

High School Blueprints

Part 1



Blueprint Big Idea: Your high school son or daughter is in an ongoing search for personal identity where they ask, “Why am I here, am I ok and what is my purpose?” It is a complex journey, but one you can enjoy as you lead them, allowing them to make choices to grow and mature in all five aspects (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual). One key foundation to their identity search is understanding why God made them male or female, and how to integrate their sexual nature in all parts of their life. Your guidance in this journey is so important and so needed! Your willingness to dialogue with your son or daughter as they process life lessons about relationships, theology, biology, neurology and more will make the experience life changing. The theology of life, love, family, sexuality, unity, wholeness, holiness and much more were previously addressed in great detail in the previous grades. If you are beginning your Blueprint reading at this level, we recommend you review the previous grades in addition to high school when you have time. High school students (9-12 th grade) should learn the foundational truths that follow and the 10 blueprints below will help you teach them and guide them. Have fun!

Your Teen's Relationships: Teens tend to form friendships from the various groups they are involved with, such as clubs, sports and life-long friends they have at school and church. This is a beneficial time for them to be friends with a lot of people, while maintaining their closest friendships with a handful of people from freshman year to graduation. Young ladies tend to adjust their friend groups more than the guys, but their closest friends will likely be cemented by sophomore or early junior year. The challenge of these teen years is due in part, to their physical and emotional development. Teens are also impacted by peer pressure and the need to be liked and accepted by everyone, including their teachers. It will help your teen immensely for you to be a sounding board when needed, making sure they get good nutrition, sleep and not too much social media! Be prepared to support their healthy friendships by opening your home to their friends, showing up at their important events and praying for them without ceasing!

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Blueprint Truth #1

YOU ARE DESIGNED ON PURPOSE WITH A DIVINE PURPOSE!

Biblical Background

Most teens want a life story full of adventure and purpose and a love story that will be romantic and authentically amazing. The good news is, it is possible for them to have great stories with God's leading and in God's timing. God, the King of the Universe, has already started an amazing story (history) creating mankind for relationship with Himself. Genesis 1:26a says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." He created men and women to uniquely reveal His nature, on purpose! Genesis 1:27 says, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." Then Genesis 1:28a says, "And God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" In other words, "be" what I have created you to be as a man and as a woman and the result will be fruitful, life-giving stories! Your teen needs to learn why God designed mankind with a male and female nature, and what purpose He has for men and women to influence the expansion of His Kingdom plan. Additionally, they should learn what it means to live with sexual integrity, in other words to live in agreement with their male and female design.

God has designed men and women to be different, but this doesn't mean one is better than the other. While men and women can "do" a lot of the same things, they cannot "be" the same in everything. Even when doing the same task, you will find men and women approach the job differently. I often teach male and female differences and describe men and women symbolically through Adam and Eve. The sample list below is just a foundation and by no means a complete list. Let's take a look at God's royal design for men and women as follows:

Adam

Prince - Royalty, possessing admirable qualities, son of the King of the Universe.

Warrior - A soldier in a cause greater than himself.

Strong - Powerful, competent.

Handsome - Attractive in behavior and demeanor.

Masculine - Overall qualities of a man lived out in agreement with his male design.

Regent - Ruling on behalf of a sovereign who is not present.

Eve

Princess - Royalty, possessing admirable qualities as a daughter of the King of the Universe.

Noble - Excellent, honorable, influential.

Strong - Powerful, competent.

Beautiful - Attractive in behavior and demeanor.

Feminine - Overall qualities of a woman lived out in agreement with her female design.

Regent - Ruling on behalf of a sovereign who is not present.

The above terms are general in nature and I intentionally use prince and princess language

to remind us of our spiritual position before the King of the Universe. Royalty means being a member of God's family, and it is a spiritual reality for those who have chosen to follow Christ. Galatians 4:7 says, "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." Many of the terms for Adam and Eve are interchangeable. For instance, a man should also be noble, and a woman can be a warrior. Spiritually speaking, both are necessary to fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12). Joan of Arc is a great example of a "princess warrior" who was able to influence her countrymen. Many masculine leaders have also shown compassion and sensitivity. King David was a mighty man of war, but he was also very musical and poetic. The point is this: we want to celebrate and notice the differences in our design, but not over generalize common traits because each young man and woman are so unique. Sexual integrity means living in agreement with your design, so knowing the distinctions validates our identity.

God has designed each of us with a sexual nature (male or female), and we also have unique personalities, talents and gifts. It is this whole package woven together and integrated, that creates your son or daughter's unique personality and their potential! They can achieve all that God has for them because He designed them for a purpose, and their gifts and talents often reveal early on what that might be. Their sexual nature is not limiting to them, but enhancing them with internal power. Sexual integrity is living in agreement with our design rather than pretending it doesn't affect us. Once you realize this, the sky's the limit on your possibilities! To bring home this point, you can have your son or daughter write a list of their gifts and talents and a list of goals to help them create a personal roadmap for success in their story. Their sex is not a hindrance, but a help when they integrate it throughout their five aspects and when utilizing their gifts and talents! We will discuss this further in additional blueprints.

Your teen should also learn at this age that a healthy culture regulates and respects appropriate sexual behaviors and attitudes. What happens to a culture that does not "regulate" sexuality or decide that the biblical teaching on sexuality is outdated, or doesn't fit their view of sex? Historically, those cultures declined and eventually fell. On the other hand, those cultures with healthy boundaries and biblical standards flourished and thrived. It is not outdated, old fashioned or even unrealistic to want our social mores to match a biblical standard. It is the right goal and should be something we all strive to support.

Blueprint Truth #2

MALE AND FEMALE BY DESIGN

Biblical Background

In Genesis 1:27, it says, "In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." God intentionally designed mankind with two distinct natures - male and female - to reflect Him and to show different aspects of His nature. What an amazing idea! Based on what we see in scripture, God's view of men and women is they are equal in value, but distinctly different. They may be able to accomplish the same tasks, but will likely manage the process differently. This is a good thing. God certainly values unique capabilities in people who function together in power. God's intentional design of men and women is

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a powerful plan for completion, unity and relationship. He brings the woman and man together in Genesis 2:24 for the first marriage, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." In God's economy one plus one makes one! Then, the amazing life story continues when the result of one man and one woman becoming "one" is new life! Let's look a little more closely at this miracle called life.

Your Son or Daughter's Story Began at Conception!

