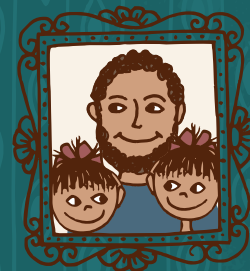
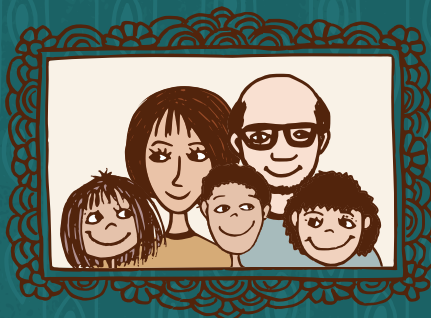
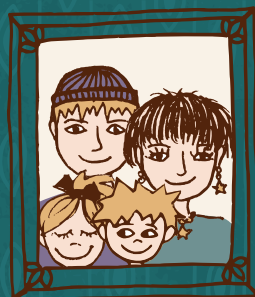
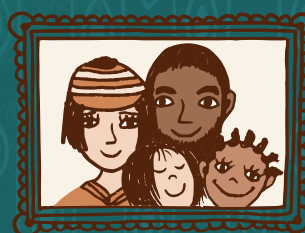
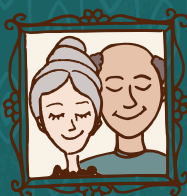
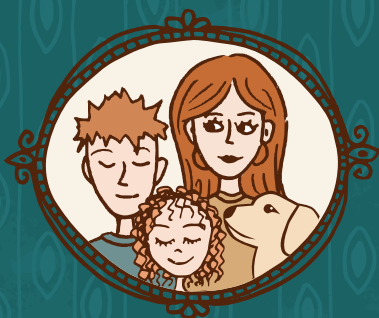


2018



# harvestusa

CARING FOR SEXUALLY-HURTING PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME



## Giving Parents and Families a Voice on Sexuality



CARING FOR SEXUALLY-HURTING PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME

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HARVEST USA brings the truth and mercy of Jesus Christ by:

- Helping individuals and families affected by sexual struggles
- Providing resources that address biblical sexuality to individuals and churches

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# From the President

## Helping Parents Speak

Perhaps you've encountered a delightful little musical by Meredith Wilson called *The Music Man*. One of its most well-known songs is "Ya Got Trouble," in which a character named Harold Hill tries to convince the people of River City, Iowa that the presence of a pool table in their city will lead to the eventual moral degradation of their young men. The answer? Distract the young men by getting them involved in a marching band.

The marching band idea turns out to be a scam, and Harold Hill is exposed as a con man. Distraction wasn't the answer to preserving the morals of the younger generation.

Scripture tells us the problem of corrupt morality is even worse than the faulty fix of a marching band in the play. God doesn't tell us that we do sinful things just because we have time on our hands. Our morals don't degrade because there's a new pool table in town or some other new distraction. Scripture tells us, rather, that the seed of sin is within all people, young and old. That seed of sin is the human heart, corrupted by the Fall. As the prophet Jeremiah describes it, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick..." (Jeremiah 17:9). That heart, with its corrupted desires, leads us not only to do bad things, but it makes us evil to the core.

In one sense, Harold Hill was on the mark: given their lack of maturity and wisdom, young people are particularly susceptible to the empty promises and pleasures of sin. As we mature in faith and in our union with Christ, we learn (over time) to turn from sin and turn toward God (Titus 2:11-14). Children, teens, and even some young adults haven't yet endured that spiritual training to its full effect.

This issue of *harvestusa magazine* should be of particular interest to parents, grandparents, and adults involved in their church's youth ministry. The culture is speaking volumes to our children about sex, sexuality, and gender, and parents,

in particular, need to bring their voices into the mix, voices that speak and reflect how God wants his people to think and live regarding these matters.

Our staff and guest authors write about how to speak into these issues with their children, helping them navigate not only the cultural battles of sexual temptation but the deceptiveness of their own hearts, as well. We examine how parents can overcome their fear in talking about sex and sexuality, explain sexual identity formation, respond to unbiblical cultural issues accurately and with grace, and warn of the dangers of pornography and how to protect them from it.

