

Over a decade ago, and before I knew the authors personally, my wife and I relied on Stan and Brenna Jones's *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex* for guidance on talking to our kids. Having seen their wisdom and insight up close, we still call them for parenting advice! The good news is that you can also rely on their wisdom in their newly updated version of *How and When*, with solid advice needed in today's world.

ED STETZER, executive director of the Billy Graham Center

Many Christian parents struggle with how to engage and influence their kids around questions of sexuality and gender—all the more as norms regarding sex and gender seem to shift beneath their feet. The God's Design for Sex series by Stan and Brenna Jones provides valuable guidance and practical information that will serve as both anchor and lighthouse to many parents who feel tossed by the waves of a rapidly changing culture.

MARK A. YARHOUSE, PsyD, the Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech Chair of Psychology at Wheaton College, previously the Hughes Endowed Chair at Regent University

The sexual revolution has come as a wake-up call for Christian parents and educators alike. The “home team” now feels like the “away team,” and in a society so far adrift from its Christian moorings, parents can no longer try to outsource the moral formation of their children. Our greatest challenge is to show what we are *for* as well as what we are against, and Stan and Brenna Jones have done the church a great service here. A comprehensive and authoritative set of resources, the God's Design for Sex series integrates biblical instruction with evidence from the social sciences, common sense, and practical wisdom. Most important of all, it fires the imagination with a positive vision of the divine gift of sex and human sexuality. This is the go-to resource for all Christian parents, educators, and pastors who care about the biblically rooted formation and flourishing of their children.

GLYNN HARRISON, author of *A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing*, former chair and professor of psychiatry at University of Bristol

Stan and Brenna Jones have done their homework. In a world of great sexual confusion, where cheap opinions and “hot takes” seem to be winning the day, these two are rising up as incredibly sane and sophisticated voices that can help show us the way.

DANIEL GROTHE, associate senior pastor at New Life Church

This is a book for our times. Although directed to parents, it will be useful to all involved in nurturing the next generation: grandparents, caregivers, teachers, and the whole church community. *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex* deals with sexuality as part of God's good plan for humanity and parenting as nurturing godly, wholesome young men and women rather than producing good kids.

It is comprehensive and deals sensitively with difficult topics, using research on parenting styles and sexual health to encourage and empower parents to be the first, principal, and continuing source of sex education for their children. In addressing relationships from the perspectives of chaste singleness and faithful, godly marriage, the book confronts the clash of cultures between a biblical worldview and the postmodern, individualistic mind-set. It challenges parents to enable children of all ages to live in a way that is countercultural to current tropes for sex, identity, and gender. Above all, it directs us all, as fallen and forgiven people, to grace-based (rather than law-driven) parenting.

PATRICIA WEERAKOON, medical doctor, sexologist, and writer

Talking with your kids about sex sometimes feels like the hardest thing in the world to do, but these books have helped discussions happen in my household for over ten years now. I've also been recommending these books to my podcast listeners for years and years. These books will help guide a conversation between you and your child that glorifies God and his desire for our sexuality.

JAMIE IVEY, bestselling author of *If You Only Knew* and host of *The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey* podcast

This series is a helpful resource for parents seeking to teach their children about the good gift of sex and to counter the false messages that their children are exposed to. The God's Design for Sex books are filled with wisdom and practical guidance. We have found these books very valuable in our parenting and often recommend them. Given the radically changing understanding—and promotion—of sex and sexuality in our culture, I am grateful that Stan and Brenna Jones have produced a new edition that tackles additional difficult questions through the lens of the unchanging Word of God.

KEN MAGNUSON, PHD, professor of Christian ethics



**HOW & WHEN  
TO TELL YOUR KIDS  
ABOUT SEX**

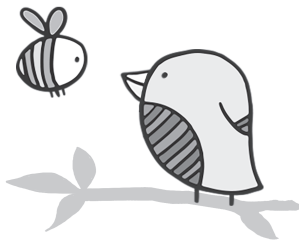


# *How & When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

A Lifelong Approach to Shaping  
Your Child's Sexual Character

---

STAN & BRENN A JONES



NavPress 

A NavPress resource published in alliance  
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

**For more information, visit [www.NavPress.com](http://www.NavPress.com).**

*How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child's Sexual Character*

Copyright © 1995, 2007, 2019 by Jones Education Consultation & Formation, Inc. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAVPRESS and the NAVPRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team for the Third Edition:

Don Pape, Publisher

Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor

Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor

Jennifer Ghionzoli, Designer

Photograph of authors copyright © 2018 by Michael Hudson Photography. All rights reserved.

