what kids are calling them these days? I'm sorry sir, I can't work here anymore. Here's my Ah. I'm going to be honest with you, Robert. I don't think it's going to catch on.

Robert: It's my letter of resignation.

Jesus: I know what it is.

Robert: It means I quit.

Jesus: I know what it means, too. I'm a pretty clever guy—might even call me omniscient.

Robert's just not in a joking kind of mood. He sits gloomily. Jesus's smile fades. He gets serious.

Jesus: Robert, you can't quit.

Robert: Sure I can.

Jesus: But we need you. I need you.

Robert: I'm sure you'll be able to find somebody to fill my spot.

Jesus: But it's *your* spot! It was created for you and you were created for it! Nobody's going to be able to fill it like you!

Robert: I really don't need the guilt.

Jesus: This is not guilt. This ... this is ... this is pleading. This is begging. Please. Don't go.

Robert: Why? The curter looks like her

Jesus: Could I ask you the same question?

Robert: Why?

Jesus: Why do you want to quit?

Robert: It's all in the letter.

Jesus: Actually it's not. Under Reasons for Departure you only wrote two words.

Robert: Unacceptable behavior.

Jesus: Unacceptable behavior. Care to elaborate?

Robert: I'd really rather not.

Jesus: Is it me?

Robert: No.

Jesus: You could tell me if it was.

Robert: No, it's not you.

Jesus: Well, then, why?

Robert: It's my co-workers.

Jesus: All of them?

Robert: Just the ones I have to work with—maybe you could transfer me.

Jesus: That wouldn't fix the problem. What would you say is the problem?

Robert: Me! I'm the problem!

Jesus: Oh, so it's you. Not them.

Robert: No, it's them. And their problem is me! And for that, I blame you!

Jesus: Me?

Robert: Yes, you. You're the one who created me this way!

Jesus: Did I?

Robert: I've always been this way!

Jesus: Well...

Robert: (*interrupting*) As far back as I can remember, this is who I am, this is who I was and in all likelihood, this is who I'm going to be!

Jesus: Crack babies.

Robert: What?

Jesus: Do you know what it's like to be addicted to crack—what it does to your body?

Robert: Well, I've read...

Jesus: There are babies born addicted to crack. Would you say that's my fault?

Robert: Well, no. That's the parents...

Jesus: What about something like Down Syndrome? If we're talking about problems people are born with – would you pin the blame on me for that, too?

Robert: I really ... My Lord, I really don't know. I don't know anything about that.

Jesus: Then let me tell you. Sin is a cancer. It has infected everything and everyone on the planet. There is no escaping it. It's in the air you breathe, the food you eat and the words you hear. It colors the world around you and it clouds your judgment. It dulls your senses and retards your growth. It lies to you. It makes you crave things that you don't really want or need. And not just you. Everybody.

(pause) As fabulous as I think you are, you're still just a pale shadow of what you could have been, had sin not entered into all this—and there are some who do think *that* is my fault. They say I shouldn't have given you free will. I don't agree with them; but I did (and do) take responsibility for my actions. So what about you? What will you do?

Robert: Me? This isn't about me. This is about them!

Jesus: Right. They don't like you.

Robert: Don't like me? They mock me! They criticize me! They look down on me! I actually had someone tell me I needed to pray harder! He looked me right in the eye and said, Maybe you should pray harder. (pause) Me! Pray harder! Do you have any idea how long I've been praying that you would fix me?

Voice of Jesus: A solid ten years.

Robert: Jesus, I pray, Why am I this way? Why am I who I am? I see me and I'm disgusting and foul and wretched and so undeserving of everything you give me! I read the Bible and it's just filled with all these amazing men and women who I can't even hold a candle to! No matter how hard I try, I can't measure up! I just keep failing and ... I am everything that I hate in the world.

Jesus: Paul said the same thing.

Robert: Yeah, well, Paul wasn't gay.

Jesus: He begged me: Jesus, take this thorn from my flesh!

Robert: You're comparing my sexuality to a splinter?

Jesus: It's a metaphor, wise guy. Only Paul and I know what he was talking about. Point is, there was something about himself he *really* didn't like. And I told him the same thing I've always told you: All you need is my grace. It is sufficient.

Robert: Yeah, well, tell that to the rest of your employees.

Jesus: I'm working with them—just like I'm working with you. So what do you say? Stay with us a little longer? Let me help you?

(Robert thinks about it for a long time. Finally ...)

Robert: No. I'm sorry.

Jesus: Don't let them come between us.

Robert: I've tried! But I just can't do it anymore! I'm sorry! I know we've been through a lot together and I know how much you've done for me I just ... can't! I can't sit here and take their abuse while their own selfishness, greed, and pettiness completely devour them! I'm sorry; I just can't continue to be the long-sufferer.