The miracle of life begins when the egg and sperm unite in the fallopian tube, to form a single cell called a zygote. This new life contains 46 chromosomes, 23 from each parent. Once this genetic fusion, or conception, takes place, we have a new cell smaller than a grain of salt, containing all the genetic information needed to design a new immortal soul! The height, skin color, eye color, gender (sex) and more are in this blueprint, uniquely designed to create each of us. There is more information in this blueprint than it takes to run a city! Your teens' genetic history came from you, your parents, grandparents and other relatives in your family tree which show how generations of people make up a family. Today is a great day to remind your teen to be grateful for their "story" because regardless of the circumstances, they are alive and a miracle! There are no accidents in God's handiwork! Your teen needs to know that God gave us life and a roadmap for success when we see how "fearfully and wonderfully we are made" (Psalm 139:14). As part of the wonder, they can learn that the male and female brains develop differently in the womb, due in part to various hormones. This process is complex, and as a result, most male and female brains have some differences that lead to certain behaviors. These differences, are part of the thread of intention in our design, and help us understand why we behave differently as men and women.

In their book, *Men Are Like Waffles and Women Are Like Spaghetti*, Bill and Pam Farrel explain in a humorous way how our brains work. Men process life like waffles, where they think and act by moving from box to box. Women process life like spaghetti, where every issue is connected just like a plate of noodles. This fun reality can be seen in your own life and is based on real research!

Blueprint Truth #3 YOUNG MEN CAN REFLECT GOD

Biblical Background

Scripture shows us in Genesis when God finished creating man, He was very pleased! Genesis 1:31a, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." God made man in His image, and this means there are attributes and design features that reflect God Himself when a man, acts like a man. It is never too early to begin to teach your son to "man up!" Proverbs 20:11 says, "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself, if his conduct is pure and right." Scripture tells all young men how to be strong and godly and prescribes a spiritual boot camp in I Timothy chapters 4 & 5.

- I Timothy 4:6: "Be constantly nourished on the Word."

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- I Timothy 4:7: "Have nothing to do with worldly fables fit for old women, but instead, discipline yourself with the purpose of godliness."
- I Timothy 4:12: "In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, be an example."
- I Timothy 5:2: "Treat young women as sisters (in the Lord) in all purity."

If You Treat A Man With Respect, He Will Be More Successful!

Every male person on the planet has been designed to reflect God Himself. Every male, young or old is esteemed by God, respected by God and highly valued by God! This reality might be news to some, since there are those in our culture who treat men with disrespect, or devalue men. The way some behave, they act as if men aren't even necessary. If you disagree with this last statement, just turn on the TV and see how the majority of men are depicted in sitcoms or ads. Your son and daughter are seeing and hearing these demeaning messages, and this will have a negative impact on your daughter's view of men and your son's view of himself. While it may be true there are some men living beneath their dignity (i.e. treating family poorly, anger issues, not providing for or protecting their loved ones and so on), most men strive to be their best and men are key to the success of every culture. If we begin to treat all men, young and old with more respect, we will see men acting more like the strong and loving warriors God intended for them to be! Respect is "man fuel" thus a man at any age can sense when he is respected. Appropriate respect creates a safe platform for him to attempt to be his best, knowing he can fail and try again. This is why respect is so important to a young man. He should not be talked down to or belittled in front of anyone, and whenever possible he should be trained and disciplined by a man. When our oldest son was 13, I knew it was time for dad to be the key voice in his life and I needed to be the cheerleader. I would still direct and teach, but instructions and training are different coming from a mother. For that matter, serious discipline should come from a male teacher or coach if possible as well. When a young man hears a female voice (he doesn't hear it as well as the male voice), he often focuses on the female emotion, as well as the information, making the message less clear. This is not to say he can't hear and respect this input because he should. However, when a young man hears the voice of a man giving him direct "orders" and input, it is more of a direct bullseye on his behavior. Somehow, the male voice and style are more effective in disciplining young men and I do believe it is the job of a man to train a man.

One of the ways a father can train a son is to expect him to respect and honor others. Here are a few basic ways young men can show respect:

1. Have a firm handshake even if he is shaking a woman's hand.
2. Make eye contact with all adults.
3. If your son wants to spend time with someone's daughter, he should know young women deserve to be treated as ladies, protected and honored. If a young woman does not require this, it may be because she doesn't think she deserves it. A real man knows she does!
4. If there is a special event, your son should call the father and ask permission to take his

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daughter, even though they are just friends. In our home, this was required. If a young man doesn't have the courage, he doesn't get the privilege of spending time with our precious daughters.

5. Your son should postpone a serious relationship until he is whole, mature and integrated in all five of his aspects: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual. Living with sexual integrity will give him success in all his relationships and when he is mature, then he is a man. The adult brain doesn't fully complete till around 25 so encouraging him to wait for a serious relationship until his late teens, or early 20's is wisdom.

Scripture describes two kinds of men:

Carnal: Being governed by the flesh, instead of the Spirit of God. The flesh is your body and your soul (mind, will and emotions). Your flesh is not innately evil, but very prone to sin. It is so easy at times to let our minds and bodies tell us what to do!

Spiritual: Being governed by God's Spirit, through your spirit. The key is in Galatians 5:16 which says, "Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." A man becomes a prince when he chooses to let his spirit lead his body and soul.

The Power of the Spoken Word

In the beginning, God spoke all things into existence. This power to speak and impact those around us is part of our design whether we are male or female. When a young woman or man uses their speech to bless, encourage and bring truth to others, they are noble. Friends will seek their counsel, adults will trust them, and ultimately they will be more successful in walking out their sexuality (meaning their male or female nature). The male voice has particular power in helping cement sexual identity. Since identity is an ongoing job for the teen, it is important that fathers (and mothers) speak truth to their sons and daughters. Tell them you love them. Tell them you are proud of them. Many men grow up without these key phrases planted in their minds and hearts, cemented by the key male voice, their dad. These men can accomplish all important endeavors in life, and yet if they don't have the question answered: "Am I ok and does my father love me?" They will have a void in their life. Don't let that be your son!

Blueprint Truth #4 YOUNG WOMEN CAN REFLECT GOD

Biblical Background

In Genesis 2:18, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper suitable for him." Since the beginning, a woman's influence and gifting has been an integral part of God's plan for His Kingdom. God views women as equally valuable to men and uniquely gifted in such a way, their usefulness is unmatched! God calls the woman "helper" and she is the compatible opposite to Adam. As helper, she is not less worthy than the man. In fact,

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the word helper in Genesis 2:18 (in Hebrew "ezer") is the same word God uses for Himself! Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Adam later names Eve woman (Genesis 2:23, "She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.") Finally, Adam calls her life-bearer (Genesis 3:20, "Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living."). Woman, helper, life-bearer are important foundational descriptions for all women and areas of important exploration to teach your daughter.

