

MAMA BEAR *Apologetics*[®]



GUIDE
to
SEXUALITY &
GENDER
IDENTITY

HILLARY MORGAN FERRER
with AMY DAVISON



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This book is dedicated to all those who have been willing to take up their sexual crosses and still follow Christ, even when it's really, really difficult.

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INTRODUCTION

My Kid's Cartoon Showed *What*?

Why I Needed This Book Yesterday

HILLARY AND AMY

Once upon a time, the sex talk was simple. It was still mortifying for both parties, but it was simple. For the little ones, you talked about the anatomical differences between boys and girls. Where do babies come from? I'm so horrified glad you asked! You discussed how those anatomical differences allowed the mommy and the daddy to make a baby, praying that the kids didn't ask for more details. As they got older, you discussed God's design for marriage and God's purpose for sex within a marriage. You read some verses from Ephesians, gave a very (very) light study from Song of Solomon about the goodness of sex (but only within marriage—DON'T DO IT OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE!). And then you turned these fully prepared (*cough*) youngsters over to the youth pastor, who taught them who-knows-what out of a study guide on purity. Phew! Glad that's over.

One question though: How's that been working out for us? How'd that

work out for *you*? Does it feel like we're winning the culture war on this one? Because it doesn't to us. We are losing so badly that many people have just given up and opted for the "safe sex" talk because any discussion of abstinence is just laughed at. Like, *How cute! As if you can convince teenagers not to have sex...you're funny!*

To paraphrase legendary fighter Mike Tyson, everyone has a plan until they've been hit. The church, unfortunately, is no different. Between hyper-fundamentalism, the fallout of purity culture, and the at-times graceless response to LGBTQ+ issues, the church has taken more than its share of hits. As Dr. Juli Slattery points out, the problem isn't that the spiritual battle defending biblical sexuality isn't worth having. The problem is that the church *doesn't know how to fight*.¹ And the results aren't pretty.

Pew Research Center conducted a survey on views regarding sexuality and found that 57 percent of Christians believed premarital sex in a committed relationship was fine, while 50 percent said that hookups (sleeping with someone you aren't committed to) were no biggie!² According to one study, upward of 80 percent of unmarried evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 29 have had sex.³

We parents aren't doing much better. Many of us grew up in a "don't ask, don't tell" household when it came to discussing sex, and we've happily carried on the tradition with our kids. For some of us, the silence is rooted in fear. We're afraid that if we talk about sex, then our kids will want sex. Or perhaps you are only now shaking off the weight of toxic sexual messages that were piled upon your teenage shoulders. The last thing you want is to make your children feel the same guilt and shame you did. And others just don't know what to say. Heck, we don't understand how the biblical sexual worldview is a critical aspect in our own walk with Jesus, let alone know how to explain it to our kids.⁴ Instead, we rely on middle school health class, our kids' friends, and social apps to do the legwork for us.

Church, can we come together for a moment and acknowledge a hard truth? This isn't working. Our kids *want* us to talk to them about sex. No really, they do. When the Power to Decide campaign surveyed thousands of students, do you know who teens ages 12 to 15 overwhelmingly said had the

most influence on their sexual decisions? *Parents*. Do you know who also won the influence race with teens ages 16 to 19? *Parents*.⁵ Don't let their perpetual eye rolls fool you: Our kids are listening. Let's start talking.

That is why you have this book, Mama Bears. You (and your husband) are your child's primary teachers. You are the youth pastors of your home. And God has given you everything you need to shepherd your family in the truth while holding fast to loving like Christ. The enemy has come in and tried to confuse these categories, but that's where we at Mama Bear Apologetics come in. The area of sexuality is like one giant knot; its knots even have knots. Our hopes are that, through this book, we can slowly unravel the threads of confusion surrounding the area of sexuality and gender identity.

Naturally, there is a lot to unpack here. As much as our nerdy selves would love to do an in-depth study of each topic, we realize we are competing with nap time, busy schedules, and an acceptable word count for popular-level books. (You mean not everyone wants 800-page, multivolume books? Pshaw.)

What we aim to present here is a biblical perspective—to backtrack how the enemy has broken God's good design, to emphasize a loving attitude toward real, hurting people behind each of these issues, and to tackle the topics in a way that helps you reinforce biblical sexuality for your children. Are you up for it?

Amy's Story

I was recently hiding from the Texas heat and watching TV with my kids. With three prepubescent boys, my vote for *Call the Midwife* was (unsurprisingly) outvoted, so we cuddled up to catch the latest episode of *The Loud House*. This show follows a preteen boy, Lincoln Loud, as he navigates life with ten sisters.

That day, the Loud family was trying to figure out which sibling had been the recipient of a love letter. It had been addressed only to *L*, which presented a challenge since everyone in the family had a name beginning with *L*! As the show progressed, each sister confronted her valentine crush with a love note, hoping her beloved was the secret admirer. Each sister, that is, except budding rock star, Luna.

Luna was too nervous to talk to her crush, but she spent a majority of the show casting dreamy looks toward a group of kids whose ringleader was a guitar-toting heartthrob. (Boys and guitars—am I right?) With some last-minute encouragement from the Loud tribe, Luna slipped a love note into her crush's locker and ducked around the corner just as the group came down the hall. It looked like dream-boy was about to discover Luna's note...but he walked right past the locker. In the last few moments, however, my boys and I watched as guitar-boy's bandmate, *a girl*, opened the locker instead. The credits rolled as the two girls shared a googly-eyed stare.⁶

The whole scene lasted only a few seconds, and had I been scrolling through Pinterest, I would have missed it. I glanced at my kids, and thankfully the younger two had been distracted by Legos. My ten-year-old, however, had not. He turned to me with a confused look and said, "Wait, what just happened? Does she like girls?"

And just like that, my son was introduced to the LGBTQ+ world. Through a cartoon.