Cover and interior illustrations of birds, bees, and vine copyright © mightyisland/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-1-63146-944-2

Printed in Canada

25 24 23 22 21 20 19  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments xi*

*An Important Word to Parents xiii*

## **PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS**

- CHAPTER 1 The Big Picture: Preparing Healthy, Godly Adults 3
- CHAPTER 2 The Challenges Ahead and Resources Available 11
- CHAPTER 3 The Twelve Principles of Christian Sex Education 23
- CHAPTER 4 Understanding Character Formation 29
- CHAPTER 5 Biblical Foundations for Understanding Sexuality 43

## **PART TWO: THE CORNERSTONE YEARS:**

*Infancy through Kindergarten*

- CHAPTER 6 Teaching Love, Family, and Trust 61
- CHAPTER 7 Teaching the Goodness of Our Sexuality 67
- CHAPTER 8 Handling Sexual Curiosity and Other Challenges 79
- CHAPTER 9 Preventing and Overcoming Sexual Molestation 87
- CHAPTER 10 Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:  
The Science 99
- CHAPTER 11 Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:  
Our Best Counsel 113

## **PART THREE: THE PREPARATORY YEARS:**

*The Prepuberty Period*

- CHAPTER 12 “What Is Sex? Why Is It Wrong Outside of Marriage?” 129
- CHAPTER 13 The Role of Stories and Inoculation in Strengthening  
Your Kids 143
- CHAPTER 14 Preparing for Puberty and Adolescence 159
- CHAPTER 15 The Dangers of Technology 175

**PART FOUR: THE TRANSITIONAL YEARS:**

*Transition through Puberty*

- CHAPTER 16 Preparing for Sexual Attraction, Dating, Courtship,  
and Marriage 191
- CHAPTER 17 Developing Moral Discernment about Masturbation  
and Petting 207

**PART FIVE: THE PIVOTAL YEARS:**

*Adolescence*

- CHAPTER 18 Supporting the Adolescent 225
- CHAPTER 19 Teaching about Contraception 239
- CHAPTER 20 What Is True Purity? 255

*Additional Resources* 261

*Notes* 263

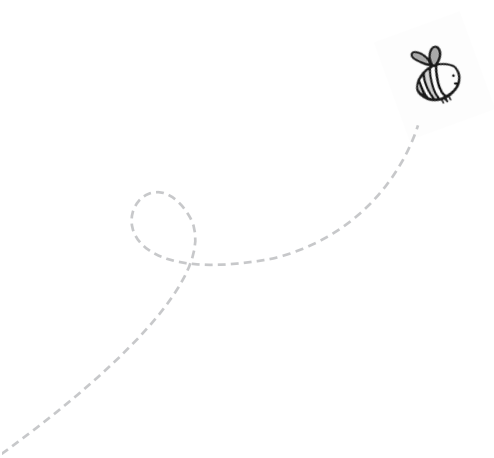
*About the Authors* 279

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

*Jerry and Wilma Barber*

——— & ———

*Marion and Edith Jones*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**WE OFFER HEARTFELT THANKS TO** the many parents who have shared their stories and perspectives, praise, and disagreements about the content of the five-book God’s Design for Sex series as we have spoken and taught about this subject around the country and around the world. Some of your stories have made it into the revised versions of these books!

We remain thankful for our friends mentioned in previous editions, with whom we shared the joys and travails of the journey of parenting our young children through to adulthood and with whom we shared enriching dialogue about the ideas in this book. Continuing thanks also to thirteen generations of graduate students in Stan’s Human Sexuality summer course (1983–1995), whose insightfulness, openness, and inquisitiveness so enriched our understanding of sexuality, and whose stories of how they learned (or mostly didn’t learn) about sexuality in their families were an inspiration for these books. Revisions to the second-edition children’s books were enriched by the professional reviews of Steve Gerali and Elaine Roberts; special thanks to Susan Martins Miller for her editorial expertise on that edition.

