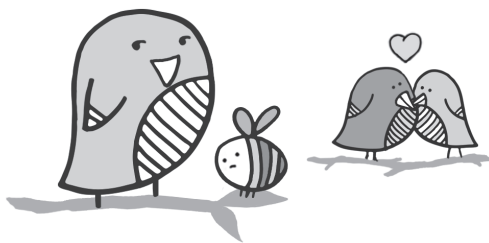


What's the Big Deal?

Why God Cares about Sex

STAN & BRENN A JONES



NavPress 

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

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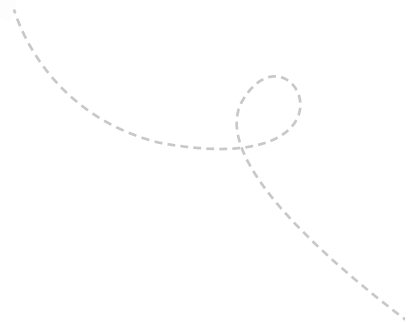
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TO BRANDON, EMILY, CANON, AND BRADY





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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 (1983–95), whose insightfulness, openness, and inquisitiveness so enriched our understanding of sexuality, and whose stories of how they learned (or mostly not) 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.

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of that important journal.¹ 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 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. Dr. Glynn Harrison, professor emeritus of psychiatry at University of Bristol, gave us the enormous gift of his review of and suggestions for the entire five-book series, for which he has our everlasting gratitude.

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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 home-schooling their three children. Our intent is that Mark and Lori 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.

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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

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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 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.

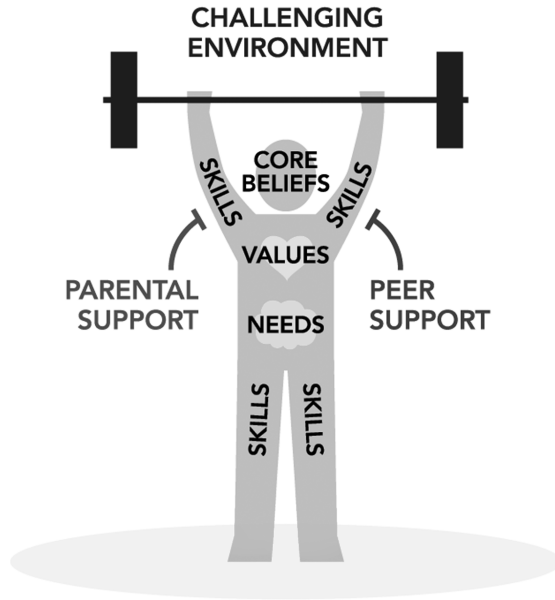
In this series, we address controversial topics about which Christians disagree, including masturbation, how far people should go sexually when they're dating, contraception, gender identity, homosexuality, and more. Our goal in doing so is not to presumptuously present our answers as completely right 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

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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 most helpful to you in your current parenting season.

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 know when and how to bring up these subjects. Our goals for *How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex* are to

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- 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 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

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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 with a more slowly maturing eight-year-old, the answer is yes. We believe this is a strategic 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.

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

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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 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

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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.

CHAPTER 1

What's the Big Deal?

Suggestion to families: If your child is a good reader, ask him or her to read the parts where Sam and Amy are talking, while you, the parent, read the Mom and Dad parts. All of the material covered is important for both boys and girls. These written conversations will hopefully start even more conversations between your child and you about God's design for sex.



SAM: *Dad, what's the big deal about sex? Why do people talk and joke so much about sex, like on TV and stuff?*



DAD: It's confusing, but I will try to explain it as best I can. First, sex is a wonderful and beautiful gift from God. Beyond the many ways in which we are similar, God made men and women, girls and boys different from each other in marvelous ways. Our bodies are a gift from God. When husbands and wives share their bodies together in sexual intercourse, it is only one of the ways they share their love, but it is a special and powerful way. So sex is a big deal because sex is a marvelous gift from God.



SAM: *But that's not what I mean. People aren't talking about sex because it is a gift from God!*

What's the Big Deal?



DAD: I know! And I'm glad you are thinking about this enough to see that! But regardless of what others say, sex is important in everyone's life because God made us men and women with special and different bodies. God made sex, so it *is* a big deal.

