

A photograph of two hands holding a dandelion stem in a field of dandelions at sunset. The hands are positioned in the upper center, with one hand holding the stem from the left and the other from the right. The dandelion seed head is at the bottom of the stem. The background is a soft, golden light from the setting sun, creating a warm and peaceful atmosphere. The field of dandelions is in the foreground and middle ground, with some seed heads in focus and others blurred.

STRONGER TOGETHER



A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES | Vol. 41 | Issue Three 2024

HUMAN SEXUALITY

STRONGER TOGETHER

Issue 3
2024



ON THE COVER

God created Adam and Eve in His image (Genesis 1:27), and blessed the union between man and woman as a sacred institution (*Daughters of God*, p. 180). God made us sexual beings, not just for procreation but also for pleasure and emotional intimacy within the context of the marriage covenant. He intended sexual intimacy to not only be cherished but also to strengthen with time. Yet, we live in a fallen world. And so, this issue of *Stronger Together* grapples with human sexuality post-fall. We'll look at God's design, sexual purity, and sexual trauma.



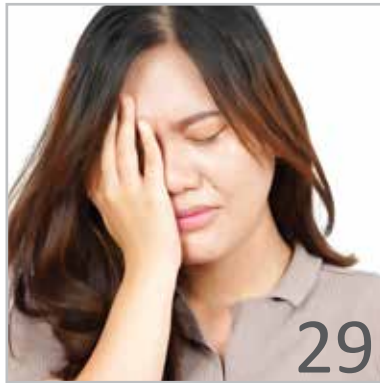
SCAN TO READ ONLINE



06



12



29

| ARTICLES

- 12 **A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO SEXUALITY TODAY**
Sharing the truth of God's Word in love
Mark Finley
- 19 **SEX, INTIMACY, AND TRAUMA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE**
There's hope, healing, and restoration for your brokenness.
Jasmin Stankovic
- 29 **GOD DOES NOT SPONSOR FAILURES**
You can trust God with your future.
Lorena Angélica Monsiváis Peralta

| FEATURES

- 03 **EDITORIAL**
God's Plan for Marriage
- 05 **SPECIAL QUOTES**
- 06 **FAMILY MATTERS**
It's Time to Talk . . . About Sex
- 09 **LIFESTYLE**
Who Am I?
- 24 **TIPS TO THRIVE**
Conversation Starters
- 26 **KIDS**
Wonderfully Made!
- 31 **NEWS FROM THE FIELD**

BIBLE CREDITS:

Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Bible texts credited to Phillips are from J. B. Phillips: *The New Testament in Modern English*, Revised Edition. © J. B. Phillips 1958, 1960, 1972. Used by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co.

PHOTO CREDITS: dreamstime.com, freepik, vecteezy.com



Stronger Together: A Resource for Ministry Spouses is a quarterly publication produced by Ministerial Spouses Association, an entity of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Ministerial Association.

MINISTRY TO PASTORAL SPOUSES AND FAMILIES DIVISION COORDINATORS:

East-Central Africa: Herbert Nziku
Euro-Asia: Svetlana Velgosh
Inter-American: Cecilia Iglesias
Inter-European: Varta Panayotov
North American: Desiree Bryant
Northern Asia-Pacific: Raquel Arrais
South American: Jeanete Pinto
South Pacific: Pamela Townend
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean: Margret Mulambo
Southern Asia: Krupa Victor
Southern Asia-Pacific: Danita Caderma
Trans-European: Patrick Johnson
West-Central Africa: Mimonte Odonkor

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600
Phone: 301-680-6513
Fax: 301-680-6502
Email: lowes@gc.adventist.org

Executive Editor: Aurora Canals
Assistant Editor: Paula Wart
Senior Editorial Assistant: Shelly Lowe
Copy Editor: Becky Scoggins
Contributing Editor: Jasmin Stankovic
Layout & Design: Erika Miike

Printed in the U.S.A.
Website: ministri spouses.org



GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

"HE CREATED THEM MALE AND FEMALE" (GENESIS 5:2)

THE BOOK OF GENESIS introduces God's plan for marriage, outlining the fundamental principles of the sacred union between one man and one woman. As the story of the creation of the world unfolds, we come across a timeless verse in Genesis 2:24 (ESV):

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

This verse beautifully captures the essence of marriage—a holy bond between a man and a woman, two individuals who become one.

The story of Isaac and Rebekah perfectly illustrates the divine plan. It is a story filled with faith, trust, and love. Abraham, Isaac's father, wanted to find a suitable wife for his son, so he sent his servant on a quest to find the perfect match. When the servant met Rebekah at the well, she offered him a drink and went beyond by taking care of his camels too. The servant then knew that Rebekah was the one chosen by God for Isaac (Genesis 24:1–20).

Looking at this story can show us God's plan for love and companionship in marriage.

*Our Creator
designed man
and woman in
His image, each
with unique
qualities that
complement
one another.*

Marriage has practical implications and holds significant spiritual value.

PERFECTLY DESIGNED

The concept of marriage is not a random idea; rather, it is deeply rooted in the very nature of God and His purpose for humanity. Our Creator designed man and woman in His image, each with unique qualities that complement one another. Through marriage, man and woman form a partnership that reflects the divine harmony within the Godhead, characterized by love, unity, and mutual submission.

Marriage is a fundamental institution crucial in building families and communities. It provides a stable foundation for nurturing children and fulfilling God's plan for procreation. When a husband and wife come together, they create the ideal environment for their children's growth and development, both physically and spiritually. A loving household with a mother and father provides children the best chance for a happy and healthy life.

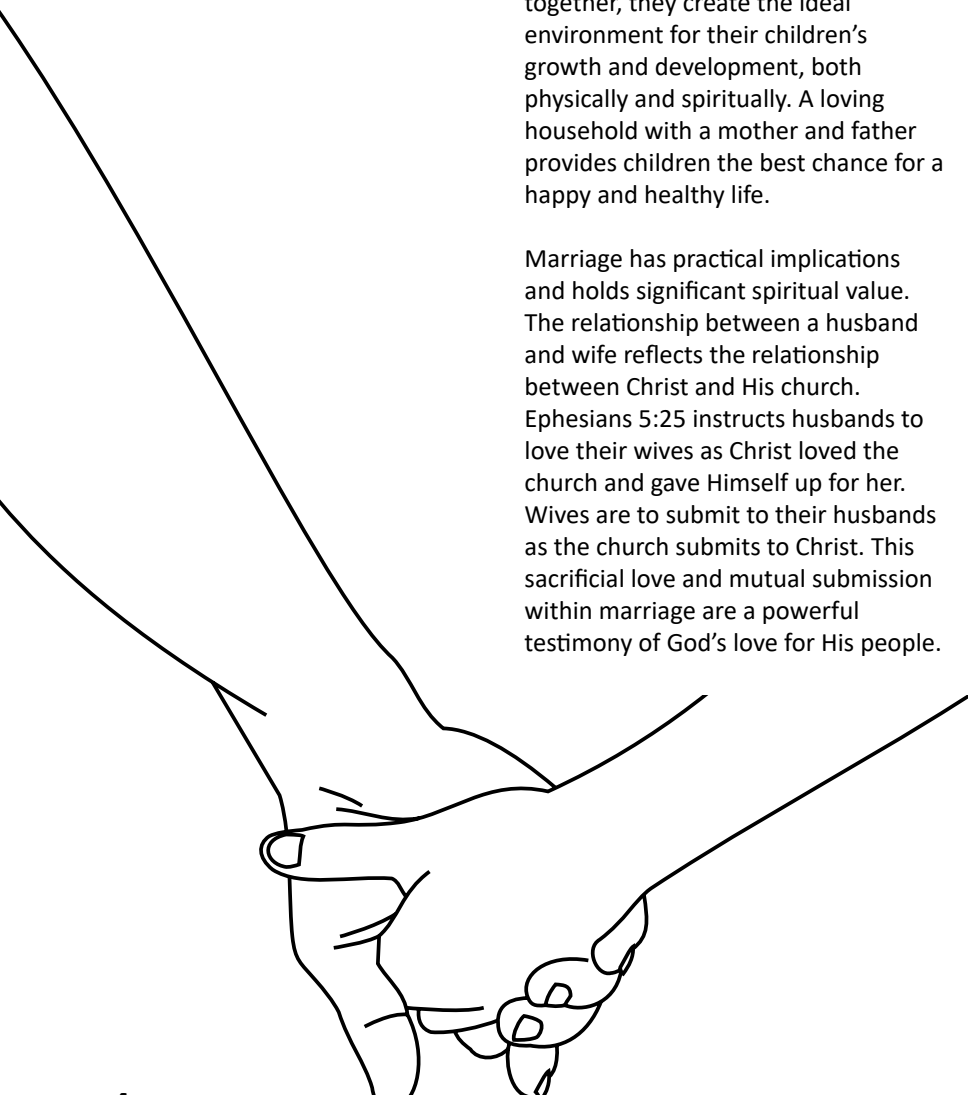
Marriage has practical implications and holds significant spiritual value. The relationship between a husband and wife reflects the relationship between Christ and His church. Ephesians 5:25 instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. This sacrificial love and mutual submission within marriage are a powerful testimony of God's love for His people.

