

CHAPTER 38

Sex before marriage?

One of the dilemmas many people face is whether to have sex before marriage. Before taking such a momentous step, it is wise to think seriously about the consequences. To start with, what are the positive reasons for staying chaste? Fortunately, there are many.

Abstinence gives us the time and space we need to grow to maturity. We retain a great deal of freedom of choice as well as control over the direction that our lives can take. Our possibilities will not be blocked because of a sexual disease or an early pregnancy.

Think about how your plans for your career or education could be destroyed if, for instance, at the age of 17 you had to care for a baby.

Many teenagers worry that by abstaining from sex they will become strange. In reality, the opposite may be true. In a world where so many people conform, you may find that saying "no" makes you a sensitive, thoughtful

and mature person. A relationship can deepen far more quickly when words and thoughts are used to express feelings, rather than physical means.

Some people think that marrying and wearing a ring is somehow a passport to self-control. Is that true? How can a person who hasn't learned to control his body before marriage suddenly know how to do so after marriage? In a good marriage there is trust, companionship and love. Those values can be passed on to the next generation, which is why it is often said that a good marriage is the foundation for a good society. Becoming a mature, respectful individual now is a vital part of having an emotionally healthy family later.

Abstinence spares us from the feelings of fear, shame and guilt that often accompany premarital sex. Studies show that there is a very big difference in the personality of people who engage in premarital sex and those who don't. One of the most important differences is that teenagers who choose the way of chastity prove to be capable of thinking about their future and planning ahead. Those who become sexually active, on the other hand, often admit they aren't thinking more than a week or a month ahead about anything at all. No wonder they get into trouble!



Still, some people think that there are reasons that justify sexual relations before marriage. We will examine some of those reasons and see how sensible they really are.

- ✘ Sometimes people say that before they marry, they should make sure they are compatible. They should have a “trial marriage” to see if it “works.” Since sex is an important part of marriage, they say it is important to “get to know each other” before marriage.

However, recent research in Britain has shown that this is not a good reason:

A survey by the British Office of Population Censuses and Surveys contradicts the modern belief that living together before marriage provides the strongest foundation: Couples who lived together were 30 percent more likely to divorce after five years than those who had not cohabited.

Sex does not help you to discover whether a person has the qualities you are seeking in a partner – for example, trustworthiness or honesty – or whether your partner is capable of loving or being loved.

On the contrary, premarital sex can cloud your judgment and lead you to marry the wrong person. Sex creates very strong emotional bonds, and can make people believe a relationship is deeper than it really is.

This emotional bonding can lead us to prolong a relationship that is based only on physical attractiveness or a need for security. As a result, people can feel trapped or committed to a relationship they have outgrown.

- ✘ Another argument is that it is good to be sexually experienced before marrying so that sex will be better in the marriage.

Sex, though, is a mystery that is very exciting for a married couple to discover together. In this way they learn together and share together. A man who is “experienced,” on the other hand, will always find himself comparing his wife to other women with whom he has had sex. (Of course, the same is true for an “experienced” wife.) If a couple does have sexual problems, they can consult with a marriage counselor.

- ✘ Some people say that sex is a purely physical need like eating, and there is nothing wrong with satisfying this need.

However, there is a difference. Sex is not a need; it is a drive. If you do not eat, you will die. If you do not sleep, you will go crazy. If you do not have sex, will you die? In fact, those who live celibate lives, such as monks and nuns, are renowned for their longevity and good health!

Animals cannot control their sex drive and have no choice but to mate when they are in heat. For them sex is not related to love. We are not animals. We can control our behavior with our minds. We think, evaluate and make decisions before we do things. We don’t follow every desire or impulse that comes into our heads. As the British writer C.S. Lewis commented, “If a healthy young man indulged his sexual appetite whenever he felt inclined, and if each act produced a baby, in ten years he might easily populate a small village.” We can fulfill our desires and direct our drives in the proper manner. Our sex drive is humanized through love.



Sex is not just a physical act; it is an expression of love between two people. It degrades our humanity by trying to separate sex from love.

- ✘ Many people say that marriage is merely a convention. They say they want a permanent relationship without marrying.

However, a marriage ceremony has only as much meaning as a couple give it. During a wedding a couple make public vows of mutual commitment. When they do this, they and everyone else recognize that this relationship has a certain status and is to be respected. Of course, a stamp in a passport is not a guarantee of a happy marriage. The success of a marriage depends on the extent to which the couple love each other and feel responsible not only for themselves but also for their relationship.

All these arguments for sharing a life together in love sound very attractive. However, aren't these people who argue for sex without marriage really hiding an unconscious fear of taking on the responsibility of a family? Relational problems are inevitable. If you are not prepared to make such a public commitment, it means you are not yet ready for this type of relationship. Therefore it is better to wait.

When a couple decide to marry, they take on a serious responsibility. But when two people simply live together, at least one of the partners—sometimes unconsciously—keeps the right to walk out when things get rough. This inevitably influences the atmosphere of the family. Even when the relationship seems harmonious, the partners cannot be completely sure of each other. There will always be a feeling of uncertainty.