As we prepare the third edition of these books, there are many whose help we are grateful to acknowledge: We owe special thanks to Wheaton College for its support of the scholarship of its faculty, particularly in the form of a spring 2017 sabbatical. Stan was encouraged in 2011 by the opportunity and invitation by the editors of *Christianity Today* to share the essence of our approach in the pages of that important journal.<sup>1</sup> Emily Verseveldt served as an outstanding graduate research assistant 2014–15, gathering and updating a great deal of material for the *How and When* book; Emily, you are a model of

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

organization and resourcefulness. Thanks also to Amy Smith, who has served as Stan's research assistant since 2017 and provided additional research and critical proofreading, and to faculty colleagues Amy Reynolds, Sandi Yu Rueger, and Tammy Schultz for help with resources in key areas.

Special thanks to Dr. Ted Witzig Jr. and his professional colleagues Kaleb Beyer, Roger Gasser, Amber Miller, and Brian Sutter at Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services for their careful review of the entire *How and When* revised book manuscript. Ted, the Holy Spirit certainly prompted your continuing involvement. Thanks also to Phil Lees, director of Public Education Advocates for Christian Equity (PEACE) in Ontario and Hawaii, and to his board members Joan Marshall, Marguerite McLeod Fleming, Glen and Nadine Nyhus, Jonathan Steeper, and Dave Willweber for the careful review of several key chapters; thanks also for the work of PEACE in advocating for equity and respect for Christian perspectives in public sex-education programs.

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Mark and Lori Yarhouse as current reviewers and future collaborators on this book series. Stan had the honor of contributing to Mark's training in clinical psychology at the master's and doctoral levels at Wheaton College, and together they have coauthored a number of articles and books. Since leaving Wheaton, Mark has established a distinguished career as perhaps the most prominent Christian psychological researcher in human sexuality in the world. Lori has invested her energies with Mark in parenting and homeschooling their three children. Our intent is that they will progressively become more involved with future revisions of the series. No one deserves deeper thanks than the Yarhouses for their extraordinarily helpful review of the entire five-book *God's Design for Sex* series in both the second and third revisions.

Special thanks to our NavPress editor, Caitlyn Carlson, and the publisher of NavPress, Don Pape, for your wisdom, friendship, and tremendous support. We are grateful as well for the partnership between NavPress and Tyndale House Publishers.

Finally, we want to express our deep love, appreciation, and pride for our three (now adult) children. Thank you for being our initial living laboratory for working out these ideas, for the shape and texture of your lives today, and for being so thoughtful, strong, and loving. Thank you for the wonderful spouses you brought into our family, whom we love as our own children, and for our dear grandchildren. You have, together and individually, enriched our lives far beyond what we ever could have imagined.

## AN IMPORTANT WORD TO PARENTS

*General Introduction to the God's Design for Sex Series*

**PARENTS, GOD GAVE YOU** your sexuality as a precious gift. And you're reading this book because God has given you a child you love as a gift flowing from your sexuality.

God gave your child the gift of sexuality as well. If handled responsibly, this gift will be a source of blessing and delight. How can parents help make this happen?

Many forces will push children to make bad choices about sex based on false beliefs and values and on misplaced spiritual priorities. These forces are more powerful, confusing, persuasive, and ever present today than ever in history, thanks to the power of social media and the confusion of our culture. From their earliest years, children are bombarded with destructive, misleading messages—messages about the nature of sexual intimacy, about marriage, about family, about the boundaries of godly sexual expression, and even about the basic creational design of humanity as male and female.

These messages come from everywhere—through music, television, the Internet, discussions with their friends, school sex-education programs, and many other sources. The result? Confusion, doubt, and shame, as well as distressing rates of sexual experimentation, teen pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted disease, divorce, and devastated lives.

We believe that *God means for Christian parents to be their children's primary sex educators*. First messages are the most powerful—why wait until your child hears distorted views and then try to correct the misunderstanding? Sexuality is a beautiful gift—why not present it to your child the way God intended? God's Word is trustworthy and true—why

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

not teach your child how to understand and live by its guidance in the area of sexuality? Why not establish yourself as the trusted expert to whom your child can turn to hear God's truth about sexuality?

The God's Design for Sex series is designed to help parents shape their children's character, particularly in the area of sexuality. Sex education in the family is less about giving biological information and more about *shaping your child's moral character*. The earlier you start helping your child see himself or herself as God does, including in the area of sexuality, the stronger your child will be as they enter the turbulent teenage years.

