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*Why True Love Waits*

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## CHAPTER 1

# WHY DOES TRUE LOVE WAIT?

## OUR YOUTH WANT ANSWERS

IF YOU MET DEREK, you would probably like him. He is well-liked and respected by his fellow students and the members of the church college group. And he's a good-looking guy with a great personality. He used to date a lot of girls, but now he has a steady girlfriend. Michelle shares his commitment as a Christian, and in Derek's eyes she is a vision of beauty. They are always together studying, talking about the Bible, or just hanging out. Derek is pretty sure he will marry Michelle someday.

Derek is something of an oddity among twenty-year-old men on his campus. He is still a virgin. He knows that God's Word forbids premarital sex, and he has lived by that standard in the midst of the culture's plummeting moral standards. And it was relatively easy for him to live a pure life—until he met Michelle. Many of their evenings end with long embraces and deep, passionate kisses. But Derek always breaks it off before they go too far. He knows God wants him to reserve sex with Michelle for marriage, but his desire to know her intimately seems to deepen daily.

I was intrigued when Derek told me about an experience he had while sharing his faith with his college friend Colin. During the conversation, Colin asked Derek, "Do I have to stop having sex with my girlfriend in order to become a Christian?" Colin told him how much he loved his girlfriend. She was taking birth-control pills, and they both felt that engaging in sex added a deeper level of meaning to their already good relationship.

This question precipitated a long discussion between Derek and Colin about commitment and the lordship of Christ. "And," Derek said, "Colin's

question opened up a fresh dilemma for me: Why am I waiting for sex until marriage?”

For the first time, Derek felt unsure in his understanding of God’s prohibitions on premarital sex. “I told Colin what the Bible says, that sex must be saved until marriage,” Derek explained to me. “Yet deep in my heart, I began to ask the same question that Colin asked me. Michelle and I are already more committed to each other than many married couples. Why wait?”

In his dorm room after what proved to be a frustrating witnessing experience, Derek began to question God even more. “I had to find an answer,” he said. “I argued with God that prohibitions against premarital sex seem a bit archaic in light of advanced birth-control methods and changing views about sex in our culture. Perhaps the apostle Paul’s admonitions against fornication need revising.”

Finally, Derek realized that God is neither archaic nor blind to twenty-first century practices. “I concluded that I just had to be patient and wait for his answer . . . even though I could not understand the reasons.” So Derek gamely waited for God’s answer, though his mind was filled with turmoil. And his hunger to experience sex with Michelle continued to grow.

Annie is another person you would be proud to claim as a relative or a friend. Even though she’s only a junior in high school, Annie’s heart is set on serving Christ as a nurse on the foreign mission field. It is what God has called her to do, and she is eager to follow.

Attractive but shy, Annie hasn’t dated much in high school. And when she did date, the boy had to be a Christian with a passion to serve God that matched her own. Since there weren’t many boys like that in her small community adjacent to an army base, Annie was content to wait for the man God would choose for her. Premarital sex was totally out of the question for Annie. She knew what the Bible said and was deeply committed to remaining a virgin until marriage.

Then Annie met Jeff, a ruggedly handsome Green Beret from the base who kept coming into the card shop where she worked part-time. Jeff was five years older than Annie, and he wasn’t a Christian. So whenever he asked her out, Annie declined politely as she had done with many other soldiers who happened into the shop. Instead, she quietly prayed for Jeff’s salvation and shared a word of witness when she could.

Undaunted, Jeff kept coming into the store. To Annie’s surprise, after a few months Jeff announced that he had trusted Christ. He started attending Annie’s

church and became an active part in the college-career group. Jeff's life seemed transformed. He couldn't get enough of church and Bible study.

When he asked Annie to go out again, she suddenly didn't have a reason to refuse. Jeff was quickly becoming the kind of guy she had been asking God to find for her. The rush of attention from the new, on-fire believer melted Annie's heart, and she fell in love—and she fell hard.

After a few weeks of the intense, thrilling romance, Annie went to see the youth minister's wife. "Before I met Jeff," Annie confessed, "premarital sex wasn't even a temptation for me. Whenever I dated, the guys weren't . . . well, they weren't anything like Jeff.

"But being with Jeff has awakened all kinds of desires in me. He doesn't understand why the Bible says we should wait for sex until marriage. When he asks me, I tell him God says it's wrong. But when I'm with Jeff, everything and everyone else—including Jeff—says it's right for two people so deeply in love. And in three weeks, Jeff's unit is shipping out for a tour of duty overseas. He'll be gone six months. He says that having sex together before he goes away will help him make it through our long separation. Funny thing. I'm starting to feel the same way.

"I have never questioned God's directives on sex until now. Why did God say wait until marriage, especially when you're so deeply in love? If I can't find a reason beyond 'Thou shalt not,' I don't think I can say no much longer."

### **"WE'RE IN LOVE, SO WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?"**

Derek and Annie are representative of thousands of Christian young people who struggle with the question, "Why does true love wait until marriage for sex?" Sexual pressures on our kids are at an all-time high. Their friends, peers, and many of their adult role models are succumbing to the pressures of a sex-crazed society that mocks biblical abstinence as puritanical and irrelevant. As one young woman told her father, "When I see how casually sex is treated by my classmates, when they make it all sound so natural and inevitable, there are times when I wonder what I'm waiting for."

Surrounded by a permissive society that accepts and even glorifies casual sex, students today are wrestling with sexual decisions that previous generations never had to face. For many of our kids, those decisions are made with little thought about the consequences. According to one fourteen-year-old high school student, "All they think is that they really want this guy to like them, and so they're going to 'do it.'"

