The Professor: Why Are You a Christian? – When Challenged, Can You Defend Your Faith in Christ

Are our adults ready to give a defense of the gospel? When challenged, can they give a reasonable explanation of their faith? Dr. Bohlin presents a sobering view of this question based upon years of experience questioning high school and college-age students on the basis for their belief in Christ. By exposing their lack of cogent answers to questions they may be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

Over the last ten years, I have used a very effective technique to help teens realize their unpreparedness for the step toward college. It seems our young people are heading into public and even Christian colleges thinking they are ready for the challenge to their faith that higher learning can be.

Probe Ministries has sponsored a college prep conference since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

If you remember the thousands of college radicals who protested and picketed in the ‘60s and ‘70s, they found their push for change was not very effective. Instead, many of them stayed in college, obtained Masters Degrees and PhDs. After all, it was easier than getting a real job! As a result, they are now your children’s professors!

The college campus was an anti-Christian breeding ground several decades ago and now it is even worse. Christianity is not so much openly mocked as it is marginalized and deemed a false and mischievous mythology.

If you haven't already heard some of these statistics, you need to hold onto your hat.

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years.{1} Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our churched youth are making many of their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years.{2}

With this statistical background, it's plain our young people need some preparation before going on to college or the military. But as most parents of teens know, just telling them they need this is less than likely to be convincing.

Enter the Professor. The technique I mentioned at the beginning is to impersonate an atheistic college professor doing research on the religious beliefs of young people. Sometimes the students know I am playing a role with them, but occasionally I play the professor and the students are none the wiser.

A Simple Question

When I step to the front of the room, I introduce myself as Professor Hymie Schwartz (a name borrowed from my late colleague Jerry Solomon who played this role far better than I do). I tell the group that, since I am conducting research on the religious beliefs of young people, their youth pastor, counselor, principal, teacher—whatever, has allowed me to

visit with them.

I begin the conversation something like this: “Since this is a church or Christian school I presume you are all Christians. Is anyone not a Christian?” Of course no one raises their hand. But I am always aware that some may indeed not be believers and may not appreciate my questioning so I am always paying attention.

At this point I simply call on someone, usually someone who isn’t really paying attention or is engrossed in conversation with a neighbor. “You! Are you a Christian?” No one has ever answered no. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, with hands casually stuck in my pockets, I demand, “Why?”

Students are paying attention now. This is for real. Now consider my question for yourself. If Peter warns us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks to give a defense for the hope that we have, this is a pretty basic question. In our highly secular culture, if someone finds out you’re a Christian, they may indeed ask you why. Peter says you ought to have an answer.

But this simple question why is usually something our young people, and even their parents, have never really considered. Their Christian faith is certainly something they would claim is central to their lives, but the dumbfounded looks on their faces tells me repeatedly that this question is a new one.

It’s usually about this time that any parents sitting in the back are suddenly quite relieved I’m not talking to them!

By asking such questions, I can get them pretty riled up and confused. The point is not to have fun but to help them see that they need to be prepared and think a little about why Christianity is important to them and why they think it’s true.

“I Asked Jesus into My Heart!”

Having their Christianity questioned usually comes as a surprise and even shock. Rather than directly answering the question, they try to tell me *how* they became a Christian. It usually takes the form of confidently saying they asked Jesus into their heart.

The professor quickly fires back, “You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What’s he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!” That always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, “No, I mean it’s like I trusted Jesus as my Savior.”

Again the professor will fire back quickly with a question like, “Why did you do that?” or “Savior? What did you need saving from?” I think you can see where this is going. It really is not difficult to pick something from what he or she said and challenge it. I either pretend I don’t understand what they said, forcing them to better explain themselves (which is rare), or I deliberately ask them why they think that way, or how they know that.

In answer to “How do you know that?” I am often told that “It says so in the Bible!” They usually can’t tell me where the Bible says that. I also ask if the Bible is true, and they say it is. But when I ask, “How do you know it’s true?” the blank stare reemerges.

Sometimes a student will say, “Because it’s the word of God!” Now I can really dig a little deeper. In response to further questioning, they usually can’t tell me where the Bible says it’s the Word of God nor can they tell me why the Bible is different from The Book of Mormon or the Qur’an. If there is a youth pastor or chaplain present there is usually an embarrassed look on their face or a head buried in their hands.

By this time the class is very tense and full of nervous laughter. When I reach a dead end with a student—for instance when they say, “I don’t know” with a very resigned and defeated voice—I look for one of the laughing students and ask, “What about you?” Of course that gets everybody’s attention again and off we go.

While I admit I have a little fun playing this role, it never ceases to break my heart at how ill-prepared our young people are to follow Peter’s advice to always be prepared with an answer. I have yet to find a student in ten years who is willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the professor.

“You’re a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous Bigot!”

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

When I have challenged students to tell me why they think or believe Christianity is true, some will turn to their own subjective experience. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, specifically when speaking to a Christian audience. But someone who doesn’t even believe in God will frequently find ways to truly make fun of this element.

A student may describe that Jesus speaks to them in their prayer time, to which I quickly ask what His voice sounds like or how they know it was Jesus and not indigestion. The blank stares usually resume at this point. We have become so comfortable in our Christian bubble sometimes that we frequently don’t see how unintelligible our language is to those outside the community of faith. It’s tough to share the gospel that way.

Sometimes a student will interject that they believe in Jesus because that’s what their family has taught them or it’s what

they learned in church. I usually pounce on that pretty quickly and repeat that this student believes Christianity is true because their parents told them so. The student usually agrees. After commending them for honoring their parents I tell them that's really pretty stupid. Pausing a second for the shock to register, I go on about the boy raised in India whose parents are Hindu and he respects his parents and believes Hinduism is true, so the boy in India and this student are both headed to heaven because they trusted their parents!

One time a student stammered around and eventually agreed with my statement as his youth pastor put his head in his hands.

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those who don't believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, "Just because I don't believe the same fairy tale as you, I'm going to hell?" When they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, "You're a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!"

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer, with Gentleness and Respect

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this routine even though they are routinely embarrassed by their inability to handle the challenge. When Peter admonished all of us to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), they fail miserably. Perhaps as a parent, you may be glad that I don't do this with adult groups.