Proactive and Not Reactive

We realize this is a very tame example according to current standards, but Amy's story still applies: We don't know when or where this uncomfortable conversation will be forced on us. Not only do we need to be prepared, but we should probably have a game plan *in advance*. But why? Why can't we just figure it out as we go along? The answer is no, for two reasons. The first is a psychological phenomenon that I (Hillary) have not found a name for, so I'm going to call it the *founder's effect*. The founder's effect is the phenomenon that whoever is the first to introduce a concept to someone automatically becomes the expert in that person's eyes. Now we can discover other experts, but we have an implicit bias toward the person who was the first to explain something to us. Our question, Mama Bears, is: Who do you want your kids to see as the expert? You or Dr. Google? You or television shows? You or your kids' friends? The obvious answer is you!

Second—and this goes along with the first point—the worldview of the founder becomes ground zero for future understanding. We will talk about

worldviews in chapter 2. Worldviews are the foundation upon which we incorporate all new information. Kids are sponges, and a child will interpret reality in light of whatever worldview is most often modeled to them. If they are exposed to alternate worldviews in these formative years, the one they hear or see the most will ultimately become their ground zero—despite that full hour of felt-board Bible stories every Sunday. This is why parents need to decide for themselves whether to use public education. The average kid can't simultaneously be a sponge *and* a missionary, holding down the fort “for God.”

This is especially true with regard to sex. If the first piece of information our kids receive on sexuality is that gender is changeable, sexuality is fluid, and heterosexual relationships have no practical benefit, it will be very hard for parents to change that foundation. Every piece of information, whether the child realizes it or not, will be woven into their original understanding of sex. At that point, you cannot just tell them that boys cannot become girls and vice versa; you will have to explain, defend, and prove this statement before they'll accept it as true. In summary, the first person becomes the expert, and that person's worldview becomes the lens through which the learner evaluates all other evidence. *That* is why we need to address these concepts first with our kids!

FOUNDER'S EFFECT: The first person to introduce a topic to a learner becomes the expert in that person's eyes; the expert's worldview will also be the lens through which the learner evaluates all future evidence.

We're Not in Kansas Anymore

I (Hillary) sometimes joke about how the Lord teaches twice—in the lecture and the lab. The lecture is the actual biblical teaching—right theology, wisdom gleaned from the Word. Amy's story reflects what I jokingly refer to as the lab portion of learning. During the lab portion, the Lord brings opportunities for you to put into practice what you've learned. Anyone who's ever prayed for patience knows what I mean. The lecture portion is fine; the lab

portion knocks you to your knees. Upon embarking on this book, Amy immediately realized how real and imminent the sexual agenda was—all the way down to cartoons.

We wish we could say this was an isolated incident, but it was not. When we crowdsourced the question on social media, asking Mama Bears to share stories of LGBTQ+ characters in kids' shows, we had more than 150 comments *within the first hour*. With increasing frequency, television characters are showcasing unbiblical sexuality. Children frequently have two mommies or two daddies, and characters are every shade of trans: nonbinary, agender, gender-fluid—anything but simply boys and girls. Why this sudden influx? Simple: Our culture has shifted.

Back in our day (and yes, we realize how old that makes us sound), kids' programming typically matched the biblical model, with a mommy and a daddy in the home. Girls had crushes on boys and vice versa. But now that our culture has redefined the family, we've seen cartoons, music, and programming shifting to follow suit. This makes sense when we remember that art mimics life...but that doesn't mean it'll always reflect truth.

Amy's not the only parent who's been thrown for a loop here. You could tell your own stories about the corruption of sexuality in our culture. Many parents have no idea what a worldview is, let alone that their children's cartoons are projecting one that isn't biblical. (We'll address that in chapter 2.) It snuck up on us while we were busy trying to figure out how this new math worked. (Why can't we just carry the tens anymore?!) It invaded our homes while our radar systems were focused on decoys. We missed the warning signs, and now we're in damage-control mode. Then, alas, it snowballed faster than we ever could have imagined, leaving us parents to wonder how we got here in the first place or where we went wrong.

And that's why we're glad you're here. This is a safe place where we totally understand that worries often stem from uncertainty, and uncertainty comes from not understanding. In this book, we want to help you understand what is going on in our culture and how we got here. We want to help you to define what's happening and empower your kids to live counterculturally, to stand up for truth without becoming the playground's morality police.

Our kids need to be equipped so they can refuse to call evil good, good evil, and lies truth. And make no mistake—that is being demanded of them. While some people like to compare this situation to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being forced to bow before a statue or be thrown into the fiery furnace, I find that our kids have difficulty drawing the comparison. There's no physical statue and no actual furnace. But we do have evidence of Christians being required to pay lip service to another god or else face the consequences.

Say It or Else!

The Roman Empire was considered a bastion of tolerance according to ancient standards. All religions were generally accepted, and their adherents could worship whoever, whatever, and however they wanted—provided their worship didn't disturb the peace or create loyalty conflicts between them and Caesar. To weed out the troublemakers, there was basically one rule: Once a year, everyone—no matter their religion—was required to offer a pinch of incense and say the phrase “Caesar is Lord.” The temple dudes didn't care if the person believed it or not. As long as they *said it*, then they were given a certificate that allowed them to buy, sell, and trade in the marketplace. No certificate, no business. Most people were willing to do this because they were already pluralistic. Why not? What's one more god? Sure, Caesar is Lord. Whatever.

The Christians and the Jews, on the other hand, had difficulties with this. According to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, words matter. They could not speak this lie while maintaining a clear conscience before God.

Some within the faith tried to cut corners, thinking they could just obey Caesar in body and worship God privately in their hearts. These people (the ones who were willing to compromise on this technicality) were the first to crumble once real persecution came. Pliny the Younger noted these “Christians” in a letter he wrote to Trajan. Once arrested, not only would they worship the statue of Trajan, but they could be persuaded to “utter imprecations against the name of Christ.” (An imprecation is basically a curse.) On the flip side, he noted that “there is no forcing, it is said, those who are *really Christians* into any of these compliances...I judged it necessary to try to get at the real truth by putting to the torture two female slaves, who

were said to officiate in their religious rites; but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.”⁷ (This superstition was that Jesus was resurrected.)

Summary: Once you start compromising in the little things, it’s easy to compromise in the big things. The ones who refused to compromise at the temple when things were easy were the ones to stand firm in the jail once things got hard.