In her book *The Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White writes that "God Himself gave Adam a companion. He provided 'an help meet for him'—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self; showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. 'For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it.' 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one'" (p. 25).

Evil forces are attacking the marriage institution, presenting alternatives to the divine design. But we must stay true to the Bible. "Christ honored the marriage relation by making it also a symbol of the union between Him and His redeemed ones. He Himself is the Bridegroom; the bride is the church, of which, as His chosen one, He says, 'Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee'" (p. 26).

The institution of marriage represents divine love and unity. This symbolism beautifully reflects the spiritual and emotional bond between a married man and woman. No other alternative can replace this beautiful symbolism. Let us share the good news of God's plan for humanity. **I**

Aurora Canals serves as associate ministerial secretary for pastoral spouses and families.





Special Quotes

by Ellen G. White

God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. 'Marriage is honorable' (Hebrews 13:4); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature.

—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46

Marriage has received Christ's blessing, and it is to be regarded as a sacred institution. True religion is not to counterwork the Lord's plans. God ordained that man and woman should be united in holy wedlock, to raise up families that, crowned with honor, would be symbols of the family in heaven.

—*Daughters of God*, p. 180

Let the husband and wife in their married life prove a help and a blessing to one another. Let them consider the cost of every indulgence in intemperance and sensualism. These indulgences do not increase love, nor ennoble and elevate. Those who will indulge the animal passions and gratify lust will surely stamp upon their offspring the debasing practices, the grossness of their own physical and moral defilement.

—*Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*, p. 114

Look to God for your strength. Pray to Him in faith. Sing His praise. Be faithful in little things. It was Daniel's faithfulness in little things that enabled him to see the necessity of faithfulness in larger responsibilities. This faithfulness gave completeness to his whole life.

—*Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 16, ms. 113, par. 23

God made from the man a woman, to be a companion and helpmeet for him, to be one with him, to cheer, encourage, and bless him, he in his turn to be her strong helper. All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman's heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband's character and give it completeness—fulfill God's purpose for them.

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 99



IT'S TIME TO TALK ...
About Sex

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT GOD'S DESIGN

MY GRANDPARENTS WERE MARRIED in the 1920s. Stan was blind, and Lily was the youngest of thirteen children. She conceived on their honeymoon and had no idea how she would give birth. When Lily asked how the baby would come out, her aunt replied, “The same way it got in.” Lily had never seen the birth of a baby or even an animal. She was frightened and confused.

Because of the silent embarrassment of their parents, my parents found a book to help them navigate the basics of sexual intimacy. Thankfully, they chose to give us the message that sex is a beautiful gift from God. Our sexuality was something to anticipate with joy and wonder and a delight to treasure. God wonderfully and beautifully created our bodies, and how they work is “very good” (Genesis 1:27–31).

It’s not easy to talk about God’s amazing gift of sexuality and the wonderful way in which God designed our bodies for intimacy. We struggle with our own stories of shame and embarrassment or to find the best words to discuss the topic. But we need to have an ongoing conversation about healthy sexuality with our children, one little piece at a time.

AS THEY GROW

The way we care for our babies, talk about their bodies, and delight in how they were created is vital for developing their healthy body image. They learn that they are wonderfully made when we handle them gently and lovingly as God’s precious gifts. Even when we change their diapers, we can smile and care for them cheerfully rather than with disgust (which can give them the unintentional message that their genitals are dirty and shameful).

A marriage in which each partner cares for the other and invests in the other person’s flourishing can demonstrate healthy boundaries and positive attitudes toward sexuality. This helps children learn about good relationships, kindness, respect, and serving each other in love.

As children grow older, continue to talk about their bodies with wonder and respect, and help them to delight in all their body systems. It’s best to give children bite-sized chunks of information about sex when it arises in the conversation or when they see animals mating and giving birth rather than having one Big Talk about sex.

Answer their questions as simply and warmly as you can, with a smiling face and a soft tone. This will help them to feel comfortable and confident when they want to talk about sexual topics and questions in the future. If you’re not sure what to say, tell them they’ve asked a good question and that you’ll look for some good answers.

Sometimes children explore their bodies and touch their genitals. This is perfectly normal. They are learning that God has filled them with enjoyable sensations, like touch, sound, taste, sight, and smell.

Look for Christian books that present a simple, positive picture of our sexuality and God’s plan for families, such as *The Story of Me* by Brenna Jones. Teach children about pornography early, especially if you live in a culture where they might accidentally discover pornography when using computers and phones. *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures* by Gail Poyner and Kristen A. Jenson explains pornography in a simple way and then teaches children five “Can Do” steps to respond to pornography if they accidentally encounter it:

- C – Close your eyes immediately.
- A – Always tell an adult.
- N – Name it as pornography.
- D – Do something distracting.
- O – Order your thinking brain to take charge.



Prepare children for the exciting changes of puberty.

Your children are on a journey of learning about sexuality, just as you are.

Prepare children for the exciting changes of puberty. Give girls a positive concept of menstruation by celebrating this new stage in a fun and special way. Keep affirming the wonder of their body, and make sure that your comments about them and their bodies reinforce that they are precious to you and God. Avoid teasing them and shaming them.

As they grow older, teens will ask more challenging questions about relationships and sexuality. The website at www.axis.org provides excellent discussion guides on various subjects. They contain current research, biblical references, and robust answers to help you navigate the complexity of your teen's questions.

TOP TIPS

- Where possible, continue to nurture your marriage by learning more about your own sexual intimacy and seeking help for your areas of struggle and pain. When your attitudes toward sexual intimacy are healthy and positive, you will also help your children to appreciate and respect God's wonderful gift.



