

“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.”

- Deuteronomy 6:7

Why “Sexual Integrity?”

How we speak about sex matters. Sometimes discussions on this subject in churches and homes can be misguided or fear-based. “Christian sex” can be reduced to nothing more than choosing to wait for sex until marriage. This may cause teens and young adults to think that their virginity is the most important commodity, an identity marker, in their relationship with the Lord.

A recent article about Elizabeth Smart, the young woman who was kidnapped and held captive for nine months in 2002 near her home in Salt Lake City, UT, had a similar thought in a recent article titled, “The Limits of Abstinence Education.” Smart says, *“I remember in school one time, I had a teacher who was talking about, well... about abstinence. And she said, ‘Imagine that you’re a stick of gum, and when you engage in sex, that’s like getting chewed. And then if you do that lots of times, you’re going to become an old piece of gum, and who’s going to want you after that?’ For me, I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m that chewed up piece of gum. Nobody re-chews a piece of gum. You throw it away.’”*

Analogies make a difference. They communicate meaning and significance; therefore we must be careful in how they are used. Ms. Smart’s response to the abstinence message reflects that reality.

I’ve been doing this for many years and realize the power of speaking on such a sensitive subject. My hope is that, as a ministry, The Sexual Integrity Initiative is doing more than just selling the value of virginity. Virginity is not what makes someone holy. Unfortunately, there are some that wrongly believe the first question that God will ask us when we meet Him face to face is, “Were you a virgin when you got married?”



Sexual Integrity requires something more than self-willed behavior. It requires turning to the Lord with all our hearts.

(Cont.)

Choosing to wait for sex until marriage is about more than our virginity.

The concept of "sexual purity" is important, but considering Ms. Smart's reaction, even the use of that term may carry unnecessary burdens for some. Without the gospel of Jesus Christ, the value of being 'clean' and 'pure' can sound like a regimine of don'ts.

I've sat through many 'purity' talks at church that omitted the name of Jesus Christ. But He is the only One that makes us pure (1 John 3:3). Sometimes this point is missed in our talks, yet it is the most important thing. The purity of Christ is where our value and identity are found.

This generation is going to have to wait longer than any other if they choose to follow God's standards for sex. In the late 1800's young people only waited one or two years from the time of puberty (physical changes communicating readiness to create life) until they married. In the 1950's the waiting time extended by 5 or 6 years. Today, because of nutrition and other factors, the onset of puberty is generally younger. However, most young adults are waiting until their late 20's to marry. This means that if they are going to follow God's standards they will have to wait anywhere from 12-17 years from the time their body is ready for sex until they marry. That is a long time! And that is why our message must resonate in ways that go beyond rules and boundaries.

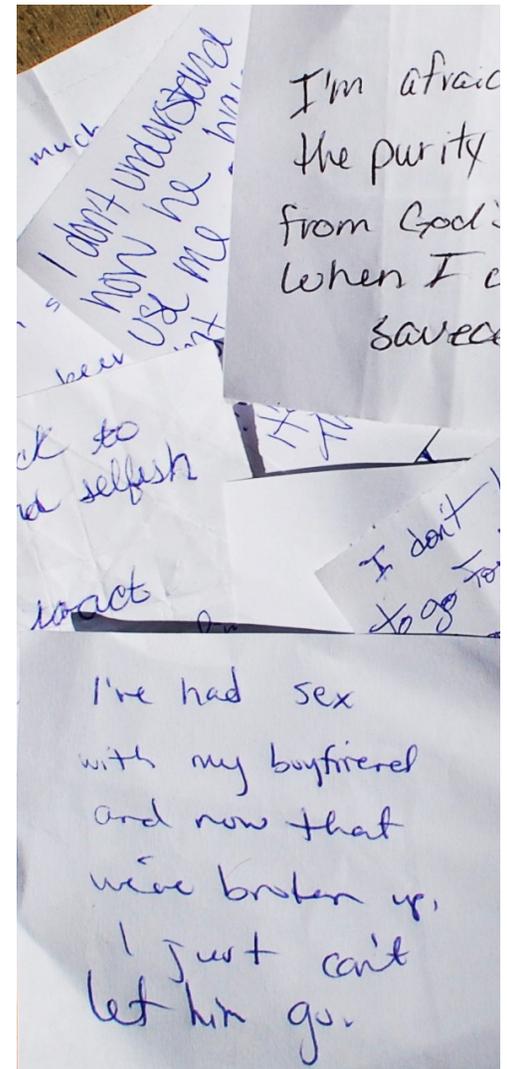
God is concerned with the heart. Virginity, if not spoken of in the right context, can be a source of pride rather than an opportunity to glorify the Creator. Virginity, as a stand-alone virtue, is not the opposite of sexual promiscuity. Sexual integrity is.