If you are someone who loves, cares for, and spiritually shepherds young saints, you'll find this content of particular value. And if you are someone who cares for a young person struggling with a particular pattern of sexual sin, you'll find helpful strategies to work toward the twofold goal of lasting behavioral change, which is always wed to heart change.

As you dive into this issue, remember the solemn and faithful promise Paul commended to his audience: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God is the only One who can change corrupted hearts. And he is faithful to do it. To him be the glory!

In Christ,



Tim Geiger  
President, HARVEST USA  
tim@harvestusa.org



# YOUR CHILD SAYS “I’m Gay”

By Tim Geiger





## "I think I'm gay."

If you are a mother or father, you know the shock of such an admission. Or maybe you are a parent who suspects your son or daughter might have same-sex attraction. Maybe you have discovered gay pornography on your child's computer or smartphone. How do you respond?

### No Easy Answers

Your first instinct may be to find refuge in denial or anger. You may want to run from the situation, or you may find yourself angry. Obviously, this is not what you expected in your life. You brought your child up in the church. He went to youth group and showed signs of spiritual growth. And now this. Who has wounded you the most, your child or God?

There are no easy answers to the "bombshells" that explode unexpectedly in your life. But the first thing to do in the midst of your confusion is grab onto an anchor, and that anchor is God, the One who promises that his love endures forever during every change. No matter how you may feel about him right now, go to him and pour out your troubles to him. Remember what he says to us when we encounter deep waters: "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, NIV). Keep going to God and asking for the help you need. Make that your morning and evening prayer and your prayer anytime during the day when you feel overcome by confusion, grief, and fear.

With the knowledge that God is with you in this, even though you might be in turmoil, how do you respond to your child's announcement? There are a few key things to keep in mind as you try to help get through the difficult initial days or weeks after hearing this news.

### You Don't Need to Know All the Answers

Don't feel as though you need to have all the answers right now, or even know all the questions to ask. It's okay to tell your child after his or her initial disclosure, "This is a lot to think about and take in. I need some time to think over what you've said. I'd like to sit down with you to talk about this in more depth later after I've had some time to process and reflect."

It's certainly okay to feel upset and rattled inside, but now is a crucial time to watch your words. You can say that the news is upsetting; you don't need to stoically put on a good face and pretend that you are above feeling deeply impacted

by this news. But simply letting loose your pain, fear, and anger will only complicate and compromise your ability to help your child. Proverbs 10:19 says, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." Pray earnestly for the grace to choose your words wisely.

If the initial conversation has already taken place and you were not able to reign in your emotions, don't despair! You now have the opportunity to model humility and repentance to your child. Remember the Lord's mercy and grace towards you, go to her, and ask forgiveness.

Between the disclosure and the next time you talk with your child, prayerfully consider what questions you might ask. Ask your spouse, a trusted friend, or a pastor to help you think through some questions to ask and write them down.

Use this time to process your emotions before God. He was not surprised by your child's news, and he can help you find peace and hope while you struggle to make sense of things. Your child was in charge of the initial disclosure, and he has probably been thinking about what he would say for many weeks, months, or even years. So you don't have to quickly respond. Don't be rushed. Go at your own speed.

But make sure you are the one to make the effort and time to get back to your child. You might be tempted to let this painful issue slide for a while. It will be hard to face this and to start a dialogue about it with your child, but you must. Even though the news your child gave

you was perhaps the last thing you wanted to hear, she honored you and her relationship with you by telling you the truth. Reciprocate and give back to her the gift of honesty about yourself and where you are.

### Acknowledge the Courage

Most likely your child has been struggling in silence for a long time. The odds are good they didn't want to be silent, but they were probably afraid to tell you, not knowing how you would respond or how it would impact you. So even if this news is devastating to you, acknowledge to your child how hard it must have been to both keep it secret and to finally get it out in the open. At least by acknowledging the truth, you can compassionately come alongside your child in this journey and relate to one another authentically.

### Affirm Your Love

No matter what your son or daughter says, feels, or does, he or she is still your child. Express your love for her. Promise her

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that there's nothing that would ever cause you to withhold that love. This may be difficult to do, but the most important way parents can minister to their child who has adopted a gay identity is to keep the lines of communication open and the relationship going. Maintaining contact with your child and continuing to love her is the best way to witness to her the Lord's unfailing and faithful love in her life.