Often students will try to turn the conversation in their favor by asking the professor a question. I quickly dismiss that idea by simply answering that *I'm* asking the questions.

But when we're done, if time allows I attempt to leave them with hope by quickly summarizing how I, Dr. Ray Bohlin, Vice-President of Probe Ministries, would answer the same question.

Here's the outline of my response. In a calm voice I quickly assert that I know there is a God. As a scientist I look principally at how marvelously our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet are designed for complex life here on earth. The number of highly improbable coincidences rules out chance and strongly implies design. This is reinforced by the evidence from biology of the incredible complexity of life, particularly the coded information in DNA. This remarkable molecule with its accompanying system of transcription and translation screams for intelligence.

The fact that all people have some sense of right and wrong, even though we may disagree sometimes, tells us we are comparing our morality to some invisible standard outside ourselves that must come from a supreme Law Giver. I am convinced there is a supernatural God.

If this God exists, then has He spoken to man? I quickly tell about the uniqueness of Scripture, written by forty authors from eight countries over fifteen hundred years in three languages and all with a consistent and unique message of a God of love who ransomed us from our sins. Where we have archaeological evidence it consistently confirms the accuracy of biblical events. I am convinced the Bible is the true and unique Word of God.

The Bible throughout is about Jesus, who repeatedly claimed to be the unique divine Son of God and offered his death and resurrection on behalf of mankind as proof. That Jesus bodily rose from the dead is the only rational conclusion of the evidence of the empty tomb. On top of that, my personal experience of the last thirty-seven years has shown me again and again the unique love and power of God.

So what about you? Why are *you* a Christian?

Notes

1. “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” 2007, www.lifeway.com/article/165949/, accessed May 15, 2010.
2. Youth Transition Network has researched this problem over the last ten years and has excellent resources, videos, research, and books and DVDs for purchase. Take a look at www.ytn.org.

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The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults

Steve Cable explores the results of Probe’s survey of 18- to 40-year-old born agains, focusing on the role of parents in their faith.

The State of Born Again Emerging Adults



In previous articles{1} we considered the dramatic changes in the beliefs of American evangelicals particularly among young adults. It certainly appears that we are sliding into an era of cultural captivity where one’s identification with Christ and an evangelical church does not keep one from holding a set of beliefs consistent with the culture and counter to biblical truth. Here we want to consider the role that parents had in establishing these inconsistent belief systems of their children, and think about some ways today’s parents may be

able to counter these destructive patterns in the future. Before looking at the roles parents do and should play in establishing these belief systems, let's consider some of the key belief trends that are driving our concern.

Foremost among our concerns is the dramatic change in the number of young adults who hold to no Christian religious beliefs or espouse a liberal view of Christianity. Looking at data from 1970 to the present, we uncover a disturbing new trend. From 1970 through 1990, the number of 18- to 25-year-old Americans who professed no Christian belief was constant at about twenty percent of the population. In 2000, this non-Christian group had grown to about thirty percent of this young generation, and by 2010 the numbers had exploded to around thirty-six percent.{2} If this trend continues, less than half of young adults will consider themselves Christians by the year 2020.

This concern over the future is heightened by the conflicted beliefs of young born agains. Among young adults, who consider themselves born again believers, only about one-third of them ascribe to a basic set of biblical beliefs. These beliefs include a creator God, a sinless Jesus, salvation through grace, a real Satan, an accurate Bible and the existence of absolute moral truths. This statistic means that over two-thirds of these born agains do not ascribe to one or more of these beliefs. Overall, this means that less than ten percent of young American adults profess to being born again and hold to a set of biblical beliefs as compared to the sixty-eight percent who hold to no Christian beliefs or a liberal view of Christianity.

When we delve further into young adult beliefs, we find that their beliefs appear to be hodgepodge of cultural concepts and what's going on in their life, with little or no connection to their religious upbringing. Even though emerging adults looked to religion as a place to learn good morals, in his study Christian Smith discovered a chilling paradox. "It was clear .

. . that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives."{3} One emerging adult observed, "I don't think it's the basis of how I live, it's just, I guess I'm just learning about my religion and my beliefs. But I still kinda retain my own decision or at least a lot of it on situations I've had and experiences."{4} In fact, when we look at how many have a consistent biblical worldview that carries over into their views on sexuality, science, a concern for the poor, and basic religious practices, the survey data indicates that less than two percent of evangelical young adults would qualify. So the overwhelming majority of young evangelicals are not carrying their basic religious beliefs into the realm of everyday decision making.

The Impact of Parents on Spiritual Beliefs

So, what role did their parents have in establishing these inconsistent beliefs?

In 2010, we commissioned a survey to help us examine the causes and potential opportunities to change the marked shift in the thinking of young adults over the last decade. We surveyed over 800 born again, young adults across America to get an understanding for what they thought about spiritual and cultural issues *and* how they felt about their beliefs and actions. One area of questioning was, "When you think about how you developed the religious beliefs you hold today, who do you feel had the greatest influence on you? Did your beliefs come from your family, your friends, your church, your independent studies, your college professors, or others?"

The answers we received to this question were not shocking but still sobering. More than sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that the source that had the greatest

influence on their religious beliefs was a family member, with the vast majority of those saying it was parents or grandparents. Over twenty percent of the respondents pointed to another influential individual such as a pastor, youth leader, or college professor. Only about eleven percent stated that something less personal such as a youth group or the Bible was the greatest influencer of their religious beliefs.

As Christian Smith noted, "What the best empirical evidence shows . . . is that . . . when it comes to religion, parents are in fact *hugely* important."{5}In fact, "religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference."{6}

Of those who stated that a family member was the primary influence, over seven out of ten stated it was their mother or grandmother while less than three out of ten said it was their father or grandfather. So clearly among born again young adults, the female side of the family has a greater influence in passing down religious beliefs than do the males. One can postulate that this may be due to a combination of greater spiritual involvement on the female side of the family and a higher level of communication with their children. However, the rate of fatherly influence almost doubles for young adults with a biblical worldview compared to those without such a worldview. So it appears that fathers who hold a biblical worldview are much more likely to be involved in establishing the spiritual beliefs of their children.

