

How to Talk with Students About Sex

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We recently survived being personally bombarded by radio, TV, and social media comments regarding the release of the movie *50 Shades of Grey*. This story of abusive sexuality has become our culture's current snapshot of romance. [The New York Times reported](#) that it is “the fastest-selling R-rated film in Fandango history.” Covering our eyes and pretending that it is not shaping our youth's understanding of sexuality is monumentally naive. We must walk alongside our students and children to help them wisely navigate difficult rapids that include both the hyper-sexual messages of culture and the curiosities of their own hearts.

That responsibility may include creating space to intentionally dialogue (in safe and trusted small groups) about the effect of the book/movie, or offering a parents' seminar on ways to facilitate discussion with their kids on sexuality. Either way, we have to offer more than virginity pledges and purity rings in our youth ministries. We need more than a pretty silver bandaid; we need a story.

Sacred Territory

Any time we preach, teach, or simply engage the topic of sexuality in our youth ministries, we enter sacred territory. This is not only a conversation about something humans do, it is a conversation about the very image of God manifest in each of us, whether we are male or female ([Gen.1:27](#)). This is our story.

All too often in teaching young people, sexuality is reduced—by both the church and culture alike—to mere behavior. When we do this, we rob the world of a glimpse of the beauty and mystery of God's design. The “no sex

before marriage” pledges and purity ring programs fall short when they fail to paint a picture of the “why” of Christian sexuality, or of sexual obedience, as [Cameron Cole calls it in this article](#) on the shortcoming of virginity pledges.

More than Moral Platitudes

When I say “fail to paint a picture,” I mean that there is more to the answer of “why” than “the Bible tells me so.” That is absolutely a good enough reason, but the conversation must go deeper than moral directives and enter into what Scripture teaches about human sexuality in light of the gospel. Our gracious God is the incarnate Word who embodies truth. He invites us into intimate relationship with himself—the place where we are fully and ultimately seen, known, and loved. He has given us in Scripture an entire story of an unfolding kingdom, which includes the redemption of our sexuality.

We often enter onto a battlefield of confusion, shame, regret, and mixed messages when we address sexuality with our students. Sexuality is a major element of how we relate to others and ourselves (as female and male), and it is connected to some of our deepest desires and some of our deepest hurts. Like every other part of us, it is tainted by sin, tainted by our demand to do things our own way in our own time ([Rom. 3:9-18](#)).

We must remember that sex is also connected to our dignity, to the glorious reflection of God, which runs to the core of every person. It points to the bigger picture of what we have been made for—for knowing and being known, for loving and being loved, for sacrifice, for delight, and ultimately, for worship. Does your theology of sexuality include the element of worship? It is another part of God’s creation designed to give him glory; therefore, it is inherently connected with worship.

Western culture has made an idol of sex. In modern society, sex represents love. It represents ultimate fulfillment. How do we know a couple has “fallen

in love” in a romantic comedy? When they finally have sex, of course. According to modern secular culture, that is the pinnacle of love. Sadly, sexuality is stripped of its deeper meaning and potential to point to the One who fulfills all desire, the One who has given it to us to reflect the deepest intimacy we can know in him.

No Place for Silence

[Articles such as this one](#), which enumerates the reasons the author regrets having abstained from sex until marriage, paint a sad picture of sexuality. All too often, the church is afraid or ignorant of the ways to go about addressing sexuality, and so the message ranges from “Sex is bad,” to “Sex will be great if you wait,” or “Sex is only for married people to discuss.”

Instead, we must hold up a vision of Christian sexuality that starts and ends with Jesus. The cross is our only hope for redemptive human relationships that honor one another’s sexuality; it is the place where our shame is removed, where we are forgiven, and where we are restored. Our sexuality is a part of a far larger story, a story that gives us a reference point for teaching, relating, and moving continually toward real love.

Here are a few recommended resources that may help us navigate this dangerous but vital discussion:

- [*Mom, Sex Is No Big Deal! Becoming Your Daughter’s Ally in Developing a Healthy Sexual Identity*](#) by Sharon Hersh
- [*Intimate Allies: Rediscovering God’s Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life*](#) by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman
- [“Practical Considerations for Teaching Students About Sex,”](#) a shorter article by Liz Edrington

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