### **Begin the Dialogue**

By adopting a grace-filled and compassionate response toward your child after the disclosure, the door is open to enter into his life and struggle redemptively. By not going on the offensive or immediately lecturing your child on why what they are doing is wrong, you will help to defuse his normal defensiveness. Your child likely knows your position, and he expects that to be your first go-to. But now is the time for discussion and dialogue. Continuing to build your relationship is the foundation that may eventually allow your child to hear what at this time he will not or cannot hear.

Use this time to ask good follow-up questions about his life. What is going on in the bigger picture of his life, and what are his hopes for the future in light of his disclosure? There is a lot of "background" information to learn about your child. After all, there was a lot hidden before this, and you want to help him move toward being increasingly open and honest with you.

It's also important to ask your child what he means by saying he is gay. Don't take for granted that your child's understanding of the terms he uses to describe himself is the same as yours. Ask your child how he came to this conclusion, how long has he been thinking about it, how certain he feels it is true, and why.

You may find that your child isn't so much making a statement about his identity as giving his assessment of a situation in which he perceives himself as helpless. He might really be saying, "I've been struggling with these feelings for years, and the only reasonable conclusion I can draw is that I must be gay." Our world says that if you feel attraction to your gender, then you're gay. There's no further discussion. This

can be premature, especially if your child is in his or her teen years, which is when one's sexuality is still being formed and there is often confusion about identity. You don't want to be in denial if your child is experiencing same-sex attraction, but you also don't want to proceed thinking you both mean the same thing.

Ask whether your child has fully embraced this new identity or whether he is open to exploring other options. If he is willing to discuss this, here are some suggestions for several conversations that can be helpful over time.

### **The Role of Faith**

If he professes to be a Christian or is willing to listen to God's perspective, talk about the role of Christian faith. The Christian faith is more than just throwing Bible verses at different situations in life. It's about a relationship with Jesus Christ, and in that relationship God works deeply and patiently over time. How do you begin to talk about faith without coming across as judgmental? One way is to share with your child that the fundamental Christian perspective on the world is that it is broken and fallen, and that what "is" is not the way things should be. As we try to make sense of life and all its struggles, our hearts naturally make something other than God central. This is the essence of sin: looking to and embracing something, rather than turning to God and clinging to him for meaning and purpose in life. Faith is a daily fight to know, trust, and love our God.

### **The Role of Feelings, Desires, and Hopes**

This might also be a good time for you to talk about the role of feelings, desires, and hopes in your own life, and how trusting Jesus brings his help into your life, though he often doesn't take away our desires and feelings; he oftentimes leaves them to draw us to himself. Give illustrations from your own life of how, by faith, you keep following Jesus when you are confused, struggling, or even angry at God. There are many hopes and dreams in life that are not going to be realized both for a same-sex attracted individual and for all of us. For those with same-sex attraction who choose to follow Jesus, they may find themselves in turmoil like Peter in Mark 10:28-30, who wondered if it really was worth it to follow Jesus and leave many good things behind in life.

But to follow Jesus means not only the loss of those things that our hearts may want, it also means that Jesus will give us untold numbers of blessings in this life and in the one to come. This is a truth that anyone experiencing same-sex attraction needs to hear and believe because our culture asserts that failure to embrace a gay identity and life is not only false but tragic.

## Discovering Together

If she is willing to examine this issue with you, study and read together. Ask your child to read and discuss with you materials that explain her position, so you can better understand it and how to talk with her about it. Then, find some well-written materials you can explore together that present a biblical and compassionate perspective on homosexuality and the gospel. But keep this in mind: after some conversations, your child may not want to talk about this issue any longer. You must respect this. If every time you are with your child the topic centers on this, it will likely push him away from you. At some point, it will be important for you to ask for permission to talk about this issue again, while assuring him that every conversation won't revolve around this issue.

## You Cannot Change Your Child

You cannot change your child. No matter how badly you might want to see change, no matter how much you pray, no matter how convincing your argument, you won't be able to convince your child to change. Your child's issue ultimately isn't with you; it's with God.

Only a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ will lead to the **heart change** that is needed. God wants to do business with your child's heart. Your child has adopted a gay identity because, at some level, he has believed lies about God, himself, and others.

Remind yourself that, while you can work toward being an agent of change in your child's life, you can't expect that you will be able to convince your child to change or make him change. It's only the Lord who does the changing in our lives. Such change is likely to come about over time, within the context of Christian community—through your relationship with your son or daughter and through his or her relationship with other mature, compassionate Christians who are willing to walk with those who struggle with same-sex attraction and not abandon them through this journey.

