



I don't
GET you

A GUIDE
TO HEALTHY
CONVERSATIONS

SHERRY GRAF

My eyes are wet and my heart is full. Sherry Graf has transformed my views on purity. Emotional purity, sexual purity—this booklet gave me a major heart check. This is something I will keep on my shelf, and it's something I definitely won't be keeping to myself.

ELIZABETH RICHARDS

Student at University of Minnesota—Rochester

I Don't Get You is a beautiful, insightful read. Sherry provides not only relatable and relevant examples but also intriguing insights that opened my eyes to the concept of maintaining healthy relationships with the opposite sex. Whether you are single, dating, married, or wanting to live out purity more intentionally in your everyday life, *I Don't Get You* will give you direction and guidance for pursuing Christlike holiness in your relationships with others.

JEREMY STIMACK

Student at University of Minnesota—Twin Cities

Sherry Graf has put words to the ambiguous, confusing, and invisible cloud of feelings that I have struggled with in my relationships with people of the opposite sex. I needed to recognize my own tendency to emotionally attach in unwarranted situations, and *I Don't Get You* helped me name this internal conflict. I feel encouraged to pursue holiness with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in ways that I hadn't considered before reading this book.

STEPHANIE KIPNISS

Student at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee

So often we grow up learning about sexual purity, but we neglect a lifelong pursuit of emotional purity in our conversations and relationships with others. Sherry Graf provides not only a biblical perspective on emotional purity but also a practical method to guard your own and others' hearts in conversation throughout every season of life. This booklet is a must-read for every man or woman looking to sustain healthy, intentional, and God-honoring relationships with people of the same or opposite sex.

JESSICA WEED

Student at University of Colorado—Boulder

I Don't Get You is an incredibly eye-opening resource about how to navigate both relationships and friendships with wisdom. Many people have heard about the importance of setting physical boundaries in relationships, but emotions are frequently left out of the equation. This booklet is a refreshing and practical take on how to guard your heart and honor the people in your life with diligence.

KELLY MORRELL

Student at Lipscomb University in Tennessee

Emotional purity is a topic that I believe is very important for Christians but rarely is discussed. Sherry Graf uses the Bible to support the ideas underlying emotional purity. She has created a book that both men and women can relate to. It is a great resource for small groups and discipleship groups. This book has inspired me to think differently, which will enhance my relationships with others.

SIFA MOSIORI

Rochester Navigators student president at University of Minnesota—Rochester

I plan to share this book with the many college women I mentor and teach. The concept of emotional purity often feels too hard to explain, but Sherry's clear categories of conversation and her description of commitment levels are so helpful. This book has much to apply to my own life as a young married believer and will be important for any and all of my students who are seeking to honor God with their relationships.

MOLLY JENKINS

Mission staff member with The Navigators (Collegiate) at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee

This booklet does a great job of explaining what emotional purity is and how to live it out. I was able to see places I have sometimes unintentionally defrauded my girl friends or myself. And the "yellow flags"—wow! I had been interested in a guy, and those questions made me realize so quickly that we weren't at that level of intimacy. Overall, *I Don't Get You* is a refreshing reminder.

ALY O'CONNOR

Navigators Associate Staff at University of Wisconsin—Whitewater

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FOREWORD

Sexual purity is a concept familiar to most people who will read this booklet, and we think we understand what that means in relationships with those of the opposite sex. But in this booklet Sherry Graf has highlighted another term: *emotional purity*. As I read this booklet, I realized that emotional purity, as Sherry describes it, is actually more basic than sexual purity and in fact acts as a gatekeeper to help guard sexual purity.

But emotional purity does more than keep one from immorality. It also guards one's casual—or not-so-casual—conversation with those of the opposite sex. Beyond that, it will help develop healthy relationships between men and women.