(Standing to leave) We can still keep in touch, if you'd like. I just can't work under these conditions.

Robert exits stage right. Jesus watches him leave.

Jesus: Gabby!

Gabby enters quickly from stage right.

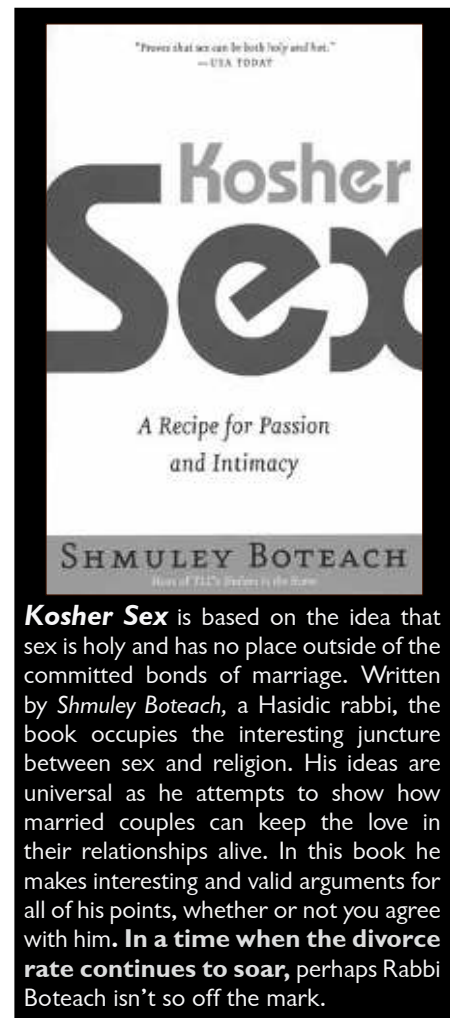
Gabby: Sir?

Jesus: Follow him.

Gabby: Yes, sir!

Gabby exits stage right. Jesus stands alone beside his desk, reflecting on the situation.

Jesus: This is completely unacceptable. ●



Kosher Sex is based on the idea that sex is holy and has no place outside of the committed bonds of marriage. Written by Shmuley Boteach, a Hasidic rabbi, the book occupies the interesting juncture between sex and religion. His ideas are universal as he attempts to show how married couples can keep the love in their relationships alive. In this book he makes interesting and valid arguments for all of his points, whether or not you agree with him. **In a time when the divorce rate continues to soar**, perhaps Rabbi Boteach isn't so off the mark.

FORUM ON UNEMPLOYMENT

by Patti Emanuele

OVERVIEW

It is no secret that the U.S. is suffering from a wave of unemployment. The “Good and Plenty” times that we have enjoyed for so long seem to be over. We watch the evening news with bated breath. As Americans in a global economy we are aware that our lives impact other countries. How do Christian youth leaders view these stressors, and what strategies do we have in place for our own personal faith walk? How do we influence, guide, and shape our youth of today during unstable times? How would God have us view these circumstances? How do we impress on our young people that our security does not come from our financial well-being but from our faith in Jesus Christ?

Guests at our Round Table:

Bob, a youth leader with a middle-class church.

Gerry, a youth leader on staff at a very large, affluent church.

Chris, the youth leader of a small, lower-income church who may lose his job.

The youth group directors involved in this discussion are local pastors living in a state with a very high unemployment rate. The downturn in the economy has enabled these pastors to offer comfort to families with prayer and practical means to manage our finances. All leaders participating in this forum are seeking to communicate a freedom of worry, confidence in a stable and rock solid God, and a thankful heart through this forum.

► **Moderator:** Unemployment rates have been calculated recently for the U.S. at 7.9%. Some states, such as Michigan, are now reaching 10.9%. Empty houses dot almost every neighborhood. Homeowners await the mail in trepidation of the dreaded news that their house is going into foreclosure. Families are feeling the fear of job loss. Bill collectors call demanding their payments from out-of-work people. Financial security is non-existent. How do families cope? How is this impacting our youth and our youth

Where do we direct our suffering families for relief and stability? As youth leaders,

what are some of the challenges that you are facing as you lead your youth groups through this treacherous walk through life, and what are some of your solutions?

Bob: Our church is a primarily middle-class, white-collared people. There is fear out there over job loss. We have seen a few families ask the church for necessities. Our church has tried to meet their needs. Our youth groups have been encouraged to adopt needy families and specifically pray for them. We also have encouraged kids to give to the Lord first for the needy. We've developed a plan.

► **Moderator:** What is your plan?

Bob: We have asked the kids to set aside one dollar a day from their own funds. After a month or two, we collect the money and give to the needy within our church. If there is no one in our church, then we look outside our fellowship to community needs.