God adores His daughters and He created them to be whole, cherished and loved. Sadly, our culture often portrays women as sexual objects to be used. This couldn't be further from the truth! God's greatest treasure is people, and you can be sure He will protect His girls! God has designed women in such a unique way, they are vulnerable due to their complex design. Similar to artwork that takes years to create and deserves proper care and display; or computer technology that is incredibly complex; the reality is that women need to be treated with care. However, this vulnerability does not mean weakness. A woman can be strong and vibrant, but she is complicated and that fact should be recognized and respected by everyone, including your daughter! No matter what age a woman is, there is intrinsic beauty in being female. God intentionally created women compatible yet different than men. The female body or "frame" is artwork on display and this living canvas, designed by God, needs to be treated as the valuable work of art it really is! Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." This means God designed all human beings uniquely for a purpose. The female frame has power that can be used for God's purposes or the enemy's, and what makes the difference is how each young lady chooses to present herself. To be her best, she should choose to display her beauty with creativity and modesty.

So... What is Modesty?

Many people make the mistake of thinking modesty is all about clothes. It's not. Modesty, when practiced, will impact your clothing choices because modesty is a form of humility. Modesty means not thinking or acting in a way that says we are better than someone else or need attention. It also means not revealing too much about who we are. God made us for relationships, and we all want to be known deeply. Sadly, too often people in our culture rush to reveal parts of themselves: their bodies or telling too much of their personal story, because they want someone's attention or they want someone to draw closer to them. We all need people to "know" us. In fact, intimacy (being known deeply) is the greatest human need we have! This desire is good, this method is not. Often the results of a young woman dressing inappropriately are many people will not want to know who she really is because they create an opinion of her based on her dress. Similarly, if someone brags all the time, trying to get people to think they are special, they actually sabotage their chances of having real friends because bragging pushes people away by virtue of natural human responses. On the other hand, humility in dress and speech usually encourage people to want to know the "real" you because they are not distracted by something else. This prescription leads people to trust you and build a real friendship. This is key information for your wonderful daughter who wants to be liked by her peers and accepted by those in authority.

Modesty is not just for women. I Peter 5:5 says, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." How we dress and how we act tells people what we believe about ourselves. What does your daughter believe?

The Power of Body Language

In the beginning God created, and did so by speaking everything into existence. Genesis 1:3 says, "Then God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light." God, who spoke all things into being, gave us the ability to "speak" with our mouths and indeed our whole bodies. In Genesis 1:28, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over creation, which gave them power and authority. Power comes in many forms, and the power of body language cannot be understated. We are created to "be" a picture of truth: reflecting our Creator. So what we say, what we wear, how we act and how we treat people, communicates something. Are we speaking truth or lies with our bodies? We are a body, we do just not have a body. We are integrated people, not dualistic. Therefore, what we say on the outside should match what we believe on the inside. Too often, our body (the first billboard of us) tells people the wrong message, or even a lie. I remember once when my husband and I were driving to church with all the kids and we saw a woman crossing the road wearing an outfit that "said" she was a bimbo, but the truth about her is that she is made in the image of God to be a royal princess! I declared to my husband, "She is lying with her body!" Immediately, my husband grabbed my arm and said, "You are not getting out of the car!" Ha Ha, He knew I wanted to free her to "be" who God made her and thankfully he kept me from making a scene in the intersection! Sometimes our precious daughters make this mistake, and it is our adult duty to stop them. Not only do the clothes we wear on the outside send a message, they actually affect us on the inside. A man in a uniform somehow feels and acts more dignified. A woman in a beautiful dress acts more ladylike and somehow feels noble. Psalm 45:13 says, "The King's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is interwoven with gold." Do you see the connection? If your daughter wears clothes beneath her dignity, she will feel she is worth less than she is and this will impact her choices.

How Women Create, Communicate, Cooperate

Young women can do just about anything! Many have gifts and talents like drama, singing, organizing, cooking, sports, leadership, Bible study, teaching, serving, etc. For example: A young woman creates an environment at school that is fun by being funny, dressing up for spirit week or decorating her locker. She communicates love and truth with her speech, notes to friends or leading Bible study. She cooperates by working with teachers, coaches and classmates listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to do something for a friend or serve the homeless alongside friends. When you tell your daughter how special and influential women are in every-day life, you empower her to come alive in who she is. Your daughter should be reminded that the more she functions in all five aspects and utilizes her unique gifts, the more power she has to impact her world. The goal is to teach her to integrate her female design with the personality and gifts unique to her. If a woman doesn't live in agreement with her complete picture as a woman, she misses a key part of her identity. We cannot raise daughters or sons to be gender neutral, or they will not fully come alive to the power they have as people, made in the image of God. Her sexuality, or feminine nature is not a casual bystander in her design that she can live without. It is a key

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blueprint feature she must learn to integrate throughout all of her aspects in order to really become who God designed her to be!

Blueprint Truth #5 **FERTILITY: A SACRED GIFT**

Biblical Background

Genesis 2:24, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Part of the blueprint for living with sexual integrity, is teaching our sons and daughters to wait to become "one" physically until after they are married. Why? In part because of the amazing power contained in their physical body. They have a unique gift of fertility, with power to procreate another human being of equal value with God's help! While it makes perfect sense to postpone childbearing until marriage, there is something we can teach our teens to practice right now. We can help them prepare for their future, by helping them frame their world "view" about children. How we see children is important to our theology of life. Psalm 127:3 says, "Behold children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward." Psalm 127:4-5 says, "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them." Let's take a moment to look at the amazing gift of fertility and its power, in the intentional thread of our male and female design.

The ability to bring a child into the world through pro-creation, is the most amazing power contained in your human design. Most likely, your son or daughter and their future spouse will create, with God's help, a "snapshot" of each of them, combined! The two become one and that "little one" will have a name. This powerful union of two family's genetic histories, combined to create one unique, unrepeatabe, eternal soul is the biggest impact we will make in our whole life. Nothing you do here on earth will last for eternity except that which is eternal - life and love.

To bring this point home for your son or daughter, remind them that our choices are like a pebble in a pond... impacting you first, then those around you. The choice to take the power of your life-giving fertility and share it with someone else results in the most powerful human union on the planet. If two become "one flesh" as the Bible calls it, (sexual intercourse) they literally fuse their genetic information. This is not just a casual physical act; it is a sacred act that bonds the two people. But even more powerful, it is a union that potentially creates another life! When this happens, then the ripple effect continues to combine two families, two histories, two lives and no other union can cause this kind of outcome. The world tells you that the sexual union is just an 'act'. They are wrong. It is the most power you will ever exchange with another human being and therefore it should be seen as the most powerful gift you can give another human being, because it is a gift of yourself, and your entire life story!