## Your Child Doesn't Need to Become Straight

Your child's deepest need is not to become straight. Your child's deepest need is the same as every person in this world—a life of faith and repentance in Christ. Having heterosexual sex will not solve your child's problem. There is more to this issue than sexuality. The ethical opposite of homosexuality is not "becoming straight." Godly sexuality is about holiness. It is about living out one's sexuality by

increasingly being willing to conform and live within God's design for sex.

Godly sexuality also includes being single and celibate, refusing to be controlled by one's sexual desires because one chooses to follow a higher value in one's life—to follow God even when it's not easy or popular. Rich relationships and friendships are possible and achievable for singles.

Being celibate today is not an easy road. If your son or daughter chooses to follow God's design for sexuality by remaining celibate, they will need to find people who will support that decision and help them live a godly life. But celibacy may not be the only path that is open before them. There are some men and women who, in turning away from a gay-identified life have found a fulfilling marriage relationship with the opposite sex. Over time, many have found a lessening of same-sex desires and some have even found growth in heterosexual desires (often not in a general sense, but toward a specific person with whom they have grown to love).

It is important to bring multiple stories of transformation and change to the discussion. You do not know what the Lord has in store for your child's future. Marriage may be out of the question—for now and possibly for the future. Waiting upon the Lord and seeking his will and wisdom is what is needed, and that will be the faith journey your child will have to walk.

Finally, throughout all of this, pray. Pray for wisdom. Pray for faith. Pray for strength to reflect the love of God through Jesus Christ to your child. Keep the lines of communication open, and make sure your child knows that he can always come to you. The Lord has sovereignly placed you in this situation with a son or daughter who is struggling with unbelief and sin in particular ways. Rest assured that he is at work in all things — especially the hard things — for the good of those who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). He hasn't forgotten you.

This is a reworked excerpt for this magazine issue from *Your Child Says "I'm Gay"*, a HARVEST USA minibook published by New Growth Press. **Tim Geiger** is the President of HARVEST USA and came to HARVEST USA more than 20 years ago for help with his struggle with same-sex attraction. Tim is a Teaching Elder in the PCA and is husband to Susan. They have one child. To reach Tim with questions or comments about his article, email him at [tim@harvestusa.org](mailto:tim@harvestusa.org)



# NECESSARY

## Conversations About Sexuality and Gender

By Brad Hambrick



My boys attend a local public school in North Carolina where legislation around transgenderism and public restrooms was a national issue in 2016. Their school ran a CNN Kids news program on the debate.<sup>i</sup> They came home and said with confusion, “Did you know sometimes girls want to come in the boy’s bathroom?” I asked how that came up, and they mentioned the news story. I did a web search for the video transcript.<sup>ii</sup>

This incident led me to think about how to have these kind of conversations with our kids. I came up with five principles and four key objectives.

**Principle One:** Don’t over-react to a conversation prompt; your initial response to a conversation prompt signals to your child whether the conversation is safe or alarming.

**Principle Two:** Do research and get what information you can about the subject before engaging the larger discussion; it is better if your child doesn’t feel like an “informant.”

Here are a few preliminary thoughts I had going into the subsequent conversation.

**Principle Three:** When we speak to our children we need to discuss the things that help our children navigate their current social world.

My boys were 9 and 11 years old; 3rd and 5th grade. I wanted to keep in mind their social and cognitive development as we talked. This was not our first conversation about sex and sexuality.<sup>iii</sup> If, as parents, we only talk about the subject of sex and ethics reactively, it will distort the message our children hear. Jesus will come across as a defensive guy. The duration of the conversation was about 20 minutes over dinner, a time when we often talk about things that happened at school.

**Principle Four:** Listen. The most important thing we offer in awkward conversations is comfortable, open-ended questions and silence.

With those things being said, there were four key objectives I had going into the conversation with my boys. I will share the fifth principle at the end.

## 1. I wanted to know what they think as much as teach them what I think.

The most important part of this conversation is what I learned from them, not what they learned from me. That’s not to downplay my influence as a parent, but the most important information transferred was my awareness of how my boys were processing the information they received.