While nobody is getting tortured yet, people are being cancelled, bullied, fired, and fined left and right.⁸ We are facing a looming crisis where Christians will be required to pay lip service to the god of our age—sex-positivity and gender ideology. Our kids are being desensitized, song by song, cartoon by cartoon, numbed to the point where immorality feels like no big deal. We want them to be able to dispense with the false ideas about sexuality that our culture sends their way, which means we need to start discipling them yesterday.

Instead of pointing us to God, sexual pleasure has become a god itself. Sexuality and gender ideology is the ruler of our age, one our kids are being required to obey and pay homage to in word (pronouns) and in deed (activism). Our children are being fed lies cloaked in the language of morality that could lead them to kneel at the altar of pleasure and deception. The call to open their eyes to false teachings is a godly conviction.

All of that starts with calling out cultural lies for what they are. After reading the first Mama Bear Apologetics book, a reader told me, “These lies were all around me in culture, and I just didn’t see them. But now I do. And now that I see them, I can’t not see them.” That’s our goal for this book as well—to shed some light on the lies so you’ll know them when you see them. As we discuss each one of these messages, we’ll hold it up to the Word and let godly wisdom inform our thinking.

Here’s What to Expect

Part 1 focuses on the biblical view of sexuality. We look at how the way we view sexuality is actually a make-it-or-break-it issue for being a disciple of Jesus (chapter 1). Sexuality isn’t just some side aspect of Christianity; what we believe about what’s done in the bedroom reveals what we *really* believe about

God, others, reality, and ourselves (chapter 2). While people might think the core of the sexual revolution is pleasure (and that is a big part of it), an even bigger issue is the idea of *authority*, meaning who has the right to determine what we do with our bodies (chapter 3). And we'll frame how all of these topics should be approached—with love for people who are held captive to bad ideas (chapter 4).

In part 2, we dig into the actual standards and curricula that are being taught to your kids (chapter 5) and the tactics (like moralization and repetition) that are being used to advance the agenda (chapter 6). Then we'll look at actual curricula that is being used all over the country (chapter 7). Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the two most important movements—sex-positivity and queer theory—that undergird everything you are witnessing within our culture's understanding of gender and sex. Once you understand it, Mama Bears, you'll see it everywhere!

In part 3, we go over the specific things that are tripping everyone up. We start by taking a long, hard look in the mirror with what happened within purity culture (chapter 10), and then we'll address all the things that are coming at your kids—pornography (chapter 11), same-sex attraction (chapter 12), gender confusion (chapter 13), and the cult that is gender theory (chapter 14). For these chapters, you'll recognize the popular ROAR format (*recognize* the message, *offer* objective discernment, *argue* for a healthier approach, and *reinforce* through discussion, discipleship, and prayer).

Finally, chapter 15 reminds us that Christians with LGBTQ+ proclivities aren't the only ones who have a rough deal when it comes to obeying God's sexual commandments. Realizing that we *all* have issues gives us the courage to take up whatever cross we have been given and have compassion for others when their sexual cross is different from ours.

As an added bonus in the afterword, we go over things you'll want to repeat to your kids until they want to gag because, as we note in chapter 6, the human brain has difficulty distinguishing between truth and familiarity. There's power in good maxims to reinforce a biblical worldview, and we're not ashamed of using them! Our kids need good, bite-sized pieces of wisdom to combat the colorfully glittered bad philosophy that parades across their Instagram feeds.

Three Types of Readers

One of the things I (Hillary) have been convicted of from the moment I started speaking in public was recognizing the variety of personalities within my audience. What feels like a refreshing new idea to one parent feels like overload to another. So before we start on this book, I want to acknowledge three very different mom-types who might be reading this book.

Group 1: It's All My Responsibility

Some of you feel everything is your responsibility—from organic meals and Baby Beethoven to homeschooling and driving your kids to Awana. If it will benefit your child, you'll give it a try. You understand the gravity of raising kids in this secular world. You are doing your absolute best, but if anyone puts one more straw on your back, you fear you will finally collapse under the weight. If this is you, please sit for a moment and acknowledge that. Praise God for your zeal in shepherding your children! However, there is also a time to rest. Consider saying the following prayer before embarking on this book:

Father God, I know Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light. I desire to please You by being faithful with my children. Lord, please teach me how to release that which is out of my control. As I read this book, I pray that the enemy's voice of condemnation would be silenced. Lord, convict me of things where I need to improve, but please protect me from feelings of guilt or inadequacy as I learn this new information. Show me the things You would have me do to raise faithful, godly children, and help me to release them back to You, knowing that You are a good, good Father.

Group 2: It's All God's Responsibility

Another group reading this book has mastered the art of resting in Christ's sovereignty, which is a good thing. However, it can sometimes lead to assumptions that a good Christian school, a flourishing youth group, and a few dinner-time conversations will suffice for raising children in the faith. This group may be less aware of the pervasiveness of culture's lies and might need a swift kick in

the pants to realize that we're in a whole new world; we can't raise our children the way we were raised because the world in which we were raised is gone. If this is you, then be prepared for a wake-up call! It will be tempting to feel like there is too much to be done, and you might want to stick your fingers in your ears and sing, "La la la la! I can't hear you!"

Please don't. It's not too late, and it's not too hard. There is grace for being an imperfect parent. Don't give up! My prayer is that the Holy Spirit would be with you in this book, convicting and motivating you to be a warrior for your kids, raising them up into a robust Christian faith with a biblical understanding of sex and gender. Here's a prayer you can offer:

Lord God, I thank You for the rest I have in You. I praise You because You are sovereign. Not a single bird falls from the sky without Your knowledge. Lord, I confess the times when I have used my faith in Your providence as an excuse to not engage the culture. Lord, I pray You would open my eyes to ways I can be actively training my kids. I pray You would reveal my blind spots. I pray for wisdom, and I pray for discernment against the enemy's lying tongue, bringing condemnation where You are trying to bring conviction. Give me the strength, Lord, to face these issues head-on, so I might be a parent who purposely shepherds my kids to resist cultural lies. I do all things knowing You are with me.