Derek and Annie are struggling with the “Why wait?” question in the face of their passions and temptations. But many other Christian students are not struggling much at all—because they are *not* waiting. Here’s what some of them said:

Sure, I’m a Christian, and I know the Bible says no sex until after marriage. But the Bible also talks about not eating shellfish and women not wearing pants in church and a lot of other cultural rules we don’t follow today. My girlfriend and I prayed about it, and we feel that sex before marriage is no different in God’s eyes than fried shrimp for dinner. It was important in the past, maybe, but doesn’t apply to today. We really love each other, and sex is bringing us even closer.



Is sex before marriage wrong for a Christian? It really depends. Sleeping around, one-night stands, just seeing how many people you can have sex with—that’s wrong. Playing Russian roulette with sexually transmitted diseases and putting others at risk—that’s wrong. Being careless and getting pregnant or having an abortion—that’s wrong. But when two people are really in love with each other and committed only to each other, then sex is natural and beautiful. Travis and I were both virgins when we had sex last summer. And we haven’t been—and won’t be—with anyone else. What’s wrong with that?



What is marriage anyway? It’s just a legal piece of paper and a formal way of saying “I do.” The lifetime commitment, which is much more important, comes long before that. Four months ago, when we were alone at my parents’ cabin by the shore one afternoon, Jana and I said our own vows to each other before God. It was our own secret wedding, and we celebrated by having sex. We’ll get married the traditional way in a few years, but we love each other and our commitment has never been deeper than it has been these last four months. We’re following the spirit of God’s law about sex, not the letter of the law. I think the Bible says that’s what we’re supposed to do.

These are Christian kids who know very well *what* the Bible says about premarital sex. As parents, pastors, youth leaders, and teachers, we have not failed to lay down the law to them: no sex until marriage. But what most Christian youth are lacking is the *why* behind the Bible’s restrictions on sex. Even those deeply committed to the Lord struggle to find answers about sex that make sense

to them. As seen in the previous examples, Christian young people are stumped by two main issues: the antiquity of the Bible and the element of true love.

### *The Antiquity of the Bible*

Christian youth accept the Bible's authority on many issues but struggle when it comes to morality and lifestyle choices. They are aware that the Bible places clear limitations on sexual activity, but they consider these limitations merely old-fashioned, overly strict rules for a different time and a different culture. They may believe the rules and moral precepts God laid out in the Old Testament had a purpose for that particular time and place, but they have a hard time accepting that God would intend these same precepts to apply to them in the twenty-first century.

To answer their objections, we must help our youth understand the reason surrounding God's rules. Behind every negative commandment in the Bible, there are two loving motivations. One is to protect us, and the other is to provide for us. The "thou shalt nots" of the Bible come not from a tyrannical ruler who wants to spoil our fun but from a loving Father who has our best interest at heart.

For example, when God says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," he is not being a cosmic killjoy. He is being a cosmic *lovejoy*. He is saying, "I don't want you to do something that will bring you and others pain. I love you, and I have better things planned for you."

Likewise, God does not prohibit illicit sex to spoil our fun. He knows the devastating consequences of extramarital sex—consequences such as guilt, pain, unwanted pregnancy, and even death and disease—and he wants us to avoid those heartbreaking consequences. In talking to our young people about sex, we've got to help them see that the precepts of the Bible were given out of purest love. Beyond that, we must make it clear that these same precepts are still relevant today for all the same reasons. God says no to premarital sex because he loves us enough to protect us from harm and provide for our good. (You'll find more on the protect and provide principle of God's love in chapter 10.)

## **GOD'S DESCRIPTION OF TRUE LOVE**

Most Christian youth have a moral standard. They agree that promiscuous sex with anyone, anytime is wrong. But sex between two people in a commit-

ted relationship who really love each other somehow seems different. We saw that Derek believes he and his girlfriend are deeply in love and are more committed to each other than many married couples. And all of the examples above expressed “true love” as their justification for engaging in or considering premarital sex. Does true love make sex right? When young couples are truly in love and plan on getting married someday, what’s to stop them from having sex now?

I shock many parents and church leaders when I say that I agree, in a way, with today’s young people—I believe that true love *does* make it right. Now, before you put the complaint letter in the mailbox, hear me out. True love *is* the biblical standard for sex. The problem is, most youth are working from a counterfeit standard of love—one that says love permits sex without boundaries, outside of God’s definition of love.

What is God’s definition? In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul gives a good description of what love does and does not do. “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out” (1 Cor. 13:4-6, NLT).

Paul also wrote that “love does no wrong to anyone” (Rom. 13:10, NLT). Instead, we are to treat all people as we would like to be treated. Remember the Golden Rule? “Do for others,” Jesus commanded, “what you would like them to do for you” (Matt. 7:12, NLT). Again, Paul put it this way: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).

With these verses and others as a guide, we can derive a concise statement defining love. *Love is making the security, happiness, and welfare of another person as important as your own.* It is really an imitation of God’s love, the kind of love that protects the loved one from harm and provides for his or her good. True love is giving and trusting, secure and safe, loyal and forever. And because its priority is to protect and provide for the loved one, true love will not do things that are harmful to the security, happiness, and welfare of another person.

Throughout this book, we will provide comprehensive evidence of how waiting to have sex until after marriage provides for the spiritual, relational, emotional, and physical health of a person, and how such waiting can protect a

person from a host of negative consequences. You will be able to demonstrate and document to your young people that anyone who uses love as a justification for premarital sex is not speaking out of love at all. You will be able to teach your young people how living in harmony with God’s loving prohibitions is for their ultimate good.