► **Moderator:** How have the kids responded to this program?

Bob: Very well.

► **Moderator:** Bob, do you think your kids are stressed over the financial state of things? How have they been affected?

Bob: Our kids do not as yet appear to be upset over our country's financial instability. They are aware due to the news and their parents that things are tough out there. Frankly, until they are affected personally, most kids don't think about it much. With this in mind, I feel that it is important to help them to be aware of the world around them. I have tried to teach them that we need to think globally and be thankful for what we have. For example, in some countries, people don't even have clean water. One activity that we recently completed was researching a global rich list online. We wrote down the top countries in our world economically and then compared their cost of living, lifestyle, and income with the rest of the world. It was eye-opening. Also, because we encourage

involvement with mission work, this centered the youth on mission needs.

► **Moderator:** Gerry, I know that your church is filled with people who have had to leave the area to make a living. How has that affected your ministry?

Gerry: Our kids have been used to going on expensive mission trips. That has been cut out of the budget. We have emphasized creativity in house games and get-togethers.

Bob turns to Gerry: How have the kids reacted to this plan?

Gerry: At first they complained. They missed the expensive trips. Then we had some great times together and the griping has stopped. Relationships have deepened between the youth. Materialism has been put on the back burner. I have benefited from the recession because now I am more closely tied in with the kids. It's easier to get to know them personally when I'm not distracted by planning fancy activities. I can just relax and talk and have fun with them. Also, there have been more opportunities for volunteers to get involved. We don't want to hire more staff, so parents have stepped up to the plate.

Chris: I hear that. We have actually had to cut personnel. My job could be next. Parents and friends have had to become more involved with the youth and planning of activities. Many people have told me that they have

been blessed by their interaction with the kids and I know that the kids have been blessed also.

► **Moderator:** What are some of the activities that you've been planning?

Gerry: For us, we've been going sledding and tubing. After all, we live in the Midwest and there's plenty of snow. Actually, anywhere that you live you can find free, fun stuff to do. If you live in a warm climate, you can do outside activities easily.

Bob: Beside board games, we've had pizza nights, and movie nights at someone's house. People have been aware of our need and opened their homes to us. One mother thanked me for giving her an opportunity to participate more by having the kids in her home. It was also a chance to exercise hospitality.

Chris: Our kids have been much more sensitive to each other's needs. I have become aware of several situations of suffering families that I may not have if we were not spending close time together, talking and having fun. I've tried to encourage the kids to look at this situation as a positive and growing experience.

Gerry: We've been going bowling and playing sports in the gym at the local high school. We're always watching what we spend. I found a

good Bible study on managing our money the way God would want us to and I've been teaching that. Hopefully, the kids will develop good spending and saving habits because of our economic situation. That will extend past our immediate circumstances. Stewardship is always a relevant topic.

► **Moderator:** In what other ways have you encouraged the youth to look beyond their own needs and help others?

Bob: We've had a canned food drive. We knew of some families that couldn't pay their heating bill so we saved and paid it for them. I've tried to plan more activities for kids, not less. This keeps their eyes on what's important, and they are busy.

► **Moderator:** How has your smaller youth ministry budgets affected your mission program?

Bob: At our church, short term mission trips have been eliminated. We have tried to assist short-term missionaries with prayer for their needs. Also we have requested lists for their physical needs and been saving and asking others to assist with those needs. We may not be able to be on the field with them, but we are one in spirit here at home. Our church has pledged support to our long-term missionaries. They have been reassured of our support and are relieved. They are depending on our funds, and we are still giving.

► **Moderator:** Let's try and sum up the blessings that have been gathered from experiencing our difficult financial times.

Gerry: We are more sensitive to other's needs. It encourages more people to get involved with our youth when a staff person is not available anymore.

Bob: We are learning how to manage our money better. We've been studying a money-management course developed by a Christian to teach us how to live and give as Christ would have us do.

Chris: Our kids are learning to think of others first. We are not as activities driven. We are learning to view this down-turn in a positive way. These are days filled with opportunities to show God's love toward others. Kids are learning to save more for hard times. If they learn to save, they can give more and feel the blessing that comes with caring for other's needs first. Also, our kids have learned how to research in their communities for relief organizations. Sometimes there is food available to distribute, especially at churches. In our town, there is a Christian organization that will help with emergency payments for heating bills,

and housing. It's important that kids learn to not only pray for needs, but discover and offer solutions to some of these very real physical problems that others may be going through.

► **Moderator:** So I guess that this does not have to be a negative experience. It would seem that this enables us to think of ourselves as part of the world—perhaps understanding that we have it easier than many other countries and that we should feel grateful and have compassion for others. Jesus said: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt. 6: 33 and 34). Each day has enough trouble of its own. God will always provide. I guess the final thought on all of this is lack of goods does not mean lack of blessing.