Less than one out of ten of the respondents listed a pastor as the primary source of influence, and only three percent listed a youth group. These church-related functions may have an important role in helping to shape our religious beliefs, but our survey shows that it is at best a secondary role for the vast majority of people. We are mistaken if we are relying on the church to pass on the right type of beliefs to our children. Parents, what you communicate through your lives is

picked up by your children. What are you communicating to them concerning religious beliefs?

The Translation of our Beliefs

Since the beliefs of today's young adults are dramatically different than the dominant beliefs of forty years ago, does this mean that older adults have changed their beliefs as well, or have the beliefs been translated by the younger culture into something different?

An important part of understanding this question is that the survey results on who was the most significant source of our religious beliefs were almost identical regardless of racial background or levels of church attendance. In other areas of consideration such as biblical worldview, views on cultural behavioral issues, and church involvement, we found significant differences based on racial background, education, etc. But it appears clear that no matter our race, economic level, or religious beliefs, our mothers are the primary sources that pass down those beliefs to the next generation. In other words, if born-again believers have degraded views on worldview and cultural issues, it appears that their parents are communicating (or at least not contradicting) similar views.

As we look at the hodgepodge of religious and cultural beliefs held in our society, we can see the results of what Christian Smith referred to as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."{7} The Baby Boomers and their children are captives of our society's focus on pluralism and tolerance as the only acceptable views. With this view, I can hold to certain religious beliefs that are strictly private in their application. But, when those religious views begin to move into areas which may imply someone else's belief is wrong, then I need to modify my beliefs to be more accepting. To believe in God as creator and Jesus as his sinless Son is probably okay. But when I say that

Jesus is the only way we can be reconciled to God, I am starting to step on other's toes, making it inherently wrong.

On the one hand, Baby Boomers have bought into the cultural distaste for absolute beliefs which makes them loathe to state their beliefs too strongly. This viewpoint has been interpreted by the younger generation as an indication that those beliefs are not firm but rather culturally determined. So living in a more multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and sexually liberated generation, these young adults pick and choose among biblical beliefs and distinctly non-biblical beliefs, with no apparent concern for the discontinuity in their belief systems.

The culture is winning the battle on two fronts. First, the older generation is buying into the importance of not being too forthright with their views. Second, the younger generation, given no clear direction from their parents, is buying into a disjointed set of views that avoids any conflict with others. According to Smith's research, the result is that the vast majority of young adult Americans are holding to some form of mainline Protestant philosophy. This philosophy states that Jesus is a worthwhile model of good behavior but our focus should be on getting along and not making waves rather than promoting faith in Christ.

Countering Parents with a Truth Experience

Have we, the Baby Boomers, the parents and grandparents of our society, so flummoxed up the works that we have started a downward spiral of disconnected beliefs from which we cannot recover? Of course, time will tell, but if we hold to a consistent set of biblical worldview beliefs, we should not sit back and wait patiently for the end of Christianity as we know it. We are called to "proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man so that we might present every man

complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

Interestingly, of those respondents who graduated from college and have a biblical worldview, a much greater percentage of them pointed to a source other than a family member as the most influential. This factor is probably the result of college students having their faith challenged and looking for answers from pastors, Bibles, and books. In other words, the direct challenge to their faith presented by some professors and many of their peers caused some to fall away but caused others to examine the reasons for their belief in Christ. We do not need to fear this examination. Our Lord's case is more than capable of standing up to examination. In fact, it is the only religion that has a consistent, viable explanation for the complexities and shortcomings of life as we know it.

If a hostile, or at least a highly skeptical, attack on the basis of their faith caused some to examine their reasons for belief and come out with a stronger, more biblical faith, perhaps a friendly encouragement to examine their faith could produce similar results. If the parents are passing on a watered down, inconsistent set of beliefs, perhaps we can change those beliefs by causing the young adults to run them through a consistency and credibility filter. Probe has been doing this for years through our Mind Games conferences and summer camps for high school students. We have seen that this approach makes a difference.

Is it too late to make a difference in the lives of our young adults? When Viggo Olsen was in his mid-twenties, beginning his residency to become a doctor, his wife's parents had a change in their belief system, becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Viggo wanted to restore his wife's parents to sanity so he began an intense study to show the obvious failure of Christianity to address the real world. What he discovered was that a biblical worldview was the only viable answer to understanding our lives and our future. He went from a mission to disprove Christianity to accepting Jesus not only as his

Savior but as his purpose in life as a medical missionary to Bangladesh.{8}

In a similar way, we need to encourage, or better yet force our younger church-goers to examine their beliefs and compare them with the teachings of Christ. Ask them not to live an unexamined life conforming to the culture, but rather to examine their beliefs and see if they stand up to close examination.

Consistent Worldview Parents are Best

Unfortunately, many parents have not been passing on a clear view of faith in Christ from generation to generation. Instead our belief system, even among those who belief they are going to heaven when they die because of their faith in Jesus, has been eroding into a mishmash of popular cultural beliefs mixed in with some variation of beliefs taught in the Bible.

Confronting young adults with the disconnects and shortcomings created by their mixture of beliefs as compared to a consistent Christian worldview can get their attention and bring about changes in their thinking. This confrontation with truth has been a major focus of Probe throughout the years.

However, a major take-away from these studies should be for the young adults who are parents of our future generations. Listen up, young adults! If you do not communicate a clear set of biblical worldview beliefs through your words and through your actions, your children are going to pick up on the worldview you *do* communicate. Your desire to fit in with the culture and not make too many waves will result in children who believe that the culture is the ultimate authority on truth and right living. Why? Because that is what your life is saying to them loud and clear.

Suzie strongly believed that sex outside of marriage was wrong before God. It had a detrimental effect on the individuals

caught up in it and on the society which promoted it. However, she felt that many of her friends did not view it in the same way she did. So, to get along, she never said much about it. What she did not realize was that her children were watching what she said. Even though she had told them she hoped they would remain pure until marriage, they did not hear her standing up for sexual purity among her friends. Without even thinking about it, her children relegated sexual purity to a nice ideal but not an important belief to live by. Suzie was instrumental in establishing their thinking on this topic. Their thinking lined up with what Suzie demonstrated was important to her even though it did not really line up with what she truly believed.