### PREMARITAL SEX AND YOUTH: THE DISTURBING FACTS

Without solid reasons for saying no to premarital sex, today’s kids are vulnerable in times of temptation, doubt, and questioning from their friends and peers. Many are responding by getting involved sexually, as evidenced in the following survey results from the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.<sup>1</sup>

PERCENT OF NONVIRGIN STUDENTS (“EVER HAD SEX”) FOR ALL STUDENTS, MALES, AND FEMALES			
Ages of students	Percent of all students who “ever had sex”	Percent of males only who “ever had sex”	Percent of females only who “ever had sex”
12–13 years	12.4%	11.5%	13.3%
14 years	13.9%	17.4%	9.7%
15–16 years	34.8%	32.4%	39.1%
17–18 years	61.1%	65.2%	58.5%
<b>Total Ages</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>

NUMBER OF STUDENTS REPORTING AGE AT FIRST SEX FOR ALL STUDENTS, MALES, AND FEMALES			
Ages	All Students	Males	Females
12 and under	13.1%	19.8%	7.3%
13–14 years	43.3%	46.6%	40.4%
15 years and older	43.6%	33.6%	52.3%

<b>VOLUNTARY OR FORCED SEX REPORTED BY MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS</b>			
<b>Forced Sex</b>	<b>All Students</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Forced	3.5%	2.2%	4.6%
Pressured	13.3%	4.4%	21.2%
Both wanted	81.1%	91.1%	72.2%
Pressured partner	1.0%	.7%	1.3%

<b>RELATIONSHIP WITH PARTNER AT FIRST SEX AS REPORTED BY ALL STUDENTS, MALES, AND FEMALES</b>			
<b>Relationship with partner</b>	<b>All Students</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Spouse	1.4%	3.0%	—
Fiancee	2.5%	.8%	1.3%
Steady	54.4%	43.6%	63.8%
Dating	13.7%	18.8%	9.2%
Knew well	12.6%	14.3%	11.2%
Just met	11.6%	12.8%	11.2%
Stranger	5.3%	7.3%	3.3%

<b>STUDENT REPORTS OF LOCATION OF FIRST SEX</b>			
<b>Where had sex <i>first time</i>?</b>	<b>All Students</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Own home	20.4%	18.7%	21.9%
Partner's home	36.8%	35.8%	37.7%
Friend's home	17.5%	17.2%	17.9%
Somewhere else	25.3%	28.4%	22.5%



TOTAL NUMBER OF SEXUAL PARTNERS FOR ALL STUDENTS, MALES, AND FEMALES			
Total number of <i>sexual partners</i>	All Students	Males	Females
One	50.2%	44.3%	55.2%
Two	14.7%	13.0%	16.2%
Three	15.4%	16.0%	14.9%
Four	6.7%	8.4%	5.2%
Five or more	13.0%	18.3%	8.4%

A recent *Los Angeles Times* article, “Talking to Teens about Sex—It’s in the Details,” further documents the practice of sexual activity among teenagers. Fifty-five percent of fourteen- to nineteen-year-old males said they had had vaginal sex. Two-thirds of these males reported having engaged in oral sex, heterosexual anal intercourse, and/or masturbation by a female.<sup>2</sup>

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health states, “Seventeen percent of seventh- and eighth-graders report having had sexual intercourse. Among adolescents in high school, the figure is almost three times as high (49.3 percent). . . . Males and females in the seventh–twelfth grade report having had intercourse just about equally: 39.9 percent of boys, 37.3 percent of girls.”<sup>3</sup>

Consider these additional statistics reflecting the current level of premarital sex among our youth:

- ♦ The 1995 Youth Risk Surveillance System Survey showed that 53 percent of this nation’s high school students were sexually active.<sup>4</sup>
- ♦ One study reported that almost one-third of ninth grade girls had had sex at least once.<sup>5</sup>
- ♦ Another study reported that 25 percent of all ninth grade students were already involved in sexual intercourse.<sup>6</sup>
- ♦ According to a March 1, 1997, article in the *Los Angeles Times*, “56 percent of girls and 73 percent of boys have had intercourse by the age of eighteen. The average teen is sexually active for about eight years before marrying.”<sup>7</sup>

- ◆ Although the world average for the onset of sexual intercourse is 17.6 years, the United States has the earliest average, at 16.2 years.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ In Baltimore’s public schools, the median age of first sexual intercourse is 13.5 years for girls, 12.5 years for boys.<sup>9</sup>

A study was conducted at Southern Baptist Carson-Newman College and reported to the Southern Baptist Ethics Conference in 1992. The following is the percent of students at the college reporting premarital intercourse over a seven-year period (1984–1991). For males, premarital sexual intercourse increased from 55 percent in 1984 to 70 percent in 1991. For the females, the change was even more dramatic. Only 27 percent of the females admitted that they had engaged in premarital intercourse in 1984, but 53 percent in 1991 said they were sexually experienced. In the most recent data collected (fall semester 1991), 66 percent of the males and 65 percent of the females said that they had experienced premarital sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup>

Notice the increase of sexual activity in older teenage women since the seventies:

Though there has been a slight drop recently, rates of sexual intercourse among U.S. teens have increased dramatically in the last few decades. Between 1971 and 1988, the proportion of sexually active adolescents and young women ages fifteen to nineteen with “more than one lifetime sexual partner increased nearly 60 percent. In the United States, nearly 70 percent of students in the twelfth grade have had sexual intercourse, and 27 percent of twelfth-grade students have had four or more sexual partners. . . . A 1992 survey of 2,248 students in grades six, eight, and ten, from an urban public school district found that 28 percent of sixth-graders and half of eighth-graders reported having had sexual intercourse.”<sup>12</sup>

One in seven sexually experienced high school girls surveyed by the CDC reported having four or more lifetime partners, and the number of lifetime partners has been shown to be strongly associated with risk of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). A teen is in even greater jeopardy of acquiring an STD if her first intercourse occurred at an earlier age, her pattern of partner selection is poor, or she uses drugs or alcohol.<sup>13</sup>