- When you have a warm and open approach to your children's sexual curiosity, they are more likely to turn to you with their concerns, worries, and questions. Breathe deeply, stay calm, and ask them where their question has come from. This will help you understand the context of their question and what kind of answers they need.
- Teach the importance of consent in relationships. This helps them create safe boundaries by saying "No!" when others want them to do things they don't want to do, and shows them how to respect others when they choose to say "No!"
- Your children are on a journey of learning about sexuality, just as you are. Don't panic when they are struggling. Stay calm and hold on to the bigger picture of their lives and God's grace.
- Help them to understand the difference between feelings and identity. Feelings can be complex, but they don't define us and can change over time.
- Help your teens find safe Christian adults to mentor them so they have a caring and positive support system.
- Keep praying for wisdom and love as you share the secrets of God's wonderful design for sexuality with your children.
- Remember that God has already forgiven every sexual mistake and unwise decision. Everyone can start again and make better choices next time.
- Tell them that whatever they are struggling with, you will always support them and be there for them, just as God is always there for us. Even when they have messed up, we can welcome them home and love them deeply, just like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

***Karen Holford** is a family therapist and a departmental director at the Trans-European Division. She has been married to Pastor Bernie Holford for more than 40 years, and they are still learning and growing in sexual intimacy!*

WHO AM I?

WHAT GOES INTO MAKING YOU, YOU?

THE TEARS WOULDN'T STOP. How did he come to be in this terrible situation—a captive, being taken to a distant land and into a fearfully dark future?

As Joseph gazed through his tears at the hills in the distance, he thought he could recognize one hill as being where home was. Family and everything familiar and dear was so near, yet so far. Would he ever see his father again? Feeling desperately alone and friendless, he allowed grief to overwhelm him once more.

EMOTIONAL SHOCK

A sudden frightening or traumatic experience can result in disorientation and strong emotions, with any number of physical responses—all parts of an overall reaction known as Emotional Shock. We all can experience Emotional Shock in the wake of a sudden, unexpected, life-altering event, including accident, injury, death, crime, health diagnosis, abandonment, job loss, or the impact of a natural disaster.

Reactive symptoms can include:

1. Fear of threat to life and safety and of an unknown future
2. Inability to rationalize and make sense of the situation
3. Physical effects such as rapid heartbeat, increase in blood pressure, muscle tension, generalized aches and pains, or gastrointestinal upset
4. Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much
5. Episodes of “brain fog” or the inability to think and plan logically, including difficulty with everyday routine
6. Temporary change in personality
7. Inability to find meaning and purpose in life

The ongoing stress which can result from a traumatic experience may impair or extend recovery. Anger, blame, rebellion, sadness, and depression can take hold and interfere with everyday life. If we are unable to cope with these and other severe feelings after some time, professional guidance and assistance may provide healing support.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



THIS IS WHO I AM

For a time, Joseph gave way to uncontrolled grief and terror. But as he journeyed on with the other captives, his thoughts turned to the God of his father. He remembered Jacob's stories of being an exile—a fugitive—and how the Lord protected him, helped him, comforted him, sent him a vision, and promised him a future. Joseph determined that his father's God would be his God too. "He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 214).

From that moment on, 17-year-old Joseph became a man who was completely committed to the high resolve of being true to God and serving Him with a dedicated heart no matter the situation. He would be faithful in duty and witness. He would be thoughtful, courageous, self-possessed, honest, and unashamed of his father's religion—a worshiper of Jehovah. During his ten years of serving Potiphar, captain of the king's guard, as a slave, Joseph was exposed to extraordinary temptations. "Yet Joseph preserved his simplicity and his fidelity to God. The sights and sounds of vice were all about him, but he was as one who saw and

heard not. His thoughts were not permitted to linger upon forbidden subjects" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 213).

This is who the man Joseph became.

WHO ARE YOU?

When we introduce ourselves to someone, we often associate our name with something simple such as our occupation, who we are married to, our role in the current occasion, or our association with a mutual friend. But there can be moments when the question "Who am I?" haunts us.

Taking time to figure out the answer to that question can infuse our lives with purpose and meaning, facilitate confidence in identity, and enrich our relationships. The process needs a growth mindset that sees value in continually learning. As with Joseph, we can more safely navigate the challenges of life with strength of conviction and purpose by knowing ourselves well—our core values, reference points, and convictions.

Figuring out who you are can be taken in steps:

1. Review your childhood and youth. What experiences come to mind that gave you joy, amazed you, or taught you unforgettable lessons? What values have you learned from your parents, relatives, and teachers?

*Anger, blame,
rebellion,
sadness, and
depression can
take hold and
interfere with
everyday life.*



Most people go through life without ever taking time to figure out what has made them the way they are and what and who they truly believe in.

2. What is your baseline reference point? Is the God of Joseph your God too? What does that look like in your life just now? Do your faith and trust sustain you in your dark experiences? Are you feeding your faith with regular study, prayer, and fresh resolve? Knowing where you stand on this issue—that of your baseline reference point—is of utmost importance in identifying the ultimate foundation of your life.
3. Ask a trusted friend or loved one to describe your personality honestly. We may be uncertain how to define ourselves, and the opinion of another could help clarify confusion and questions we may have.
4. What do you value? Thoughtfully make a list and then prioritize it. Your list could include love, freedom, God, church, nature, health, family, quiet time, and more. Your list will tell you what you feel is important and what motivates you.
5. What are you passionate about? The environment? Feeding people experiencing homelessness? Caring for others? Family time together? Knowing what excites and sparks joy shows us how we tend to direct our lives in ministry and vocation.
6. Make a list of what you are *not*. Knowing what you are not good at or passionate about will help you understand what you want or need in life.
7. How do you spend your free time? What brings you joy, relaxation, and inspiration? Reading? Trying new recipes? Gardening? Visiting with friends and family? Traveling? Knowing what adds balance and restoration to your life helps you understand what energizes and feeds your spirit.

GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Later, while reassuring his brothers that he had no ill feelings toward them, Joseph showed he knew who he was and who God was to him—a God who “works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

“You intended to harm me,” Joseph told them, “but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20). Through adversity and prosperity Joseph never wavered from his faith or from his commitment to God. And God was glorified by His faithful servant Joseph.

We, too, can have confidence and peace in the certainty of knowing *who* we are and *whose* we are. **7**

RESOURCES:

Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ie/blog/the-well-being-toolkit/202308/3-steps-for-navigating-lifes-daily-unexpected-storms>

<https://www.harleytherapy.co.uk/counselling/7-warning-signs-acute-stress-reaction-emotional-shock.htm>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/coping-with-emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/emotional-shock-definition-symptoms-causes-and-treatment-5214434>

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/ss/slideshow-emotional-trauma-self-care>

<https://www.trackinghappiness.com/how-to-figure-out-who-you-are/>

<https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-find-yourself>

Rae Lee Cooper is a registered nurse. She and her husband, Lowell, have two adult married children and three adorable grandchildren.

She spent most of her childhood in the Far East and then worked as a missionary with her husband in India for 16 years. She enjoys music, creative arts, cooking, and reading.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO SEXUALITY TODAY

SHARING THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD IN LOVE

THIS ARTICLE IS EXCERPTED FROM A VIDEO MESSAGE
PASTOR MARK FINLEY GAVE ON AUGUST 4, 2023.

AS CHRISTIANS, WE CONDEMN all violence against any human being. Not only is it inappropriate, but it's a violation of God's moral law. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Everyone has a fallen human nature and propensities toward evil.

We cannot have any superiority over another person and look at them with hate because of their actions. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that everyone has a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and Romans 3:23 states, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

There is no place for hate. We're saved by grace. We rest in His love. In the Christian ethic, we respect others' freedom of choice, even if we disagree with their choice. So, as Christians, it's important to separate our compassion for others from their behavior or actions that are not in harmony with the will of God.