Sherry's discussion of 5 Conversation Categories is very helpful. As I read through them, I was

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reminded of the practice of “due diligence” in the business world. Due diligence is the careful and thorough examination of another company’s management, financial condition, future growth prospects, etc., by two companies considering a merger, a buyout, or other organizational and financial contracts.

Sherry’s 5 Conversation Categories are in a general sense an outline for relational “due diligence.” At the beginning level, these conversational guidelines will help keep casual relationships from becoming awkward or hurtful. Categories 3 through 5 will prove valuable in helping a young man and young woman discern the will of God in leading them into marriage.

This booklet is a valuable contribution to the subject of God-honoring relationships between young men and women. As I read it, I kept thinking, *I want my sixteen-year-old granddaughter to read this*. I trust that it will be widely used.

JERRY BRIDGES

Navigator staff member

Author of *The Pursuit of Holiness*

PART I

The Heart of Healthy Conversations



Jack and Lucy are sitting alone on a moonlit beach. All their other friends have left by this time, and Jack decides to bring the conversation back to where they started earlier as a group, talking about their faith stories. He asks thoughtful questions prompting Lucy to open up more and more. She feels comfortable and at ease with him, so she shares more details about the harder things from her past.

“I know I mentioned earlier that my parents divorced when I was seven. Ever since then my

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relationship with my dad has been really rocky. I really miss being close to him.”

Jack leans in, giving her his full attention because he senses that what she is sharing is significant. He shares about his parents' splitting up as well. As an RA on campus, he takes pride in being a good listener. He wants to help Lucy, too.

An hour later, Jack gives her a supportive one-arm hug and a “thanks for sharing” as they part. Lucy leaves, feeling cared for and closer to Jack than to anyone else in her group of friends. Jack leaves, feeling surprised by her vulnerability and a little awkward, but he can't quite figure out why. He also wonders why Emma left the beach so early in the evening. . . . He wishes he had had more time to talk to her.

Can you relate to Jack or Lucy? Many of us have found ourselves in a confusing relationship with someone of the opposite sex. I know I have! When I was in college, I thought I was being such a “good friend” when a guy started pouring out his troubles about his fiancée. I didn't realize my mistake until

later . . . when he broke up with her and started pursuing me. A lot of heartache could have been avoided if I had known more about emotional purity.

Christians hear a lot about physical purity, but emotional purity is a vitally important piece of healthy relationships that we tend to miss. In *Sex and the Soul of a Woman*, Paula Rinehart writes, “It is a strange irony that sometimes it is less vulnerable to be sexually involved—to be two strangers in the night—than it is to share your life and your heart with someone.”¹ And while both physical and emotional purity are important, all purity really starts with what we do with our hearts, not our hands.

All too often we don’t recognize or respect the emotional component happening below the surface of every conversation. And as a result we don’t “get” one another. We think we are communicating clearly, but what one person hears is often different from what the other person said. Especially when it comes to talking with the opposite sex.

In her book *The Best Yes*, Lysa TerKeurst says, “Conversational threads are what make up the fabric of relationships.”² As we build relationships

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through conversation, invisible emotional ties are being formed. Practicing emotional purity recognizes and respects the potential for those emotional ties. It guards our hearts and the hearts of others as we engage in conversation.

Emotional purity holds our hearts and relationships to a holy standard. It promotes healthy opposite-sex friendships while guarding against defrauding relationships. What do I mean by “defrauding relationships”? Defrauding relationships deceive, seemingly offering something they cannot or will not be able to give. They also rob us of the fulfilling and satisfying relationships that God intends for all His children. Sometimes we defraud without realizing it, as in the situation I faced with that guy in college. He mistook my concern for attachment. (By the way, he later restored the relationship with his fiancée and married her. Whew!) Other times we are aware of our defrauding but like the attention, so we let it continue.