The biggest long-term impact I will have on my boys is shaping *how* they think as much as *what* they think. Conversations like these are times when I get a litmus test for how they respond to awkward-controversial subjects, how

## Don’t over-react to a conversation prompt; your initial response to a conversation prompt signals to your child whether the conversation is safe or alarming.

perceptive they are about moral dilemmas, the degree of impact authority figures (like teachers) have on them, and what kind of logic they use to support their beliefs.

## 2. I wanted them to be BOTH biblically informed AND personally compassionate.

I wanted my boys to be both thoroughly versed in God’s original design and increasingly equipped to care for others in a broken world. My boys love biology, so we talked about how gender is ingrained in every cell of our body as either an XX (female) or XY (male) chromosome. They love to ask, “Whose nose do I have? Whose eyes do I have?” Tying the conversation to something they were familiar with and enjoy was an important way of making it less awkward.

We talked about gender being part of God’s design (Genesis 1:27) and that God’s design was good. I wanted them to know they should enjoy being boys and strive to grow into mature men who care for and lead their families well. I also wanted to communicate that it’s okay if they think girls have cooties right now [attempt at humor], but they should always respect women and treat them with honor.

We talked about how, because of the Fall (Genesis 3), we live in a broken world where many things don’t work the way they’re supposed to and everything falls apart. One result of this is that some people don’t feel comfortable in their own bodies; some people feel fat even when they’re very skinny, some people feel scared when there is no threat, and some people feel like they should be a boy when their body is a girl or vice versa.

I tried to make clear that it is important not to profile those who experience gender dysphoria as sexual predators.<sup>iv</sup> We talked about how it’s not the person who is confused about their gender that would take advantage of this law. Instead, the concern is that people who want to abuse children would take advantage of these laws.

We emphasized that we should never make fun of someone who is suffering. We should never call people names that make them feel embarrassed or ashamed. Whenever we hear people doing these kinds of things to others, we step in and help the person who is being picked on. This was the primary application of what it meant to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-40) well in their current social context.

We don't have to agree with someone or understand their experience to love them. We believe that everyone is made in the image of God and deserves our honor and respect. *If they're hurting*, we try to represent God's compassion. *If they're sinning*, we let them know of God's forgiveness through the gospel. *If we're not sure*, we listen and ask questions.

### 3. I wanted them to learn how to honor authorities with whom they disagree.

I want my boys to be well-versed in the art of disagreement — the ability to be skeptical or disagree while showing honor to the person with whom they disagree. I affirmed how they handled themselves in the classroom, listening respectfully and bringing their questions to my wife and me. Even when they were uncertain, they made wise choices about how to respond.

We talked about how there was a great deal of debate on this topic in our country, so that is why this was a topic discussed at school. We talked about the good values of those that want open bathrooms are standing for, that no one should be discriminated against for things they did not choose.

We talked about how one of the challenges of government is balancing personal freedom (i.e., choice of restroom) with the collective good (i.e., privacy and safety in public restrooms). I was surprised how much they were interested in and followed this point.

The main point here was that just because someone has a different view from us, it doesn't mean they're bad. It also doesn't mean we're bad if we disagree with them. It is important to know what you believe and why. It is important to be able to articulate and defend what you believe. It is equally important to listen well to those with whom you disagree and honor their leadership when God has placed them in that role.

### 4. I wanted them to be sympathetic to the reality that even good legislation can have unintended consequences.

Our conversation may have had as much to do with politics as sexuality. It is easy for kids (and adults) to begin to think that good rules would make a good world, that the problem with the world is that we just haven't figured out what the best rules should be. We talked about how often laws have unintended consequences.

We talked about why we don't need better rules as much as we need a Redeemer. Jesus wasn't just a teacher (although he was the best teacher). Jesus came as our Savior. He knew we needed a new heart, not just better thoughts.

At the end of the conversation, when my boys asked me, "So, what should be done about the bathroom thing?" my best answer was, "I don't know. I know that God's design of men and women is good. I know there is a lot of pain and brokenness in our world. I know I want to love well anyone God gives me the chance to befriend and that it's not mean to think about safety in private places like restrooms. But when it comes to this law and its possible unintended consequences, I'm not sure."

**Principle Five:** Our children need to hear us say that sometimes the best answer is "I don't know" because they need to have the freedom and courage to say "I don't know" when they're uncertain. It also makes the things we are sure about seem more solid, if we are willing to admit our uncertainty on things that are less clear.