<b>PERCENT OF WOMEN 15–19 WHO HAVE HAD PREMARITAL SEX<sup>11</sup></b>	
<b>Years</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
1971	31.7
1976	39.0
1982	45.2
1988	52.6
1995	49.6

In another study, 17 percent of seventh and eighth graders report having had sexual intercourse. Among adolescents in high school, the figure is almost three times as high at 49.3 percent. Males and females in the seventh through twelfth grades report having had intercourse just about equally: 39.9 percent of boys, 37.3 percent of girls. Teens living in the South and rural areas, and teens whose parents receive welfare were most likely to have experienced sexual intercourse. Of girls who are sexually experienced, 11.8 percent of younger teens and 19.4 percent of older teens report having been pregnant.<sup>14</sup>

The Institute for American Values conducted a nationwide study of one thousand college women over a period of eighteen months. The findings show that many college women prefer to “hook up” rather than to date. Hooking up is a new phenomenon in many universities. Hook-ups are defined as physical encounters ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse without emotional involvement or any kind of commitment. Both participants expect nothing further after the encounter. The ambiguity of the phrase hooking up and the zero commitment are part of the reason for its popularity. “Saying we’ve hooked up allows women to be vague about the nature of the physical encounter while stating that it happened.”<sup>15</sup>

Teen sexual activity is highly associated with other health risk factors. Compared with students who never had intercourse, those who reported ever being pregnant or getting someone pregnant were

- ♦ twelve times more likely to have been treated for a suicide injury;
- ♦ ten times more likely to have been treated for a fight injury;
- ♦ five times more likely to have driven drunk;
- ♦ three times more likely to binge drink.<sup>16</sup>

I’m not rolling out these statistics to make our kids look bad or to attack their behavior. Our young people don’t need our condemnation; they need our forgiveness and love. This is why, wherever I go today, one of my most important talks for young people is on self-image. I tell them, “In God’s eyes, you are special!” And within the context of our love and acceptance, our kids need reasons to wait. It’s not enough to tell them “no sex”; we must lovingly and clearly share with them why.

### **A SMALL BUT POSITIVE TREND AMONG YOUTH TO WAIT**

In the midst of the alarming statistics about teenage premarital sex, there are some hopeful signs. A 1995 national survey found that 50 percent of young

women fifteen to nineteen years of age had experienced intercourse, the first decline ever recorded by the periodic survey.<sup>17</sup> Additional research indicates a similar trend for teenage males. The percentage of never-married males age fifteen to nineteen who had experienced sexual intercourse declined from 60 percent in 1988 to 55 percent in 1995, reversing a trend measured since 1979.<sup>18</sup>

Another study of teens showed that 44 percent had made a conscious decision to delay intercourse; 76 percent had a friend or close acquaintance who had made this decision; 74 percent said that among their peers “it is considered a good thing to decide to remain a virgin.”<sup>19</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “The latest data show that nearly 52 percent of high school students are still virgins.”<sup>20</sup>

Since 1991 the number of teens who have had intercourse has dropped from 54 percent to 48 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control, and teen pregnancy is down slightly as well. Abstinence initiatives are now commonplace around the country. In the last two years, the federal government and various states have cofunded 698 new programs, which are clearly making inroads. “Project Reality,” an Illinois-based abstinence group, recently asked 10,000 teenagers the question, “Can sexual urges be controlled?” Fifty-one percent said “always”; just 3.5 percent said “never.”<sup>21</sup>

The number of teens in high schools across the country who are virgins has been increasing since 1990. Today approximately 52 percent of teens in high schools are still virgins. Another 13 percent have not had sex in the past three months and are not considered to be sexually active.<sup>22</sup> A decline in teen pregnancies has also occurred during the same period. Pregnancy rates for teenagers have decreased 17 percent from 1990, and abortion rates have dropped by 31 percent since 1986.<sup>23</sup> This information should encourage and support policy makers and parents who believe that adolescents can understand and respond to messages about abstinence and marriage.

In a nationwide study of 1,000 college women, 39 percent said “they have not had sexual intercourse”; that is, they have remained virgins.<sup>24</sup>

In a recent report, the government’s National Center for Health Statistics said the teen pregnancy rate for females aged fifteen to nineteen declined 19 percent from 1991 to 1997, the most recent year for which data are available. That trend reversed an 11 percent increase in teen pregnancies from 1986 to 1991.

The report says that most pregnant teens are eighteen or nineteen years old—40 percent are seventeen or younger. More than three-fourths of all teen

pregnancies are unintended and out of wedlock. More than half of the pregnancies result in birth, and very few of those babies are put up for adoption. Of the rest, 30 percent are terminated by abortion; 14 percent end in miscarriage.<sup>25</sup>

The most recent trends show the overall birthrate to teens aged fifteen to nineteen declined by 18 percent from 1991 to 1998 and teen birthrates have fallen in every state and across ethnic and racial groups. In 1998, for girls aged fifteen to seventeen, the birthrate of thirty births for every 1,000 was a record low. In addition, pregnancy rates for this group are at the lowest level since 1976, the earliest year for which such data are available. For fifteen to nineteen year olds, the pregnancy rate decreased by approximately 15 percent between 1991 and 1996 (the latest year available). The abortion rate declined by 22 percent over the same period and the share of pregnancies ending in abortion fell. Similarly, repeat births among teens declined by 21 percent from 1991 to 1998, when nearly 18 percent of teen mothers had a second child.<sup>26</sup>

At least one poll found that, regarding sexual matters, the majority of the more than 1,000 teens questioned held conservative opinions.