► Let us close with prayer. ●

remember to always

Be positive. Do not let any discouragement show through when you are looking for work. Potential employers are looking for people with a positive, "I can do it" attitude. **Ask God to help you project a positive image when you look for work.**

GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

- **The origin of marriage.**

According to Scripture, marriage was instituted and divinely blessed as the closest human relationship. On the sixth day of creation week God performed the first wedding, bringing together the first man and woman as equal partners (Gen. 2:18-25). The divine intent was for the first marriage to be the pattern for all future marriage relationships: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). During His earthly ministry, Christ reaffirmed the creation plan for marriage (Matt. 19:3-6; Mark 10:6-9).

- **The defining elements of marriage.**

In the Genesis account, marriage is a lifelong, exclusive union between a male and a female. It has three essential elements: 1) leaving father and mother; 2) being joined to each other; and 3) becoming one flesh. “Leaving” implies the creation of a distinct family unit publicly recognized by the couple’s families, the community of faith and the society at large. “Being joined” refers to the mutual commitment of the couple expressed in a formal marriage covenant. “Becoming one flesh” describes both the sexual union and the process of growth in intimacy, unity, and fulfillment that God intends a couple to experience in all aspects of their lives.

- **The purposes of marriage.**

Marriage was instituted by God to meet the fundamental human need for love, companionship and community (Gen. 2:18). It is the divinely ordained setting for sexual intimacy and is intended to safeguard the virtues of purity and faithfulness (Gen. 2:24, 25). God designed the complementary relationship between the genders to enhance the development of human wholeness and a fuller understanding of each other and of God and His love. The first couple was given the shared task of caring for the earth and its resources (Gen. 1:26). They were also privileged to cooperate with God—reflecting His creativity, sharing in the joys of establishing family, providing for the care and nurture of children, and perpetuating the human race (Gen. 1:28). While divine revelation places a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting, Scripture never presents procreation as

an obligation of every couple in order to please God (Matt. 19:14; Ps. 127:3). The narratives of Scripture illustrate how the tasks and priorities related to these purposes vary over time and circumstances for each marriage.

● **The preeminence of marriage.**

In Scripture, marriage is recognized as the cornerstone relationship in the family and takes precedence over all other human relationships. The biblical injunction to “leave father and mother” implies that the couple is sufficiently mature to establish and maintain a new family unit. They are to give priority to protecting the boundaries around their relationship, even as they receive support, nurture, or counsel from family members and others who can help them (Gen. 2:24; Song of Solomon; Matt. 19:6; Eph. 5:21-33).

● **The covenant of marriage.**

The foundational passage on marriage in Genesis 2:23, 24 describes marriage in covenantal language. In the divine plan for marriage, husband and wife as equals make a covenant with each other before God. In the biblical sense, this covenant is a binding commitment that includes promises, privileges, and obligations. With solemn and sacred vows, the couple seals their covenant, pledging love, loyalty, and dedication to each other as long as they both live (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). The marriage covenant, which in many respects resembles God’s covenant with His people, is grounded in divine grace (Ezek. 16:4-8; Eph. 1:6). Marriage as covenant implies mutual steadfast love, goodwill, fidelity, and commitment to permanence (Ps. 89:28-34; Song of Solomon 8:6, 7; Is. 54:5, 10; Jer. 32:40, 41; Hosea 2:19-23; 3:1-3; Rev. 21:2, 3).

● **Sexual intimacy in marriage.**

Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman in marriage is an exquisite and sacred gift granted to the human family by God at creation. It is an integral part of marriage, reserved for marriage only (Gen. 1:31; 2:24; Ex. 20:14; Prov. 5:15-17; Song of Solomon 4:12-5:1; 8:10; 1 Cor. 7:1-4; Heb. 13:4). The sexual relationship is designed by God as an experience of love, pleasure, celebration, and bonding between husband and wife, a blessing to be enjoyed without shame and received with thankfulness. Sexual intercourse and love-

play are portrayed in Scripture as a wholesome, delightful expression of togetherness that promote an ever-increasing closeness, happiness, and security between husband and wife (Gen. 2:23-25; Prov. 5:18-20; Song of Solomon). A loving marriage relationship is God’s chosen setting to provide a secure environment for the procreation, care and nurture of children (Gen. 1:28; 4:1; Eph. 6:4).

● **Marriage as partnership.**

In the creation account, God provided Adam with “a helper comparable to him” (Hebrew, *ezer kenegdo*), an “equal partner.” Their partnership was one of equality, mutuality, companionship, and interdependence. In this relationship their individuality was preserved (Gen. 2:18, 21-22). As partners, husband and wife bear equal responsibility in the marriage (Gen. 1:26-28). Their partnership is a wholistic one in which spiritual compatibility is vital. Marriage of believer to believer is the biblical ideal (Amos 3:3; 2 Cor. 6:14).