*How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex* is a parents' resource manual in which we offer a comprehensive understanding of what parents can do to shape their children's sexual character. The four children's books in this series are designed for parents and children to work through together. Those books are structured to be read with your child at ages three to five (*The Story of Me*), five to eight (*Before I Was Born*), eight to twelve (*What's the Big Deal?*), and twelve to sixteen (*Facing the Facts*). These age ranges are not strict formulas; you need to exercise your judgment about your child's maturity level, environment, needs, and so forth to decide when and how to introduce the books.

The four children's books are meant to provide the foundational information kids need. Further, they are to be starting points for you to build upon and personalize as you discuss sexuality with your child in an age-appropriate manner. They provide an anchor point for discussions in order to jump-start deeper explorations. These books help break the silence and put the issues out on the table.

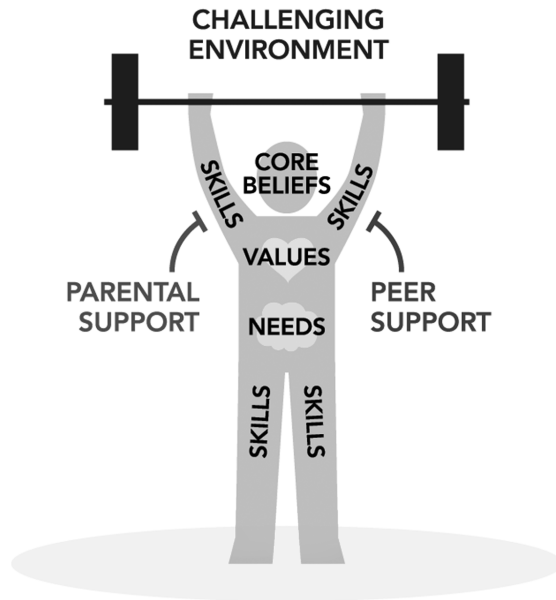
Don't simply hand these books to your child to read, *because our whole point is to empower you as the parent to shape your child's sexual character*. The books are meant to start and shape conversations between you and your child and to deepen your impact on your child in the area of sexuality.

In this series, we address controversial topics about which Christians disagree, including masturbation, how far people should go sexually when they're dating, contraception, gender identity, homosexuality, and more. Our goal in doing so is not to presumptuously present our answers as completely right but rather to encourage you to reach reasoned conclusions and to teach your child as you see fit before the Lord.

We have tried in each book to present information that we believe children of that age must have, without presenting controversial topics "too early." Your child may be confronted with complicated and

confusing issues at a much earlier age than you expect. In such cases, you can draw on our discussions in later books to inform your dialogue with your child. For instance, we hold off on discussion of sexual orientation until the book for eight-to-twelve-year-olds (*What's the Big Deal?*), and on discussion of gender identity and transgender issues until the book for twelve-to-sixteen-year-olds (*Facing the Facts*). But your child may need more basic information much earlier, and in such cases, we urge you to use or adapt material from this book and our books for older children to meet your child's needs.

Why start early? Because if you as the parent are not teaching your child about sexuality, your child will learn distorted lessons about sexuality from television, the Internet, and playground conversations. If you are silent on sex while the rest of the world is abuzz about it, your child will learn that you cannot help in this key area. If you teach godly, truthful, tactful, and appropriate lessons about sexuality, your child will trust you more and see you as a parent who tells the truth.



We'll briefly unpack each of the books at more length to help you discern which would be more helpful to you in your current parenting season.

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

### PARENT RESOURCE:

### ***How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex:***

#### *A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child's Sexual Character*

This book is the parents' comprehensive resource manual for the God's Design for Sex series. We take on the hardest subjects, such as sexual abuse, gender identity, and homosexuality, helping you to know when and how to bring up these subjects. Our goals for *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex* are to

- help you understand your role in shaping your child's character, including his or her views, attitudes, and beliefs about sexuality;
- instruct you in the twelve key principles for Christian sex education in the home and how to implement the strategies and tactics suggested by these principles;
- familiarize you with the challenges that your child will face from secular culture and empower you with strategies and skills to help them overcome those challenges;
- ground your understanding of God's view of our sexuality;
- equip you and your child to explain and defend the traditional Christian view of sexual morality in these modern times;
- examine each major developmental stage of your child's life and share age-appropriate information and approaches;
- address directly the most complex issues you and your child might or will face in today's culture in a manner grounded in biblical thinking and also informed by the best contemporary science;
- explore how you can most powerfully influence your child to live a life of sexual chastity; and
- equip you to provide your child with the strengths necessary to stand by their commitment to traditional Christian morality.