- ♦ Almost half said that sex before marriage is “always wrong” (53 percent of girls, 41 percent of boys).
- ♦ Fifty-eight percent of boys and 47 percent of girls said that homosexuality is “always wrong.”
- ♦ Fewer than 25 percent admitted to ever having had sex, but 71 percent said “a lot” or “some” of their peers were sexually active.<sup>27</sup>

The following findings come from 18,462 high school students aged fifteen to seventeen who voluntarily participated in the 1999 Oregon Youth Behavior Survey, a study conducted by the Oregon Health Division. Here are a couple of interesting highlights:

- ♦ Sexual abstinence among teens is increasing. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of students surveyed said they have not yet had sexual intercourse. In 1991, 54 percent of students surveyed reported never having intercourse.
- ♦ More students would advise others to wait. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents would advise classmates to postpone sexual intercourse until they are older or married. In 1995, 62 percent of survey respondents said they would give postponement advice.<sup>28</sup>

A recent survey of teens, published in the May 1998 issue of *YM (Young and Modern)*, revealed the pleasantly surprising results that many teens are indeed learning to say no to premarital sex. Sixty-eight percent of the teens surveyed said they were virgins. Eighty-seven percent of the girls said that, among their closest peers, being a virgin is admired, and 62 percent of the boys said the same. Most encouraging of the survey's results was the fact that 44 percent of the teens said they had made a conscious decision to delay intercourse until they are "majorly in love or married."<sup>29</sup>

We would much prefer that "majorly in love" had been omitted from the statement. But even as it stands, the statement indicates that teens are at least rethinking the free-love philosophy that has prevailed over the last generation. As responsible parents, pastors, teachers, and youth workers, we need to come alongside our young people and help them move even further away from the dangerous "anything goes" view in our culture and bring them back into line with God's best for their lives.

### REASONS FOR THE TREND TO WAIT

What are the reasons for the slight decline in premarital sex? There are many. In a survey of college-age men and women, all virgins, respondents gave four basic reasons they had not engaged in sexual relations. They were:

- ♦ too early in the relationship (22 percent of women, 14 percent of men)
- ♦ moral or religious reasons (31 percent of women, 11 percent of men)
- ♦ fear of pregnancy (almost 50 percent of both men and women)
- ♦ partner wasn't willing (11 percent of women, 64 percent of men)

In addition, many of the women interviewed indicated "lack of a loving or committed relationship" as a major reason for abstaining from sex, while a large number of both male and female participants said "they had not yet met the 'right' person." However, those who had abstained from sex solely because they felt they had not yet met the right person were less likely to feel good about their virginity than those who maintained their virginity for moral or religious reasons. "Both male and female virgins who were satisfied with their sexual status reported greater religious commitment than did virgins who were frustrated by their sexual status." None of the virgins indicated they abstained from sexual intercourse because of lack of sexual desire, which "belies the stereotype of the 'frigid' virgin."<sup>30</sup>

According to one study, “Half of the teens surveyed (50 percent) said that fear of pregnancy and STDs is the main reason why teens don’t have sex. . . . One quarter of teens surveyed (26 percent) said the main reason why teens don’t have sex is because of religion, morals, and values.”<sup>31</sup>

The following statistical study reveals an even greater breakdown of reasons students give for abstinence. The numbers in parentheses represent the rank order of the reasons given.

<b>REASONS FOR BEING A VIRGIN<sup>32</sup></b>			
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Total Sample (289 polled)</b>	<b>Virgin Men (97 polled)</b>	<b>Virgin Women (192 polled)</b>
I have not been in a relationship long enough or been in love enough.	3.21(1)	2.78(1)	3.43(1)
Fear of Pregnancy	3.00(2)	2.66(2)	3.16(2)
I worry about contacting AIDS.	2.84(3)	2.59(3)	2.96(3)
I worry about contracting another STD.	2.73(4)	2.53(4)	2.83(6)
I have not met a person I wanted to have intercourse with.	2.61(5)	2.00(9)	2.91(4)
I do not feel ready to have premarital intercourse.	2.60(6)	2.12(7)	2.84(5)
It is against my religious beliefs.	2.13(7)	2.02(10)	2.18(8)
I believe that intercourse before marriage is wrong.	2.09(8)	1.91(11)	2.18(7)
I have been too shy or embarrassed to initiate sex with a partner.	2.06(9)	2.39(5)	1.89(11)
Fear or parental disapproval	2.02(10)	1.73(12)	2.17(9)
I don’t feel physically attractive or desirable.	1.96(11)	1.98(8)	1.96(10)
My current (or last) partner is (was) not willing.	1.85(12)	2.24(6)	1.65(12)
I lack desire for sex.	1.33(13)	1.31(13)	1.35(13)

*Hearts Broken, Hopes Shattered*

Before you break out the sparkling cider and toast the demise of the sexual revolution, be aware that the promising trend is still quite small. While we are encouraged that the abstinence message has made some headway among our youth, we are not out of the woods by any means.

A few more may be waiting, but those who choose not to wait are yet in peril of the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational dangers of premarital sex. For example, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy recently reported: “While the percentage of high schoolers who say they’ve had sexual intercourse is falling (55 percent in 1999, compared to 68 percent in 1995), more are catching sexually transmitted diseases, especially gonorrhea and chlamydia.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, the declining rates of premarital sex among youth are not good news to those who do not wait—and pay the consequences.

Without solid reasons to wait, too many of our young people are still plunging headlong into sexual activity unaware of the harvest of pain and heartache they will reap. Many of them started out like Derek and Annie, whose stories opened this chapter. They had been told that premarital sex is wrong, but they struggled to understand *why* true love waits. So they eventually gave in and found their answers the hard way.