● **Marriage as ministry.**

When Genesis speaks of God’s creation of male and female in His image, it bestows value and dignity on both husband and wife and establishes their place as His representatives in the midst of His creation. The couple bears witness to the relational nature and oneness of the Godhead in their responsiveness to each other, in their capacity for love, intimacy, unity, creativity and procreativity, and in their co-regency and stewardship over all that He has made. With God’s blessing, they are empowered to bring order and harmony to their world and by their careful management to be accountable for the nurture and care of their family and their environment. As they respond to this calling, they minister the love and grace of God to one another and to their wider community. Thus they exalt His name and testify of His power (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15, 18-25; 1 Chron. 16:8-13; Ps. 34:1-3; John 13:35; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 John 3:14; 4:20).

● **Marriage and the Sabbath.**

Marriage and the Sabbath are the two divine institutions that have come down to humanity from Creation. These twin institutions are paired in Genesis 1-2: the Sabbath forms the climax of the first creation account (Gen. 1:1-2:3), while

marriage constitutes the apex of the second, complementary account (Gen. 2:4-25). Each illuminates our understanding of the other. The Sabbath provides a special time for the married couple to renew and celebrate their commitment to each other, to enjoy fellowship with one another and family, and to experience the many facets of Sabbath rest (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:11; 31:16-17; Is. 58:13; Heb. 4).

MARRIAGE AND HUMAN TRANSGRESSION

● Responsibility for transgression.

The Scripture holds both Adam and Eve accountable for the entrance of sin into the world (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22). They both denied responsibility for their behavior. Their failure to follow God's plan led to separation from Him and from one another (Gen. 3:8-13).

● Effects of the Fall on the nature of marriage.

The sin of Adam and Eve resulted in the loss of intimacy, mutuality, harmony, and togetherness. Their relationship was marked by guilt, fear, shame, and blame (Gen. 3:7-12). As a result of the Fall, the delicate balance in their marriage was lost. Under the curse of sin, the woman would now struggle with an inordinate desire for connectedness, even as the man would assume supremacy over her (Gen. 3:16). The curse on the ground and the pain that would now be experienced in childbirth set the stage for strife over work, sexual desire, and procreation (Gen. 3:14-19). Many women came to be regarded and treated as property, even as slaves, and differences in power led to roles being rigidly prescribed and male domination and control being idealized (cf. Ex. 21:7-11; Esther 1:17-22). The sad effects of sin on marriage are often manifested in misunderstanding, neglect, conflict, alienation, and failure to love, accept, and forgive one another. Violent and abusive behavior in human relationships are among the most destructive manifestations of the effect of sin (Gen. 4:8, 19, 23, 24; 6:11, 13; 2 Sam. 13:11-20; Ps. 11:5; Is. 58:4, 5; Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:19-21).

● Effects of the Fall on the permanence of marriage.

God's original plan for the marriage covenant rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, trust, and support upheld by both partners in obedience to God (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:1-7). When these principles are violated, Scripture acknowledges that the marriage covenant is undermined and may even be destroyed (Deut. 24:1-4; Prov. 5:1-23; 6:20-35; Mal. 2:14; cf. Hos. 2:2-13). In addition to the

death of a partner, other factors can lead to the destruction of a marriage. Sexual immorality, including a range of improper sexual behaviors, and desertion by an unbelieving partner are acknowledged in Scripture as circumstances that destroy the marriage covenant (Deut. 24; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Rom. 7:2, 3; 1 Cor. 7:15). Other factors, such as abuse and violence in the family, also severely threaten and may break the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14-16; cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).

● Dissolution of marriage.

Sin has wrought havoc with human relationships and has led to the breakdown and dissolution of many marriages. Annulment, repudiation (the putting away of a spouse), separation, and divorce have become customary in many societies. Despite the social and legal support for these practices, they are not part of God's original plan for marriage (Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5). Scripture expresses God's deep concern for families experiencing the trauma associated with all forms of marital dissolution. Laws were given in the Old Testament to limit the pain and damage such practices caused (Deut. 24:1-4; Hos. 2, 3; Mal. 2:13-16).

● Cultural distortions of the marriage ideal.

Since the entrance of sin, diverse cultural forms of family and sexual relationships have emerged that are not in keeping with the pattern set in Genesis 1-2. Some of these relationships, such as concubinage and polygamy, though tolerated in Old Testament times, were nevertheless out of harmony with the divine design. While levirate marriage fulfilled specific purposes in ancient times, it did not become Christian practice. Cohabitation, consanguinity, incest, and same-sex liaisons are clearly condemned (cf. Ex. 22:16; Deut. 22:23-29; 27:20-23; Lev. 18:7-18; 20:11-21; 2 Sam. 13:11-13).