Group 3: I've Already Blown It

It is naive to think that all the readers of this book have squeaky-clean pasts. We have a God who came to remove our shame and bring beauty from ashes. That being said, I believe many of us are still walking in sexual shame and don't even know it.

Dealing with shame is not a process we can rush any more than we can rush the process of grief. Grieving is not fun, but it is *healthy*. It is *necessary*. It is practically a *requirement* for emotional healing. We cannot repress grief; it will come out in some other way. Similarly, there is no fast-tracking the repentance and healing process.

And here's where I want to make a bold thesis. Not until we have come to terms with our own sin—fully acknowledging, fully confessing, fully grieving, and fully receiving God's forgiveness—can we finally walk in freedom. And freedom is what I want for you and your children, friends! Experiencing God's freedom from our sexual past is key to being able to talk to our kids about sex in a healthy way.

Some of you have experienced sexual abuse or trauma and are still walking in bondage to a burden placed on you by another. For these Mama Bears, let me speak from experience that the Lord is faithful. Some healing comes quickly and some slowly. Never give up! Praise Jesus for the amazing counselors who are out there. He has given us His Word, and He has also given us His medical and counseling ambassadors who can walk us through the damage that comes from sexual trauma. For you, I pray the Lord would bring healing to the parts that have been broken so that you can walk in freedom from a burden you should never have had to carry.

For other Mama Bears, freedom means receiving the forgiveness God offers and then forgiving *yourself*. I have known amazing women, godly wives and mothers, who live in fear that someone will discover their past. For you, I want to pray peace and hope. The Lord has removed your sins as far as the east is from the west. You are *free*, Mama Bear. Don't let the enemy tether you to what the Lord has freed you from.

Now, we might have some Mama Bears who are currently in sexual sin. To you, I implore: Please realize your worth. My prayer is that you would see yourself the way the Lord sees you. He wants freedom for you. Sexual sin is the only sin Scripture calls sinning against your own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). Romans 1:24 refers to sexual sin as people "degrading" themselves with one another. Do not believe the lie that degrading yourself is empowering or fulfilling.

Each one of these types of bondage can lead to difficulties in talking with our children about sex. Slavery to shame can result in fear-based teaching, confusing kids as to the innate goodness of sex within marriage. Slavery to sin results in a "do as I say, not as I do" type of teaching, or even a tacit permission to sin because deep down you don't believe young people are capable of

controlling their urges. Whatever your bondage, it will likely be passed on to your kids when you talk about sex. It's not an insurmountable issue. But it's something to keep in mind and something to pray about as we go through this journey together.

A Final Word

We are going to address a lot of topics in this book—both from a biblical perspective and from the secular perspective that is trying to rewrite God's commands regarding sexuality and gender. My prayer for you is that you don't let the pervasiveness of the secular worldview overwhelm you. We need to be aware of the adversary's schemes so we can properly defend against them. We can't defend against that which we don't understand. There is power in understanding the enemy's playbook. There is power in preparing to meet these schemes head-on, and we can empower our children to do the same—with grace, love, and truth.

You'll find problems here of which you might have been blissfully unaware, but ignorance isn't safety. Think of this book as a takedown of the enemy's manual, and now, for the first time, you can actually prepare your kids for what is coming.

Get ready, Mama Bears. It's time to ROAR.



PART 1

Things I Probably Already Knew...But Kinda Forgot

PRAYER OF LAMENT¹

Turn to God

LAMENTATIONS 2:19; 5:1

Our young children have gone into captivity before the enemy. We pour out our hearts like water before You, Lord, for the lives of our children. O Lord, earnestly remember what has come upon us! Look down and see our reproach, our national disgrace!

Lord, hear our prayers. We are desperate. Who else can we turn to? Where else can we go? You are our only help and refuge from the onslaught of the sexualization of everything, from the normalization of all things contrary to Your will. Our kids are in a world of trouble.



CHAPTER 1

Sexually Set Apart

*How Sexual Holiness Is a
Nonnegotiable for Disciples of Jesus*

HILLARY

In the year 2000, Hollywood graced us with the poignant and moving cinematic masterpiece *Dude, Where's My Car?* The film follows two dimwitted deadbeats who, after a night of binge drinking, cannot find their car and have unexpectedly acquired an otherworldly device about which they know nothing. Well, not nothing. They know exactly two things: It's a mysterious and powerful device, and its mystery is only exceeded by its power.

A mysterious and powerful device, you say? Of which its mystery is only exceeded by its power?! *That*, my friends, is sexuality. *Selah*. (That's Christianese for "meditate on that for a hot second.")

While I am joking about the movie being a masterpiece, the mystery and power of sex are no laughing matter. You might even call sex the first command. God was like, "Here's your garden; be fruitful and multiply (wink!)." As Clay

Jones explains, “All Adam and Eve had to do all day long was to garden and play with creation’s *only* physically perfect and completely naked member of the opposite sex.”¹

The idea that sexuality should be guarded is not very popular. Our society sees it as just a prudish phase we went through back in the Victorian era. Thanks to Freud, we are now supposedly enlightened, understanding that sexual repression is basically the gateway to all mental illnesses. *Be free, little birdies! It’s for your own good! Don’t listen to those religious nutjobs. They all crraaaaaazy.*

Christians are often accused of being obsessed with sex or afraid of sex because we uphold the biblical teaching that sex is intended for husband and wife...and because we speak up when abstinence is excluded from the options laid before today’s teens. We believe that far from portraying sex as a dirty act, Scripture teaches that sex is good! God created it! There’s even a whole book of the Bible celebrating it. As my old pastor used to say—from the pulpit, no less—“God is not a killjoy. We serve the God who *created* the orgasm.” Shock! Gasp! He actually said that? Yes, he did! And I think all our pastors should too. If we blush at declaring good what God said is good, we’ve already let our culture redefine the gift and steal something that doesn’t belong to them.