God desires and designed us to have intimate and healthy relationships with Him and each other. By understanding how He designed men and women,

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especially related to communication, we can find the freedom to enjoy these relationships even more. This booklet lays out simple principles to guard our hearts and protect the hearts of those we relate with. It also teaches how we can have intentional conversations that build appropriate intimacy. As we learn and apply these things, we will grow more into the image of Christ, the Ultimate Lover and Protector of our hearts. When we cultivate healthy relationships with others, we bring honor and glory to God. Friendships that develop and maintain appropriate levels of intimacy are satisfying and a gift from Him. They aren't awkward and don't leave us too emotionally attached, connecting on an emotional level that is inconsistent with where the relationship is in reality. Instead, healthy relationships are fun, freeing, and intentional. Pursuing emotional purity through how we communicate with others will help us in friendships and romantic relationships alike.

Men, if sometimes you don't understand women, keep reading! This emotional purity stuff might sound like it's touchy-feely and not for you. Don't be fooled. Men also form emotional bonds and need to

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practice emotional purity in how they connect with and communicate with women. Doing so will help you honor the women you interact with. Trust me, women will really appreciate it if they know they can rely on you to not mess with their hearts. Emotional purity can help you keep female friends you don't have any feelings for from attaching to you in a way that goes beyond friendship. In other words, it can keep that conversation from getting awkward. It will also help guide you as you lead one special woman into a deep, rewarding relationship.

A young man from our ministry years ago heard these principles early on in his dating relationship with his girlfriend. He had at least two years left in college, and the guidelines in this booklet helped him pace their relationship. He intentionally didn't go too emotionally deep too soon with her because he knew he didn't want to get married until after graduation. As time progressed he guided their hearts into deeper attachment until he was ready to commit to her for life.

Practicing emotional purity now as a single person helps you form healthy relating habits that you

will carry into all future relationships—whether you remain single or get married. We will talk later about what emotional purity looks like after marriage and how it can help you go deeper with your spouse while safeguarding your marriage from outside attachments.

Stop and Discuss

1. Reread the story at the beginning of this section. Why did Lucy feel so close to Jack after their talk? Was that feeling mutual? Why or why not?
2. Why was this conversation significant to Lucy?
3. Did Jack realize how important this conversation was to Lucy? Why or why not?

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4. Have you ever found yourself in Jack's situation when a conversation with someone became awkward? Describe what happened. When and how did the conversation turn from lighthearted to deep?
5. Have you ever found yourself in Lucy's situation, where you became more attached to a friend after a deep conversation? Why do you think you felt that way?
6. Do you think Jack and Lucy had ever heard of emotional purity? Why or why not?
7. How much time have you spent thinking about emotional purity? What role has it played in your life up to this

point? Looking back, do you recognize the emotional component in conversations with the opposite sex (e.g., invisible emotional ties being formed)? Describe any conversations that come to mind.

Guard Your Heart

I remember reading a snarky and slightly bitter blog post about guarding your heart. The writer felt that emotional purity was unbiblical and had kept her from getting to know men she later wished she had gone deeper with. I don't know her or all of her story, but I think she was misinformed about what emotional purity really is and why guarding her heart is important. The Bible actually has a lot to say on this subject.

God created us for relationship. These relationships originate in our hearts as we attach emotionally to one another. Our hearts, relationships, and lives belong to Him. The Bible mentions *heart* and *hearts* over eight hundred times, referring not only

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to our physical hearts but to the seat of our lives and emotions. God's greatest commandment to us is to love Him with all our hearts, and the second is to love our neighbors well (Matthew 22:37-39).

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." These words are from a father to his son as he implores him to guard his heart because it is the source of inner life. The New Living Translation says, "It determines the course of your life." And the King James Version translates this verse as, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Guarding our hearts is important because our hearts affect all areas of our lives. From our hearts come all our thinking, decisions, feelings, actions, and motives.