Sexual Integrity means living in agreement with your design and that includes your fertility. This complex system in your body gives you the ability to pro-create another human being of equal value. Fertility is also an integrated system in both males and females that affects

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many of our daily experiences. For instance:

A woman will be affected by her hormones daily and at times during her cycle, she will feel it is difficult to take a test. She may feel fuzzy in her mind. This isn't because she didn't study, but because her complex system goes through many hormonal changes to keep her functioning, and one day allow her to be a mother. This "Tree of Life", as microbiologists call it, is so complex it is good for women to learn about it in detail. Our fertility affects our energy level, our learning ability, our physical well-being, our moods, our temperature, our brain function and much more. It is so important to understand this and we encourage all teens, in particular women, to learn about their fertility.

Young women who learn in detail how their fertility functions, are not only better prepared for life and feel more confident and competent, but research shows there is a decrease in sexual activity for those who are already engaging in physical sexual activity. In other words, learning how you are designed elevates your value of yourself and your choices. I took a fertility class when I was doing research for our Sexual Integrity Program that we produced for pregnancy resource centers nationwide, and was amazed at what I didn't know! I had five kids by this time and was disappointed I hadn't learned about my complex fertility sooner. I think this is one area in the church we can improve for the next generation of women.

Fertility for a man is not as complex, but still affects his behavior. When a man knows he is producing life-giving seed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, it validates the reality of the "drive" he has and the ensuing tension. My encouragement is for your son to use the energy and drive he has, to conquer and mature in the five aspects of his life! He can daily take his sexual energy and turn it in to social energy by placing his focus on his school work, sports, spiritual life and relationships. We have seen in previous lessons that sexuality when regulated, or strategically spent, advances cultures. Sexual energy is not for ourselves, but all sexual energy and activity should be a gift to another. Once a man realizes he is life-giving 24/7, 365 days a year and the energy does not need to be spent on self or pleasure, he is no longer at the mercy of the lie that says sexual pleasure is "the point" of sexual power. He can use his sexual powers and the energy contained therein and impact all five aspects of his life in a godly way, all the while becoming more mature as a man.

Teen's Choices Will Impact Generations

Your son or daughter may think bad things won't happen to them, or that they can beat the odds. This is classic adolescent thinking. Research shows us that even though a teen might make poor choices regarding their own story, they will make better choices for their future offspring when they actually contemplate that reality. In other words, we can tap in to the maternal and paternal instincts now to encourage better decision making for both your teen and your future grandchild.

The choices your teen makes regarding their physical sexuality, in particular, who they choose to become "one" with will impact their child's story. Most adults say they would not intentionally put their son or daughter at risk, but intentionally choosing to have a child

outside of marriage (over one-third of all babies born now are living in single parent homes), actually puts a child at risk for some of the most difficult social challenges a person can face. Why is this data important to know in High School? There is power contained in our fertility system to procreate. Remember, our physical sexuality is not just about potential pleasure; it is about a potential person!

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High School Blueprints

Part 2



Blueprint Truth #6

MARRIAGE, A DIVINE IDEA

Biblical Background

Weddings are great cause for celebration! Song of Solomon 3:11b says, "On the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart." Marriage is supposed to be held in high regard and the rights and privileges of marriage protected for the sake of the next generation. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Marriage, the union of a man and a woman is more than just two people becoming one. It is a glimpse of a divine mystery. Ephesians 5:31-32, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the Church."

Marriage then, is a sacred picture of Christ and the church. In Mark 12:25, it says, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." So, this institution we are told to honor, will go away when we die. Why? The purpose of the "glimpse" will be gone because we will be in the presence of the Lord Himself! The real wedding and the complete "picture" has come! Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb (Christ) has come and His bride (the church) has made herself ready." In God's presence, we will have love, true unity, total oneness, immense joy and completion! Isn't that what we long for in marriage? Our individual marriage stories are meant to be one-act- plays, highlighting the bigger story... the church together with Christ forever! Our marriages are pictures on display of what our eternal union with God will be like, and this is why marriage between one man and one woman is sacred, never to be altered regardless of what any man or law says.

The Meaning of Marriage

Marriage is far more than two adults who have feelings for each other. It is the absolute biggest promise on the planet! Many people in our culture see weddings as an opportunity for a big party and their day to be the center of attention. God is the ultimate party giver (just look at all the references to feasts, celebrations, etc. in scripture), but a wedding ceremony

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and the celebration afterwards is far more than just a party and is much more than just two people. It is actually supposed to be about Him! Additionally, it involves two families and their histories coming together. Marriage is God's way of bringing male and female together with His blessing, grace and power. What a great idea He had. I used to have my own party planning business so I planned many weddings, including one for 1,000 people and my own for 600. I love weddings, in part, because I love the institution of marriage. I am a little saddened though by the over commercialization of weddings. Too many young couples are missing the point of the wedding ceremony and celebration. Helping teens understand the purpose of marriage and the most important elements in a wedding, will help them understand how to plan for their own Christ- centered wedding.

The Purpose

Weddings, what fun! All of the planning, finding dresses, preparing food, invitations, photographer, showers, gifts, friends and much more goes on for months! This is the biggest event in anyone's life and most likely it is the greatest celebration they will ever have with all of the people they know and love! Planning a wedding is usually the most time someone will spend on an event, the most attention to detail, the most money spent, and I could go on! Why do we do this for a wedding? Traditionally, cultures have seen the importance of celebrating the union of a man and a woman and instinctively knew we want each couple to start out strong to help hold up society. Why is it that we don't go to this much trouble when a couple moves in together? Somehow, even in a secular society, we know living together is the counterfeit. It's not the real deal. On the other hand, a wedding is more than two people loving each other, a certificate, pretty dresses and a desire for a party. The purpose of the big wedding day is the vow. Remember, God spoke all of creation in to existence. When we speak the words, "I do," it is more than the phrase; it is a commitment that alters lives for a life-time. This sacred vow is intended to bind and protect the two individuals and their potential legacy... children. We declare before God, family and friends our commitment to be like Christ to each other. The happy couple makes a promise, indeed a covenant.

Marriage: A Covenant Promise

The term "covenant" describes the marriage relationship throughout the Bible, a concept foreign to modern times. The closest western culture comes to the idea of covenant is the term contract, which is a temporary agreement between two or more parties to give something in exchange for receiving something. Contracts are part of everyday life. Contracts can be a good thing in life, but they are limited because they can be changed, ignored or broken. The idea of covenant is very different. A covenant is two parties mutually entering into an unconditional, life-long promise that cannot be broken. Regardless if one of the two parties neglect to fulfill their part of the agreement, the covenant is still binding. In the Old Testament, several covenants are recorded between God and mankind and always present when a covenant was made were witnesses and a visible seal that would remind the parties of the covenant. A covenant commitment for marriage has the best interest of the other person in mind, regardless of their actions, their weaknesses and their frailties. It does not expect perfection out of the other partner. It does, however, anticipate perseverance.

