

WHY WAIT FOR SEX?

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A Look at the Lies We Face

History teaches us that people believe what they want to hear. Lies can sound so true when people are starving for truth. Even whole societies will feast on their promises. The Inquisition was based on the lie that some people could force other people to change their religious beliefs. American colonists believed the lie that people of one race had the right to own, buy and sell people of another race. More recently, hundreds of thousands of people believed Hitler's lie that the Jewish race should be eradicated. Most of us can hardly imagine that anyone could have believed these lies. And yet we swallow other lies all the time.

Our society is starving for intimacy. And many of the lies we believe in our culture have to do with our hunger for relationship. We want acceptance, loving relationships and deep intimacy, and yet we believe the lie that sex will satisfy our hunger. It's true that we are profoundly sexual beings, but it's time to examine some of the lies we feast on: the lie that premarital sex is one of our unalienable rights, the lie that sexual intercourse is the route to intimacy, and the lie that premarital abstinence is obsolete at best and repressive at worst. These are all lies.

We have bought into these lies because we are a starving people. We are people who long to be loved, touched and understood in a world of declining family ties and epidemic dysfunction. Our desires are certainly not new; they are as old as humanity. The difference in our world today is that people are trying to fulfill these longings in strange ways: through machines (TVs, CD players, and computers), through sports, material possessions, institutions and sex. Especially through sex. "Try it just once and you'll be fulfilled." "Go for variety and you won't be bored." "A life without sex is a life without belonging." Sexual experience has become a personal right, a need to be met and a norm to be accepted.

The tragedy of all this is that people are dying of emotional starvation, and they are looking for food in the wrong places. I would like to identify seven lies that our society is making about sex. The truth is that sex outside of marriage is not all it's cracked up to be. There is no pot of gold at the end of that rainbow.

Lie #1: Sex creates intimacy. Genital sex is an expression of intimacy, not the means to intimacy. True intimacy springs from verbal and emotional communion. True intimacy is built on a commitment to honesty, love and freedom. True intimacy is not primarily a

sexual encounter. Intimacy, in fact, has almost nothing to do with our sex organs. A prostitute may expose her body, but her relationships are hardly intimate.

Premarital sexual intercourse may actually hinder intimacy. Donald Joy writes that indulging in sexual intercourse prematurely short-circuits the emotional bonding process. He cites one study of 100,000 women that links early sexual experience with dissatisfaction in their present marriages, unhappiness with the level of sexual intimacy and a prevalence of low self-esteem (*Christianity Today*, October 3, 1986).

Lie #2: Starting sex early in a relationship will help you get to know one another and become better partners later. Sexual intercourse and extensive physical exploration early in a relationship do not reflect sex at its best. Of course there is sensual pleasure for those who engage in premarital sexual experiences, but they are missing out on the best route to marital happiness. Sex is an art that is learned best in the safe environment of marriage. I met with one student whose disappointment with her sexual encounters prompted her to overcome great embarrassment and ask me point blank: “Is sex in marriage as bad as it is outside of marriage?” She had arrived at the end of the rainbow, looking for the promised pot of gold, and she had found only disillusionment.

When unrestrained physical intimacy dominates a relationship, other parts of that relationship suffer. In healthy marriages, sex takes its natural place beside the intellectual, emotional and practical aspects of life. Married couples spend less time in bed than they do in conversation, in problem solving, and in emotional communion. The lie that premarital sex prepares you for marriage denies the fact that sexual happiness grows only through years of intimate relationship. The height of sexual pleasure, psychologists tell us, usually comes after ten to twenty years of marriage.

Good sex begins in the head. It depends on intimate knowledge of your partner. The Bible uses the words “to know” to describe sexual intercourse: “Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived...” (Genesis 4:1, NRSV). This choice of words elevates human sexuality from mere animal sex where availability is the main requirement to a full, intimate expression of love and commitment.

Lie #3: Casual sex without long-term commitments is both fun and freeing. Those who settle for short-term sexual relationships are settling for second-best sex. Journalist George Leonard observed that “casual recreational sex is hardly a feast—not even a good hearty sandwich. It is a diet of fast food served in plastic containers. Life’s feast is available only to those who are willing and able to engage life on a deeply personal level, giving all, holding back nothing.” (Quoted by Joyce Huggett in *Dating, Sex & Friendship*, InterVarsity Press, p. 82.) For a woman, particularly, sex can reveal hidden fears and lack of trust. Good sex—which can be a healing agent over time—requires trust, trust which grows best in the context of the life-long commitment of marriage.

Lie #4: If you don’t express your sexuality freely, you must be repressed, sick or prudish. This can be a very intimidating lie, but the facts are that premature sex is bad for your emotional, physical and cultural health. The February 1991 issue of the journal *Pediatrics*

reported that researchers at Indiana University found that sexually active teenagers are more likely to be prone to alcohol abuse and illegal drugs, and are more likely to have trouble in school. They reported that sexually active girls were more likely to be depressed, have low self esteem, feel lonely or attempt suicide.