Unfortunately, Christians notoriously blush at such statements, but the world has no such squeamishness. In fact, our live-and-let-live world can’t understand why such an awesome gift shouldn’t be shared with as many partners as possible. But let’s take things back a bit...or a lot. If we are to understand sexuality, we must go back to the very beginning. As we will show later in the chapter, sex is intended to be a *sign* of the covenant between husband and wife.² Every time a married couple makes love, they are—in bodily form—*repeating their marital vows*. God doesn’t place limits on sex because He wants to downplay the goodness of sex. He places limits on it because sex has *meaning*, meaning that our culture has lost.

To be fair, our culture hasn’t just lost the meaning of sex; we’ve actually lost the meaning of *meaning*! Postmodernism teaches that there is no such thing as inherent meaning; it’s a social construct *imposed* upon things by us humans.

We ascribe meaning. We determine truth. We're fashioned into little gods who can speak truth into existence...or change it on a whim.

If you read the first Mama Bear Apologetics book, you know how prevalent postmodern ideology is. Which brings me to a sad truth: If our kids can't understand the concept of unchangeable, inherent meaning, then they will never understand that *sex* has unchangeable, inherent meaning. They will not understand that sex carries a message, and that we do not have the authority to tamper with that message. When we tamper with God's plan for sex, we miscommunicate the truths that God intended to be seen through the marital union. (We'll discuss this more in chapter 3.)

The message the world is telling our kids is that sex is no longer just a behavior; *it is a person's very identity*—a foundational aspect that can be neither questioned by others nor restricted.

Our world treats sex as the inviolable truth on which everything rests. It's the big kahuna of human experience to which everyone has a right. Secular culture sees itself as the champion of the most powerful and important aspect in the world, and we Christians as the great buzzkill, trying to downplay the awesomeness of sex.

Okay, fine. We'll play that game for a second. Let's just grant briefly (for the sake of argument) that sex *is* the most important thing in the world. Shouldn't we then ask, "Doesn't *every* important and powerful thing involve boundaries and protection from misuse?" Seriously. Name one other thing that is super important and super powerful that isn't carefully guarded or meticulously controlled (nuclear warheads, controlled substance prescriptions, etc.). In fact, the more important and powerful something is, the more it is usually safeguarded. Why wouldn't we expect the same to be true about sex?

Since God created sex, He is the only one who truly knows what it means, what it communicates, and how powerful it really is—and how destructive it is when misused.

Set Apart from the Beginning

God's commands regarding sex are not just a side issue. They are a prominent theme spanning the Old and New Testaments, especially in terms of

holiness. The word *holy* literally means “set apart for a special purpose.” As Christians, our sexual ethic is a major way in which we are called to be set apart from the world because sexual holiness is, in essence, a sign of our knowledge of and commitment to God. It has always been this way.

Throughout Scripture, we see how God’s people have been called to sexual holiness—how they are to be sexually set apart. Let’s take a cursory overview through the Old and New Testaments to see exactly how serious the Lord is regarding this topic.

The Old Testament: Whoring After Other Gods...Oddly Not a Metaphor

I recommend reading through Deuteronomy 22:13-25 and Leviticus 18 and 20 to get a thorough overview of what God defines as sexual immorality and how seriously He takes it. One might notice that He’s *really* specific in these passages. His commands regarding sex aren’t just revealing sexual boundaries; God is actually describing the culture the Israelites were coming out of and the culture they were told to conquer.

Yahweh prefaces the Levitical sex laws by saying, “*I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you*” (Leviticus 18:2-3). God then proceeds to list everyone (family members) and everything (animals) with whom to *not* have sex. After this extensive list, He restates His original purpose for sexual holiness: “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled” (Leviticus 18:24). In other words, *This is how I am calling you to be set apart from the rest of the world! Don’t mess it up, or I’ll remove you just like I did them.* (And if you keep reading through Judges and Chronicles, you’ll see how that’s exactly what happened.)

Israel struggled with sexual idolatry from the start—and kept returning to it throughout the course of its history. For a few pockets of time here and there, they were faithful to God. But more often than not, they fell right back into the practices of the nations whom they were told to drive out of the land.

The Canaanites were not—as some people might think—just a poor, unsuspecting people who were just trying to live their lives in peace. (Admit

it...you've thought this before, haven't you? It's okay. I did too, once upon a time.) But if you really dive into Canaanite history and culture, at some point—after you've recovered from your nausea—you start to think that maybe, just maybe, this was a culture that needed to be wiped out.³

I cannot even begin to describe the kind of sexual debauchery that went on in Canaan before the Israelites got there. I remember a pastor reading through Ezekiel 16–20 and thinking, *Holy schnikes, I've never heard someone say whose this many times in a row.* I'm serious. Grab an ESV translation, a two-liter of Mountain Dew, and take a swig every time you see the word. You'll be so hopped up you won't be able to sleep for two days. It's also prevalent in the book of Hosea. When I was younger, I assumed the “whoring after other gods” language was merely metaphorical, symbolic of Israel's spiritual adultery. (And yes, it's true that the Lord uses the word this way.) But after studying ancient Near East practices, I came to the horrifying realization that whoring after other gods was not—I repeat, *not*—purely a metaphor. People were literally worshipping other gods by having temple orgies.

The Asherah poles and the “high places” described in Scripture were giant phallic symbols. According to pagan worship, the gods needed to be stimulated into giving up the goodies—fertility, rain, and crops. So how did they stimulate the gods? By basically providing a veritable smorgasbord of live religious porn—complete with incest, child abuse, homosexuality, and...things that should never be done with a goat.⁴ In this culture, sex with the temple prostitutes was the height of religious piety. I suspect there were lots of “very religious men” in this culture. “Honey, I'm going to the temple...again.”

And what would they do with all the babies that were born from these sex-capades? They'd burn them on the altar to Molech.⁵ Child sacrifice was just one more of the detestable practices of Canaan from which God called His people to separate. And before you ask (like a woman did during a lecture on Caanan), “How could anyone allow such a thing to happen in their community?” remember this: *It's still happening.* Our culture serves its own Molech. It's called Planned Parenthood. Children always have been and always will be the victims of our sexual immorality. We have not changed. We have not progressed. We've just gotten better at hiding (and renaming) our child sacrifices.