As parents, our beliefs have the greatest impact on our children's views. Things that you may not believe but grit your teeth and say nothing about will become core beliefs of your children. The society is saying they are true; they don't see a consistent disagreement from your words or your life. Thus, it must be the right value to hold. This process of gradually turning over our core beliefs to be reset by the culture is at least partially the reason for the tremendous shift in our cultural morality over the last
sixty years.

As parents, we can make a difference in future generations. We need to hold fast to the truths of Jesus Christ, speak them with our tongues, and live them through our actions. Our children are still looking to us for truth in this area. Let us commit to not let them down by deferring to the norms of the culture.

Notes

1. "Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America," probe.org/emerging-adults-and-the-future-of-faith-in-america/; "Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths," probe.org/emerging-adults-part-2-distinctly-different-faiths/;

"The True State of Evangelicals in 2011," probe.org/the-true-state-of-american-evangelicals/.
2. Source General Social Surveys taken from 1976 through 2010.
3. Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 154.
4. Ibid., 154.
5. Ibid., 285.
6. Ibid., 256.
7. Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-170.
8. Viggo Olsen, *Daktar: Diplomat in Bangladesh* (Moody Press, 1973).

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The Golden Compass: Pointing in the Wrong Direction

> *The Golden Compass* is the opening gambit in Phillip Pullman's all out-attack on the religious faith of his readers. The film version is scheduled for wide release in theaters on December 7th following a massive marketing campaign. The movie may be more subtle than the book, but it is still opening the door to the full anti-God message of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Since the intended audience for these books is children and young adults, Christian parents need to be prepared to respond to the advertising hype and peer group pressure associated with the upcoming movie release. You want to be able to explain why a PG-13 movie is not appropriate for adolescents.

Just in case you don’t have time to read this entire article, I am going to summarize my recommendations:

1. **Don’t be put on the defensive.** Pullman is not the first to try to glamorize atheism and, although his fantasy is intriguing and well written, it does not introduce any new arguments into the discussion. If a friend has read it, consider this a great opportunity to make a defense for the hope that is within you. Since his books are allegorical fantasy, you don’t need to rebut the books. Simply explain why you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

2. **Don’t reward evangelistic atheists financially for their efforts.** Unless you need to answer specific questions for someone who needs help dealing with *The Golden Compass*, you don’t need to read the books or see the movie. Let’s send the message that freedom of expression is accompanied by the freedom to choose *not* to pay to read or see it. If you do need to read it, check it out of the library or purchase a used copy.

3. **Don’t allow your children to enter this world without a chaperone (i.e. you as their parent).** It is not only anti-Christian; it is also contains elements which should be deeply disturbing to children (e.g. a father murdering his daughter’s best friend; a prison camp for torturing children). Even though I think their time would be better spent reading other things, some parents may want to go over Pullman’s key themes with their older children to prepare them for their classmates who have seen the movie or read the book If you have older teenagers, you could check these books out of the library and use them to dissect Pullman’s worldview, helping them understand that it does nothing to undermine the historic truths of Christianity.

The Message of *His Dark Materials*

I have read the complete trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, of which *The Golden Compass* is the first volume. In my opinion, this trilogy is both well written and well crafted. Well-written in that the primary characters have some depth and I found myself caring about them. Well-crafted in that the fantasy world (actually an infinite number of parallel worlds) and plot are reasonably self-consistent and continue to be fleshed out as the trilogy unfolds. However, even if this were simply a classic allegory of good vs. evil, some of the events and imagery are too dark for anyone younger than late teens. So the problem is not that it is poorly written pulp, but that it is well written with a clear intention on the part of the author to promote a worldview that considers Christianity a bane rather than a benefit.

The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis and *His Dark Materials* are both allegorical fantasy series written by British authors. However, while *The Chronicles of Narnia* overtly promotes the message of Christianity, *His Dark Materials*, promotes the message that the God of Christianity is a fraud and the organized church is an evil blight preventing mankind from reaching our fullest potential. This contrast is no accident considering Pullman's criticism of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and of monotheism:

> *Morally loathsome, he called it. One of the most ugly and poisonous things I've ever read. He described his own series as Narnia's moral opposite. That's the Christian one, he told me. And mine is the non-Christian.*
>
> *Every single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up by persecuting other people and killing them because they don't accept him, he once said.{1}*

Pullman sets out to counter the impact of C. S. Lewis and

J.R.R. Tolkein by creating his own fantasy world in which God is ultimately unmasked as a fraud. The trilogy includes an alternate garden of Eden story, ushering in the Republic of Heaven where people are free to reach their full potential without the oppressive effects of God or organized religion. With over 15 million copies of his books in print, Pullman has had some success with his objective to influence others with his atheist worldview. *His Dark Materials* has been the recipient of numerous literary awards, most of them for children's literature.{2} (This categorization of his work is unfortunate since his books are definitely not suitable for children.) However, prior to the movie release, he had not achieved the notoriety he had hoped for:

> *Four years ago Pullman wondered why his books hadn't attracted as much controversy as the Harry Potter series(since) he was saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God.{3}*

One interesting feature of the trilogy is the progressive unmasking of Pullman's worldview. After reading *The Golden Compass*, one may be equally disturbed with the actions of those representing the Church and those rebelling against it. The intended meaning of the allegorical elements is still fuzzy. However, by the time the reader reaches the climax of the trilogy where the Ancient of Days and his minions are defeated in their battle with the fallen angels, Pullman's objective becomes abundantly clear. He invites the readers to embrace his vision of a Republic of Heaven; a Republic where individual self-awareness and self-fulfillment replace the need for truth and a relationship with our creator.

How Does the Movie Compare to the Books?

Of course, we have not seen the movie yet. However, anyone who has ever gone to see a movie version of one of their favorite

books knows that Hollywood does not feel bound to stick to the original plot, much less the message. As the release date for the movie nears, many reports are surfacing that New Line Cinema has chosen to obscure the anti-religion message of the books.