As you read the following descriptions of each of the books for your child, please know that the concepts and issues presented in each of these books flow directly from the background provided by this foundational parents' guide.

AGES THREE TO FIVE

***The Story of Me: Babies, Bodies, and a Very Good God***

Your most important task with your young child is to lay a spiritual foundation for their understanding of sexuality. God loves the human body (and the whole human person), and the body is included in what God called “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Children’s bodies, their existence as boys or girls, and also their sexual organs are gifts from God.

Young children can begin to develop a wondrous appreciation for God’s marvelous gift of sexuality by understanding some of the basics of fetal development. In this book we discuss the growth of a child inside a mother’s body and the birth process. With such instruction, young children begin to develop a trust for God’s law and to see God as a lawgiver who has the best interests of his people at heart. God is the giver of good gifts!

Finally, we want children to see families grounded on the lifelong marital union of one man and one woman as God’s intended framework for the nurture and love of children. If you are reading the book as a single parent or with an adopted child, you will have opportunity to talk about how God sometimes creates and blesses alternative forms of families. We hope that you will find *The Story of Me* a wonderful starting point for discussing sexuality with your young child.

AGES FIVE TO EIGHT

***Before I Was Born: God Knew My Name***

by Carolyn Nystrom, with Stan and Brenna Jones

*Before I Was Born* emphasizes the creational goodness of our bodies, our existence as men and women, and our sexual organs. This book introduces new topics as well, including the growth and changes boys and girls experience as they become men and women.

It includes a tactful but direct explanation of sexual intercourse between husbands and wives. God wants sexual intercourse limited to marriage, because sexual intercourse brings husbands and wives close together in a way that honors God and helps to build strong families.

Parents often ask, “Do my kids really need to know about sexual intercourse this early?” Remembering that you are the decision maker as to whether you use this book with a very mature five-year-old or to a more slowly maturing eight-year-old, the answer is yes. We believe this is a strategic

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

decision parents must face based on their individual children, considering that first messages are always the most powerful messages. If, as a Christian parent, you want to begin to shape a godly attitude in your child about sex, why would you wait until they first soak in the misperceptions of the world? Why not build godly attitudes and views from the foundation up?

If you're reading this with an adopted child, use this opportunity to explain that not every couple will have biological children. If a baby doesn't grow in the wife's womb, the couple might look for a baby to adopt. And some women are not able to take care of a baby, so another family might adopt the baby and make it part of their family forever. Even though the baby grew inside a different mother, the husband and wife love this baby very much. Adoption is another way that God makes families.

### AGES EIGHT TO TWELVE

#### ***What's the Big Deal?: Why God Cares about Sex***

This book reinforces the messages of our first two children's books, covering the basics of sexual intercourse and the fundamental creational goodness of our sexuality. It continues the task of deliberately building children's understanding of why God intends sexual intercourse to be reserved for marriage.

But this book goes further than the earlier books, adding more of the facts your child will need to know as they approach puberty. Further, it will help you begin the process of inoculating your child against the negative moral messages of the world. In *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*, we argue that Christian parents should *not* try to completely shelter their children from the destructive moral messages of the world. If they mature in environments where they are not exposed to germs, children grow up with depleted immune systems that are ineffectual for resisting disease. When parents shelter their children too much, children are left naive and vulnerable; parents risk communicating that the negative messages of the world are so powerful that Christians cannot even talk about them.

But neither should you let your child be inundated with society's destructive messages. The principle of inoculation suggests that you should deliberately expose your child to the contrary moral messages they will hear from the world. It should be in your *home* that your child first learns that many people in our world do not believe in reserving sex for marriage, and it should be in your home that your child first understands such problems

as pornography, teenage pregnancy, gay marriage, sexual identity and gender issues, and so forth. In this way, you can help build your child's defenses against departing from God's ways.

AGES TWELVE TO SIXTEEN

***Facing the Facts: The Truth about Sex and You***

*Facing the Facts: The Truth about Sex and You* builds upon all that has come before but also—in more depth—prepares your child for puberty. At this age, your child is old enough for more detailed information about the changes their body is about to go through and about the adult body they will soon receive as a gift from God.

In this book, your child will hear again about God's view of sexuality and about his loving and beautiful intentions for how this gift should be used. The distorted ways in which our world views sex must be clearly labeled, and your child must be prepared to face views and beliefs contrary to those they learn at home. We attempt to do all this while also talking about the many confusing feelings of puberty and early adolescence.