Psychological research has shown that for the majority of families marriage helps a couple to harmonize their lives. The woman feels more secure with her partner and free from anxiety. Pregnancies, even unwanted ones, aren't as big a problem for married couples as they are for co-habiting couples.

- ✘ A common argument nowadays is "If I love someone, it is natural to express that love sexually, even if I know it will not be a permanent relationship."

One way we communicate with each other is through language. Each word and expression conveys some information and meaning to another person. If we misuse words, then we will no longer be able to communicate. So-called "strong" words, especially, become devalued if they are overused.

The same applies to love, which is often described as a language. If we say "I love you" to everyone, then it becomes difficult to find words to express love that is more exclusive and unique. It is part of our human nature to desire a lifelong, unique relationship with someone of the opposite sex. This is the conjugal relationship to which there is an exclusive sexual dimension. This is why traditionally people reserve their sexual love for the person whom they marry. This sexual love becomes the seal upon this unique, exclusive relationship and sets it apart from all other relationships. If one has sex with several people, one no longer has any unique and special way to express love to a person. Just as words are devalued by misuse and overuse, sexual love also is devalued if it is misused.



The benefits of chastity

Let us think about what chastity means. Traditionally it is understood as abstinence from improper sexual relationships, but it also includes purity of thoughts, words and actions. Chastity means keeping one's heart and soul pure and untouched for that unique love that belongs to marriage. In addition to avoiding the negative consequences of immature sexual relationships, chastity (if we take such a broad definition) has other benefits.

You can be free to develop your character to maturity.

Young people spend a lot of time making themselves sexually appealing. By taking the sexual pressure off yourself by deciding to wait until marriage, you can devote your energy and time to developing your unique personality. You don't need to conform to anyone else's standards of behavior or beauty. You can spend time developing your creativity, talents, skill, interests, and prepare for your career. By saving sex for marriage, you have the time to pursue your vocation, interests and hobbies, which you may have less time for at a later stage of your life.

You can develop friendships with a wide variety of people.

You can be free to befriend many people and learn the value of friendship without sexual pressures. Many times a young man or woman is afraid to simply make friends with someone because their partner may become jealous. Often very good friendships are ruined when the friends become sexually involved. By deciding to wait until marriage, all of your friends can remain as friends because you have drawn a clear line between your friends and your eventual spouse.

You can trust yourself and your future spouse.

By developing self-control before you are married, you can trust yourself to be faithful after marriage. If you cannot wait until you are married, the guilt and mistrust within yourself can easily destroy your marriage. If you know your spouse had no ability or desire to control his or her sexual behavior before marriage, how can you completely trust your spouse after marriage?

You can keep your marriage fresh and alive.

The intensity of first love is tremendous—it fills every cell of your body. You walk into your first love full of hope and expectation. You feel as if it must last forever. If you break up, then heartbreak is inevitable, and somehow the second love is never as intense as the first. But if that first-love feeling is cemented by total commitment in marriage, your marriage will be much more fresh and alive than if you enter it with walls fortified from past hurts. You are more likely to realize your dreams of marriage if you enter it as fresh and alive as your dreams.

You won't be compared to past lovers.

It's not easy to forget the experience of previous love affairs, even if you are married. Here is one young man's sad testimony: "Before I was married, I had many girlfriends. Sometimes when I'm making love, I can't help remembering their faces and bodies. It can be so bad, I don't know whom I'm sleeping with anymore."



If both you and your spouse come into the marriage chaste, you will never suffer from comparing your spouse to anyone or being compared to anyone. There is nothing more demeaning to self-esteem than to be told that you aren't as good as someone else, especially in this most intimate aspect of life. Without someone to be compared to, you can accept each other in a more innocent, unblemished way.

You will be able to respect your spouse with a sincere love.

True love means that we live for the sake of the other. In marriage the husband thinks of what is best for his wife and the wife thinks of what is best for her husband. They live to bring joy to one another. Your ability to control your sexuality for the sake of your spouse shows respect and love. He or she is cherished above all else.

Individual Exercise



"The Baby"

For four days keep near you at all times a two-kilogram bag of flour (or sugar, salt, etc.). Never put it down. This is your "baby." The only time you can put the bag down is when you go to sleep at night. You should set your alarm clock for some time during the night and rise to "check on the bag." This exercise will give you some idea of what it is like to have a baby. When you have finished, write a reflection on your experience.



For Your Journal



- How clear are your plans for the next ten years? Take a moment and think about what you want to have accomplished by then. Start by writing down how old you will be. What are your goals in terms of schooling and career? Are you thinking of traveling? If you become involved in an immature sexual relationship, how could it influence the fulfillment of your plans?
- What short-term plans can you make now in order to avoid a situation by which you might damage your future?
- Which reasons for saving sex until marriage seem strongest or most convincing to you? If no reasons seem convincing, explain why.



To read

"Judy's Story", from *The Art of Loving Well*