> *In the end, the religious meaning of the book was obscured so thoroughly as to be essentially indecipherable… The movie's main theme became, in one producer's summary, One small child can save the world. With $180 million at stake, the studio opted to kidnap the book's body and leave behind its soul. {4}*

Even if this is true, I recommend that Christians avoid this movie for several reasons:

> *1. An adolescent who enjoys the movie may well be interested in reading the books where the message is very clear and compelling.*
>
> *2. If this movie is a success, the studio will begin production on the next book in the trilogy. It will be much harder to obscure the anti-God message of the second and third volumes of the trilogy. In fact Pullman is attempting to rein in his vitriol against Christians because he wants to make sure that all three books are made into movies.*
>
> *3. If Christians patronize this film, we are financially rewarding Phillip Pullman for his attack on Christianity and encouraging the studios to produce more anti-Christian propaganda than they already do.*

Conclusions

Please go back to the opening of this article for a summary of my conclusions. Join me in praying that while the movie is a financial disaster, many Christians will be motivated to share

their faith with people who want to discuss the movie and the underlying books.

Addendum: Post-Viewing Assessment of Film's Departure from the Book

Now that I have viewed the movie, I wanted to add a short update addressing the differences between the book and the movie. There are three primary differences that are worth noting.

> ***Theology-Lite Version****As reported above, theology and any mention of God are almost completely removed from the movie version. Clearly, the Magesterium represents a powerful church that is condoning horrific experiments on children for the greater good of mankind, but in this parallel universe the movie does not indicate that the Magesteriums beliefs relate directly to any actual religions. One could argue that the historic Catholic Church is presented in a much more unfavorable light in the film Luther than in The Golden Compass. As a stand-alone movie, The Golden Compass would not be much different than many movies that promote a humanist message of individual dignity and choice versus an authoritarian system. Even with theology-lite, this movie has a strong worldview message that should be discussed with any young people who view the movie.*
>
> ***Chilling Ending Truncated****The movie ends before the corresponding end of the book. The last three chapters of the book are not covered at all. This definitely leaves the door open to use the last three chapters as the opening for a sequel based on the next book in the trilogy. I suspect these chapters were left out because they contain the most disturbing images in the book (e.g., Lyras father murders her best friend in front of her to further his scientific work) and an explanation of the relationship between dust and Adam and Eve. Even without those chapters, this movie earns its*

PG-13 rating and is not suitable for children.

Significant Modifications for the Silver Screen*The screenplay plays fast and loose with the order of events in the books and creates new storylines to shorten the build-up to key transitions in the plot. All of the major events of the book (excluding the last three chapters) are retained, but the order in which they occur and the details of how they play out are significantly modified.*

None of the differences noted above cause me to change the recommendations above. I still would encourage you not to reward Phillip Pullman or the movie producers financially. Pullman is very candid that his objective is to influence people to view belief in Christianity as misguided and damaging. Financial success will encourage them to make movies of the other books in the trilogy which entail much more direct attacks on God and religion. It will also provide Pullman with resources to support his crusade. We should keep in mind that most young people who read these books will identify strongly with the protagonists and their mission to free people from Gods authority *and* will not have parents who will sit down with them and discuss the worldview implications of these books.

Involved Christian parents could certainly review this material with their children as a way to better equip them to deal with contrary worldviews. However, I would encourage you to do it in ways that do not financially reward the cause of atheism.

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Notes

1. Hana Rosin, “How Hollywood Saved God,” *The Atlantic*, Volume 300 No. 5, December 2007
2. The awards include but are not limited to: Whitbread Award-

Best Children's Book and Best Book 2001, Carnegie Medal (England), American Library Association Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults, A Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon book, A Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year, Children's ABBY Honor
3. Hana Rosin, "How Hollywood Saved God"
4. Ibid

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Divorce and You

How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is going through it? What about divorce and the ministry? Practical—and personal—thoughts on this important issue.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

It's Over

Divorce. What thoughts and feelings does that word kindle in you?

Are you happily married and feel that divorce is not an option? Maybe the concept scares you. The fear of loss seems overwhelming.

Are you in a struggling marriage and the end is near? Perhaps you are confused, angry, depressed, or grieving. Or maybe you are happy and envision this as the necessary end of an

unpleasant relationship.

Perhaps your parents are divorced. Maybe you recall their angry disputes during your childhood, fear over your family's future, anguish over deciding with whom you would live.

Got any friends whose marriage is on the rocks? You might care for both of them, but how should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

In 1975 I married a wonderful woman. She was kind, sensitive, beautiful, loving, intelligent, fun, talented . . . my best friend. We traveled the globe together speaking in universities, on television and radio, writing books and articles about love, sex and marriage. She taught me much about love, kindness, sensitivity, communication. Much of the modest success I've seen in speaking and writing I owe in part to her excellent coaching.

Twenty years later, in 1995, she told me she wanted out. I felt devastated. The love of my life didn't love me any more. The pain of rejection ran deep. I had not committed adultery or desertion. I felt helpless. Legally, I was helpless. California's "no-fault" divorce laws mean that in our state it takes two to get married but only one to get divorced. One partner can simply claim "irreconcilable differences" – no proof is needed – and a judge will dissolve the union after a six-month waiting period. The unwilling partner is legally powerless to stop it.

Imagine the worst spat you've ever had with your spouse, partner, or friend. Multiply the pain of that by a jillion and you have a glimpse of the hurt. It felt as if I were being reamed out by an emotional Roto Rooter. I cried buckets. It was really, really awful. Are you getting the idea that I did not like this experience?

What does the Bible say about divorce? How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is

going through it? And what about divorce in the ministry? This article offers you some practical thoughts on this controversial topic.

Biblical Issues

Is divorce a solution or a cop-out?

I appreciate it when speakers or writers make clear their way of looking at the world. My worldview is a biblical one. You may agree or disagree, and I certainly respect that, but may I encourage you to consider what the biblical documents say on this issue?

Moses, the famous Jewish liberator, explained that God made the first man and woman for a close bond. "For this reason," Moses wrote, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."{1}

Hundreds of years later, some religious leaders asked Jesus of Nazareth about divorce. He quoted Moses' statement, then added, "Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."{2} Jesus held marriage in high esteem: "God has joined them together," He declared, ". . . let no one separate them."

