

MARK OESTREICHER
& JOEL MAYWARD

A

PARENT'S
GUIDE

TO UNDERSTANDING

SEX & DATING



BEYOND THE BIRDS AND THE BEES



YouthMinistry.com/TOGETHER

A Parent's Guide to Understanding Sex & Dating

Moving Beyond the Birds and the Bees

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CHAPTER 1: CREATING A FOUNDATION FOR SEXUALITY

The original title for this book was *A Parent's Guide to Sex*. We realized that title sounded a bit redundant—if you're a parent of a child, you've managed to figure out how to have sex at *least* once in your life. Maybe parents would pick it up thinking it was a how-to book for their sex lives now that they've got a bunch of kids in the house (hint: lock the door).

Unfortunately (or fortunately) for you, this is not that book.

First, a disclaimer: I (Joel) am not the parent of a teen. I do get *mistaken* for being a teenager all the time due to my natural youthful demeanor and inability to grow facial hair. But my eldest child is barely out of diapers, and as of this writing, I haven't even entered my 30s.

On the other hand, I (Marko) am way older than Joel. My half-century mark will be here in mere months, and I'm the dad of an almost-19-year-old, and an almost-15-year-

old—one girl and one guy (which means I've *done it* at least twice!). But just because I've mostly weathered parenting one teenager and am in the midst of parenting another doesn't make me some sort of sex expert.

So why would we write a book on teen sexuality and dating intended for parents? And why should you even bother reading this?

Because we believe this stuff matters.

By “this stuff” we mean your teenager's well-being and future, particularly when it comes to their sexuality. Their future marriage and family and self-worth depend on it. We think you probably agree, which is why you've picked up this little book.

But “this stuff” is, frankly, difficult to talk about. It's hard and messy. Many parents and teens don't feel comfortable talking about sex openly, partly due to the intimate nature of the subject, and partly because they simply don't have an understanding of its complexity. It's pretty simple: Even if they think they *should* talk about it, they don't know *how* to talk about it and they don't *like* talking about it. So they don't.

The first time I (Joel) talked with my father about sexuality was in the Red Robin® located in my childhood stomping grounds of Federal Way, Washington. At the time, I was engaged to my soon-to-be wife and wanted a deeper friendship with my dad before I got married. In my naiveté, I broached the subject of sexuality. I figured, “We’re two adult men now, so we could put childish ways behind us, right?” Wrong. He stiffened up, avoided eye contact, and spoke in a coded language, only referring to sex as “it” and “stuff.” My dad is normally a very stoic man who isn’t easily rattled, but this conversation had him squirming. I thought at one point that he’d actually spew his ranch-covered French fries all over the table from the nerves and anxiety.

That was the first and last time I talked with my dad about sex. I’ve still never broached the topic with my mom (and I don’t plan to anytime soon).

When I (Marko) was a teenager, my parents found out that I’d been to a party where there was some fairly innocuous “making out” (and they were church kids!). Two days later, I found a book on my bed. It was called *Almost Twelve*. I was almost 15. Like Joel, the only *out-loud* conversation about sex I ever had with my dad was on the night before my wedding, and I remember it with nothing short of terror.

(Oddly enough, my parents—now in their late 70s—talk about sex all the time. It’s simultaneously sweet, cute, and creepy.)

We’re sharing these stories with you because we think we could have been saved a great deal of hurt and confusion in our lives if our (otherwise fantastic) parents simply would have talked with us about sex. We want to spare you and your teenager the same hurt and confusion. We think it’s too important of a subject to *not* talk about.

We’re hoping this little book feels more like a conversation than a how-to guide. Conversations about sexuality are important, but not in offensive or vague terms—we need to be able to have healthy, honest, theologically informed discussions about sex. It’s been part of our story as human beings from the very beginning, and it plays a significant role in our identity formation. So we invite you to enter the conversation with open eyes and open ears. We’ll strive to be candid without being crass, and authentic without over-sharing. (In other words, this won’t be a book about our sex lives or filled with junior-high-level scatological humor, even though we have both been junior high pastors.)

Oh, one thing about us you should know: Both of us have been youth pastors for years (about 40 years between the

two of us). In that context, we've talked with thousands of teenagers about the issues in this book, met with hundreds of parents, and read at least a few articles. So while our own parenting (particularly Marko's) will factor into what we have to say, we're mostly writing to you as youth workers who care deeply about your teenager, and about you.

Let's talk about "stuff."

A Theology of Sex – Back to the Beginning

A few years ago, I (Joel) went on a church mission trip to Mexico to build homes for impoverished families. I had done similar trips in high school, but this time we were building a real *house*. Doors, windows, roof, a concrete foundation—the works. Our first day was spent mixing concrete by hand and pouring it into a rectangle-shaped hole in the Mexican sand. Some of the men on our team literally spent hours making sure the edges of the hole were even and level, getting down with their faces in the dirt and making sure the concrete was smoothed and evenly distributed. Impatient and ignorant about architecture, I complained to one of the foremen that this was taking *forever*. He patiently explained that the foundation for the house made the framing and final construction possible. If

we rushed ahead without doing the hard work of creating a level foundation—if we were only slightly off with our measurements—then the final house wouldn't be stable. It might take only days, or it might happen in a few years, but the results would be the same: The foundation would split. At best, the entire home would be slightly leaning; at worst, the house would collapse.