And just in case you are *still* wondering how seriously God takes sexual sin, hop over for a moment to Numbers 25. This is one of those Bible stories that will *never* be reenacted on a felt board in Sunday school, but it's an important read. Moses is giving a verbal smackdown to the entire nation of Israelite men for sleeping around with the Midianite women. In the middle of his rant, some moron traipses through the crowd with a Midianite woman on his arm and disappears with her into his tent. Aaron's grandson Phinehas sees this, follows them in, and skewers them with a spear . . . in the middle of the deed. How does God respond? He gives Phinehas and his descendants an eternal priesthood for being so zealous for the Lord. No, this is *not* a model for Christians to currently imitate! But it does illustrate the eternal principle that our sexual faithfulness *really* matters to God. Like, a lot.

The New Testament: Pointing Back to God's Design

The New Testament also has quite a bit to say on the topic, though not necessarily by Jesus Himself. And some people find that to be a problem. Since Jesus didn't explicitly condemn all the same sexual practices prohibited in the Old Testament (like homosexuality), some feel that His silence is tacit approval for all sexual unions. But this is just a logical fallacy called "the argument from silence." When Jesus came, He didn't spend much time reexplaining God's sexual law because He was speaking to Jews, and the Jews *already knew how God defined sexual immorality*. They had studied the Jewish law for centuries. If you were to take Christ's silence on topics as permission, then you could justify almost anything—sex with animals (Leviticus 18:23), sleeping with your mom (Leviticus 18:8; 1 Corinthians 5:1), or anyone else in your family (Leviticus 18:9-17), you name it. Don't get sucked into this bad argument from silence.

When Jesus *did* speak on sexual morality and marriage, He stuck with (as my high school biology teacher used to call it) the K.I.S.S. method ("Keep It Simple, Stupid") and simply pointed His Jewish audience back to *their own scriptures*, back to God's original design—"A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5, quoting Genesis 2:24).

Later, in Romans 1, the apostle Paul describes the descent of a culture into

oblivion. The passage begins with people who know God but don't really care about worshipping Him (verse 21). Then their minds and their hearts go stupid (verse 22). They start worshipping something else (verse 23), and God gives them over to what they think they want: lots and lots of sex (verse 24). A few orgies later, their sexuality goes from depraved to unnatural (verse 26). At the end of the whole process they have become a group that doesn't even know what good looks like anymore. Take a peek at verses 29-32, friends. This is our society's future if things continue as they are.

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Sexual morality is emphasized in almost every New Testament epistle, especially the ones aimed at Gentiles, who didn't have the benefit of centuries of Jewish law. Sexual immorality is not only mentioned, but it's usually mentioned first in the long lists of sins that a Christ-follower *must* forsake—no ifs, ands, or buts.

- Acts 15:23-29: When asking which of the Old Testament laws should apply to Gentiles, there were only *four*, one of which was sexual morality.⁶
- 1 Corinthians 5:9-13: Paul is so emphatic on sexual holiness that he commands church members not to associate with those who call themselves Christians but engage in sexual immorality.
- Ephesians 5:3: Paul says there shouldn't even be a hint of sexual immorality among them.
- Colossians 3:5: Believers are told to put sexual immorality to death.

- Galatians 5:16-19: Sexual immorality is contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8: This might be the most convicting passage of all! It is God's will that we avoid sexual immorality, and "anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God" (verse 8).

Praise God that we are able to repent and be forgiven! First Corinthians 6:11 says that the whole list of evil things describes what some of us *were*. None of them are an unforgivable sin from which we can't repent. Who you *were* is not the same as who you *are*. (This becomes especially important when we start talking about same-sex attraction and transgenderism!) Yes, we will probably still sin, but how we respond afterward is most important. The heart that is saved does not make sinning a deliberate, continual practice, nor does it delight in things contrary to God's commands. The transformed heart does not interpret Christ's kindness as permission to live-as-you-like now and ask forgiveness later. No. A person with a saved, renewed heart is inspired (even compelled!) to repent (Romans 2:4).

There is forgiveness seventy times seven times (and then some!) (Matthew 18:22). A broken and contrite heart the Lord will not despise (Psalm 51:17). Be encouraged by this...because I say this next scary part in all seriousness: Persistent, unrepentant sin is not the kind of sin that Christ paid for. We are warned about this in several passages:

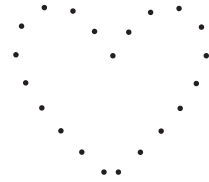
- Hebrews 10:26: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." Why? Because: "No one born of God *makes a practice* of sinning" (1 John 3:9 ESV).
- Revelation 2:13-16, 18-25: A lax attitude regarding sexual immorality is a deal-breaker, even in churches that are faithful, loving, and serving others in every other way. (In other words, no amount of "love" or "social justice" can make up for ignoring God's commands about sex.)

- Revelation 22:14-15: Practicing sexual immorality and loving falsehood puts us outside of God's eternal kingdom.

Do these verses sound harsh and scary? Maybe it's because God wants to be clear on how big of an issue sexuality is! I'm not sure how much more explicit we need the Bible to be. It is mind-boggling how many professing Christians are getting this wrong—redefining sexuality based on their terms and not on the Bible's.

Fine, but Where Exactly Does It Say That Sex Outside of Marriage Is Wrong?

Maybe your teenager is asking, "Where does the Bible *specifically* say sex outside of marriage is wrong?" If you're having this conversation with your teen, use this illustration. Look at the picture to the right.



Ask them what shape it is (a heart). Ask them which one of the dots "proves" that it's a heart or defines it as a heart. (Clearly, none of them.) You have to look at all the dots *together* to say definitively, "That's a heart."

This is the way the Bible communicates on some topics (which is why we always advocate Greg Koukl's advice to "never just read a Bible verse"). Case in point, not every teaching in the Bible has a single, ironclad verse. Rather, *many* verses, when taken together, illustrate a particular teaching. There is no "thou shalt not have sex outside of marriage," but God gives us the picture of what marriage is in Genesis 1. We have a ton of examples of how badly things go when people have more than one spouse (alllll of the OT). We have Leviticus talking about sexuality. We find a lot of verses about sexual immorality. We've got references to things like keeping the marriage bed "undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4 ESV).