The Bible is very clear: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (Romans 12:2, Phillips), but be transformed "by the renewing of your mind." Paul invites us to go out and change the culture, to "shine as lights in the world" (Philippians

2:15, NKJV). If we walk in the light as Jesus is in the light, we walk in the truth of His Word. The purpose of the Church is to transform culture, not to be transformed by culture. So let's pursue what Scripture says about human sexuality.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF SEXUALITY

In Genesis 1:27, 28, we find the basis of understanding all human sexuality. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number . . .'"

The male and female "one flesh" experience (Genesis 2:24) reveals God's image and His magnificent love. That love is most fully manifest when a male and a female created in the image of God give themselves to one another in self-sacrificial love as Christ did for us. The first reason God created male and female—two distinct, separate sexes—is to reveal God's image in the perfection of their love for each other. The second reason is to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28)—to propagate the human race.

In the Christian ethic, we respect others' freedom of choice, even if we do not agree with their choice.



Jesus affirms marriage is between one man and one woman in Matthew 19:4–6: “Haven’t you read,” He replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

A same-sex marriage union between two men or two women denies the clear biological, physiological, and psychological differences between men and women. It denies the reality of husband and wife coming together and, from that sacred union of self-sacrificial love, producing children.

LIFE PRINCIPLES

In the book of Leviticus, God outlines life principles for His people. In Leviticus 18, you find what some people call “the purity code.” This purity code deals with moral and ethical standards, not just the ceremonial law. It speaks of adultery, idolatry, and sexual depravity.

Leviticus 18:20 says, “Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor’s wife and defile yourself with her.” This is the seventh commandment on adultery. In verse 21 we read, “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am

the Lord.” What commandment is that? First, second, and third. Then in verse 22, we find, “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.” We have already seen the commandments mentioned in these verses. So this must be more than a purity or holiness code—it also contains moral and ethical standards.

In a release titled *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church*, Dr. Ekkehardt Mueller, a former associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, wrote, “First, these two texts describe and condemn male homosexual activity. No exceptions are mentioned. Obviously they’re opposed to any homosexual activity. However, it’s very likely that they included lesbianism.”¹

This reputed scholar explains that this prohibition of male with male in Leviticus 18 is far more than simply a holiness code for ancient people in the ceremonial law; it has to do with the moral Ten Commandment law. The purity code, indeed, is not simply something for ancient people. Its bedrock principles help us define the truth about human sexuality.

INHERITED OR CULTIVATED?

There’s a fascinating article published in the well-respected journal *Nature* titled “No ‘gay gene.’” The article reports on a study by researchers at Harvard and MIT. After studying the genomes of nearly half a million people, the researchers concluded there is no such thing as a single “gay gene.”²

There have also been some fascinating studies on identical twins. With identical twins, you would expect them to have the same genetic disposition. How is it, then, that one identical twin (a very small percentage) may lean toward homosexual tendencies while the other twin might not? If they’re genetically the same, you’d expect they both would. But research indicates that’s not always the case.³

But let's assume some people are born with tendencies for male-to-male or female-to-female sexual relationships. Does that necessarily make these tendencies God's will? Let's suppose a man is born with strong sexual desires for women, and let's suppose he has a really difficult time controlling those sexual desires. Does that mean his tendencies are God's will? What about a person born with a propensity toward alcoholism or drugs because of some genetic predisposition? Is that in harmony with God's will?

David said, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). All of us have brokenness. All of us have fallen human natures and propensities toward evil. We do not understand all the reasons for LGBTQ+ tendencies. There may be some genetic reasons, social reasons, or environmental reasons. It's a very complicated, complex situation. And again, I want to emphasize that we reach out in love to all human beings. And while we accept all human beings, as Christians, based on the Word of God, we cannot condone all behavior.

THERE IS HOPE

But there is incredibly good news for every propensity that any human being may have! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

If we're in Christ, we are new creations. There's hope for those who have sexual desires and express them outside of marriage, for those who have committed adultery and have

uncontrolled passions, and for those who have LGBTQ+ relationships. And that hope is in the power and grace of Jesus Christ. "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20). Christ forgives us when we fall, and His grace enters our lives and changes us. It makes us new creations in Jesus.

The Apostle Paul talks about the incredible power of God's divine grace in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. First he gives a warning; then he articulates incredible hope:

"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were."

The male and female "one flesh" experience (Genesis 2:24) reveals God's image and His magnificent love.



The church at Corinth lived in a godless, immoral society. “But you were washed.” What does that mean? You were cleansed by the grace of Christ. God changed you. “You were sanctified”—you were made holy, set apart for God. “You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Here is the incredibly good news: Whatever tendencies we have inherited or cultivated because of the brokenness of our lives, whoever we are, straight or gay, the grace of Christ can transform us.

Ellen White makes a marvelous statement on this point in the book *Ministry of Healing*. “Those who put their trust in Christ are not to be enslaved by any hereditary or cultivated habit or tendency. Instead of being held in bondage to the lower nature, they are to rule every appetite and passion. God has not left us to battle with evil in our own

finite strength. Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart” (pp. 175, 176).

What hope! “Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671).

PAUL ON SEXUALITY

The book of Romans exalts the cross of Christ, justification by faith, and the power of the gospel to transform lives. To show the supremacy of Christ and lay out the case for our desperate need for salvation and justification, Paul establishes the lostness of humanity. In chapter one, he deals with the waywardness, vileness, and wickedness of the Gentile world. In Romans 2, he points out that the Jews, although they have the oracles of God and the prophets of God, have disobeyed them. In Romans 3, we read that all have sinned and fall short. But Paul explains in Romans 4–6 that there is salvation and justification in Christ. In Romans 7, he goes through a great struggle, but in Romans 8, Paul finds there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, and sin no longer controls him. Like Paul, we are no longer dominated by sin because we are free in Jesus in the context of the plan of salvation.

The most loving thing we can do is to share the truth of Christ’s amazing grace that forgives our past, transforms our present, and gives us hope for the future.



As Paul catalogs the sins of the Gentile world, he addresses the concept of human sexuality. “God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error” (Romans 1:26, 27).

Notice Paul talks about men leaving the natural use of women. Where does he get the expression “natural”? He’s talking about creation. The “natural” order of creation is a male and a female becoming married. But, he says, they change the natural use of nature, indicating that homosexuality is unnatural. Just prior, in verse 25, he wrote, “They exchanged the truth about God for the lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator . . .”

In the *Andrews Study Bible*, we read this comment from scholars specializing in the Old and New Testament: “These verses [26, 27] condemn homosexual activities. Unnatural sexuality, however, goes beyond homosexual behaviors. The New Testament sanctions only the monogamous relationship between male and female. It condemns all other forms of sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, as sinful.”⁴

STRONG BIBLICAL ADVOCATES

Recently, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a reaffirmation statement, leaving no doubt as to where the Church stands on this issue:

“We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position as expressed in the Church’s Fundamental Beliefs: ‘Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.’ . . . God instituted ‘marriage, a covenant-based union of two genders [male and female] physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.”’ ‘The monogamous union in marriage of a man and woman is . . . the only morally appropriate focus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.’ ‘Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal.’”