If we don't have a healthy foundation for our conversation on sex, then all of our ideas and thoughts and actions regarding sexuality will ultimately be skewed. They'll be slightly—or terribly—off-kilter. Our foundations have to be secure and right and true.

So allow us to get all theological on you and share some foundational thoughts from Scripture.

The first three chapters in the book of Genesis form a foundation for humanity's story. We first learn who God is. We learn about how the world was created and how humanity plays a part in that world. We learn about the relationship between God and human beings. We learn about how human beings broke that relationship. Genesis 1–2 gives us a picture of what life *should* be like, the Edenic paradise of living in peace and harmony with God and creation.

At the climax of the creation account, after God has created light and dark and earth and water and sky and vegetation and animals, something significant happens:

So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27 TNIV).

This passage is the first clear instance of poetry in the Bible. Poetry is used to express the inexpressible. This is important, because it means the author wants to highlight something, to draw our attention to an important truth: *Human beings are valuable to God.* All people—men, women, young, old, smart, not-so-smart, every race and ethnicity—every human being is made in the image of God. It's like we have the thumbprint of God in our lives, that we are a reflection of his beauty. The theological term for this is the *imago dei*, or the “image of God.”

The implications are that if we treat human beings as any less than human beings, then we are not treating them how God created them to be. We are treating them as things, as objects, as tools. When we start treating people as objects and commodities to be used, then we are not valuing God's creation.

Treating human beings as less than human takes many forms that are directly connected to sexuality. There are obvious extremes, such as rape or the illegal sex slave trade. These horrible acts can only occur when human dignity and value are ignored, when the image of God is not acknowledged. As a culture, we all agree that these are forms of evil and depravity; they are outlawed, and justice is enforced against those who participate in such actions.

But there are more subtle ways we can turn people into objects, such as pornography, sexism, and lust. With pornography, a valuable human being with the image of God is distorted into a mere image used for selfish pleasure, or as a commodity to be sold in order to make money off people's lustful desires. With sexism, one gender dominates the other—usually male over female—degrading the other. Making sexist jokes or offensive comments about an entire gender removes the individual beauty of people.

The story of Genesis continues in chapter 2, describing how God created both man and woman. In verse 7, God forms the man from the dust and breathes the breath of life into his being. A second important truth occurs here: *We are created with both bodies and spirits.* We are more than just flesh and blood, but we also cannot ignore our bodily

needs and desires. We'll talk more later on why this is so important, so file it away for now.

The man in the Garden of Eden turns out to be lonely, so God creates a woman out of the man's rib and brings her to the man. The man is obviously happy about this—he's been alone, and suddenly a naked woman appears. The author of Genesis describes something remarkable:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:24-25 NIV).

This is the picture of the first marriage, the union between Adam and Eve in perfect unity with God and each other, all without sin. They could be both naked and unashamed. When we're naked, we're typically self-conscious, awkward, and exposed. Yet Adam and Eve could be completely vulnerable with each other and not feel a hint of disgrace. This is a holistic vulnerability, a sharing of their very being and identity with one another. It is perfect intimacy.

God's intention for human sexuality is quite clear here: *Sexuality was meant for marriage.* Marriage is the only

healthy context where we as human beings can experience real sex, true sex, the kind that God desires for us. Anything else—premarital sex, adultery, hooking up, pornography, and so on—it’s all just fake sex. It is choosing less than what God intended. This is the motivation behind the Christian mantra of “don’t have sex before marriage.” It’s not because we are killjoys or prudes or stuck in outdated traditions. This is simply the best possible way to live out our sexuality.

Let us ask you a question: How sexual are you?

Ten percent? Fifty percent? Maybe closer to 90 percent?
Depends on what you ate today?

Here’s the answer: 100 percent. You are a sexual being. *Our sexuality and our identity are inherently intertwined.* God created us as male and female, set us in his creation, and said, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Our human sexuality affects our bodies, our emotions, our desires, our dreams, and our fears. It’s not that sex is the driving motivation behind all our actions and feelings. We’re not getting all Freudian on you. Yet human sexuality is clearly wrapped up in the *imago dei*, and God created us as sexual beings, both by creating gender and the marriage covenant.

Having this theological foundation for our sexuality will set the tone for the rest of this little book. We'll be coming back to the foundation over and over again, because many of the sexual mistakes we make come from distorting or ignoring significant aspects of this foundation. We don't want your foundation to be tipsy or unstable, so come back to this section often to refresh your memory.