But people make such a big deal about sex mostly for bad reasons, not good ones. For instance, sex is a big deal because when people don't use God's gift the right way, bad consequences often result. When people use the good gift of sex the way God meant it to be used, it is much more likely to have a beautiful and wonderful result. Sex is a big deal because so many people can be and are hurt by sex.



AMY: *Hurt by sex? How? What kinds of bad things can happen?*



MOM: Here's one example. Whenever a couple has sexual intercourse, the woman might get pregnant. A baby might start to grow in her womb. If the man and woman are married, usually this is a happy time. They feel like celebrating and it draws them even closer together in love.

But if the woman who has sex and gets pregnant is a fourteen-year-old girl, usually she is not happy. She may have to raise a baby without a husband. Her whole life changes—her dreams about finishing high school, dating, going to college; everything changes. God meant for pregnancy and giving birth to a child to be wonderful, something worth celebrating. But having a baby is something that many people dread because they didn't save sex for marriage.



DAD: Misusing God's gift of sex also spreads some diseases. Because sex brings people so close together, one partner can catch a disease the other partner has. Did you know that if a man and a woman never have sex with anyone except each other, that husband and wife have almost no chance of ever getting any diseases from sex at all? But because so many young people today are not waiting to

get married before they have sex, these terrible diseases are becoming more common.

If you use God's gift correctly, treating it like a beautiful gift, you can be wonderfully happy that God made you a boy or a girl. But when people misuse sex, it almost always hurts someone. Did you know that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of teenage girls get pregnant every year? Did you know that many teenagers are getting sexual diseases with bad consequences like cancer or not being able to ever have children, all because they do not follow God's rules?



AMY: *That sounds terrible!*



MOM: Another reason sex is a big deal is that some people make it more important than it should be. Do you remember what the Bible says about idolatry? People commit idolatry when they take something God made and then treat it like it is a god. In the Old Testament, God hated it when people took things he made, like rocks and trees and gold, and then worshiped those things.

When people stop believing in the real God, they often start believing that other things can take God's place, things like money, or power, or being famous.



SAM: *Do people do that with sex?*



MOM: Sadly, yes. Sex is sort of like a god for some people today. They think that sex will make them happy or that sex is the most important thing in life.

They are wrong. Only God can make us truly happy, and only God deserves to be the most important thing in our lives. So when such people try to get happy by having as much sex as possible or by breaking God's rules about sex, they usually find they are not happy at all.

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AMY: *I think I understand that, but why do people joke about sex so much?*



DAD: For some, it's because they want you to believe that sex is no big deal so that you might behave like they do, which would make them feel better about themselves. For others, it may be to cover up or express their disappointment in sex. In a lot of television shows and movies, people talk about sex, joke about sex, and think about sex all the time. I worry that these shows teach kids and grown-ups that sex is worth thinking about all the time. We Christians think sex is a wonderful gift, but it was not meant to take the place of God in our lives. And thinking about sex all the time or making sex the most important thing in our lives can never make us happy.



MOM: I agree that's why some grown-ups joke about sex, but I think there are different reasons, Sam, why kids your age joke about it. It's because they hear adults, especially on TV and in the movies, talk about it a lot, but the kids don't really know for sure what the adults are talking about or why. Maybe their parents haven't talked to them like we have with you. So the kids are really curious about it, but they're nervous and embarrassed because they don't really understand it. They also may joke about it because they don't understand how God made it special.



SAM: *That makes sense, sort of.*



DAD: But now let me tell you why I think sex needs to be a big deal for us. We want to teach you the truth about sex so that you will be ready to make the right decisions about it as a teenager and adult. Please always feel free to ask us any questions that come to your mind, because we won't be able to think of everything you need to know. And we won't always know the answers to your questions! We

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might need to think about it awhile before we answer you, but that's okay. We may even need to read to find the answer or ask someone, but we would be glad to do that. It is important for us to keep talking about this topic. We love you so much that we want you to learn about how God made us and meant for us to live, even when it isn't always easy to talk about.

SOME QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

1. When have you heard kids joke about sex? Why do you think they do that?
2. What have you noticed about the way people in television and movies talk about sex?
3. What do you think about God making you a sexual person?