

“There are three things too wonderful for me to understand—no four! How an eagle glides through the sky. How a serpent crawls upon a rock. How a ship finds its way across the heaving ocean. And the growth of love between a man and woman.”—Proverbs 30:18-19

Thanks be to you, O Lord my God.
 You have gifted my parents to share love and life, and behold: here I am!
 You have gifted a faith community to parent me in grace, and behold: I am your son or daughter!
 You have endowed me with sexuality and I cherish this uniqueness.
 You have called me to parent others, perhaps physically, perhaps spiritually, perhaps both.
 And for this call I am grateful.
 Thanks be to you, O Lord my God.

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a message for young people . . . SPEAKING OF SEX

. . . from young people

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"Everyone at school was always talking like they knew everything about sex. I felt I was the only one still a virgin. I found out most of the kids who were doing all the talking hadn't had sex after all."
—Monica, 14

"At my school the attitude among the guys was that if you were not having sex, you were a wimp. But having sex didn't make me more popular, and it didn't make me feel any better about myself. Being on the debate team and improving my running time did a lot more."
—Patrick, 14



Sexuality is more than the ability to have children or the physical need for another person. The physical act of sex is certainly one aspect of sexuality. Sexuality is part of who you are and what you are all about: body and soul, heart and feelings. It is a deep desire for friendship and intimacy, a basic human need.

This great gift from God—for love and for life—needs to be handled with care. Decisions made today affect a lifetime.

"They" say that . . .

■ **If you love someone, it's OK to have sex.** Love is important. The problem is there are so many different kinds of love. Ed had loved and been engaged to another woman before he met Kelley, his wife. "The 'love'—the feeling—is almost the same," he says. "The difference is the commitment."

■ **Having sex makes us closer.** There is no denying that sexual activity gives a feeling of closeness to your partner. Yet, often it leads to a break-up. "Sex became a part of every relationship I had, and it would ruin every relationship. It would just get to the point where I wouldn't want to see that person anymore," offers Kelley.

■ **Sex is no different before or after marriage, so what's the big deal?** The "big deal" is that romance is not commitment. Romantic feelings that lead to sex outside of marriage are just that, fleeting emotions. In marriage love takes root. Genesis says that "a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh." This is not just the physical act of becoming one. It's the spiritual unity between two people that develops over time when they love each other and include God in that love.

"I found out most of the kids who were doing all the talking hadn't had sex after all."

■ **I can be committed to my partner without being married.** Marriage is a public statement of your love and unity. The people at your wedding recognize your commitment, rights and responsibilities on behalf of the community.

You take emotional risks

Consider one teen who shared his love, trust and secrets with his girlfriend. One day, she ended the relationship, telling him only, "I don't think it's working out. . . ." He was hurt and afraid. He wondered if he could ever trust or love again. One morning, he woke up thinking, "So this is what hell must be like."

How many friends do you know whose sexually active relationship ended up in misunderstanding, pain, anger and even hate? Do you think people who say, "I don't even want to see the jerk!" also feel "I'm awfully glad we had sex"?

Says Kelley, now married and in her 20s, about her teen years and the decision to have—or not have—sex: "There are a lot of risks. You are putting everything on the line emotionally. It ends up not being fulfilling. This lack of fulfillment outlasts the momentary pleasure."

You face physical problems

■ **Pregnancy.** Unplanned pregnancies top the list of troubles for teens who choose to have sex before marriage. Fact: three thousand teens will get pregnant *today*. A high school teacher in San Francisco surveyed her students about teen pregnancy. The results: Most boys admitted they would probably "dump" the girl. The girls resigned themselves to "walk alone" through the situation.

"I thought I was making love, not just having sex. I didn't think I could get pregnant so young, especially just doing it once," reflects Tammy, 13, and four months pregnant.

"Please think before you act; look before you leap," says Susan Fowler of Virginia, who found herself pregnant and alone as a teen. "I loved the father of my child, but I know now that he didn't love me. I was too needy to say 'no.'"

■ **Disease.** Fact: one teen gets a sexually

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"Talk to my parents about sex?"

■ **Remember that your parents were once your age.** Every mother and father was at one time a teen caught up in the exciting, yet confusing, discovery of his or her own sexuality.

■ **Open the lines of communication yourself.** Often parents are uncertain how to start the conversation. Don't hide your feelings from them. Take a chance and tell them you want to talk and to listen.

■ **If you can't express your feelings out loud, write a letter.** One teen penned this note: "Dear Mom and Dad, I had sex with a woman I found out has AIDS. I am terrified. Help me. . . ."

transmitted disease every 13 seconds. Some kill. Some cause sterility. Others are just plain painful.

A word about AIDS . . .

One of the sexually transmitted diseases young people are at risk to get is AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It impairs the body's immune system. It is incurable. Among teens, AIDS cases have risen 40% in the past two years.

AIDS is passed from one person to another through an exchange of bodily fluids. That's what happens during intercourse. It is not possible to catch AIDS through casual contact, such as shaking hands, sharing food or hugging. Nor can you get AIDS from donating blood. And you can't tell if a person is carrying the AIDS virus by his or her physical appearance. People who are HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) positive don't always

show physical symptoms.