Our hearts haven't changed since biblical times. We still need to guard our hearts, and the hearts of others, in order to love God and our neighbors well. A firm and growing relationship with Christ is the first step toward protecting our hearts and developing fulfilling relationships. Christ fills our "emotional tanks" and defends against unhealthy attachments. We can then look to others to bless

them, not simply to meet our own needs; we can love them better.

If I could talk to the woman who wrote the bitter blog post about guarding her heart, I would ask her to reconsider her definition. Guarding our hearts isn't about putting walls up to keep others out. It is about respecting our hearts and the hearts of others. It actually frees us up to go deeper with the people we are really committed to and who are committed to us. The part of us that God designed to “determine the course” of our lives is worthy of great care and respect.

Stop and Discuss

1. Why do you think Proverbs 4:23 is important?
2. What do you think of when you read this verse? What does “guarding your heart” look like to you?

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3. How have you seen your heart affect your attitudes, actions, and life?
4. Have you responded negatively to the idea of emotional purity in the past, or encountered someone else with a negative view? How could learning what the Bible says about our hearts impact a negative perspective of emotional purity?

What Makes a Conversation Intimate?

I'm *not* saying you should never have a conversation with the opposite sex in order to guard your heart and theirs. Please, please, please don't hear that! If you are single, there's nothing wrong with talking to people and keeping your radar out for a potential deeper relationship. In fact, it's healthy to develop friendships with people of both the same and the opposite gender. But there are ways to do this while practicing emotional purity. The key is

to understand what really makes a conversation intimate. God designed our hearts to attach to others through conversation. The more intimate the discussion, the greater the emotional bond we form.

Two things (among others) make a conversation intimate: (1) context and (2) content. Understanding these two things will help us practice emotional purity.

As a reminder, emotional purity promotes healthy intimacy while guarding against unintended or unhealthy attachment. For an example of unintended attachment, and how context plays into it, let's go back to Jack and Lucy that night on the beach.

“You’re such a good listener and a great friend,” Lucy whispers as Jack hugs her good-bye. Her heart suddenly feels full of affection for him. She is a little surprised by this but also enjoys it.

Jack shrugs off the compliment, feeling a bit awkward. “It’s no big deal.”

Lucy smiles up at him. “No, really, you would make a great pastor someday.”

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Jack feels like he was being a good Christian brother by listening to Lucy. "Thanks!" he says. But he walks away thinking, I just wish Emma could see that side of me. Later as he lies in bed, he thinks, Lucy seems like a good friend already. Maybe I'll ask her for help in getting to know Emma better.

Jack and Lucy did what is normal and natural—developing a friendship. The night began innocently and safely—in a large group of people sharing some of their faith stories together. But when the *context* changed to one-on-one, the potential for emotional intimacy changed as well. This would be great if Jack and Lucy were intentionally pursuing a romantic relationship, but they weren't. Unfortunately, they were both unaware of the invisible emotional bonds forming. Context is key in how much our hearts attach in conversation.

Remember the guy friend that I unintentionally split up from his fiancée in college? The problem was not only that we were discussing this one-on-one—what we were discussing was also a big issue.

He didn't just share about his relationship troubles; he was a very emotional guy and shared a lot of his feelings as well.

When we move from sharing what we think to how we feel, our hearts are more prone to form emotional ties. That is why the second factor of intimacy in conversation is *content*—what we share. In other words, what we talk about directly correlates with our level of intimacy with another person.

God created our hearts to attach when the context and content are intimate. It does matter, though, who is doing the sharing. I think this happens in general more for women because we tend to share our feelings more. But it can happen for men, too. A deep conversation doesn't always equal a deep attachment on both ends. And the "listener" is often unaware of the attachment forming on the other end. So you can see now that not only does the context matter, but what we share is just as important for developing intimacy—or avoiding it when it is unhealthy or unwanted.

Okay, so now we know that God created us for relationship, that these relationships form through

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conversation, and that the context and content of those conversations determine how emotionally attached we become. Knowing this, how do we know when what we share is okay or too much?