The closest to a one-and-done example of not having sex outside of marriage is probably 1 Corinthians 7:9: "If they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." Paul is not offering marriage as the only and ultimate remedy for dealing with sexual desire; he sings big praises for staying chastely single as well. Nor is he saying

the only reason to get married is so you can have sex. What he is saying is that marriage is the proper alternative for the sinning already going on (sexual immorality). Ask your teen this: If Paul's solution to sexual immorality was to get married, then what do you think the Corinthians' original problem was? (Hint: People having sex outside of marriage!)

To which your child then tries to justify, "But they didn't have a category for long-term, monogamous, committed relationships." Stop it. Yes, they did. It was called betrothal, and it was like our engagements but more binding. (Note how Joseph was betrothed to Mary, and he couldn't just take the ring back. To break it off, he had to divorce her—even before they got married and consummated the relationship. Jewish committed relationships were even more committed than ours!) Paul closes this loophole when he addresses those who are betrothed. If their passions are too strong—meaning they're going to go crazy if they don't have sex—then by all means, they should get married! A person looking for loopholes (while hoping the text doesn't say what it clearly says) will always make things sound more complicated than they are.

It should be clear by now what God says about sexuality. But the word on every teen's mind is *why*. *Why* does God define sexual morality in such a narrow way? It seems like an arbitrary rule. If sex is so wonderful and a gift from God, why would He try to limit it so much? The answer is simple, but it won't make sense if you don't understand the power and purpose of sex.

Sex as a Sign of the Marital Covenant

All conversations about sex with our kids need to include a very important concept: Sex is a married couple repeating their marital vows in bodily form. Or in Tim Keller's words, sex is a covenant renewal ceremony.⁸

A covenant is a promise ratified and remembered by something external. God gave Noah (and us) the rainbow in Genesis 9:16-17, saying, "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the *everlasting covenant* between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. . . . This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth." Likewise, God gave Abraham and his descendants circumcision. In Genesis 17, God says, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father

of many nations...You [and your descendants] are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the *sign of the covenant* between me and you” (verses 4 and 11).

In short, covenants include 1) a promise and 2) a physical sign reminding them of the promise. The vows we make on our wedding day are our mutual covenant promise; sex is the physical reminder of those vows. Every time a married couple makes love, they are repeating those vows in bodily form. God warns the men in Malachi 2:14-15 to not forsake the covenant by being faithless to their wives. And it's not just a covenant between husband and wife; it's between the husband and wife and God Himself. God refers to the adulteress woman in Proverbs 2:17 as one who “forgets the covenant of her God” in her infidelity (ESV).

Even if people pretend that they don't believe this about the act of sex, their instinctual reactions reveal otherwise. I don't normally point to Hollywood for transcendent truths about sex, but there is a line from one movie that has always stuck out to me. In the movie *Vanilla Sky*—not one I'd recommend for casual (or any kind of) viewing—two characters, Julie and David, have a lot (and I mean a *lot*) of what we would consider “friends with benefits” sex. Later in the movie, when David meets another woman and actually falls in love, Julie goes absolutely psychotic. At one point she screams at him, “Don't you know that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not?”⁹ It's a surprisingly accurate (though incomplete) statement for a Hollywood movie. The caveat is that the act of sex is not itself a promise; the act is supposed to *point back* to a promise that was already made.

So what are you doing when you engage in the act of sex before committing to the covenant of marriage? Lying. You are lying. Your body is pointing back to a promise you never made. Our minds, unfortunately, cannot always tell the difference though. We were created to equate sexual activity with promises of forever-love. The only way to wreck that innate knowledge is to systematically deprogram it out of existence—which is basically what the sex-positive culture is doing (as we'll talk about in chapter 8).

Ask anyone and they'll tell you that having a spouse (or even a significant other) cheat on them is an unparalleled betrayal—even for people who engaged in lots of casual sex prior to commitment. Why? Because it's really

hard to reprogram a built-in instinct. Beavers will try to build dams whether they are in the wild or not.¹⁰ Cats will still chase birds whether you yell at them or not. And we can't deprogram a human to ignore the power of the bond created through sex, even if they engage in meaningless sex a million times. Return a person to even a marriage-like environment, and they instinctively return to the knowledge that when you are committed to someone, you don't have sex with other people.¹¹ Sex is a powerful physical statement that should not be uttered lightly.

Things That Are Powerful Enough to Be Guarded

So how do we get these concepts across to our little ones? Let's go back to something that is easy to instill if we do our jobs well: creating categories. When I was a kid, I loved playing Scattergories—a game where you have a general category, and then you think of things that belong in that category. For example, if the category was “things that are red,” a participant could list apples, blood, or stop signs. When we talk to our kids about sex, we need to make sure they are already familiar with the proper categories in which sex should be placed. One category might be “things that are so powerful they need to be guarded with boundaries.” Another might be “things that are good or bad depending on how they are used.” Fire gives a useful analogy for both categories.

Ask your kids, “Is fire good or bad?” Some might say good because they are thinking about roasting marshmallows or soaking in a bathtub surrounded by scented candles (yes, please!). Some might say bad because they are picturing forest fires or explosions. The truth is, fire is neutral; it can be good *or* bad depending on how it's used.

Here's another question for your kids: “How powerful is fire?” If they were already picturing a forest fire, then they're on the right track. Not only is fire powerful, but it also can be used to accomplish great feats of strength that we'd never be able to do on our own.

Using fire, we can blow holes through solid rock on a mountainside, cook food, provide light, purify metal...you name it! Or we can burn down half of California. Fire is most beneficial when contained within proper boundaries

and most dangerous when removed from its proper place. A fire within a fireplace can create a warm and inviting home. Take it outside the fireplace, and it can destroy everyone and everything you love in the blink of an eye. Long story short, fire can create and fire can destroy. That it can do both is our first clue that it should be handled with caution.

Enough About Fire, You Pyro...