Premarital sex may be bad for the emotional health of your future marriage. It lays the groundwork for comparisons, suspicions, and mistrust. “Am I as attractive (or as sexually stimulating) as his last partner?” “If she didn’t wait for me before we were married, why do I think she will settle for only me now?” “If someone better comes along, will I be left in the dust?”

Premarital sex is also bad for your physical health. Sexually transmitted diseases have received abundant attention from the press in recent years. Equal time has not been given to the opinion held by many medical experts that extra-marital abstinence is without a doubt the best way to avoid these diseases.

Sexual promiscuity is even bad for the health of our civilization. One study of more than eighty societies ranging in development from ancient to primitive to more modern revealed “an unvarying correlation between the degree of sexual restraints and the rate of social progress. Cultures that were more sexually permissive displayed less cultural energy, creativity, intellectual development and individualism, and a slower general cultural ascent...” (Reo Christenson, *Christianity Today*, February 19, 1982). Why, then, do we-as individuals and as a society-trade our energy, creativity, and intellectual development for momentary sexual pleasure? Because we have believed a lie.

Lie #5: Sex is freedom. Premarital sex is hardly an expression of freedom. Young people who become sexually active in response to peer pressure to be sophisticated and independent are actually becoming victims of current public opinion. No one is really free who engages in any activity in order to impress the majority.

Lie #6: Surely God understands that this is the twentieth century! How can what society says is okay be wrong? Scripture is clear that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of marriage is sin. Even if we had no other evidence, God’s Word makes it clear that intercourse outside of marriage is not only outside our best interests, but it is also wrong. In his seventh commandment to the Israelites, God said “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Jesus was even more inclusive when he described the evil within men’s hearts, including “sexual immorality” (Mark 7:21). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to “flee from sexual immorality” (see 1 Corinthians 6:18-19), and to the Ephesians he said that there must not be among them even a “hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Ephesians 5:3). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4).

I do not believe that God gave these rules because he is a spoil-sport. Quite the contrary. Because God created us and because he loves us more than we can ever know, he has told us how to have the best, most satisfying sexual experiences: in marriage. That’s where sex

is fun! Premarital abstinence and marital faithfulness is not a denial of my rights or my pleasures. It is choosing to experience sex in the healthiest, happiest context.

Lie #7: Why wait? How can you know for sure that waiting is best? Maybe sex isn't worth the wait. Maybe it's best to take the opportunities you have now. Obedience to God's commands includes trusting him to know what's best for us—even if we don't fully grasp his reasons. The choices we make in our sexual behavior require faith in truths we may not understand. God required the Israelites to obey dozens of laws, many of which were good for their health even though they didn't know why. Look at one example in Leviticus 15:2, 9-10: "When any man has a bodily discharge, the discharge is unclean... Everything the man sits on while riding will be unclean." Thousands of years ago, no one had heard of germs and micro-organisms that carry disease. If some young man had complained about God's unfairness in not letting him ride the same horse as his friend who had the discharge, could he have understood if God had explained venereal disease to him in scientific detail? Not likely. Likewise, there are spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological reasons why God has limited sexual intercourse to the marriage bed. Some of those reasons are beyond our understanding. We simply must believe that God knows what is best for us.

When we live within the confines of God's limits, we live by faith in a loving God. Sexual purity is, in the final analysis, an expression of our confidence in God's goodness, an indication of our trust in Jesus. "You are my friends," Jesus said, "if you do what I command" (John 15:14). "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). Living by faith means applying this definition of faith to the situation at hand. We exercise faith and obedience, not because of what we know, but because of the person we love, Jesus himself. The truth that sex is best within the context of marriage cannot be proven ahead of time. But we can learn from those who have already made their choices. I asked my friend Liz, a psychotherapist, "How often do you see clients who wish they had not explored their sexuality so much before marriage?" "Oh, very often," she answered. Then I asked, "And how often do you have clients who wish they had gone further in physical intimacy before marriage?" Her eyes widened, and she looked at me with surprise as she answered emphatically, "Never!" This is one of life's great faith issues.

If you decide to wait, it will take great courage and strength. If you decide not to wait, you will never know what you missed. You cannot have it both ways. No one can prove that premarital abstinence works. I believe that medical, psychological, and sociological evidence strongly supports the position that sex outside of marriage is not good for us. But in the final analysis, it is an issue of faith. For Christian men and women at the end of the twentieth century, the choices we make in our sexual behavior may be one of the main ways God calls us to believe. Do we dare to be different? Do we dare to believe the truth of God's Word even though it contradicts most of the lies surrounding us? I believe that God is calling us to this kind of radical faith.