While children could read this book independently, we do not believe this would be optimal. We encourage you to read it alongside your child and then talk about it together. You could go chapter by chapter. Alternatively, you can read it and use it as a resource for important conversations with your soon-to-be or young teenager.

In this book we address the most controversial topics of the series, topics about which biblically grounded Christians can and do frequently disagree. We make suggestions about appropriate moral positions on all of the important issues, including sexual-intimacy limits before marriage, masturbation, contraception, gender identity, homosexuality, and more.

We have joked that in each of these books, we are guaranteed to say something to lead almost any Christian parent to declare us too conservative or too liberal on some topic or to disagree with us somewhere. We do not presume our answers are completely right. At the very least, we hope our thoughts empower you, the parent, to think the matter through and present a better answer to your child as the Lord guides your thinking.

All of these books were written as if dialogue is an ongoing reality between mother, father, and child. Yet in some homes, only one parent is willing to

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

talk about sex. Many Christian parents shoulder the responsibility of parenting alone due to separation, divorce, or death. Grandparents sometimes must raise their grandkids. We've tried to be sensitive to adoptive families and families that do not fit the mold of the traditional nuclear family, but we cannot anticipate or respond to all the unique needs of families. Use these books with creativity and discernment to meet the needs of your situation.

We hope these books will be valuable tools in raising a new generation of faithful Christian young people. If you follow this plan, we believe your child will have a healthy, positive, accepting, godly attitude about sexuality. As an unmarried person, your child will be more likely to live a confident, chaste life as a faithful witness to the work of Christ in their heart. If your child does marry, we believe they will have a greater chance of having a fulfilled, loving, rewarding life as a husband or wife. It is our prayer that this curriculum will encourage and equip you to dive into the wonderful work of shaping your child's sexual character.

PART ONE

# *Foundations*





## CHAPTER 1

# *The Big Picture: Preparing Healthy, Godly Adults*

**SEX IS A GIFT** from God—a frequently misunderstood, misused, and squandered gift, but a gift nonetheless! Our sexuality can be a tremendous blessing when that gift is understood through the Word of God and lived out in submission to him.

When thinking about sex education, many parents focus their goals too narrowly and negatively on avoiding sexual promiscuity, sexually transmitted infections (STIs; sometimes STDs for *diseases*), pregnancies, abortions, and so forth. While it is good to protect children from the damage that illicit and irresponsible sex can cause, this goal is too small, too limited, and too narrow. Why only prevent the negative? Why not give children something profoundly positive when discussing sex and sexuality?

*Our ambitious but reachable goal is to equip and empower children to enter adulthood capable of living godly, wholesome, and fulfilled lives as Christian men and women, whether as Christian singles or Christian wives and husbands. We want to prepare them to become the kinds of*

- **single adults** who, whether single for a substantial season before they marry or for their entire lives, live full and meaningful lives as sexual persons with loving, deep family relationships and friendships; or

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

- **married adults** who can have deep and *meaningful* marriages filled with spiritual, sexual, and emotional intimacy, as well as loving, deep family relationships and friendships.

Sex as God intended allows a child to live as a mature and healthy single person before marriage (or instead of marrying) and to one day give the astonishing gift of his or her very self to another in marital union. Healthy sex education is about preparing children to protect this gift wisely and to give this gift rightly—to be able to love and trust enough to commit their whole selves and futures to another and to God. If we as parents prepare them in this way, we protect them too!

### **PARENTING AS GOD INTENDED**

You *can* prepare your children to experience God's best in the area of sexuality. You are capable of being a wonderful and effective sex educator, even if you don't think so. You just need some advice, encouragement, information, and help to get there. That's what this book (and the God's Design for Sex series as a whole) provides.

We parents rightly want help from churches and schools, but we cannot abdicate such an important task to others. The primary job is ours. How do we do it?

Many of us think too small. We think of sex education in terms of “the talk” with the early teen that will convince him or her not to have sex before marriage. How could that possibly work? Wherever our children turn, the secular world inundates them with messages about sexuality, all pointing them in the wrong direction. Can one discussion at age thirteen or fourteen counteract all the destructive messages they are receiving? No.