But if divorce is wrong, these male religious leaders responded, why did Moses discuss how to handle certain complicated divorce situations? Jesus explained: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you," Jesus continued, "that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."{3}

Strong words. What do they mean? Even dedicated followers of God differ about whether He allows divorce and under what circumstances. A thorough study exceeds the scope of this short series. I recommend Jay Adams' book, *Marriage, Divorce,*

and Remarriage in the Bible,{4} for more detail.

Years before my own marriage began to crumble, I carefully studied a biblical perspective on divorce and remarriage. Here is what made the most sense to me. Partners should enter marriage for life, "until death do us part." If splits arise, reconciliation should always be the first aim. If reconciliation fails, I see two biblical bases for divorce and remarriage: adultery of one spouse{5}, and desertion{6}. Adultery or desertion do not mandate divorce, but they make it allowable.

As difficult as this subject may seem, remember that God loves you and wants the very best for you.{7} If you are hurting right now, He understands. He wants to wrap His arms around you, be your friend, and help you handle your deepest disappointment.

Coping With Divorce

What are some ways to cope with a shipwrecked marriage?

Divorce can teach you a lot. I'm a sinful person who made plenty of mistakes in marriage. I could have been more thoughtful, sensitive, and kind. Though I tried hard to be a good husband, I realized I could not be responsible for another's decision.

About a year after the divorce, at some friends' encouragement, I began to speak publicly about what I had learned. I was determined not to speak ill of my ex wife, but I wanted to encourage others. My story got several reactions, which I began reflecting to audiences to help them process it. Maybe you can relate.

"Some of you feel uncomfortable with this topic," I would tell listeners. "You wish I would change the subject. I've felt that way. Others of you think, I wish the person I love would be as open with his heart as you're being.' Some of you are

skeptical," I'd continue. "You'd like to hear *her* side of the story! I can appreciate that. Maybe you're angry. Perhaps I remind you of your ex-spouse. You think, He talks so sweet. But I bet he's a tyrant in private!' I realized that I cannot assume responsibility for all the people who have hurt you. But I can offer hope. Maybe people will reason, He's hurt; I've hurt. He says Jesus helped him with his hurt. Maybe Jesus can help me with my hurt.'"

Jesus can help you with your hurt. He said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls."{8}

Often divorcees experience the classic stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.{9} You may not believe you're experiencing this. You may be mad at your mate or God. You may promise God you'll follow Him if He restores your marriage. You may become depressed when the end seems certain. Eventually you may accept reality.

What helped my journey through grief? I had to believe that God really did cause "all things to work together for good to those who love" Him.{10} I sought to walk closely with Him. I asked forgiveness of my ex-wife for my many shortcomings. I forgave her and forgave myself.

I saw a skilled counselor. A wonderful divorce recovery group helped me understand what I was experiencing and feeling. I did not date for about two years after the divorce was final, to allow time to sort things out. And some fine friends helped me to land on my feet.

Responding to a Friend's Divorce

How might you be a friend to someone in the midst of divorce?

The couple next door is splitting up. One partner is bailing

on the marriage. You and your family have known them for years. You've babysat each other's kids, carpooled to work, vacationed together, laughed and cried together. You are members of the same church.

How should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

If you are a follower of Jesus, you likely will want to seek divine wisdom. Every situation is different, and marital strife can be explosive. Jesus' mother Mary once had some wise advice that relates well to these situations. She said, "Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it."{11}

I was quite fortunate to have a circle of good friends who reached out in loving care. Perhaps their examples can give you some ideas of what you might do.

My friends did not abandon me in my darkest hour. They stuck with me, let me know that they cared, asked how they could help, arranged opportunities for us to spend time together. One couple had me over to dinner every Friday night during the fall. Then we would watch their son play high school football. It helped take my mind off of my problems, relax, and enjoy being around other people.

Some recommended books,{12} met me for lunch, and invited me to a concert. One couple listened as I poured my heart out and helped me plan my future. Some organized a prayer meeting among close friends, helped me move, sat with me in court. They would call to ask how I was doing, especially when I felt particularly lonely or burdened.

Two friends tried to contact my estranged wife to encourage her to drop the divorce action.

After the divorce, many gracious folks welcomed me into their circles and encouraged me to serve others. Some pastors and theologians who knew me well told me they thought it was

appropriate biblically for me to remarry. I was reluctant. I wondered if I could ever open my heart to another woman.

Then, at a conference, I met Meg Korpi, a beautiful, sensitive, kind, wise, caring, brilliant, fun woman. She was as dedicated to God as she was wise and gorgeous. (I get points for saying all this in writing, you understand!) I knew what I liked and I liked what I saw! We began to date almost three years after the divorce ended and were married about a year-and-a-half later. We are very happy together. We thank God often.

Divorcees and the Ministry

What about divorce and the ministry? If a ministry leader divorces, should he or she remain in ministry?

If a leader initiates an unbiblical divorce – or commits adultery or otherwise acts inappropriately – one should confront him or her as described in Matthew 18. In my view (not all will agree), with a change of mind and heart – and after appropriate time – it may be possible to restore a fallen leader to effective service. Paul wrote, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."{13}

What about the victim of an unbiblical divorce? There are both wise and unwise ways to deal with such tragedies. Ministry boards and executives should take special care to act biblically. They may be tempted to value public image and donations above biblical principles.

Perhaps my case will be instructive. My first wife and I were international speakers with a prominent evangelical movement with thousands of wonderful staff. We traveled the world together, wrote books, appeared on television. In my twenty-fifth year with this organization, my wife filed for divorce without – in my opinion – biblical grounds. This caused quite

a stir.

Though initially expressing concern and care, corporate leaders claimed they had a policy requiring me to leave if my spouse divorced me. I was told I was a PR risk and would need to go. At one point they wanted me to agree never to speak or write about marriage, divorce, or remarriage (mine in particular or these themes in general). Things got "curiouser and curiouser."

Again, this movement has done much good around the globe. It helped me come to faith when I was a student. Please understand that I am seeking here the proper blend of grace and truth, not an easy task in these matters.