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The Power

Marriage has more benefits than most people realize, in fact so many I can't list them all. I have listed a few for you here:

1. Married couples have improved relationships with their kids.
2. Married couples have more wealth, live longer and have better overall health.
3. Children who live with both married parents enjoy better physical health.
4. Married couples have reduced rates of alcohol and substance abuse.
5. Children of married couples have less mental illness, less delinquency, less trouble in school overall, better grades.
6. Women who are married experience less domestic violence than women living with a boyfriend.

If you have experienced divorce, I am deeply sorry for you and your family. Nobody gets married planning to divorce. I know this information is challenging because you don't want any adverse impact on your kids, the divorce was awful enough! God loves you and your kids and He will make a way to decrease any potential negative outcomes when you seek His help. This information is good for you to share with your teens so they can see how God has already protected them, and how important their future marriages are to their own future children.

Blueprint Truth #7 MARRIAGE A DIVINE IDEA CONTINUED...

Sacred Union

In a wedding ceremony, once the couple says "I do" with their spoken word in the sacred vow, then, they later say "I do" with their bodies. When this sacred union of two people takes place in the flesh, it is called consummation, which means: to complete or perfect something. The Sacred Union Completes the Sacred Vow. The Bride and the Groom together "complete" or "perfect" the picture God has in mind for their marriage. There are no perfect people, but there is a perfect God who has a blueprint for your son or daughter to have true, lasting love! If we become "one" with someone physically before our vow is spoken in a wedding ceremony, we are not perfecting or completing anything. As a result, we don't feel whole in the relationship. Something always feels a bit off. The reason for feeling off is because we took things out of order. You might truly love the person, but God has ordained an order for all things in His creation, including our love lives. Why? God designed your son or daughter for true love and wholeness. Additionally, their sexuality is not just about them, the power contained in their design is also about future generations, and God wants those stories protected as well. The information that follows shows your teen the power in the "one flesh union" and gives them a roadmap to success, whether they have made mistakes or not. It's never too late to seek God's help or forgiveness because

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He loves us all unconditionally!

Counterfeits

Your teen needs to understand the power in the one flesh union through looking at the conditioning process that may take place prior to that union. Physical sexual expression starts in the brain so the conditioning, or training of our brain will affect our relationships for a life-time. What we experience in physical behavior or what we consume in sexual images creates neurological pathways in our brain. There are thousands of tragic stories of those who didn't realize the power of this bonding process and thought it was just "normal" to have numerous physical sexual relationships prior to marriage, or exposure to unhealthy graphic images or pornography. Many of these stories reveal well intended people who marry their true love, after previously conditioning their brain on counterfeits. They love their spouse, but they cannot have a normal and healthy physical sexual relationship because they trained their bodies prematurely to respond to the wrong things, like pornography and romantic fantasies. When someone has seen too many sexual images, or has been physically sexually active and knows they need to start over, it's never too late to do that! The Bible tells us in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." God's will for you and your teen is that your life be full of good, acceptable and even perfect outcomes (perfect can mean whole). God can make us all clean again, through the work of Christ. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." He does not want any of His children stuck in sin, past memories or pain. I'm so grateful for this truth!

Cohabitation has become a popular substitute for marriage making it a very dangerous counterfeit. It seems more couples are comfortable buying a house together than saying "I do." Sadly, the research is very clear that couples who live together sabotage their future marriage (50-100% greater chance of divorce). There is overwhelming data that shows cohabitation is not the same as marriage and yet I have met so many young Christians who don't seem to think living with someone is harmful or wrong. Anything outside of God's plan for your relationships is wrong and the Bible calls it sin. Sin is an archery term for missing the mark or the bullseye, and regardless of how close or far, if you don't hit the bullseye, you sin. Missing the mark in relationships means settling, and God did not create us to settle but to succeed! Would you choose missing the mark for a special event dinner (sort of tasty), your clothes (don't fit right), your child's teacher (really can't teach), your airplane (sort of safe)? NO! Then why do so many settle for less than ideal when it comes to their love life?

Cohabiters in the United States resemble singles more closely than married people. They have lower incomes and less education. On average, they report relationships of lower quality than do married couples, with cohabiters reporting more conflict, more violence, and lower levels of satisfaction and commitment. Currently, 60% of marriages that take place are people who have lived together first. It is good news they eventually chose marriage, but it will be challenging for these couples unless they deal with some of the patterns formed during cohabitation. To be fair, I understand why so many people choose

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cohabitation, because they think test driving the relationship will prevent divorce. Their parents divorced and they actually want a healthy marriage that lasts. It's sad that these smart, talented, good people don't know the truth about cohabitation.

So why doesn't living together work? The truth is that commitment is what makes relationships work. If you don't have 100% commitment from each person, you don't have the security and trust you need to build a strong foundation. Marriage, unlike any other promise is meant to be a covenant that will last a life-time, through pain, joy, heartache and success. Cohabitation is a relationship with an exit sign. It isn't 100% and both people know it.

Premature bonding is probably the most common counterfeit to God's plan for living with sexual integrity. When someone experiences the one flesh union (sexual intercourse) prior to marriage, they have chosen to take things out of order. As a result, they put themselves at risk in all five aspects (physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual). The following is a short list of negative outcomes, but you will get the idea of the serious nature of this list, and the potential ripple effect it will have on your teen:

Sexually transmitted diseases and infections; sin affects your view of God and yourself; shame and guilt; memories that are hard to erase; bonding with the wrong person; reputation is affected; school work suffers; broken relationship with parents or friends; being treated differently; loss of dreams; potential harm through date rape; potential pregnancy; potential depression; feel used; bad habits start to form; other sin is easier.

This is definitely missing the mark on relationships! Now you know why God lays out a plan, He wants us successful in our search for love. Encourage your son or daughter to begin planning today for a great story, and to not settle for a counterfeit! Remember, if anyone has sinned in any way, God is ready to forgive and restore us to wholeness so I invite you to keep that language at the forefront with your teen. Often our teens fall into a trap of sin but don't feel they can tell us for fear of our reaction. I have heard this from my own grown children, and part of their concern in not wanting to share was the potential of disappointing the parent they love. Let your teen know you love them no matter what and really want them to come to you if they have fallen into any trap of sin. Remind them you have the same sin potential and it is only through choices and God's grace we don't fall into the same traps!