Our vision is for children to grow up having godly, age-appropriate discussion and teaching about sexuality as a regular part of their relationship with their parents. Why you? Because parents are God's most important agents for shaping the sexual character of their children. You can help your child to trust God's wisdom given for their good throughout their lives.

Think on two of the most important passages in the Bible about parenting and the beauty of God's commandments:

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may

## THE BIG PICTURE: PREPARING HEALTHY, GODLY ADULTS

do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, *that it may go well with you*, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.* You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9, emphasis added

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today *for your good?*

DEUTERONOMY 10:12-13, emphasis added

Parents have the opportunity to encourage their children to become followers of God in love and obedience. We are to do so trusting that God's commands are a source of blessing and for our good. We are to walk in faith, loving God with our whole being and seeking to impart the same love and faith to our children. Sex education is about making this great vision a reality in the area of sexuality.

### GODLY PARENTING

Parenting is complex, with many ways we can approach it. We have found one line of research particularly instructive and encouraging to Christian

## How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex

parents.<sup>1</sup> In this approach, some researchers divided parents into four basic types according to two major factors: (1) what the parents expect of their children, and (2) how they respond to the children emotionally. The four resulting types of parents are *negligent*, *permissive*, *authoritarian*, and *authoritative*.

	<b>LOW EXPECTATIONS</b> (Indulgent & Lenient)	<b>HIGH EXPECTATIONS</b> (Disciplining)
<b>Low Acceptance, Support, and Love</b>	Negligent/Neglectful Parents	Authoritarian Parents
<b>High Acceptance, Support, and Love</b>	Permissive Parents	Authoritative Parents

Negligent parents expect little of their children and offer little emotional support. Permissive or indulgent parents are big on emotional support but expect little from their children and do not challenge their children to “be all they can be.” Authoritarian parents overemphasize discipline, expectations, and control of their children; they push their children hard but are cold and disconnected emotionally, leaving their children feeling unloved and valued only for their accomplishments.

Authoritative parents, however, offer both high expectations and lavish love and support to their child. These parents want to teach their children, but they combine an emphasis on discipline with warmth, communication, respect, and affection. *The authoritative parenting style is the most effective style and produces the healthiest kids.* Research suggests that “kids raised by authoritative parents are more likely to become independent, self-reliant, socially accepted, academically successful, and well-behaved.”<sup>2</sup>

This research reinforces that parenting is a way in which we symbolize God to our children within our families. Righteousness (expectations) and love (acceptance) are two fundamental facets of God’s character, and God’s perfect balance of these two characteristics is at the heart of the gospel and of good parenting. Parents are ambassadors or representatives of God in the lives of their children.<sup>3</sup>

In having expectations of their children, parents embody God’s character of justice and righteousness, in which he reveals his will for his people and desires us to follow for our own good. In being accepting and loving, parents embody God’s loving and merciful character, as he persistently pursues his wayward people out of love until he brings them home.

Strive to embody these two qualities—as God does himself—by being authoritative parents as you do lifelong sex education. You have the opportunity to bless your child and shape his or her sexual character through your relationship.

## THE BENEFITS OF FOLLOWING GOD

As you approach the task of sex education, be encouraged that as a follower of God, you and your child will prosper as you help him or her handle the gift of sexuality the way God, the Gift-Giver, intended. God’s Word shows us four ways in which following him leads us to prosper.

### *1. Prosper in Pleasing God with Our Obedience*

The greatest benefit of conducting our sexual lives in the manner in which God urges us to, and teaching our children to do the same, is that we can know we are doing what our Father wants us to do and are pleasing him. Scripture promises that in obedience—in living as God wishes—our faith can be completed or perfected:

His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,  
but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

PSALM 147:10-11

[Jesus said,] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . . . Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . . If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”

JOHN 14:15, 21, 23-24

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 JOHN 2:3-6

### *2. Prosper in Safety from Calamity*

Sexual-activity rates remain high among teens, even though they have declined a bit since their peak around 1990; approximately 68 percent have had sexual intercourse by their nineteenth birthday.<sup>4</sup> STI rates continue to climb, and teen pregnancy continues to be at troubling levels.<sup>5</sup> Premarital chastity and marital monogamy are safeguards against unwanted pregnancy and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