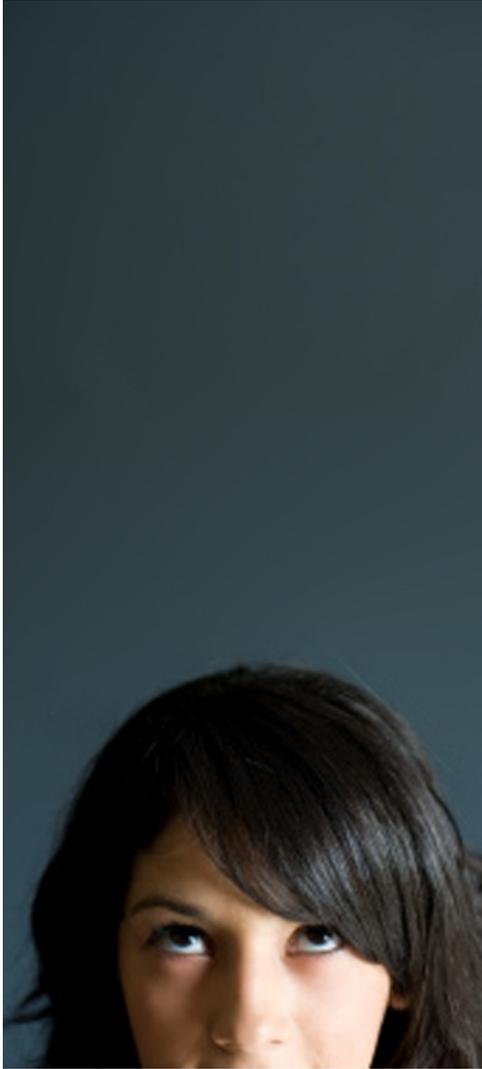
Sexual integrity (and purity, if spoken about correctly) requires something more than self-willed behavior. It requires turning to the Lord with all our hearts and being empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey. Our identity in Scripture is not found in our good works (like saving our virginity), but in the One in whom we find TRUE life, Jesus Christ. If we make a mistake (sin), our identity is not stolen from us because this identity is not based on what we do, but on what has already been done.

Finally, another reason we use the term sexual integrity comes from the root word "integer," which means whole or complete. Our desire as a ministry is to see individuals become sexually whole in Jesus Christ. In a wonderfully written article, "Why Virginity is Not Important But Chastity Is," Stephen Kenyon speaks of this dynamic. The author says, "For it is Christ who makes us completely whole again that we might love fully without shame. This is why virginity is not important, but chastity (or sexual integrity) is: because in Christ the old has gone, the new has come, we are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus to give ourselves in love as He did. That is our identity. That is what really matters." This great truth resonates in each and every message we share on sexual integrity.