Blueprint Truth #8

A TRAGIC MOMENT IN A GREAT STORY

Biblical Background

There is an enemy of God and his name is Satan. Satan is evil, he does exist, he hates you and he wants to ruin your son or daughter's story! He has been ruining stories since the beginning of time. He was able to convince Adam and Eve that he had something better for them. Remember, they had the perfect parent, but they chose to listen to the liar. Adam and Eve had what we all have been given: the gift of free will. This means you get to decide what you are going to do with your time, your body, your worship, your taste buds, your

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mind, your passion, your devotion and so on. This amazing gift from God is one of the ways you reveal how you are made in His image. But, if this gift is not stewarded carefully and thoughtfully, this gift of free will can be dangerous. It cost Adam and Eve everything. Let's look at some of the ways Adam and Eve functioned in their male and female natures in a negative way using their free will, and we begin to see the cost of their choices as they said "no" to God and "yes" to sin. I recommend you read Genesis chapters 1-3 for this.

Adam and Eve ate of the fruit they were told to avoid in Genesis 3:6. Adam knew it was wrong because God, his Heavenly Father had instructed him in Genesis 2:16-17 to eat of any tree but one, and he disobeyed God when he allowed himself to be talked in to sin. Genesis 3:17 God says to Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you saying, 'You shall not eat from it.'" Wow, what power the female voice has! Eve was deceived, which means she believed that which was bad, was actually good for her. Adam was passive. He should have stopped Eve and killed the serpent! Eve was not content. She had the whole garden, perfect fellowship with God, a flawless husband, animals to serve her, no family of origin issues, (you get the idea) and yet she wanted the ONE, forbidden thing in her whole story, which she eventually located and thought about! We all need to combat these traits of passivity and discontentment. One way I encourage young men is to act like real men and commit to action, and I encourage young women to be grateful. Here is a sample of what I would say to young men and women:

"Every young man will have opportunities to do the right thing at the right time. Often, it will mean putting yourself at risk for the sake of another. It might mean saying "no" to pressure. A REAL man, (Reflecting the Eternal Attributes of our Lord) faces every day with valor. In other words, He faces life in a valiant, brave and courageous way. Let's be honest, it takes a lot of courage to say "NO" in the face of temptation. But, you were made to do the right thing! It's in you. However, it is also in you to be passive or just let things go the way they are going. Men of valor are men of passion. You don't let things happen to you (passivity), you make things happen (passion).

All young women have what it takes to be a beautiful representative of the King. Regardless of how much you have, or don't have, God wants His noble daughters to be grateful. Gratefulness: expressing warm thankfulness for a kindness or benefit received is an attitude that makes all women look beautiful, inside and out. The Bible tells us in James 1:17, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." God is able to give us what we need and more, but He does notice who is grateful. Your gratefulness will affect you, and those around you. It isn't easy to be grateful when there is so much pressure to have the right clothes, the right "look" and the so-called right friends. God knows you care about these things, and He will provide what you need. It is your job to choose to be content!"

The Results of the Fall: The Reality of Divorce

Divorce is a result of broken relationship with God in the beginning with Adam and Eve, and we find it affecting all our relationships. Divorce can happen in a marriage, but other types of divorce can create disunity or fracture of every kind. I do not judge anyone who has experienced the pain of divorce, you have enough pain and only God knows the whole

story. However, divorce is not the best outcome for marriage as all adults well know. I want teens to know that regardless of their parent's story, they should plan not to divorce to the best of their ability. I'm sure that is what you would want as well. Couples getting married today are divorcing at a rate of approximately 25-35%. This means your son or daughter's marriage has a very good chance to succeed. We need to prepare them intentionally for marriage and encourage them to decide that divorce is not an option if at all possible. This doesn't mean they can control someone else's behavior or that people are perfect. It means that they decide to work through all challenges to the best of their abilities. In cases of adultery there is a Biblical reason for divorce, but I would still encourage any attempt at healing and forgiveness. In the case of abuse there are times a person's safety is at risk and in these cases, divorce may be needed.

It is important to teach our teens that divorce is something we all do if we create disunity. One of the best ways to prevent divorce is to not practice it now. Divorce means a total separation between two married people. But divorce also means division and disunity and this is what we want teens to avoid. The following are some good principles to teach your teens:

- **Friendship** - If a friend makes you mad, what do you think would be the best choice: a) ditch them b) forgive them. Of course, the correct answer is b. The Bible tells us we have been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). It's hard to fix broken relationships, but it's worth it. If we end every relationship when someone makes us mad, this is practicing divorce. This does not mean however, that we stay in dysfunctional or unhealthy relationships. It means relationships require work at times and one way you can protect your teen is to make sure they understand levels of friendship and intimacy to navigate their friendships.
- **Gossip** - Our speech is a powerful reality. You saw the negative power of words when Eve convinced Adam to sin! Talking poorly about anyone will create disunity and this is practice for divorce, or practice creating an environment of disunity. Changing someone's view of another person, or altering their "image" in the eyes of another is serious business to God. We are all made in His image, and we are to honor and protect other people's image, story and reputation whenever possible. In a culture where social media can destroy someone over one mistake, it's so easy to see how this works. Teach your teen to 'cover' a friend. Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions."
- **Dating too many people** - Spending time with someone of the opposite sex, enjoying their company, is healthy. Does your teen have friends who are the opposite sex they enjoy spending time with? The challenge comes when they decide to "go together," in other words "get serious," because they like so many things about each other, but then eventually they break up. This same cycle then begins again with someone else... and again, and again. So, you didn't like everything about him or her? She made you mad? He wasn't perfect? So you ended it...this is also practice for divorce. There isn't a perfect person anywhere so how do you prevent this? Many teens are deciding to not get in a serious relationship with the opposite sex, and just stay friends and enjoy each

other's company. They don't like risking the friendship, because generally once you break up, you have lost the friendship. Historically, dating was seen as a process to find a mate for marriage, so dating is important to find the compatible opposite other who will be a good match and yes, that might mean some break ups. However, teens should consider postponing dating until they are old enough where marriage is a possibility, and not so many years off, so the dating can be taken seriously and the amount of break ups can be limited.

Authority: Does It Matter?

It's hard to imagine why Adam and Eve would give up the perfect life they had, but they did. Ultimately, they decided God did not know what was best for them. They decided the King of the Universe was holding out on them. Their rebellion against God occurred because they did not honor His authority in their life. They had free will, but they were hardly free once they sinned. Like many of us, they believed a lie. The lie that says you can be in charge, and no one should be able to tell you what to do.

In every civilized, healthy society there are rules. In every organization, there is someone in charge, and the most successful organizations have great leaders who can be very demanding. To make it to the Olympics, you submit to a tough coach and a grueling training regime. Oscar winning films have talented directors telling everyone how to act; every art form has mentors training young artists; every skill-based vocation has apprenticeships; every student has a teacher and every child has a parent. So what is the point?