The effects of premarital sex can be detrimental. I talk to the victims everywhere I go. These students are crying out because they are hurt, disillusioned, and despairing after premarital sex. My heart breaks for them and for the countless numbers of students who, like Derek and Annie, are yet teetering on the precipice, needing answers to the driving question, *Why should true love wait?*

Look into the pain-filled hearts of several young people who have intimately shared with me the emotional pain they have suffered after deciding not to wait for sex until marriage. The poignant comments below can be multiplied by literally thousands of students who have written our ministry to express similar heartbreaking experiences with premarital sex:

Premarital sex gave me fear as a gift . . . and shame to wear as a garment. It stole my peace of mind and robbed me of hope in a bright future. Sex smashed my concentration in class to smithereens. My desire for church activities was ground to a pulp. It made crumbs of the trust I had known in Christ . . . and in men and women. Sex gave me a jagged tear in my heart that even now, seven years later, is still healing.





Dear Mr. McDowell,

Can you help me? I'm thirteen and I've just ruined my life. I thought Mike really loved me, but last night we had sex for the first time and this morning he told my girlfriend that he didn't want to see me anymore. I thought giving Mike what he wanted would make him happy and he'd love me more. What if I'm pregnant? What am I going to do? I feel so alone and confused. . . . I can't talk to my parents, so could you please write me back and help me. I don't know how I can go on.



Having premarital sex was the most horrifying experience of my life. It wasn't at all the emotionally satisfying or the casually taken experience the world perceives it to be. I felt as if my insides were being exposed and my heart left unattended.



It's not a pretty picture. It's not a TV soap opera either. The reality of pregnancy outside of marriage is scary and lonely. To have premarital sex was my choice one hot June night, forcing many decisions I thought I would never have to make. Those decisions radically changed my life.



It took losing my virginity at a very young age, losing my self-respect and possibly my fertility, helping to ruin another person's marriage and family life, acquiring a non-curable virus, not getting the fulfillment that sex should provide in marriage, and living with the guilt that Satan always tries to make me feel . . . for me to realize how detrimental sex before marriage can really be.



I love him. He said he loved me too. But after we did it, he called me all sorts of names and left me. The reason I am writing is, I don't understand this. We went together for months and I thought we had something special . . . I really need help. I have this feeling that no one cares about me, and no matter what I do I am not able to make any man happy. If it's not too much trouble, could you write me back and tell me what to do? I'd appreciate it.



The reason I'm writing this is I'm alone and confused. My boyfriend kept pursuing me for sex . . . I had sex with him thinking that I owed it to him. . . . Later when I learned I was pregnant he blew up, said to get an abortion, and that it was all my fault. So, to save my parents heartache and to keep Matt, I had an abortion. Now Matt has left me. . . . How can God love me after all I have done?

Could you please write back? I'm just so confused. Can God really love and forgive me?



It's so hard sometimes—like last week, when I was over at Bill's, and his roommate Tom started talking to me again. He knows Bill and I haven't slept together, and he's basically told me I'm too Victorian. But what really hurt was his accusation that there's something wrong with anyone who doesn't want to have sex before marriage. I didn't know what to say.

The following student told her story in the third person. Consider the heartache she felt when her lips said yes as her heart was saying no:

She was extremely young, but she didn't feel young. It seemed like such a mature jump . . . from the immature age of twelve to the much more exciting, official-teenager age of thirteen. She really loved being and "acting" older. She thought everything was great!

She was an honor student and was also very involved in extracurricular activities. She loved to do things and share deep, dark secrets with her best friend. She had a good family and her parents taught her well the difference between right and wrong. She was sensible and had a good head on her shoulders . . . so it seemed.

He was older than she and extremely popular. He was very talented and was always the center of attention. She was overwhelmed with joy when he started to pay special attention to her. She was so pleased when he picked her as a girlfriend, rather than any of the other girls who would have died for the chance.

One day he told her, "I love you." But she had nothing to say in return. She did not love him, yet she adored the popularity he gained for her. She was blinded by the new attention she received from that newly discovered "popularity." Everyone said "Hi" to her. Everyone wanted to know her.

He asked her if he could express his love to her. She said she wasn't ready. He said, "I love you." She did not reply.

Later he told her something had happened. He said he showed his "love" to someone else. She said it was all right. He said, "I love you." She was naive. She looked down and said nothing.

She had never had so many friends before. So many people wanted to talk to her. In fact, she noticed that boys were paying a lot more attention to her. But, she stayed with him . . . because he loved her.

Then he told her it had happened again. He showed “love” to someone else, yet he did not really love that someone else. He even told her who the girl was. She looked away. She felt threatened. But he told her, “I love you.” She looked down and quietly replied the same. He told her to show her love for him. She didn’t want to, but she didn’t want to lose him to someone else. So she “showed her love.”

She was violated. She was innocent no longer. She broke up with him. He asked her to take him back. He told her, “I love you.” But she rejected him.

A few days later, he was “in love” with someone else. She was impure and unwholesome. She was used. She was drowned with shame. She was swallowed up by guilt. She was very alone.

She is afraid to love ever again. She is afraid to ever be loved again. She knows she can never change the past. She has stained her life . . . a stain that will never come out.

She was extremely young. She finally realized how young.

This girl no longer needs answers to the why wait question. What she does need is an understanding of God’s cleansing forgiveness and grace.

### *“If Only I Had Waited”*

She is not the only young person to regret her decision to become involved in premarital sex. A number of studies and surveys have uncovered widespread remorse and regret among students who decided not to wait for sex.