The statement describes how homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness of human nature but closes with this important statement: “We hold that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are loved by God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn or derision, let alone abuse. Still, God’s Word that transcends time and culture does not permit a homosexual lifestyle. The Bible’s opposition to same-sex unions/marriage is anchored in God’s plan at creation for marriage . . . , in divine legislation . . . , and in Jesus’ explicit confirmation of a permanent, monogamous, and heterosexual relationship . . .”⁵

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been very clear on this. We should, though, make a distinction between LGBTQ+ orientation and action. Because of the brokenness of sin, each of us has certain passions, desires, and orientations, but by the grace of God, we can choose not to act upon them. To love another doesn’t mean we approve of actions out of harmony with God’s will. The most loving thing we can do is to share the truth of Christ’s amazing grace that forgives our past, transforms our present, and gives us hope for the future.



A Biblical Response to Sexuality Today

Jesus invites us to reach out as brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing the truth of God's Word in kindness and compassion, recognizing that if any man or woman is in Christ, they are new creatures, and recognizing that the grace of God, the power of God, is greater than any sin. There is no sin that God's grace cannot deliver us from by His grace and through His power. Let us embrace and love one another enough to share the truth of God's Word, pray together, share the divine truths of Scripture together, and watch the new creation take place in every single one of our lives. **I**

- ¹ Ekkehardt Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church*, Biblical Research Institute, Release 6 (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), p. 14. adventistbiblicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/BRI-Release-6-2.pdf.
- ² Jonathan Lambert, "No 'gay gene': study looks at genetic basis of sexuality," *Nature*, vol. 573 (5 September 2019): pp. 14-15, cited in Bennett McIntosh, "There's (Still) No Gay Gene," *Harvard Magazine*, 29 August 2019, harvardmagazine.com/2019/08/there-s-still-no-gay-gene.
- ³ Michael Balter, "Gay Is Not All in the Genes," *Science*, 30 June 2008, science.org/content/article/gay-not-all-genes.
- ⁴ Andrews Study Bible (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), p. 1469.
- ⁵ "Same-sex Unions," Official document, Seventh-day Adventist Church, voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, October 17, 2012, adventist.org/documents/same-sex-unions/.

Mark Finley serves as assistant to the president of the General Conference. He and his wife, Ernestine "Teenie," have been involved in ministry for over 40 years.

MARRIED TO A PASTOR?

Discover a safe place to fellowship, ask questions, and learn from others on social media!

DISCUSS

SHARE

CONNECT

Official groups for ministry spouses online:



ministerialspouses



@ministriyspouses



@gc_ministerial_spouses

NEW

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/esposasministeriales/>

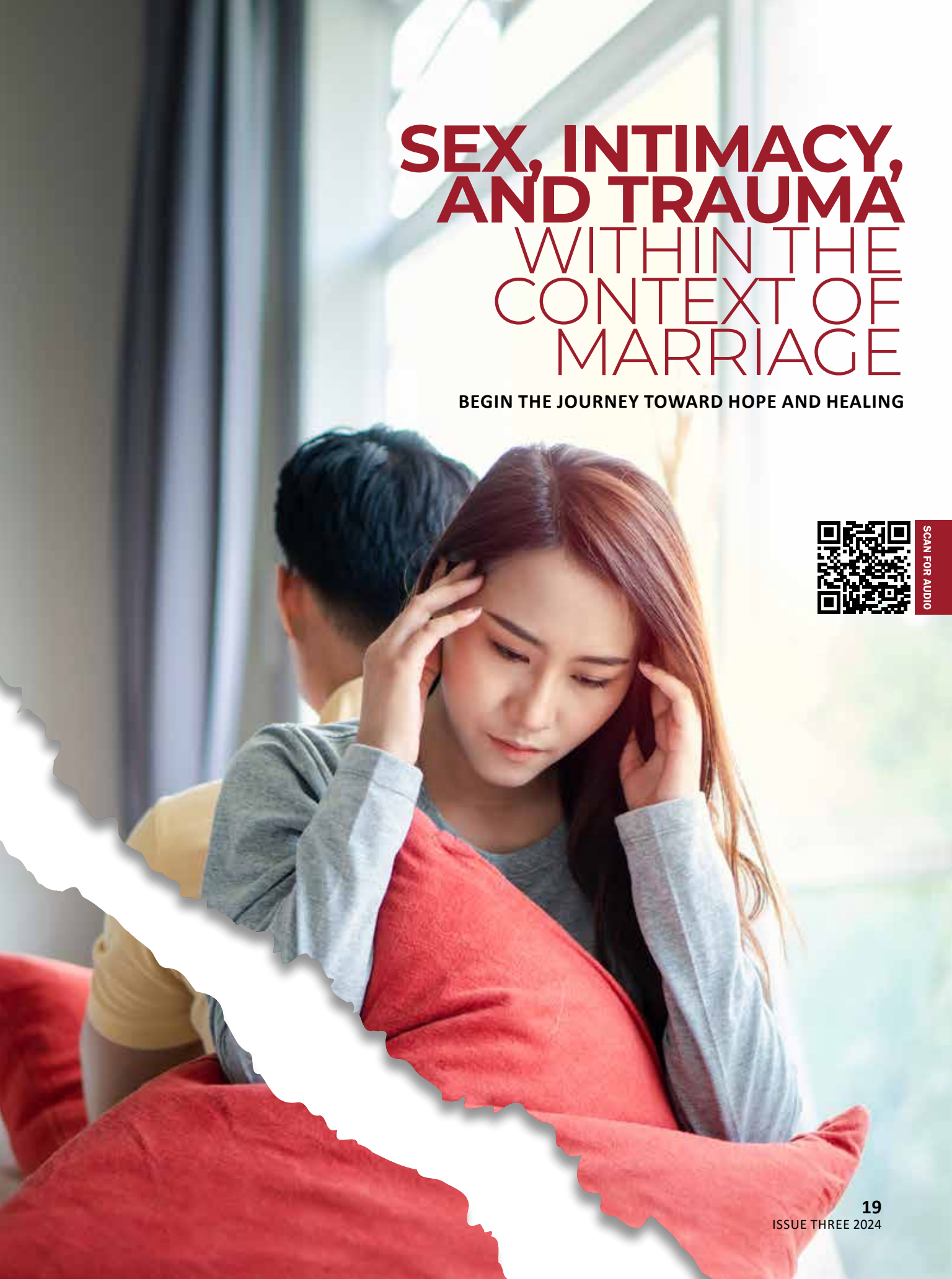


SEX, INTIMACY, AND TRAUMA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

BEGIN THE JOURNEY TOWARD HOPE AND HEALING



SCAN FOR AUDIO



Sex, Intimacy, and Trauma Within the Context of Marriage

“CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING personal?” Mary* asked, sounding a bit unsure.

“Sure thing,” Elizabeth* responded, sensing where this was going. This wasn’t the first time someone had asked her, but she was still figuring out how to address it.

Mary paused, as if the words were difficult to say out loud, before probing, “Has your dad’s sexual abuse affected your marriage?”

Elizabeth replied with tears in her voice, “I’ve been married for twenty years, and I can’t shake this feeling of guilt and anxiety every time my husband and I are intimate. I feel like something’s wrong with me, and I’m worried it’s hurting him and our marriage. What should I do? How do I heal?”

Such conversations are likely familiar to pastors and counselors, and survivors of abuse might have pondered the questions themselves. The trauma of abuse is immeasurable, and its residual anguish touches upon the most intimate aspects of one’s life.

These questions aren’t just coming from women. Both men and women have shared their struggles, expressing a deep desire for intimacy while grappling with the feeling of insecurity in their relationships. They worry that their marriage is heading for unhappiness and eventual separation or that they might be unfit parents. Spouses of survivors want to know how to support their loved ones in feeling safe and loved.