At age 23, Alison Gertz discovered she had AIDS, "seven years after she had sexual intercourse, just once, on a romantic, moonlit night, with a man infected with the AIDS virus." For all

"I can't talk to my parents about anything, least of all sex."

"My friends and I can figure it out. What do I need to talk to my parents about? They just don't understand the way it is for kids today."

The fact is, most parents do understand. But they may be unsure of the best way to offer the advice and support teens need. To help them, consider these tips:

■ **Ask questions.** What was it like dating when they were young? What did they do when things got too hot to handle? What did they do about pressure from friends about sex?

■ **Stay open and listen.** Often you can learn from their experiences, their knowledge, and even their mistakes.

■ **Tell your parents you love them.** Sometimes it's hard to say, but it's the one thing you both need to hear. Give them a hug. It will be good for all of you. Anthony, 16, says what more teens learn every day, "My folks may yell about dating and girls and all that, but they care."

that time she had been silently infected, never suspecting that she was anything but healthy, never suspecting that AIDS could happen to someone like her.

A 17-year-old Colorado teen who is pregnant and HIV-positive wonders, "How could I have got it? I never did anything wrong. I thought you'd only get it if you were a drug user. I knew you could get it by sex, but I didn't think, "Oh wow, it could happen to me!"

The only sure way to avoid getting the disease through sex is to abstain from sex.

Swept away

"True or False: Most teenagers usually go further physically than they thought they would." Responses indicated that few have control. Answered one boy: "It's true. Faced with a situation of being alone with someone special, things just seem to happen." A girl agreed: "A lot of people say, 'I'll only go this far,' but then you realize you've gone further. It's hard to stop once you start."

Even with the knowledge of risks, many young people still find they can be swept away by the power of their own sexuality.

A young woman from Missouri wrote a letter to *Teen* magazine: "I'm 17 and in love with this guy.

We've been going out for about eight months. I want to get more physical with him, but he doesn't want to with me. I'm confused! Usually, it's the guy who pressures. What's going on here?"

The answer stated that the guy was being mature and the girl should follow his lead. Today's teens are realizing that sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise and that early sexual involvement can cause emotional complications.

Smart young people today are choosing "dating but waiting."

"Sex before marriage complicates a relationship," says Julie, now married and in her 20s. "You may temporarily feel closer to a person but when the relationship becomes bad or rocky, you feel physically tied to the person and find it hard to end it."

Paul, who has been dating Brigitte for three years and is engaged to marry her, comments, "If you're going to get married and you really love each other, you have the rest of your lives to have sex. Abstaining from sex says a lot."

The quality that takes control

Asked if teens heard too little or too much about saying "no" to sex until marriage, 54% of the young people surveyed say too little is being said about the no-sex message. A *USA Weekend* poll shows that 63% of teens reject the "safe-sex" message because it seems to condone casual sex.

The special ability that regulates human love is called chastity. It is not a denial of sexuality but an appropriate channeling of God's powerful gift.

Students at Baltimore's Lemmel Middle School were part of a program with the motto, "You can go farther when you don't go all the way."

"No one yelled at us, but they talked to us in such a way about pregnancy that we thought about it when we got home," says Kevin Ruff, a 15-year-old. "I don't want anything holding me back. There's no need for me to have kids now. I want to be a pilot in the Air Force one day."

Within one year, pregnancies at Lemmel dropped 75%.

Make dating decisions

■ **Develop the friendship.** Get to know the other person. Keep the conversation flowing to develop intimacy that helps you respect and know one another.

■ **Make innocent expressions special.** Let gestures, like hand-holding and hugs, express feelings of affection. Says a 17-year-old young man: "I realized that there were lots of ways to express your feelings other than sexual intercourse."

■ **Set limits on the physical.** Be certain that you both understand and respect limits before you get into a tempting situation. If being physically close becomes "too hot to handle," say so. Open talk is essential.

■ **Avoid tough situations.**

Plan your date carefully. Julie, now in her 20s, says she and her husband decided when they were dating to save sex for marriage. She offers: "You can go to a rink where there are people skating. You're sitting on the benches alone but there are people skating by." Adds her husband: "If you are going to be alone, be alone in a public place."

■ **Tune out opposite messages.** Decide if friends have any business in your sex decisions. Rick Shallenberger, recalling locker room talk, says: "There was one guy we all thought was pretty cool. A lot of girls were attracted to him, and he bragged about the sex he had. Then one day we found out he was going to be a father. No one envied this guy now. He had to tell his folks. A few months after that, my locker room buddies and I found out that another guy in school had a sexually transmitted disease. He was embarrassed and scared. The rest of us really took a long look at sex outside of marriage and the risks. Suddenly, our talk turned to how cool it would be to be the 'first' for your wife and for her to be your 'first!'"

■ **Pray.** This will help you get in touch with the Giver of your sexuality. You might attend church and related activities together. If your church doesn't have a youth group, perhaps you could start one. Sharing experiences and spending time with other teens dealing with the unpredictable power of sexuality can help.

"I realized that there were lots of ways to express your feelings other than sexual intercourse."

Coming soon

World Religions are the focus, as we look at the spiritual beliefs of people around the globe.