

before you
teach this lesson...

Suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate onto the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan)

Something has gone wrong with our appetite for sex. By virtually any objective measure, our *cultural* preoccupation with sex has grown out of proportion to its actual significance. That may be hard to see since—other than more convenient access to pornography—not much has changed in the last decade.

Nothing has changed for the *kids* we serve. They've grown up largely unprotected from what grownups cynically refer to as *adult content*. Our younger brothers and sisters never knew a world without home video and cable sex, descriptive sexual language on pop radio, one-click access to Internet material that might have gotten their grandfathers kicked out of the house—or maybe even thrown in jail.

They also never knew a world without HIV/AIDS and rampant outbreaks of sexually transmitted infections—a world where careless sex can sterilize or even kill.

Telling kids how much things have changed doesn't make sense. It's like telling a porpoise the ocean used to be a nicer place to live. There's not much he can do with that information, is there?

So what do we tell our students? How do we equip them for life in the world where they live instead of in some Neverland where children don't wrestle with sexuality? Do we throw up our hands or dig in our heels? Do we ignore biblical messages written "too long ago and too far away" to be much use in the 21st century? Alter them to fit modern sensibilities? Or hunker down and defend our tiny square of turf until the last of us dies off and the world goes to hell?

Oddly enough, what the Bible says about sex may be more helpful than ever. Most everybody agrees we're in a mess. We're sexually confused and nobody seems to be doing much to clear things up. But almost no one wants to go back to pretending people don't think about sex until their wedding night. No one looks at the previous era of sneaky sex and thinks people were nobler because they lied about their behavior. And who in his right mind wants to go back into hiding about sexual abuse, leaving women and children vulnerable to assault?

This is no commendation for where we are now. Things are messy. But not messier than what's recorded in the Bible. People think the Bible is hopelessly naïve about modern sex. It's not. The Bible's message flourished in places where the sexual norms were far more abusive than modern western culture. Those folks lived in places where male and female prostitution was part of religious life—so just imagine life among the irreligious! They lived in towns where sacrificing girls was the main event at the shrine up on the hill. They lived in cities where boys were sex objects for wealthy men. They lived in cultures where women were property—collected, traded, used, and discarded. And no one raised an eyebrow, let alone a helping hand.

The people of God blew into those cultures like a fresh, but very strange, breeze. They brought hope and a wind of change. And not so much by their words as by their lives.

God's people reinvented the family by introducing committed marriage, instilling respect for women, and protecting and nurturing children instead of exploiting them.

Culture is the language, economy, spirituality, media, work, play, and social relationships that shape your environment.