From a biblical perspective, sexual abuse is a grave violation of God’s design for human relationships and is contrary to the principles of love, respect, and consent that underpin healthy sexual relations within marriage.

This brief article is not intended to serve as a comprehensive guide for healing from sexual trauma. Rather, it aims to help you gain insight into two of the common impacts that sexual trauma can have on survivors. By understanding these implications, you may be better equipped to support those who have experienced sexual trauma, who may include members of your congregation.

*Mary and Elizabeth are pseudonyms.

For church leaders and churches, it is crucial to approach survivors with empathy, understanding, and a commitment to justice and healing, rather than judgment or blame.



SEX—A GIFT FROM GOD

The Bible portrays sexuality and the practice of sex within the context of a marriage as a gift from God. We find this perspective in the early chapters of the Bible, particularly in the creation story in the book of Genesis. In this narrative, God creates Adam and Eve and blesses them, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27, 28).

Furthermore, the Bible celebrates sexual intimacy between a married man and woman in the context of love and commitment. In the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon is an example of poetic and romantic writing that celebrates the joy and beauty of marital love and sexual attraction. For individuals and faith communities, the concept of sex as a gift from God implies a view of sexuality as something sacred to be cherished, respected, and enjoyed within the confines of a loving and committed marital relationship.

But what happens when sex is scarred by sexual trauma?

Let's look at two of the most prevalent cognitive frameworks shaped by sexual trauma:

1. The Sense of Complicity

The concept of complicity and trauma can be a complex issue to navigate. Complicity, often defined as the willing involvement or participation in a wrongful act, can manifest in various ways within the context of trauma. For instance, individuals may feel responsible for their own abuse for several reasons, such as:

- **Desire for Kindness and Attention:** Before experiencing abuse, there might be an environment in which the victim needs care, attention, love, and protection. Abusers may exploit this vulnerability by offering kindness and attention, grooming the victim, and ultimately gaining access to their heart. This can lead to feelings of complicity, as victims may believe that if they hadn't desired the abuser's attention or kindness, the abuse may not have occurred.

- **Sense of Choice:** Victims of sexual abuse may believe they had a measure of choice in the abuse, particularly if they willingly engaged in activities with the abuser. The abuser may encourage this feeling of choice, as it can lead to a sense of cooperation and responsibility on the part of the victim.
- **Loss of Resistance:** Victims may reach a point during the abuse where they stop resisting or saying no, often because they feel powerless or that resistance is futile. This can contribute to feelings of complicity, as victims may feel that their lack of resistance implies a level of consent.
- **Physical Responses:** Victims may experience normal physical responses, such as arousal, during the abuse, even if they do not want or enjoy the experience. We are designed to feel a response to stimuli. However, this can be confusing and lead to feelings of complicity, as victims may feel that their bodies' responses imply a level of participation in the abuse.

Recognizing the tactics abusers use to create feelings of complicity can help victims understand that they are not to blame for their abuse, and they can start the healing journey from the trauma they have experienced. This understanding not only allows the survivor to realize that the responses they had to their abuser were natural human reactions, but also to recognize that they were conditioned to think, feel, and act in certain ways to survive. It is all about self-protection and survival. It was not their choice; whatever they did, it was their survival strategy.

2. A Sense of Shame and Guilt

Shame and guilt can be profound responses to sexual trauma, and they can often intersect with our spiritual beliefs. Many survivors of sexual trauma struggle with feelings of guilt and shame that are deeply ingrained in cultural and religious narratives about sexuality, morality, and personal worth. Here's how these emotions can be experienced in the context of sexual trauma and our biblical perspectives:

Sex, Intimacy, and Trauma Within the Context of Marriage

- **Internalization of Blame:** Survivors often grapple with a sense of self-blame, wondering if they somehow caused or deserved the abuse. They perceive themselves as having fallen short of these standards.
- **External Judgments:** Survivors may also face external judgment from their faith communities, churches, or leaders. Such judgment can be explicitly stated or subtly implied, reinforcing the idea that the victim is at fault for the abuse. This can further exacerbate feelings of guilt and shame.
- **Questioning Faith:** Sexual trauma can shake a person's faith and understanding of God's role in their life. Survivors may struggle with feelings of betrayal by God or doubt about their spirituality. This spiritual distress can intensify feelings of guilt and shame, as they may perceive their suffering as a punishment or test from God.

For survivors, it is important to navigate these emotions with care and compassion, seeking support from trusted individuals and communities. For church leaders and churches, it is crucial to approach survivors with empathy, understanding, and a commitment to justice and healing rather than judgment or blame.

The Bible addresses sexual trauma and the accompanying feelings of shame, guilt, and complicity in various ways. At the forefront, it is vital to recognize that sexual trauma is a violation of God's intended design for human relationships and reflects the brokenness and sinfulness of the world. It is not the victim's fault, and they are not complicit in the abuse they endured.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL TRAUMA

Seek Professional Help: It's crucial to reach out to a trained professional to assist with processing the pain. Time alone won't heal the wounds of trauma. Trauma is complex and requires expert guidance to navigate and make sense of the story.

Avoid Minimizing Your Experience: Survivors should never minimize or justify the harm done to them. Downplaying the experience only reinforces the pain. It's essential to acknowledge the gravity of what happened.

I cannot overstate this enough; you cannot not heal alone. . . . Survivors must seek professional help to facilitate their healing journey.



Commit to Healing: Healing is a process that takes time and dedication to therapy. It's important to remain committed to the therapeutic journey, even during challenging times.

Find Support in Faith Communities: Grieving the loss within a trusted faith community can provide solace and understanding. Seek out a supportive environment where judgment and condemnation are absent. Drawing from teachings like those found in the book of Lamentations can be beneficial.

Hold On to Hope: Remember, hope and healing are promises. Despite the challenges, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Trust in the possibility of healing and recovery.

Recognize the Need for Professional Help: I cannot overstate this enough: you cannot heal alone. Dealing with sexual trauma cannot be done on your own. Survivors must seek professional help to facilitate their healing journey. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, and guidance from a trained therapist is invaluable.

By following these practical steps, survivors can begin their journey toward healing and reclaiming their lives from the effects of sexual trauma.

However, ministerial spouses (and pastors) must address this critical issue with a deep sense of compassion. Like Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well, where He showed compassion without judgment or condemnation, we are called to embrace God's healing approach. The initial step toward healing is for the church community to come together in support of survivors and provide them with hope.

THERE IS HOPE IN HEALING

One powerful passage in the Bible that speaks to the hope of healing from sexual trauma is Isaiah 61:1–3. The phrase “beauty for ashes” is found in verse 3: “He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for His own glory” (NLT).

This passage describes God's promise to bring healing and restoration to those who have experienced deep pain and brokenness. The imagery of “beauty for ashes” suggests that God can transform the ashes of our past experiences into something beautiful and meaningful. He can take the pain and suffering we have endured and use it to bring about growth, healing, and wholeness.

For those who have experienced sexual trauma, it is important to remember that God sees and cares about your pain. He offers a path to healing and restoration through His love, grace, and presence. While the journey toward healing may be difficult and may involve seeking professional help and support, God promises that He can bring beauty from the ashes of our past. As we entrust our pain and brokenness to Him, He can work in our lives to bring healing, hope, and redemption.

Disclaimer: Healing from the trauma of sexual abuse is a complex process. It's essential for survivors to seek out the support of trained professionals, such as therapists or counselors, who can help them process their experiences, work through the trauma, and develop coping strategies. i

REFERENCES:

Dan Allender, *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2016).

Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, *Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995).

Aundi Kolber, *Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode—and into a Life of Connection and Joy* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Pub., 2020).

Curt Thompson *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

Jasmin Stankovic is a pastor's wife, proud mom of three, and a licensed counselor, working in both a government-funded setting and in private practice. She loves socializing, making new friends, indulging in Latin and Thai cuisine, playing the piano, and spending quality time with her family.



TIPS TO THRIVE

CONVERSATION STARTERS

PURITY ENCOMPASSES MORE than sexual and moral purity, as important as those are. Jesus calls us to spiritual purity. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). Purity is a gift from God (James 4:8).

We all want the best for our children, which includes a connection with God that purifies their thoughts, words, and actions. We want the same for their future spouses. Certainly pray for your child and their future spouse, asking God to lead, protect, and empower them to wait patiently for Him. We can also talk with our children about purity and help them choose friends and, ultimately, a spouse who is wholeheartedly committed to God.

Keep your chats casual. Driving to and from school or church events provides opportunity to talk about God and His plan for their lives—which includes their future spouse. Give advice and listen if they want to talk.

ADVICE TO SHARE

What kind of spouse do you hope to have some day? Someone who will be true to God and you? A faithful worker for God? Someone cheerful, helpful, and loving to you and your children and steady through life’s trials? If so, you need to look for someone who already displays strong traits of character. The way someone lives now indicates how they will approach life in a future with you.

Watch the way a person relates to members of the opposite sex. Friendships should be casual, completely out in the open, and wholesome. Daughters: Observe how a guy treats his mother. That will be a good indication of his respect for womanhood and how he will someday treat his wife . . . YOU! Sons: If a woman doesn’t treat her father with respect, she likely won’t respect you.

Do they exhibit fruits of the Spirit? Is their language clean, kind, truthful, and uplifting? Are they faithful in Bible study, prayer, tithing, and church attendance? Do they encourage others? What kind of music and entertainment do they consume? Be sure you don’t get someone who is into pornography! Pornography can cause divorce.

To have a good spouse you will need to be preparing yourself to be a good spouse. Daughters: One of the first things a good guy will notice is how you dress. Do you try to show as much of yourself as you can get away with? Does your character show the beauty of Jesus? Sons: A woman looks for a man to initiate and lead. You’ll need to make the first move by pursuing her. She’ll likely ask friends or family about your character, your work ethic, and whether you are a man of prayer. Is your focus on Christ?

At some point in your relationship, you will encounter sexual desires. You might be told, “Oh Babe, I love you SO much; let’s go to bed together. We are going to get married just as soon as . . .” You can answer, “If you REALLY loved me, you wouldn’t ask me to do this. I have pledged myself under God to wait until I’m married. I want to save myself for my future spouse, and I don’t know yet who that is.”

OF SMUDGES AND WORTH

When I was single, I told each young man I dated this story: “Once there was a little white rose bud. While many admired its beauty, it was promised to someone special—someone it had not yet met. A few young men took the flower, promising faithfully to bring it back unharmed, but each time the rose bud returned with a slight smudge or tear. I am that little white rose bud. I have determined to save myself for that special young man. Only God knows now who he is. But when he does come for me, I will be so happy to be able to give myself to him without spot or blemish.”

But what about those roses who are or become smudged and torn? Some of us have endured abuses that have left us feeling unworthy. Some have willingly made choices we later regret. Either way, we find forgiveness and healing in Christ. There are ample examples in the Bible of renewed lives, including Rahab, a harlot who became the mother of Boaz and the great-great grandmother of King David.

God promises: “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25, ESV).

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1–4, ESV).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

While sexual purity is valuable, spiritual purity is essential, and both are found only in Christ. His power can make us and keep us pure. ■

Evelyn Griffin is a retired pastor's wife. She and her pastor-husband have four children and 14 grandchildren.

*To have a good spouse
you will need to be
preparing yourself to be
a good spouse.*



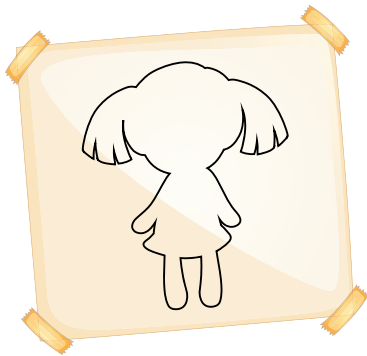


WONDERFULLY MADE

When God made human beings, He said they were “very good.” And that includes you!



SCAN FOR AUDIO



I'M AMAZING!

Read Psalm 139:13–18. You are fearfully and wonderfully made! Draw a picture of yourself. Roll out a long piece of craft paper, or glue or tape several sheets of printer or construction paper together. (Or you can use sidewalk chalk on your driveway or church parking lot.) Ask a parent to draw around your body. Write something amazing about each area of your body: your toes, legs, knees, tummy, chest, arms, and more.



SHAPED FROM CLAY

God shaped Adam out of clay (Genesis 2:7). Use clay or make playdough with flour, salt, and water. Give each person in your family a piece of clay or playdough and ask them to shape a person. It's a bit tricky! Don't worry if your person looks a bit wobbly. Show your models to each other. Imagine that all humans looked like your models! Laugh! Then thank God for making you—because He is a much better artist than any human will ever be!



HANDY HANDS

Draw around an adult's hand. Then fill the hand shape with things you love to do with your hands. Isn't that amazing? Thank God for making your amazing hands! How do you use your hands to bless the people around you by sharing God's love? Read Ecclesiastes 9:10.

Find the answer to these questions:

- How many bones are in each of your hands?
- What is special about human thumbs? (Try doing some simple tasks without using your thumbs. What happens?)
- Find out how you can use your hands to communicate if you can't speak. Learn to finger-spell your name.



TOUCHY-FEELY

Ask a parent to place several clean objects with different textures into a pillowcase. Without looking, put your hand inside and see if you can name all the objects just by feeling them. Your hands are amazing because they can feel the difference between so many things!



NIFTY NOSE

Ask a parent to find several things you would recognize by smell and put each in a different paper sack so you can't see what they are. Smell each sack and try to guess what's inside. Lemon? Soap? Garlic? Lavender?

Coconut? Thank God together for all the lovely things He made that you can smell with your nose. Paul told the Corinthians that they were to be a lovely fragrance of God's love in the world (2 Corinthians 2:15). If God's love had a fragrance, what do you think it would smell like? How can your family be the fragrance of God's love in the world and make your community a kinder and happier place to live?



INCREDIBLE FEET

Draw around one of your feet. Write in the shape some of the things you like to do with your feet. Then jump, skip, hop, and run! Have everyone in your family stand on one foot and see who can stand the

longest without putting the other foot on the floor. Standing on one foot is very good for your body's balance. Some doctors encourage people to balance on one foot every time they brush their teeth. This habit can develop their balance muscles!

Read Romans 10:15. How do your feet carry the good news of God's love into the world?



LISTENING EARS

Be very still and quiet for a few moments, and then tell each other the different sounds you can hear inside and outside your home. Your ears are amazing! God made them so you could listen to those you love, sing together, learn from your teachers, stay safe on the roads, hear the wonderful birdsong, and listen to so many other things! Thank God for your ears because they help you learn about Him. Ask your parents how they listen for God's voice.