MARRIAGE AND THE GOSPEL

● **Restoration of God's creation intent for marriage.**

From the beginning of the entrance of sin, God has been actively at work to restore everything that was lost in Eden (Gen. 3:15; Hos. 11:8, 9; Eph. 1:3-10). The Bible consistently upholds marriage as honorable (Heb. 13:4). Many laws were given to protect the marriage covenant (Ex. 20:14, 17; Lev. 18; Deut. 5:18, 21; 22:13-30; 24:1-4). God uses marriage imagery to illuminate the special intimate relationship between Himself and His people (Is. 54:5; 62:5; Jer. 3:1; Hos. 2:19-21). The Bible writers celebrate married love (Prov. 5:18-20). One entire book of Scripture reflects the Edenic themes of joy, delight, mutuality, safety, and oneness experienced in the marriage relationship (Song of Solomon).

● **Redemptive work of Christ for marriage.**

In Jesus Christ, the fullness of God's redemptive plan was revealed (John 1:16; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10; Heb. 1:1-4). In Him, the kingdom of God has come to us to rescue us from this present evil age and to enable us to be filled with all the fullness of God (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; 17:21; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 3:17-19; Heb. 6:5). Because Christ has made all things new, the institution of marriage is now part of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). With His inaugural miracle at Cana, Christ honored and blessed marriage and thereby signaled His will to effect a radical transformation of the marital experience among believers (John 2:1-11). He reaffirmed the creation view of marriage as a lifelong covenant before God between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). He exalted marriage, as did the prophets, by frequently referring to Himself as a Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19, 20; cf. John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:6, 7).

● **Effects of the gospel on the marriage relationship.**

The gospel opens the eyes of marriage partners to see one another as persons of value and worth redeemed by Christ, each deserving of dignity and respect. This is manifested in the gracious way they love, accept, and forgive each other, their willingness to listen, to understand, and to connect with each other. It can also be seen in the way they reconcile their differences and resolve their conflicts. The gospel has the power to transform both natural and cultural practices, freeing each couple to explore their giftedness and develop a partnership compatible with God's original design for marriage.

Jesus taught and modeled the way of spiritual leadership, demonstrating the appropriate limits of power and authority in relationships. He cautioned His followers not to lust after power, or to allow others to

exercise undue power over them, as this is out of keeping with the principles of His kingdom. With Jesus came a new paradigm that invited both men and women to reach their full potential and to be responsive to each other's needs. Service to one another, humility and respect, rather than domination and control, characterize His followers (Matt. 18:1-4; 20:25-28; 23:1-12; Mark 9:35; 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:2-17; Phil. 2:1-8).

The marriage and family relationships of Christians are shaped by these gospel principles (Eph. 5:21-6:9; 1 Peter 3:1-7; 1 John 2:9, 10). At the cross of Christ humankind has been brought together and the barriers that have created inequalities between Jew and gentile, slave and free, male and female broken down (Rom. 2:11; 3:23; 1 Cor. 11:11; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-18). Unity in marriage is achieved by mutual respect and love. No one is superior (Eph. 5:21-28). Paul's understanding that husbands and wives have equal rights and responsibilities in their sexual relationship exemplifies the larger mutuality to which Christian couples are called in marriage (1 Cor. 7:3, 4). The entrance of sin led to the subjection of the wife to the husband, however, the gospel emphasizes the love and submission of all believers, including husbands and wives, to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). Scripture gives special attention to the accomplishment in marriage of this mutual submission of believers. Husbands and wives are to submit to one another, wives through their love, respect, and honor for their husbands (Eph. 5:33; Col. 2:18; Titus 2:4; 1 Peter 3:1, 2), and husbands through their self-sacrificing love for their wives (1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Eph. 5:21, 24, 25). Husbands are called to honor their wives as fellow heirs of salvation in a grace-filled marriage (1 Peter 3:7). The principles of the gospel preclude either husband or wife assuming rulership within marriage.

● Singleness as an option.

The gospel allows for both singleness and marriage as valid options for adult living, including ministry as single persons like Jesus and the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:7, 8). While some, by choice or circumstance, are single, they may experience wholeness as individuals, connect with others through family and friends, and bring glory to God as single men and women (Matt. 19:12; Mark 3:33-35; 1 Cor. 7:7, 8). Sexual intimacy, however, is reserved for marriage (Prov. 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 2:6,7; 3:5; 8:3,4; 4:12; 8:8-10; Hos. 3:3).