In living according to God's law, we experience the joy and blessing of sex as God meant it, free from fear. Obedience creates safety; we can live without fear of the devastation that can come from illicit sex. The Bible speaks often about such devastation and danger. Typical passages include such warnings in Proverbs 5:1-14 about the "forbidden woman" (verse 3), likely a prostitute but also inclusive of any sexually immoral partner. The writer warns that "in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword," and that "her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol" (verses 4-5, likely referencing the dangers of STIs and spiritual ruin). He warns also that you do not want to "give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner" (verses 9-10), nor the ultimate outcome of finding oneself "at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation" (verse 14), likely references to destruction of marital, familial, church, and social relationships. The apostle Paul spoke similarly of sexual sinners "receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:27), likely speaking about negative physical, social, and spiritual consequences of immorality. The risks of illicit sex are stark compared to the blessings of marital sex: closeness, intimacy, physical pleasure, children, and unity.

More broadly, obedient Christians are also safer from the relational confusion and emotional traumas that premature and inappropriate sexual intimacy can foster. We are not only safe from bad things but also have the blessing of experiencing the good God intended in giving us the gift of sexuality.

### *3. Prosper in Singleness*

While marriage is a fundamental human institution through which husbands and wives may reflect aspects of God's image, chaste singleness is also a blessed reflection of God's image. Christ taught that our perfected and everlasting life with him in heaven will be one where people possessing perfect resurrection bodies "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). We are made in God's image and will reflect his glory for eternity as embodied single persons, male and female; human marriage is a sign and reality intended for this world only, because in heaven, our union with God will be complete.

Scripture clearly commends—and the chaste single life of our Lord Jesus beautifully depicts—the companionship that can be experienced in serving the Kingdom of God as a single person in the company of fellow believers, the goodness and worth of individual unmarried human beings, and the virtuousness of sexual chastity in singleness (see 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35). Chastity in singleness manifests fidelity to our loving God in this life while we await full communion with him. The New Testament teaches further that we are one body, which implies that single and married people ought to share life together for mutual encouragement (see Romans 12:4-5; Hebrews 10:24-25).

Jesus refers to singleness as a praiseworthy calling "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:10-12). The apostle Paul says that "it is good . . . to remain single" (1 Corinthians 7:8), echoing Jesus' call to singleness in order to be singularly devoted to work for Christ's Kingdom. Paul goes on to say, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him" (1 Corinthians 7:17). This suggests that, for some, the call to singleness is from God and not necessarily of a person's choosing.

Single people can have rich and fertile relationships. As a single man, Jesus raised spiritual children. Scripture pictures the church as the betrothed of Christ waiting faithfully for the consummation of her marriage (see Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 19:6-8; 21:1-2). Chaste single believers thus serve the church as visible reminders that the Kingdom of God points away from any worldly idealization or idolatry of marriage and family and toward our everlasting calling to union with God through his Son. We should celebrate the important contributions of singles to the Kingdom of God and our understanding of the gospel, while also seeking to integrate single and married members of our community for mutual encouragement.

## *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex*

### *4. Prosper in Marriage*

Sexual chastity contributes to a successful marriage. Solomon is clearly commending the sexual restraint of the beautiful bride-to-be when he describes her as “a garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed” (Song of Solomon 4:12). Similarly, the writer of Proverbs 5 commends the wise young man to “let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (verses 18-19). Paul alludes to similar blessings in 1 Timothy 4:3-5, where he instructs us that God created marriage “to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”

While premarital chastity is no guarantee of having a good marriage, the evidence that it helps is indisputable. For example, a recent series of research studies<sup>6</sup> suggests that delaying sexual intimacy is strongly associated with more positive outcomes in terms of relational satisfaction and sexual satisfaction on long-term follow-up. An important if older sociological study of marriage<sup>7</sup> found results that Christians will appreciate:

- The single most powerful predictor of a good marriage was whether couples pray together regularly.
- Couples able to pray together and enjoy good sex together were the least likely to divorce.
- Cohabitation before marriage approximately doubled the degree to which couples themselves believe that they are likely to get a divorce; this reinforces numerous other studies that show cohabitation as bad for marriage rather than the preparation for it that so many claim.
- The higher the incidence of premarital sex, the lesser the likelihood the couple reported high sexual satisfaction and the greater the likelihood of infidelity in marriage.

You want the best for your children. Teach them by your words what they need to know as rules for living and show them the proper path to follow by the way you live your life. Pursue the high goal of equipping and empowering them to enter adulthood capable of living godly, wholesome, and fulfilled lives as Christian men and women, whether as Christian singles or as Christian wives and husbands.