Jason Soucinek, Executive Director, Project Six19

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Challenges to Speaking on Sexual Integrity:

1. **The language we use can be limiting** - *If we are only using words like 'no' and 'don't' what will they be able to look forward to? Further, the story of Creation is always pointing us towards a future goal not something we can't do.*
2. **We live in a sex saturated culture** - *It is becoming increasingly difficult to protect our youth from the messages in music, movies and everywhere.*
3. **The growing acceptance of porn use** - *What were once vices are now virtues. It is not uncommon for porn exposure to happen around age 11 and be an issue for teens and young adults throughout much of their life. Its acceptance makes it easier to access and more affordable than ever before.*
4. **Individuals are having to wait longer than any other generation** - *Today's youth are having to wait almost 15 years to have sex if they follow God's standards and also follow the trend set by our culture to marry around 27. This is almost a decade longer than teens would have had to wait in the 1950's.*
5. **No map for questions** - *The questions that are being asked today require more thought, time and effort to respond to. Many youth, unfortunately, don't have anyone respond to what they ask. This means they are left to figure out sex and relationships on their own.*
6. **Believing your voice has no power** - *Parents can feel defeated before they ever start. Studies suggest that the reason parents don't share their value with their kids is because they think their voice doesn't have as much impact as their son's or daughter's peers.*
7. **Not sure what Scripture really says about this subject** - *Sometimes the biggest hurdle we can have talking about sex from a biblical perspective is not really being sure what is said.*

"I plan on having to sort through the questions, decisions and issues concerning sex and sexuality alone. I've done it this long and don't see it changing for me in my future. I created the map for my life with little or no help from my parents."

- Molly, 20



Things to remember when speaking to your kids about sex:

1. **Recognize the truth found in Scripture** - *This is not a topic from which God hides. Over and over again Scripture highlights four key aspects about sex. First, we are meant for relationship with our Creator and with others (in that order). Second, we need to recognize that God invented sex. Third, God gave us our sexual desire. That is why we need to talk about this with our youth...we are all sexually tempted. Finally, God created a time and place for us to enjoy this great gift, marriage. This is repeated over and over again in Scripture (e.g. Genesis, Proverbs, Hebrews, and the list goes on).*
2. **Need to change the focus** - *Our language needs to go from the "no's" to pointing to a BIGGER "yes." Throughout Scripture God's "no's" are always encompassed within a larger "yes." Changing the direction youth are going, making sexual integrity more than just a rule someone follows, and making it an act of obedience rather than a rule all comes from how we speak about this subject and pointing youth in that direction.*
3. **It's not about a BIG TALK** - *It is more of a process than a confrontation. Remember that many of your son's or daughter's expectations surrounding sex will come from many of the other values you communicate everyday.*
4. **Create a safe place** - *We need to create a space that allows for youth and teens to ask real questions and have an opportunity to hear real responses without judgement.*
5. **Your voice DOES matter** - *Study after study shows that it's not a teens peers that have the most influence but YOU. Although that is not what we always hear or think, a parent's voice is the most influential.*
6. **Check in every day!** - *Making sure your kids know you care and are there for any questions they might have will help when they do have questions about sex.*
7. **Clarify the facts** - *It's inevitable that your kids will hear from some other kid about so and so. So you need to be constantly talking with your kids.*
8. **Become the Authority!** - *Get to your kids first. Your kids are going to hear about sex at some point. So it's important that you talk to them early and tell them the truth - BEFORE they receive information from other places.*

Recommended Resources:

Books:

- *How and When to Tell Your Kids About Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child's Sexual Character* by Brenna and Stan Jones
- *Questions Kids Ask About Sex* by Medical Institute of Sexual Health
- *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* by Tim Chester
- *Sex and Dating* by Mindy Meier
- *The Space Between* by Walt Mueller

This handout is a resource from:

Project Six19

Phone: 509 993-7272

Email: info@projectsix19.org

Website: www.projectsix19.org

CPYU - Center for Parent/Youth Understanding

Phone: (717) 361-8429

Email: cpyu@cpyu.org

Website: www.cpyu.org, www.digitalkidsinitiative.com

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