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

As the body of Christ, the church is called to be a faith community that is inclusive of all members, both single and married. In building a sense of community, the church concerns itself with strengthening all relationships, especially the marriage relationship, which is foundational to family, church, and society. Following the example of biblical leaders, those who lead God's people today are responsible for upholding God's ideal and proclaiming the divine will for marriage. Such ministry seeks to prepare children and youth in the family, church,

and school for single or married adult life. It encourages couples to make wise marital choices, strengthens relational skills, and facilitates marital commitment and growth.

Whenever marital distress or breakdown occurs, the church as the family of God seeks to listen and understand, and to minister to all involved. The church respects the couple's responsibility for making decisions regarding the future of their relationship. It also provides encouragement and support for them and their families in their hurt and pain, and connects them with resources as they experience reconciliation or grieve the loss of significant relationships. If the marriage does fail, the church accepts the responsibility to minister God's grace and forgiveness and shows understanding and compassion as a healing community. ●

This statement was approved by the General Conference Department of Family Ministries World Advisory, March, 2006.

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Karen and Ron Flowers worked with an international taskforce to produce a curriculum framework on human sexuality: Human Sexuality: Sharing the Wonder of God's Good Gift with Your Children.

This framework serves as a basis for the development of family life education resources on sexuality within the Seventh-day Adventist church worldwide. As a parent, youth leader, pastor, or teacher, do you wish you knew how to talk about sexuality as easily as you speak of sports or music? Are you avoiding “the big talk,” hoping to educate your child about sexuality in better ways? Are you concerned that too much information about sex will encourage sexual activity? Do you wish you knew how to help your teen make wise choices about sex and avoid STI's and teen pregnancy? Does your child have the skills to resist harmful peer and media pressure? This resource puts a deliberate, comprehensive understanding of God's wonderful plan for sexuality into your hands. It provides important information for all who desire to live virtuously and makes a compelling case for Christian sexual values in a sexually permissive society. It organizes essential teachings about sexuality, from a biblical perspective, into age-appropriate messages that can be presented in teachable moments with children and youth whenever and wherever they occur.

BIBLE STUDY:

How to Study the Bible

by Kimberley Tagert-Paul

Leader's note: Read through the lesson and be prepared for any questions your group may have. What a great opportunity to get your group excited about studying God's Word for themselves!

ICE BREAKER: What's Your Study Style?

Since you've chosen to study—you'll learn best if you use your preferred learning style. There are three commonly accepted categories in which learners often fit.

1) Auditory Learners. If this is you, you probably learn best when things are discussed out loud. You might benefit from listening to audio tapes, or reading the material out loud. You really enjoy discussions with others.

2) You might be a Tactile or Kinesthetic Learner if you like the hands-on approach. You like to get physical with your learning. You do best when you can move about and handle things. So, you might want to move about as you read and study—have something to write with, hold a pen in your hand to underline important things.

3) Visual Learners like the written word. They also like pictures and handouts. If this is you, keep a special notebook for all the notes you like to write. Create pictures in your mind as you are reading the material to help you remember.

No one uses one of the styles exclusively. When you were a child you were a kinesthetic learner. All kids are. But as you mature sometimes that style changes, and it can change with the activity you are doing.

Other factors that affect learning styles include things like deductive/inductive reasoning. If you like to look at the big picture first, then get the details, you are a deductive reasoner. You like to know all the rules before you play a game. If you like to learn as you go and see examples of something before you get an overview, then you are an **inductive reasoner**.

Then there's something called personal .vs. interpersonal learning. Do you like to figure things out on your own? Do you like doing your homework by yourself instead of in a big group? Then you are probably a personal learner. If making decisions involves advice from family or friends, and you prefer working out problems in a group, then you are an interpersonal learner.

Why is it important to understand your learning style? Because you are about to embark on a great adventure: Studying God's Word. And if you know how you learn best then you will get the most out of the fascinating material you are about to open and learn from. You are about to find information that has the power to transform your life! So figure out what's the best way for you to study—and dig in. And hang on for a wonderful new time in your life!

DIG-IN

Is the Bible more than something to gather dust on a bookshelf? Do you think you would benefit if you spent more time reading your Bible? Why or why not? Reading may be hard for you—so why choose the Bible, which may seem hard to understand?

In the dark days before the Reformation, - people were not encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. They listened to what their local pastor said about it. Of course there weren't any printed versions available for home use—and there weren't public libraries. Many people couldn't read so they trusted someone else to do their reading for them. The name Dark Ages isn't far off. People were often in the dark about God.

Today, when others put all their trust in someone else to tell them what the Bible says, often the same results occur. Look at Waco, and the Jim Jones cult mass suicide.