My employer owned a seminary, a separate corporation that had no automatic divorce restriction. The seminary president hired me. He took some heat for acting biblically, but those like him who refused to convict me of a sin – divorce – that I did not commit were God's instruments of grace in my life. After a time of healing, I returned to the lecture circuit. Today, I am privileged to enjoy an even larger global influence via speaking and writing.

Divorce does not have to end ministry. Has any sin been dealt with in a biblical fashion? If so, then the divorced servant of Christ can, with God's direction and power – and with appropriate accountability – continue to touch lives for Him. Jesus welcomed the denying Peter into fellowship and service.

The wounded servant may become even more effective, able to connect with people on a deep level and to point them to the One who can heal their broken hearts.

Notes

1. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
2. Matthew 19:6 NLT.
3. Matthew 19:8-9 NIV.

4. Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).
5. Matthew 19:9.
6. 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, taken with Matthew 18:15-17. An outline of this argument regarding desertion is as follows: 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 can be understood to mean that when a spouse who does not believe in Christ deserts a spouse who does have faith in Christ, the deserted believer is not bound from remarriage. Regarding a marriage between two believers, a deserted spouse should first seek reconciliation. If the deserter will not reconcile, the deserted spouse should follow the biblical "progressive correction" prescription in Matthew 18:15-17. That is, s/he should confront the deserter with his/her sin individually, then (if the deserter continues to resist) with one or two others, then involving the church. If the deserting spouse still resists, then the Lord's admonition to the church (which includes the deserted spouse) is "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." In other words, relate to that person just as you would to someone outside the church, as to an unbeliever. How does the church relate to unbelievers? One of the many biblical teachings regarding relationships between believers and unbelievers is that an unbelieving spouse who deserts a
believer does not bind that believer from remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). See Adams, op. cit., for a more complete discussion of desertion as allowable grounds for remarriage.
7. Romans 8:35-39; Psalm 23.
8. Matthew 11:28-29 NLT.
9. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., *On Death and Dying,* reprint edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, reprint, 1997).
10. Romans 8:28, NASB.
11. John 2:5 NASB.
12. Especially helpful are Joseph Warren Kniskern, *When the Vow*
Breaks (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); and many of the Fresh Start resources
at www.freshstartseminars.org.

13. Galatians 6:1 NIV.

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Cool Stuff About Love and Sex

Hey, kids. Want to read some cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your folks? Hey, parents. Want to learn how to communicate with your kids about these important topics? Read on!

This article is also available in Spanish. 

Cool Stuff

Psst! Hey, kids! Want to hear some really cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your parents? Listen up! (But . . . how about closing your ears for the next few seconds?)

Hey, parents! Want to learn how to talk to your kids about sex in a way they will understand and relate to? Keep listening.{1}

OK, kids. You can listen again.

“A fulfilling love life. How can I have one? How can I get the most out of sex?” University students worldwide ask these questions. As I’ve spoken on their campuses, I’ve tried to offer some practical principles because I believe both pleasure and emotional fulfillment are important facets of sex. These principles relate to teens, too. Teens of all ages.

Sex is often on our minds. According to two psychologists at the universities of Vermont and South Carolina, 95% of people

think about sex at least once each day.{2} You might wonder, "You mean that 5% of the people *don't*?"

Why does sex exist? One of the main purposes of sex is pleasure. Consider what one wise man named Solomon wrote. Writing sometimes in "PG" (but not "R-rated") terms, he said:

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.
As a loving hind and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
Be exhilarated always with her love.{3}

Solomon's ancient love sonnet, the "Song of Solomon," is one of the best sex manuals ever written. It traces the beauty of a sexual relationship in marriage and is an openly frank description of marital sexual intimacy. You might want to read it yourself. (Would it surprise you to know that it's in the Bible? You can dog-ear the good parts.)

Another purpose of sex is to develop oneness or unity. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses, the great Israeli liberator, wrote, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."{4} When two people unite sexually, they "become one flesh."

A third purpose for sex is procreation. That, of course, is how we all got here. You learn that in first year biology, right?

OK, so sex is for pleasure, unity, and procreation. But how can people get the most out of love and sex?

How to Have a Most Fulfilling Love Life

One way not to have a fulfilling love life in marriage is to concentrate solely on sexual technique. There is certainly nothing wrong with learning sexual technique—especially the basics—but technique by itself is not the answer.

The qualities that contribute to a successful sex life are the same ones that contribute to a successful interpersonal relationship. Qualities like love, commitment, and communication.

Consider love. As popular speaker and author Josh McDowell points out, those romantic words, "I love you," can be interpreted several different ways. One meaning is "I love you *if*—If you go out with me . . . if you are lighthearted . . . if you sleep with me." Another meaning is "I love you *because*—because you are attractive . . . strong . . . intelligent." Both types of love must be earned.

The best kind of love is unconditional. It says, "I love you, *period*. I love you even if someone better looking comes along, even if you change, even if you have zoo breath in the morning. I place your needs above my own."

One young engaged couple had popularity, intelligence, good looks, and athletic success that seemed to portend a bright future. Then the young woman suffered a skiing accident that left her paralyzed for life. Her fiancé deserted her.

This true story—portrayed in the popular film, "The Other Side of the Mountain"—was certainly complex. But was his love for her "love, period"? Or was it love "if" or love "because"? Unconditional love (or "less-conditional", because none of us is perfect) is an essential building block for a lasting relationship.

Unconditional love with caring and acceptance can help a sexual relationship in a marriage. Sex, viewed in this manner,

becomes not a self-centered performance but a significant expression of mutual love.

Commitment is also important for a strong relationship and fulfilling sex. Without mutual commitment, neither spouse will be able to have the maximum confidence that the relationship is secure.

Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices. As one sociology professor expressed it, “Sexual foreplay involves the ’round-the-clock relationship.'”{5}

Why Wait?

After I’d spoken in a human sexuality class at Arizona State University, one student said, “You’re talking about sex within marriage. What about premarital sex?” He was right. I was saying that sexual intercourse is designed to work best in a happy marriage and recommending waiting until marriage before experiencing sex.