This was the gist of our conversation and the intentions for the various points of emphasis. I hope it's helpful for other families as you consider how to have similar conversations.

**Brad Hambrick** serves as the Pastor of Counseling at The Summit Church in Durham, NC. He also serves as Instructor of Biblical Counseling at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, a council member of the Biblical Counseling Coalition, and has authored several books including *Do Ask, Do Tell, Let's Talk: Why and How Christians Should Have Gay Friends and God's Attributes: Rest for Life's Struggles*.

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<sup>i</sup> May 10, 2016 edition: <https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/09/studentnews/sn-content-tues/index.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/160510/sn.01.html>

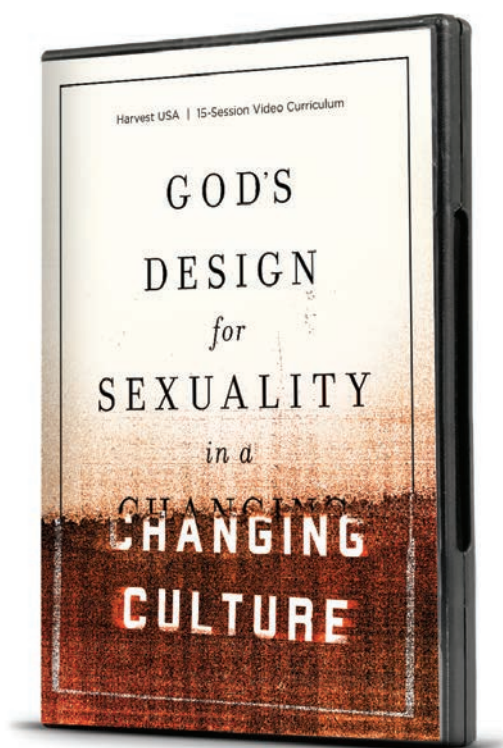
<sup>iii</sup> For more on the initial conversation about sex, see my post <http://bradhambrick.com/mantrip6/>. You will find more application of principle three in this article.

<sup>iv</sup> More on this clarification can be found at <http://bradhambrick.com/conservative-christians-and-debates-over-public-restrooms/>.





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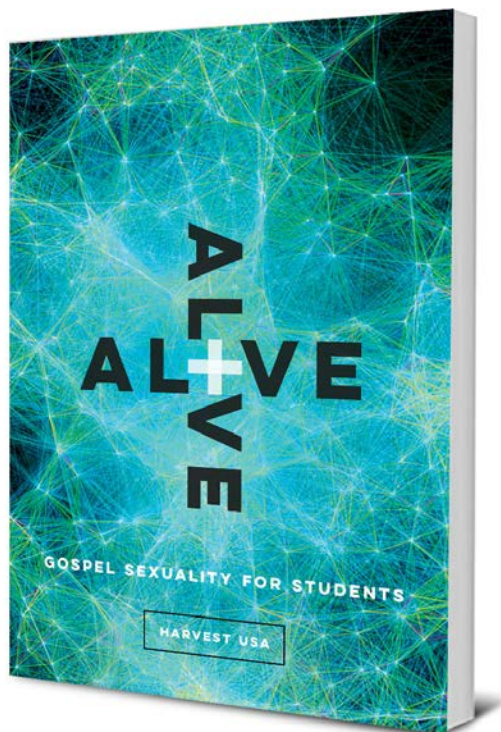


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Pick Your  
PAIN:  
Facing Your  
FEARS  
About the  
Talk

By Mary Flo Ridley



Parenting is one of life's greatest joys—and greatest challenges! One of the more daunting challenges that parents face is, "How am I going to talk to my children about sex? Where do I start? What do I say? What age is the best? Do I really have to do this?"

But for most parents getting started is the hardest part of talking to their children about sex. Why is that? FEAR. Fear of where these conversations will go, fear of the inability to answer their questions or fear of doing it poorly. I get that! I had to face my own fears, as well as the fear of the unknown because my parents had never approached this subject with me.

If you are a parent paralyzed by fear, not wanting to talk to your children about sex, let me have your attention for just a moment. Let me give you four ways of thinking about this intimidating subject so that you can, with God's help, overcome your fears and do what God calls us to do as parents: raise our children in the Lord so that they might follow his ways when they become adults and spouses.