- ♦ Sixty-three percent of teens surveyed who have had sexual intercourse wish they had waited longer. More than one-half of teen boys (55 percent) and the overwhelming majority of teen girls surveyed (72 percent) said they wish they had waited longer to have sex.<sup>34</sup>
- ♦ Nearly two-thirds of teens who have had sexual intercourse wish they had waited, according to a poll released by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.<sup>35</sup>
- ♦ Nearly eight out of ten teens surveyed (78 percent) agreed that teens should not be sexually active.<sup>36</sup>
- ♦ In a study of 1,228 parochial school students, nearly half wished they had waited longer before having sex, especially females and the more religious students.<sup>37</sup>
- ♦ According to a report titled “Teenagers Under Pressure,” 76 percent of

girls and 58 percent of boys agreed that the most common reason for teenagers to initiate sex is because the boys want it. The report also said that 81 percent of the teenage girls who had sex said they wish they had waited until they were older, and 60 percent of the boys said they hadn't been mature enough.<sup>38</sup>

- ♦ One study found that “84 percent of girls age sixteen or younger want to learn how to say no without hurting the other person’s feelings.”<sup>39</sup>
- ♦ A 1994 poll by ICR Survey Research Group for *USA Weekend* asked more than 1,200 teens and adults what they thought of “several high profile athletes [who] are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before marriage and are telling teens to do the same.” Seventy-two percent of the twelve- to seventeen-year-olds and 78 percent of the adults said that they agree with the pro-abstinence message. Moreover, 44 percent of those under the age of eighteen agreed that “today’s teenagers hear too little about saying no to sex.”<sup>40</sup>

STUDENT REPORTS OF WISHING THEY HAD WAITED LONGER FOR SEX <sup>41</sup>			
Wish waited longer for sex	All students	Males	Females
No	57.3%	72.2%	44.5%
Yes	42.7%	27.8%	55.5%

On the television news program *Prime Time America* in 1992, Diane Sawyer interviewed a number of teenage girls who had been sexually active and had gotten pregnant. At the close of the segment, Sawyer asked a penetrating question to each girl: “If you had it to do all over again . . . let’s say, starting right now, you’d never been with a boy at all, how long would you wait?” Here are the answers she received:

Christy: “Till I got married.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Brandy: “Uh-huh” (agreeing with Christy).

♦ ♦ ♦

Andrea: “Till I got married.”

♦ ♦ ♦

Bethany: “I think I would be better off if I was still a virgin.”<sup>42</sup>

You can feel the regret in the words of this young man, who shared his story with me.

If only I had waited. I see now how uncluttered my life would have been, how my mind would have been free from this burden that besets me even years later.

If you want to know what it is really like, get two pieces of paper and glue part of one to the other. After it has dried, pull them apart. What you have in your hands is a vivid picture of two people after a premarital sexual relationship—both torn, both leaving a part of themselves with the other.

All my relationships had two things in common: one was we made love a lot, and the other was that they always ended and I always went through (and am still going through) incredible pain. I don't know if the breakups were because God didn't want us having sex or because of other reasons, but they hurt worse than anything ever has.

I finally got this girl into bed (actually it was in a car) when I was seventeen. I thought I was the hottest thing there was, but then she started saying she loved me and started getting clingy. I figured out that there had probably been a dozen guys before me who thought they had “conquered” her, but who were really just objects of her need for security. This took all the wind out of my sails. Worse yet, I couldn't respect someone who gave in as easy as she did, and I was amazed to find that after four weeks of sex as often as I wanted, I was tired of her. I didn't see any point in continuing the relationship. I finally dumped her, which made me feel even worse, because even I could see she was hurting. At least one of her parents was an alcoholic (maybe both were) and her home life was a disaster, and just when she thought she could hold on to someone, I ditched her. I didn't feel very cool after that. I felt pretty low.

I gave no thought to what I would tell my future wife about those months when my girlfriend and I engaged in all the pleasures of the marriage bed with none of the commitment. A wife was a nebulous figure in the far-off future, not a person with feelings or someone who would care that I had been intimate with anyone besides her.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps this man could have saved himself and his partner a lifetime of pain and regret if someone had only provided him with good reasons to wait.

After hearing me speak about waiting for sex, a young man at a university told me, “What you said really hit me. If I could have just one wish in life, it

would be for me to be twelve years old again and hear this same lecture. I have made some wrong decisions and now I'm feeling pain from my choices.”

Somehow we have to get the word to these young people before they scar their lives with behavior they will regret for a lifetime.

### *Searching for Reasons to Wait*

Month by month and year by year, I hear young people expressing their confusion about premarital sex. Most of them, like Derek and Annie at the opening of this chapter, are Christians who attend church, read their Bibles, pray, and share their faith. And most of them know that sex before marriage is wrong, but they don't know *why* it's wrong. They understand that God says no, but they don't know *why* he says no. “I was looking for reasons not to have premarital sex,” confesses Michael, a university student, “and I didn't receive answers.”

A coed writes, “I knew [premarital sex] wasn't ‘right’ but I never knew why.”

After interviewing thousands of young people, I am convinced that many teens and young singles are sexually active, not because they really want to be, or don't know how to say no, but because they don't have any deep personal reasons for waiting until they are married. Listen to the cry of the following students who struggle with how and why to say no to premarital sex:

I had been told all my life that sex before marriage was wrong, but no one ever told me *why*. In the twelfth grade I found myself dating one boy for a long period of time. We spent a lot of time alone, and as a result our relationship became more physical. I felt guilty, bitter, frustrated, and dirty. Because of those feelings, I would say to him, “We need to stop having sex, or at least slow down.” Well, we tried to slow down, but that didn't work. Instead of getting closer, we grew further apart. After two years of dating I finally said, “No more sex,” and he said, “Good-bye.” Since then, whenever I dated another person for a length of time, sex became a part of the relationship. Tears always came because I knew I had blown it again.