The same line of thinking can be applied to sex. Is sex good or bad? Well, it depends on how it's used. Sexual intimacy can be used to forge bonds of intimacy between man and woman that not even Hades can separate. It can literally create a human being—from scratch, I might add! Sexual energy is *really* powerful. Sexual desire—when channeled toward one's spouse—reemphasizes the vows they made to love, honor, cherish, and protect till death do they part. When a couple takes their marriage vows seriously, they fortify their marriage, stabilize their home, and create strong families in which children can thrive. Strong families create strong communities, which lead to a strong society.

But just like fire, sex can be used to destroy as well. The sexual impulse, without restraint, can devastate an individual and destroy a marriage. If sex is—as we've stated—a recommitment to the marital vows, then even sex within a marriage can be misused. As Christopher West says in his book *Our Bodies Tell God's Story*,

Treating a spouse merely as an object for one's selfish indulgence is never an act of love. Few Christian men understand this critical point. The books and programs that have flooded the Christian market to help us in our "pornified" culture rarely get this either. The main goal of these programs is to help husbands direct their sexual desires toward their wives—a good first step, of course. But rarely, if ever, do these programs invite men to examine *what kind of desires* they're directing toward their wives.¹²

I have known far too many women who have been at the receiving end of this misuse of sex. Just because he put a ring on it, he feels he can come to his wife and demand sexual gratification as much as he wants or in any way he

chooses. Such demands in no way reflect a Christlike agape love, which honors and cherishes his wife as a person. These demands, even if made within the confines of marriage, can undo what sex was intended to do. Rather than reinforce, these selfish acts of lust can nullify in bodily form the promises he made on their wedding day. And this is not just for men. Ladies, we are not off the hook. The way we initiate or respond to our husbands sexually should also reflect the vows we made to him.

So as you have probably noticed by looking around at our culture, sex misused outside of marriage—without reaffirming a lifetime commitment—often produces broken hearts, broken families, unwanted or aborted babies, and way more venereal diseases than should ever exist. Sex misused within a marriage—without the self-giving agape love promised on the wedding day—can devastate a marriage. Like fire, sex can create and sex can destroy. That it can do both is our first clue that it, too, should be handled with caution.

Who Are Really the Ones Obsessed with Sex—Christians or Secularists?

We have established that sex can be good or bad depending on whether it is properly channeled or contained. We have established that sex is extremely powerful. Let's go one step further in our analogy and discuss the ways one can interact with something that is extremely powerful and potentially dangerous. Back to our fire analogy!

There are two extreme ways one might interact with fire: as an arsonist or as a fireman. Question: Who of these two do you think is more obsessed with fires? I'd say they are equally obsessed, just in different ways. One is obsessed with creating as much fire as possible, and one is obsessed with containing fire to prevent destruction. The arsonist doesn't care about the consequence; he only cares about the flame. The fireman doesn't hate fire—I'm sure he loves a good campfire just as much as the next person. But he takes great pains to make sure a flame doesn't turn into a raging inferno. Firefighters put their lives on the line to help curtail the negative impact of fires gone wild. Arsonists just stand back and enjoy the show.

Our world treats sex like an arsonist treats fire. Who cares about consequences? Sex, sex, and more sex! As the arsonist hates anyone who tries to

put out his fires, so our world hates anyone who rains on their sex parades. They look at the church and assume we are a bunch of dumpy, frigid, sexually repressed schoolmarms sitting atop our moral high horses, wagging our fingers and chastising people for having too much fun. No. We are trying to protect what is powerful!

Like it or not, we as Christians are called by God to be set apart, and one of the defining characteristics of His followers is sexual holiness. And now we can understand why! He didn't make boundaries because He wanted to control us or stomp on our fun, but because He wanted sex to retain its original meaning. God desires for us to experience real, lasting, flourishing fellowship with Him and with others. As we'll see in chapter 3, we flourish best when we stick to the beautiful design He created.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. **Icebreaker:** Has there ever been a time when you underestimated the power or danger of something and got hurt? What happened?
2. **Main theme:** *Sex is a very powerful covenant renewal ceremony and a bodily recitation of our marital vows; anything powerful enough to create or destroy can and should be carefully guarded.* What's the most powerful thing you can think of? Are there any kind of controls or regulations that govern it? What do you think would happen if there were no guidelines for it?
3. **Self-evaluation:** What were you taught about sex growing up? Was it treated as something good? Something dirty? Did your family even talk about sex? Have you ever been tempted to think that sex was "no big deal"? What are your thoughts on it after reading this chapter? How seriously does God take sex? Why do you think that is?
4. **Brainstorm:** As a group, compile a list of powerful and dangerous things in the world that should be treated with caution. Nuclear bombs? A rabid raccoon? You name it. Make sure you have a clear category in your

head of “things that are so powerful they need boundaries” (because you’re going to do this with your kids next!).

5. **Release the bear:** Here’s a fun discipleship idea! Create a secret handshake with your child and give it a meaning that involves a promise. It could be something like, “I’ll love you forever and ever,” or, “You will always be my child.” (This one is especially useful if they start falling into some of the lies we talk about in section 3. Use it often in place of the words, establishing a category in your child’s mind of “things we do with our bodies that reinforce or restate a promise that was already made with their words.” Ask them frequently if they remember what it means, and have them recite it to you. Later, when they are old enough for “the talk,” you can put sex into this well-established category, telling them that sex is a way married couples use their bodies to restate their wedding vows to their spouse.
6. **Pray:** Have you treated sex with the gravity that God describes in Scripture? Does your sex life reflect the kinds of messages you would have said in front of friends and family on your wedding day? Is it self-sacrificial? Honoring? Focused on self or focused on the other person? Are you using marital sex as a “rubber stamp” for fantasizing or acting out sinful situations? If so, ask the Lord why that is attractive to you. (For example, who on their wedding day would ever ask their bride or groom: “Can I pretend that you’re someone else?”) Our society has burdened sex with so much extra baggage that even God-fearing, married Christians often don’t understand the messages the act is meant to reinforce. Pray and ask the Lord to work in your heart to understand sex the way He does. Pray that He would show you when to start having these conversations with your kids so that they can understand the goodness and power of sex.