This view is, of course, very controversial. You may agree with me. Or you may think I am from another planet, and I respect your right to feel that way. Here’s why I waited.

First is a moral reason. According to the perspective I represent, the biblical God clearly says to wait.{6} Some people think that God wants to make them miserable. Actually, He loves us and wants our best. There are practical reasons for waiting.

Premarital sex can detract from a strong relationship and a fulfilling love life. Too often, it’s merely a self-gratifying experience. After an intimate sexual encounter, one partner might be saying, “I love you” while the other is thinking, “I love it.”

Very often premarital sex lacks total, permanent commitment. This can create insecurity. For instance, while the couple is unmarried, the nagging thought can persist, “If he or she has slept with me, whom else have they slept with?” After they marry, one might think, “If they were willing to break a standard with me before we married, will they with someone else after we marry?” Doubt can chip away at their relationship.

Premarital sex can also inhibit communication. Each might wonder, “How do I compare with my lover’s other partners? Does he or she tell them how I perform in bed?” Each may become less open; communication can deteriorate and so can the relationship. Premarital sex can lessen people’s chances to experience maximum oneness and pleasure. I’m not claiming that premarital sex eliminates your chances for great sex in marriage. But I am saying that it can introduce factors that can be difficult to overcome.

A recently married young woman told me her perspective after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. She said, “I really like what you said about waiting. My fiancé and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait.” (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) She continued: “With all the other tensions, decisions and stress of engagement, sex would have been just another worry. Waiting ’till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made.”

Wise words. I waited because God said to, because there were many practical advantages, and because none of the arguments I heard for not waiting were strong enough.{7}

The Vital Dimension

So far we’ve looked at “Why sex?”, “How to have a most fulfilling love life,” and “Why wait?”. Consider now the vital dimension in any relationship.

Powerful emotional factors can make it difficult for teens to wait until marriage for sexual intercourse or to stop having sex. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self esteem. They may fear losing love if they postpone sex.

Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, “Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It’s degrading to be treated like a piece of meat.” The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by telling her, “There’s plenty of me for everyone.” What I suspect he meant was, “There’s plenty of everyone for me.” She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become brand “new persons” inside.{8} He promised unconditional love to all who ask.{9} Once we know we’re loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.{10}

This teacher said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”{11} Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had been a skeptic, I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year in college. Through a simple heart attitude, I said, “Jesus, I believe you died and rose again for me. I ask you to enter my life, forgive me, and give me the new life you promised.” He forgave all my flaws—and there were (and are) many of those. He said His own death and resurrection—once I accepted His pardon—erased my guilt.{12} That was great news!

Marriage with Jesus involved can be like triangle with God at the apex and the two spouses at the bottom corners. As each partner grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each other. Life doesn't become perfect, but God's friendship can bring a vital dimension to any relationship.

Parents and Kids

A nationwide survey of teens asked the question, "When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?" Forty-nine percent of teens responding said it was their parents. The next closest response was "Friends" (16 percent). Eleven percent said the media influenced their decisions about sex the most. Only 5 percent said it was their romantic partner.{13} Kids, lots of your peers think that it is important to consider how their parents feel about sex.

And teens feel that talking with their parents about sex can make important sexual decisions easier. In a subsequent national survey, teens overwhelmingly expressed that they could more easily postpone sexual activity and avoid getting pregnant if they could only talk about these matters more openly with their folks.{14}

But there's a problem. Too many parents are unaware how important what they think about sex is to their teens. Parents often think that their teenagers' friends are the strongest influence on their teen's decisions about sex. Yet teens don't consider their friends as being nearly as influential as parents think they are.{15}

And mom, you are really, really important!

A major report based on two University of Minnesota studies involving national data found that teens having close relationships with their mothers are more likely than teens lacking close relationships with their mothers to delay first intercourse. The report authors note, "previous studies have

shown that mothers tend to have a greater influence than fathers on teens' sexual decision-making."{16}

What can a parent do to help their teens develop positive, healthy sexual attitudes and behavior? Here are some ideas:

- Develop close, loving relationships with your kids from the time they are young.
- Model the types of behavior and attitudes you wish them to emulate.
- Listen to them and treat them with respect.
- Talk about sex, your own values, and why you hold them.
- Help your teen think through their life goals, including education, and how teenage sexual activity might affect their dreams.
- Discuss what types of media are appropriate for your son or daughter to consume.

Making sexual decisions can be hard for teens today. Parents and teens can help each other by becoming close friends and by communicating. It's not always easy, but the rewards can be significant.

Notes

1. Parts of this article are adapted from Rusty Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," Every Student's Choice, 1996 and Rusty Wright, "Safe Sex?", Cross & Crescent LXXXI:4, Winter 1994-95, pp. 19-21.
2. Kathleen Kelleher, "Entertaining Fantasies? Don't Worry, Everyone's Doing It," *Los Angeles Times,* August 15, 1995, E1. She cites Harold Leitenberg of the University of Vermont and Kris Henning, "now at the University of South Carolina Medical School".
3. Proverbs 5:15-19 NASB.
4. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
5. Emily Dale, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington,

Illinois, 1975.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
7. For a summary of arguments for premarital sex, with responses, see Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," op. cit.
8. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.
9. John 3:16; 13:34-35; 17:20, 23, 26; 1 John 4:7-21, 5:14-15.
10. Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.
11. John 8:32 NASB.
12. Luke 24:44-47; Colossians 2:12-14.
13. "Faithful Nation: What American Adults and Teens Think About Faith, Morals, Religion, and Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, September 2001, p. 5; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/keeping.pdf.
14. "With One Voice 2002: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, December 2002, pp. 2, 26, 27; http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2002_fulltext.pdf.
15. Ibid., pp. 2, 22-23.
16. "Teens' Closeness With Their Mothers Linked to Delay in Initiation of Sexual Activity, Study Says," Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report, September 5, 2002, http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/print_report.cfm?DR_ID=13275&dr_cat=2. The words quoted are those of the Kaiser Report summary of what the University of Minnesota research authors communicated.

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, "Cool Stuff About Love and Sex," *The Plain Truth,* January/February 2004, pp. 17-19.

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