(Leaders, you may have to present a little about each of these groups to the youth. The point here is to show that when you let others make your choices, sometimes the results can be disastrous!)

They depended on their leaders to interpret God's Word—and they failed their groups miserably by twisting God's Word into something that brought death instead of life.

HOT POTATO:

Errant Bibles

Did you know that several of the early editions of the Bible translated into English contained infamous mistakes. In 1560, The Geneva Bible was nicknamed the Breeches Bible because Gen. 3:7 read, “They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves breeches.” In 1632, the Bishops Bible, nicknamed the Wicked Bible, dropped the word “not” from an important verse. Look up Ex. 20:14, and you’ll see why it got its nickname. In 1702, the King James Bible contained a flaw in Psalms 119:161 it erroneously read: “Printers have persecuted me without cause.”

The Bible contains 66 books written by 44 authors, and it was written over a 1500-year period of time. So how can you know if the Bible is true to its word? What makes studying it worth your investment of time? Why study it for yourself—why not just let others tell you about it?

APPLY IT/BIBLE TEXT DISCOVERY:

Psalms 119:160. King David had a living relationship with God. He knew Scripture and had something to say about it. If David trusted God’s Word, do you think you can?

2 Timothy 3:16. Paul wrote Timothy. Remember Paul? He was the one persecuting the Christians until God hit him with His light. Look up what Paul says about Scripture. Do you think that he is correct?

Do you trust that all the scripture is “God-breathed?” How is that possible? Do you think it could have something to do with the work of the Holy Spirit?

Romans 15:4. Want to find hope and encouragement? Need guidance? Paul tells us a way of finding it in God’s Word.

John 5:39. Do you think that studying will help you understand God more? Check out what Jesus Himself said about the Scriptures.

Ps. 119:9-12. Back to King David—he was a pretty cool dude with a great relationship with God. He had sons and daughters that he wanted to tell about God. And he wanted them to learn—what did he say about living and learning? Read this section of the Bible and see. (*The only way to put something into your heart is to see it first. So, you have to read God’s Word to store it in your heart.*)

When you study, don’t forget to start with prayer. God will be more able to open your heart and hide His Word in it. And don’t forget to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us Himself to do this in John 14:26. Check it out. You may also want to have a highlighter and pen ready to make notes about what you are learning.

EXTRA GEM:

Ellen White loved to read God’s Word, too! And God showed her that in the Scriptures we would find God’s true character: Check out this quote

from one of her books, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pages 26 -27:

“The pure in heart discern the Creator in the works of His mighty hand, in the things of beauty that comprise the universe. In His written word they read in clearer lines the revelation of His mercy, His goodness, and His grace. The truths that are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. The beauty and preciousness of truth, which are undiscerned by the worldly-wise, are constantly unfolding to those who have a trusting childlike desire to know and to do the will of God.”

SHARING TIME:

Now that you’ve discovered some important truths about God’s Word, why keep it to yourself? Can you think of some ways that you might share Scripture with others this week? How about writing your favorite verses on a note card and memorizing them. As others see this they may ask you what you are doing. And what good news you will have to share with them! Can you think of other ways?

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to “*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth*” (NIV).

JOURNAL TIME THIS WEEK’S CHALLENGE:

Write out one thing you can do this week that will help you find time to study God’s Word more for yourself. ●

readIT: book info



HURT: *inside the world of today's teenagers.*

Chap Clark

Based on solid research and years of insightful observation,

Clark's *Hurt* serves to open the eyes of parents, youth workers, pastors, education, and youth-serving professionals to realities from which the church has too often chosen to look away. *Hurt* provides more insight into what young people feel and how to deal with their feelings than almost any other book that will come your way. Discover the world beneath the one adolescents expose to adults.

SEX HAS A PRICE TAG: *discussions about sexuality, spirituality, and self respect*

Pam Stenzel with Crystal Kirgiss



Today, people are faced with a raging plague of sex related problems.

Pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and rape statistics are at all-time highs. Even so, today's society encourages sexual activity, and young people must have a compelling reason to commit to sexual abstinence. *Sex Has a Price Tag*, tackles today's tough issues of sex with candor, insight, humor, and the challenge for young people to get the abstinence advantage. Pam has traveled worldwide, speaking in person to over 500,000 young people each year about issues of sexuality and the importance of abstinence—her videos are viewed by millions worldwide. Pam also holds seminars with parents and educators regarding issues of teen sex and how vital character building is in a child's upbringing.

More material is available online at <http://shoppamstenzel.com/p-27-sex-still-has-a-price-tag-dvd-public-school.aspx>.



ACCENT: resource for Adventist Youth Leaders

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WHO WAS JESUS?
HOW DID HE KNOW WHO HE WAS?



WHO AM I?
HOW CAN I KNOW WHO I AM?

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