I had already achieved the impossible. I was almost eighteen and I was still a virgin. I had just never wanted to “do it.” . . . I was very much in love, or thought I was, with a dashing college man, and from time to time he would mention that he had never dated a girl who said no as many times as I had. After a while, my resolve weakened, and since I had no reason to say no, I decided that I would do it to show how much I loved him. I didn't really want to, but in my own mind I

couldn't rationalize not having sex. I gave in to pressure because saying yes was easier than saying no and trying to explain why not.



I feel like sex is OK as long as you don't get pregnant, but if you get pregnant, then you should get married to the guy. I disagree with the statement that a person should wait until marriage to engage in sex. My question is, Why? I know God will show me, but I have a real hard time getting it all straight. Sometimes when I get to the point where I want sex, I run to this certain guy. Most of the time it's not his fault but mine that we have sex. I really love this guy and I pray that I marry him, but I want it to be OK in God's eyes. Why isn't it?

Our young people desperately need to know more than just the difference between right and wrong. They need to know and understand why right is right and wrong is wrong. They clearly need and want more information, especially on the *why* of sexual relationships rather than the *how*. They need those reasons now. One of my major concerns is the urgency behind these cries for help. How many more beautiful lives will be damaged if we fail to provide our young people with “Why Wait?” answers—and soon?

If our kids are going to be able to say no to sexual pressure, they need to know more than Bible verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (“abstain from sexual immorality,” NASB). They need to understand that God's precepts are in their best interests and the best interests of those they love. As parents, youth leaders, pastors, and teachers, we must equip ourselves with solid answers to the question of *why* true love waits, and equip ourselves to provide young people with down-to-earth answers that make sense spiritually, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and physically.

The so-called sexual revolution of recent decades has created a dangerous moral precipice from which many are falling to destruction. We must do more than just erect a barbed wire fence at the top of the cliff or put a fleet of ambulances at the bottom to care for the wounded. *We must keep our young people away from the cliff in the first place.* To do so requires that we flood their lives with the truth about morality, for truth will help buoy them up and destroy the very foundations of the sexual revolution.

### ***Youth Want to Know***

Our church young people are not immune to the dire problems incurred by those who dabble in premarital sex. On the contrary, many of them are included in the

stories and statistics in this book. When it comes to our kids and premarital sex, their church attendance seems to have limited value as a deterrent.

How do we adequately refute this “get-it-now” approach? If sex is truly satisfying—and it can be—why should adolescents wait to enjoy it? Why shouldn’t the young in heart and body explore this fascinating dimension of their humanness as soon as they feel the “urge to merge”? How do we tell students like Derek and Michelle, Annie and Jeff to buck the trend and save sex until marriage, especially when no one else seems to be waiting?

The why wait question demands a forthright and complete answer. We cannot afford simply to tell our young people no and try to deal with sex as a negative.

I have found that most adolescents don’t know the biblical basis for waiting until marriage for sex. They don’t know the whys of their moral beliefs. And a generation without moral conviction will crumble under the pressures of a secular worldview. Consequently, when they face the tremendous temptations to give in to their sexual drives, they lack the necessary foundation for the conviction to abstain. They are ignorant of the devastating emotional, physical, relational, and medical reasons to wait. *We must equip them with that foundation. We must give them the answers they need!*

A while back I ran into an old friend who shared an interesting story. She had begun teaching eighth-grade girls in her local evangelical Bible church. “Several weeks ago I had seven of them over to the house for a sleepover. Just before everyone went to bed I asked them, ‘How many of you plan on being a virgin when you get married?’ Not one of them said yes. Finally one girl spoke up and asked, ‘How many of us are virgins?’ They all were. That night I went to bed in turmoil, wondering what to do.”

The next morning my friend asked the girls to watch one of our ministry’s videos that documents the many possible painful consequences of getting involved in premarital sex. The video also provides solid reasons for saving sex for marriage. After watching and discussing the program with the girls, she again asked, “How many of you now intend to wait until marriage for sex?” This time all seven said they did.

Before leaving, one of them came back to thank her. She said, “Mrs. Duke, no one ever gave us any reasons for waiting.”

For the first time in my memory, teenagers are seeking solid reasons for waiting. In a study done in the Atlanta, Georgia, school system, students were



asked what they wanted most in a sex-education program. The overwhelming majority answered, “How to say no to physical involvement.”

The stories and statistics in this chapter vividly illustrate why I feel the need to address this issue. Parent, pastor, youth leader, or teacher, your young people are asking, “Why wait for sex?” They want to know why they should save sex for marriage and how they can say no in the meantime. If you don’t tell them, where will they get the answers?

This book has the answers you can and must share with your young people.

In part 2, we will detail and document the many reasons kids become sexually involved today. If you don’t know what motivates them to participate in premarital sex, you will be ill-prepared to help them say no to it.

In part 3, we will lay out the reasons why true love waits for sex until marriage. These reasons are biblically based and relevant to your kids. This section will give you the insights you need for combating the immorality and permissiveness that engulf this generation.

In part 4, you will learn practical, proven steps for helping your young people say no to premarital sex and instead, choose to save themselves for marriage. You’re reading this book, so you obviously want to become more involved in their lives and their decisions regarding their sexuality. Part 4 will equip you for that involvement.



But first we must count the cost of adolescent premarital sex to our young people. Encouraging and helping them to wait for sex until marriage is not just a biblical issue. It is also a serious health issue. Sexually active kids are playing with a live hand grenade. Every encounter of casual sex places them at great risk physically, emotionally, and relationally. By answering their why wait questions you will do more than satisfy their curiosity. Your timely intervention on the matter of premarital sex could possibly save their lives.