When it comes to relationships, some believe that authority doesn't matter. They believe relationships are all about "feelings," so nobody else gets to weigh in on what we do. In fact, they think they should be left to make their own choices and do their own thing... and then they are truly free. While it is true that making choices is a healthy part of maturing, it is false to assert that when there are no boundaries or rules, we flourish. This is not true in any part of life, and it is not the way God has designed the blueprint for living with sexual integrity.

Parents, you have been placed in your teen's life to give them the direction and protection as they move into adulthood. Of course, we are not perfect, but that does not stop God from using us for our teen's good. God uses all authority ultimately for His purposes, even flawed parents! I'm so grateful this is true.

Daniel 2:20-21 says, *"Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings..."*

1 Peter 2:13-15 says, *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."* And one last verse:

Romans 13:1-5 says, *"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not the cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For it (authority) is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath up on the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake."*

Authority is an ordinance, a decree or command; a principle God uses to minister to us. In other words, He uses authority for our own good. This even means authority that is unfair at times or even imperfect. The Bible tells us in Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land." This means God's Kingdom and His influence as King, will be as real in your life as the honor you give the authorities in your life. God, your Heavenly Father, is a King. He designed His transfer of truth to go through channels of leadership, and as parents we are leaders. When we honor authority, we honor God. In Malachi 1:6, God says, "A son honors his father and a servant his master. Then if I am a Father, where is my honor? And if I am a Master, where is my respect?" Not only are your teens to honor authority, but we as parents must honor authority as well. All adults must honor those in authority, or we will face negative, natural and supernatural consequences because God is training us as well, using the "tool" of authority.

I believe understanding this truth unlocks a person's influence and authority. I have met many amazing people. Those who seem to have been given more authority from God, have also been tested and trained in this truth. I have learned, not always the easy way, how to honor authority. Even when I disagree at times, I am learning to submit to God through the process. I believe God will give you authority directly related to your view of authority and how much you honor authority. I hope you model honoring authority to your teen. How do you talk about their teachers, coaches, pastor etc.? In all my years of teaching on sexuality and relationships, the one common factor in every story seems to be that the people who choose to sin, without any regard to God's plan, have a low view of God's authority in their life. Overt sin of any kind is a picture of a person's attitude about our Heavenly King, so when you find yourself struggling to teach your teen why something is wrong or a sin, it may be they just don't want to give God authority in their life. All sin, including sexual sin that is practiced, is a sign of a person's heart toward God, the ultimate authority. This is why those who want to practice alternative lifestyles or live in sin get angry when their life isn't validated, because ultimately they have issues with God. Remind your son or daughter they need to obey you, just as you obey God, because ultimately it's all about obeying and honoring God.

Blueprint Truth #9

A GREAT RESCUE: THE STORY CONTINUES

Biblical Background

Regardless of your upbringing, intelligence, race, gender, family income, church and all of the issues that make your story unique, we all have one thing in common: original sin (the sin committed by Adam and Eve representing all mankind). Sin has separated us from the King, and our "nature" has been affected. God designed you with a body, soul and spirit, but your spirit is dead in sin at birth. Your spirit is how you communicate with God. The Bible tells us in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Your spirit must be alive to communicate with your Heavenly Father. It is the saving work of Jesus Christ that conquers sin and death and opens the door for us to eternal life with a Holy God! When you accept this salvation gift, the Holy Spirit is given as a seal of the transaction, (Eph. 1:13-14) and He abides in you, allowing your spirit to come alive to the things of God. Think of a cell phone battery that is dead, and the phone doesn't work. With a new living battery placed inside the cell phone, you can communicate. Ephesians 1:13 says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." Very radical, and very real! The amazing reality is that a living God, gives you His Spirit, as a seal and sign of a relationship with Him! It is the Spirit of God that will lead you into all truth and His name is Helper. John 14:16 says, "And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." The Holy Spirit can teach us, guide us, illuminate truth and even convict us of sin. This gift is the key to your teen's story. Your son or daughter may have raised their hands, gone to the altar and prayed to receive salvation, based on the message of the gospel. Fantastic! Now they need to follow Jesus with the help of His Spirit, to make right choices.

Without this internal change, you cannot have a relationship with a 100% holy God, and this is why Jesus is the centerpiece of God's rescue plan. Colossians 1:13-15 says, "For He delivered us from the domain (authority) of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Your son or daughter should learn as much as possible at this age about the amazing love of our King and His plan to rescue all His children. John 3:16-17 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." They should also learn that "image" is a big deal to God. Not only that they are made in His image, but the image they reveal with their body and the images they consume, affect their continuing story.

The Power of God

The key to living whole, complete, and reflecting God's image, is to be whole in all aspects of our life: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual. In order for all of these aspects to be integrated well, we need to be whole spiritually. God made a way through the saving work of Christ for us to be whole spiritually, and as a result, able to live according to His plan and purpose for each of us. If we don't deal with our sin nature, and as a result

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are not whole spiritually, we won't be able to appraise spiritual truth and God will not have the same influence in our lives. Even more serious, being dead in our sins means we are choosing eternity away from God, and it is God's desire that nobody would perish. Once your teen is a follower of Christ, they will want to know what it looks like to live whole and integrated throughout all five aspects using their sexual nature as a key, in other words, living with sexual integrity.

The Power of Images

God created each of us with a body, on purpose. He gave us a body "billboard" to tell the truth about who we are, whose we are, and who He is. He made us in His image, and the way we "talk" with our bodies either tells the truth about us, or it lies about us. What we say when we speak with our mouth, what we wear on our bodies and what we do with our bodies speaks truths or lies about us, and about God. Your son or daughter is so valuable and precious to God. It is beneath their dignity to believe lies about themselves because they were made to speak the truth! The most powerful way to learn to speak the truth is to know truth. They can open their mouths with wisdom if they take wisdom into their mind. They will dress in ways that reveal the truth if they take in mental pictures that are good. They will have thoughts that are true if they listen to messages and music that speaks the truth. The truth is everyone will know what they believe by what they say, wear, and do in their body. So, how are they doing? Proverbs 20:11 says, "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself if his conduct is pure and right."

When it comes to teen's expressing their sexuality physically, images make a difference. Research from Rand Health reveals some interesting facts: Watching TV shows with sexual content hastens (accelerates) the initiation of sexual activity (so the "I can handle it, Mom" argument won't work). Sexual talk on TV has a similar effect on teens as depictions of sex so the argument that says, "They aren't doing anything" doesn't matter to our minds because we are still affected by talk and innuendo. Remember the power of the spoken word!

