

BOUNDARIES

The Bible doesn't acknowledge the one question unmarried people most often ask—at least not directly. The question goes something like this.

I know I'm not supposed to have sex, okay? But how far can I go? Second base? Third base?

You may not like the answer. Because the Bible doesn't really talk about sex and dating in any modern sense. What the Bible does talk about—quite a bit, actually—is lust.

So here it is:

You can go as far as you want—as long as you stop before you lust.

Lust is a serious fixation on something that's not ours to have. It's a deep, focused, inappropriate craving. In the Bible, the images associated with lust are heavy breathing, smoldering, and bursting into flames. The Bible doesn't talk about hooking up—it talks about longing for experiences that are not rightly ours and breaking boundaries to get them.

This chapter is about learning to identify and respect sexual boundaries.

The trick is, not everybody lusts the same. Some people can hardly go to an art gallery or ballet without drooling, so forget about watching R-rated films and television. Some people are turned on by the least bit of exposed midriff, so that trip to the beach is going to be a problem. Some people can barely endure a hug, let alone a back rub, so youth group cuddling is out of the question. For those who lust easily, just being around other people is a trial, just turning on a computer is a temptation, just going to the pool (or beach or lake) is an ordeal.

Other folks have a much higher lust threshold—who knows why? They take in stride images and touch that drive other people crazy. Which is why Christians are called to a high level of sexual sensitivity. It's our duty to look out for each other and do our best to avoid tempting someone who may lust for different reasons than we do.

Turn over the coin. If your friends decide to ask each other, "What makes you lust?" then it's time to speak up for yourself. If sexual content in films and television is a problem for you, please say so. If short skirts drive you to distraction, please admit that. If brotherly hugs ignite un-sisterly fires in you, please sound off. And this is okay because you're not alone. We have different thresholds for lust, but sooner or later we all lust. Anyone who denies that simply hasn't gotten there yet, or they've decided to lie about it. It's just a matter of time.

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