WONDERFULLY MADE

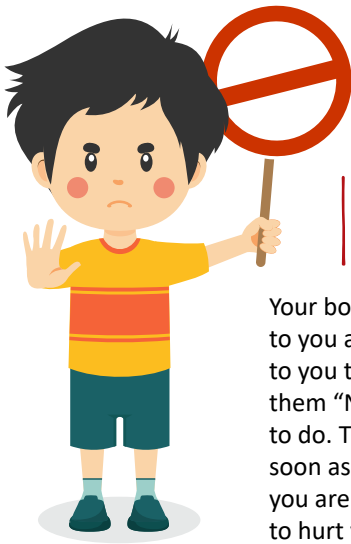
Make a little sign to put on every mirror in your house that says, "You are wonderfully made! You have been designed by the greatest Artist and Scientist in the universe, and He loves you!" Remember that whatever anyone says to you or about you, God loves you and thinks that you are beautiful and amazing.





THANK YOU, GOD, FOR MAKING ME, ME

Design a card to thank God for making you just the way you are! You could paste a photo of yourself on the front or draw a picture instead. Then write a thank you note to God inside the card. Even though you can't mail it to God, He sees what you write!




IT'S OK TO SAY NO!

Your body is very precious and special. It belongs to you and God. If someone wants to do something to you that you don't want them to do, you can tell them "No!" and yell "STOP!" This is a good thing to do. Then tell your parents or a trusted adult as soon as you can. This is very important because you are so special, and God does not want anyone to hurt you. Read Matthew 18:2-6.



BODY PRAISE

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6). We can praise God with our whole bodies! Sing one of your family's favorite praise songs. Take turns choosing a body part, such as your toes, arms, hands, legs, knees, or elbows. Then invite everyone to praise God with that part of their body. Wow! You will all bring a lovely smile to God's beautiful and loving face. 

JESUS BLESSED CHILDREN

All children are very precious to Jesus. He took them in His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). Every bit of you is very precious to God because He made every part of you, and everything is beautiful and wonderfully made. Worship is using all that you are to praise God for all His amazing love! Ask your parents to take you in their arms, bless you, and praise God for the way He has made you and gifted you to them.



Karen Holford is the family, children's, and women's ministries director of the Trans-European Division. She lives in England and loves praising God with children because they are so full of joy and creativity!

GOD DOES NOT SPONSOR FAILURES



SCAN FOR AUDIO

A TESTIMONY OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

> PART 2

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF *STRONGER TOGETHER*, AUTHOR LORENA ANGÉLICA MONSIVÁIS PERALTA TESTIFIED HOW GOD WATCHED OVER HER FAMILY'S FOOTSTEPS THE MOMENT HER HUSBAND DECIDED TO ENROLL IN A THEOLOGY PROGRAM. THIS ARTICLE CONCLUDES HER TESTIMONY.

MY HUSBAND WORKED hard every summer and every vacation period to cover his and our daughter's tuition bills. Still, the amounts he earned were never enough. Thanks to God and His blessings, I was offered a job the day after we arrived on campus. It was not aligned with my profession, yet God opened the doors of heaven and gave the job to me. I am confident there are no coincidences or mistakes! God always goes before His children to prepare their way.

His blessings continued! After two years, a small room became available on campus. We did not pay utilities, and the rent was significantly lower than we had been paying (something that rarely happens for students).

About that time, I found out that I was pregnant. Now I faithfully confirm that our Father's timing is perfect, yet I was disturbed upon receiving the news. My mind kept pointing out that God was allowing us to get a good shake-up. I was on my knees, praying and praying that He would manifest His will in our lives.

BLESSING UPON BLESSING

Just a few months before the birth of our child, we received news that the last business we had—the business we already considered lost—was returning to us because the current owners could not pay for it. We immediately asked the family to help us dismantle and preserve all the equipment so we could recover some assets.

We again felt the care that the Lord had for us when the university had a similar project. We were able to negotiate the equipment to be applied toward the debt we had. You know, that was a breath of air in our lives. Our tuition debt had grown to the point that, in a short time, my husband would only be able to continue studying if the school debt was paid or settled. God manifested Himself with great power and allowed a considerable amount to be paid to our account.

Compañeras, my life in those four years always hung by a very thin thread of little faith, fears, discouragements, worries, and insecurity, even though God blessed us with every blink of the eye. My spiritual blindness led me to question God. I did not want to see how He had already answered my prayer. Day after day I asked Him, "Did You really call us to Your service?" and every day He told me, "Lorena, do not fear because I am with you."



God Does Not Sponsor Failures

My husband received a scholarship in the last year and a half of university. Combined with his summer and winter jobs, we could gradually cover the debts. My baby was blessed with donated clothes, diapers, and toys. This is how we were able to cover his needs.

“As for God, His way is perfect. The word of the Lord is pure. He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him” (Psalm 18:30, *New Heart English Bible*).

Six months before my husband finished his degree, we remained aware that God had helped us up to that point, but my faith began to waver. Would my husband receive a call to ministry? One day during worship at the university, the pastor said, “God does not sponsor failures.”

I recalled all God had done in our lives, all the blessings we had enjoyed. We could see the angels of God go through our home in our times of need. We experienced joy amid the storm of a baby. We could look back and see the moments of sadness pass—the moments where we thought we could not go on—and see that the Lord always sustained us. We saw how God reaffirmed our stay at the university by providing for us, wiping away our tears, and turning trials into blessings.

Graduation day rapidly approached. There was a massive celebration at the university, where administrators of the Inter-American Division, administrators of the five unions in Mexico,

pastors, and other authorities gathered. We would soon discover that the Lord had prepared the answer we were waiting for. Our greatest desire—the best gift we could hope for—was to serve Him in the ministry. That celebration day, they told my husband they already had a calling for him. It would start the day he graduated! My joy did not fit in my heart! I asked God for forgiveness for my lack of faith. I thanked Him for all that He let us experience and for the four years that I remained on my knees praying and asking for His quick help.

How can we not believe in our Heavenly Father? How can we not praise Him? How can we not testify to His great love for His children? Dear friends, I invite you to have faith, much faith. If you are going through difficult times, trust Him! If you are in the middle of a storm, kneel and wait patiently for His answer! If He has brought joy to your heart and your home, praise Him and testify to His power!

Thanks to our Heavenly Father, we have experienced five years of ministry. We have served three fields in two unions. God has also allowed me to enter His work. We will continue for as long as He allows under the slogan “Passionate for souls!”

I hope my testimony can greatly help and bless your life. Remember: God does not sponsor failures.

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13). J

Lorena Angélica Monsiváis Peralta lives in Mexico City and serves God in a pastoral family with her husband. Lorena works for the church in legal affairs and teaches theology students how to care well for others. She and her husband have two children.

*God always goes
before His children to
prepare their way.*

North American Division

Division ministerial spouse leaders and ministerial secretaries met in Tennessee for a spiritual retreat and training for the Back to the Altar initiative. Daily meetings were held for a week in March 2024. Attendees spent time in prayer, Bible study, powerful worship, good music, and fellowship.



Ministerial spouse leaders gathered for spiritual renewal and training.



The North American retreat provided time for prayer.



Attendees enjoyed worship and fellowship.

ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE

Northeastern Conference ministerial spouses embarked on a prayer summit retreat in March 2024. The topic was “Prayer: Our Top Priority.” Audrey Folkenberg was the keynote speaker for the weekend. The prayer summit rejuvenated, refreshed, and revived attendees. To God be the glory!



Northeastern Conference pastoral spouses met for a prayer retreat.



Revival
& REFORMATION

INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES
FOR A DEEPER WALK WITH CHRIST

REVIVALANDREFORMATION.ORG