Pornography

Pornography is obscene sexual literature and images. It is one of the most powerful weapons the enemy has to weaken men, objectify women and hurt the Kingdom of God. It only takes a few glances to get interested and then hooked. The power of lust and the way your body is designed physically to respond to the opposite sex creates a very powerful and potentially dangerous package. We were never meant to spend our sexual energy on a picture, or a stranger! We are meant to reserve our passion for a real person, in a life-long relationship with a spouse, who will love us as well. We can't let the enemy lie to us or our teens with a mere picture.

Addiction to pornography is unfortunately very real and hurting marriages, families and the church in large numbers so protect your son or daughter by setting up safe guards on your computers, TV, music, technology etc. and having a social media contract.

Blueprint Truth #10

HEALTHY BONDING: A KEY TO A GREAT STORY

Biblical Background

We all have a desire to be known deeply (the definition of intimacy). This desire causes us to want to bond with others, and it is very good. Anthropologists have observed the bonding process throughout many cultures and have determined the cultures that are monogamous (bonding seriously with and marrying one person) and monotheistic (belief in only one God) thrive the most. How interesting that the God who is The "One" (Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!") also made us to be one. I Corinthians 6:17 says, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him." The principle at work in us is the ability to become unified, one and integrated. It is a beautiful, powerful reality.

Bonding is a process that is worth protecting. I Corinthians 6:16 says, "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.'" When we physically touch someone, it actually bonds us. The more bonding stages we go through, the more connected we become. The final and most powerful glue is the "one flesh union." Note the word one. You and someone else become one! Emotional bonding takes place in all relationships to some degree, but physical bonding should be reserved for that special relationship that can potentially be the "one." Attaching yourself and bonding with too many people affects your ability to be really connected to the "one" you want to love for a lifetime. Your teen should learn the amazing power of bonding to see why they need to set limits and boundaries to protect their story!

Bonding is for Babies

The research available today allows us to see the importance of bonding and attachment and how powerful, and necessary bonding is for every human being. Even from a very early age we are affected by the power of bonding, and it actually shapes our emotional health. Take a look at some of the facts below:

- Allan Schore of UCLA's School of Medicine has done extensive research on how children regulate emotions and behaviors and has presented data underscoring the importance of infant attachment and suggests: "The idea is that we are born to form attachments, that our brains are physically wired to develop in tandem with another's, through emotional communication beginning before words are spoken."
- Other scholarly reviews concur: "The self-organization of the developing brain occurs in the context of a relationship with another self, another brain. This relational context can be growth- facilitating or growth-inhibiting, and so it imprints into the developing right brain either a resilience against or a vulnerability to later forming psychiatric disorders." *Hardwired To Connect, Dartmouth Medical School, Institute For American Values*
- In his book, *Bonding, Relationships in the Image of God*, Dr. Donald Joy discusses at length the importance of attachment in the life of a newborn baby. "Skin to skin contact, literally galvanic connections, appear to have important effects on attachment and

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we are in awe of discoveries about the powerful effects of touch in enhancing body chemistry and the tendency to thrive. Premature babies who must remain in the support environment are now exposed to parental stroking, based on the discovery that brain chemistry is enhanced and healing is speeded up by its chemicals released by touch. So, we have a sort of first axiom of attachment: You will be bonded to whomever you touch and to whoever touches you."

- Anthropologists also support Joy's findings: "The human infant, as the anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hardy says, "Is born to attach." For the child, this born-to- attachness is the essential foundation for the emergence of conscience and of moral meaning. The fundamental meaning of morality is love of neighbor, we can therefore say, speaking scientifically as well as poetically that the human child is talked in to talking and loved into loving." The ongoing interaction with parents teaches the child what is permitted, pleasing, non-pleasing etc. to form a security- empathy-oughtness within the child's mind (what is right and wrong). Our sense of right and wrong originates largely from our biologically primed need to connect with others. What happens if this process is ignored? Evaluating seven decades of attachment research, Robert Karen writes: "All of the early researchers, though unaware of one another's work has unanimously found the same symptoms in children who'd been deprived of their mothers—the superficial relationships, the poverty of feeling for others, the inaccessibility, the lack of emotional response, the often pointless deceitfulness and theft, and the inability to concentrate in school."

So Why Is This Important?

God has designed us to bond with other human beings. We need touch and love. If we don't receive a proper amount of bonding as infants, it affects our ability to love. It is a fallacy to think that a baby doesn't need this, and in fact the more nurturing environment by the baby's parents, the stronger their bond, and ultimately their relationship. This is important for anyone who plans to be a parent to understand. I know young couples choose to put their child in day care, and sometimes that is necessary and parents do the very best they can to make things work for their families. After noting the studies about bonding and its formative impact on well-being, and a healthy sense of self, babies need their mothers and fathers as much as possible early on. This bonding information also helps us understand why some people may crave physical attention, sometimes from the wrong people. They were not properly "connected."

Bonding Is Powerful For Adults

"Studies show that the hormone oxytocin enters a female's bloodstream during sexual intercourse, affecting the brain and limbic system in ways that appear to promote emotional intimacy and bonding. Oxytocin is also released during birth and lactation (nursing) and appears to strengthen the mother's attachment to the baby. Similarly, in males the steroid hormone testosterone is associated with both sexual desire and aggression. Researchers have found that for men, getting married and becoming physically and emotionally bonded with a spouse seems to lower testosterone levels. The result is a diminished biological basis for male sexual promiscuity and infidelity. Researchers also report, not surprisingly, that drops in testosterone seem to be connected to better fathering. Call it a

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"neuroendocrine basis" for recognizing that male connectedness resulting from marriage tends to guide men away from certain negative behaviors and toward family life." *Hardwired To Connect*, Dartmouth Medical School, Institute For American Values Brain researchers and other scientists are now clearly mapping out what might be called the biochemistry of connection: At the Ohio State University Medical Center, Janice K. Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues have conducted studies of married couples and report growing evidence linking relationship intimacy (including physical intimacy) to better health, including stronger immune systems and physical wounds taking less time to heal."

So what does this tell us?

Touch releases chemicals, and this is why you become bonded, or glued to someone else. This is God's plan - to glue people who are married! This helps especially during the stormy times in life. But if you bond with the wrong person, it can glue you to them. The point is, touching people beyond a friendly hug actually bonds you to them, and this is often the reason people end up "together." A guy and a girl see one another and they are attracted. They spend time together and end up touching. Then, they "feel" connected but don't really know each other. This kind of relationship is common in high school and usually ends up with a break up, because the two people didn't have the time to form a real, emotionally bonded relationship. It was all merely physical. The relationship may seem real because the chemicals and bonding are real, but not enough to form a healthy relationship. Now that you have seen a glimpse of the power of bonding, you are even more equipped to help your son or daughter make some decisions. I encourage you to teach them the stages of physical bonding and have them determine their personal boundaries. Remember, they are ultimately the one who is going to make the choices that will determine their story.