**Remember, too, that this isn't about you  
and your comfort level or your past,  
it's about them and their future.  
You are not just shaping your child's  
sexual values, you are casting a vision  
for someone's future husband or wife.**

**One, let me ask you to consider the phrase, "Pick Your Pain".** All of us understand that these conversations are uncomfortable for most parents, but that pain pales in comparison with the pains that can come from a family where these conversations never happen. Children are then left to other outside influences, and these days that can be quite perilous. If your fear feels overwhelming, let me urge you not to sit with that pain alone. Ask friends and other parents for help and prayer. Look for resources like the material I have developed.

**Two, start the conversations early.** I have developed a different strategy that I have been teaching parents for years. I encourage parents to start at a much earlier age with much more simple conversations, not just one talk. When this happens, parents are given the power of the first impression, better equipped to be the loving authority on this subject for their children.

Parents can overcome their fears once they know how simple some of these conversations can be. Just as the

beauty of the Genesis story begins with God, so does this story. The beauty of God's design is a great place to begin, making simple observations to our children about seeds and eggs, simple yet factual explanations of birth and conception. In fact, in our family Dave and I usually started every answer to their curious questions with the phrase, "By God's Design". And that got us started in the right direction.

Traditionally, parents wait for the pre-teen years to have THE TALK...but that is a completely outdated idea. When you think about it, having the most awkward conversation at the most awkward age is pretty much a recipe for disaster, so I understand the fears that surround that idea.

However, now some of you may fear that you have waited too long and now it's too late. Fear not...it's never too late. We suggest you get started right away, however, and begin with an explanation that this subject is now on the table. Yes, it will be tougher to do so if they are older, but use this opportunity to model repentance: ask for their forgiveness, and then follow through with the conversations that need to happen next, based on their ages and knowledge of what they already know. Remember, "Pick your Pain" and embrace your role as their parent.

What many parents have found successful is to begin a series of after-dinner walks. Talking about sex is best-done shoulder-to-shoulder and not eyeball-to-eyeball. Limiting your time is helpful, and taking a walk minimizes interruptions. Invite questions, and give plenty of grace. Don't be afraid of the silent moments either. Don't be afraid to say, "I'll have to think about that and get back to you."

**Three, think like a sponge.** In my teaching to parents, I encourage them to think about a sponge being in the mind of their children. Let's label that sponge "Curiosity about sexual things". Children are born with this curiosity. "Where do babies come from? Daddy, how is that baby getting out of mommy? Why do people kiss?"

We believe it's best for parents to fill that sponge with the ideas about their sexuality because otherwise their children will absorb whatever they may pick up on the playground or the next click on the computer. I don't say this to frighten parents but to open them up to the great opportunity that is before them. Before the hormones kick in, before the culture has its turn, you can have the power of the first impression.

You have the chance to fill the sponge, drop by drop, sprinkling small bits of information in everyday life! Let them absorb the facts and hear your values. Ask some curious questions yourself, "Why do you think God wanted two of every kind of animal on the ark?" If your child is older, raise a current topic about sexuality and ask "Why do you think



Before the hormones kick in,  
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of the first impression.

people your age believe that?" Let them absorb the facts, engage in a conversation, and hear your values.

Who has the power to influence your children? According to research, that answer depends on the age of your child. From ages 0-7 parents have the strongest influence, from 7-11 teachers and coaches, and from 11-16 their peers. This makes sense because as their world widens, they are met with forces outside of the home that have new and different ideas that sometimes reinforce what was taught at home and sometimes challenge them.

Topics that are left OUT of conversation at home are left UP to others. Where there is a void of influence at home, it will be taken up by the culture at large.

**Four, look to the future.** Remember, too, that this isn't about you and your comfort level or your past, it's about them and their future. You are not just shaping your child's sexual values, you are casting a vision for someone's future husband or wife. How exactly did God intend for us to understand sex? What words can we use to shape that vision correctly? How can we help our children to think biblically about sex?

Giving some thought to the answers to these questions can put us on the path to parenting our children purposefully on the subject of sex. No one does it perfectly – absolutely no one. So put the idea of perfection out of your mind. Instead of being paralyzed by fear, lean in to conversing with your kids as purposefully and as simply as possible.

**Mary Flo Ridley** is the Founder and President of **The Birds & The Bees**, an online resource to equip parents of young children to start the conversation about sex. Mary Flo & her husband Dave have 3 married children and 8 grandchildren. They live in Dallas and are active members of Park Cities Presbyterian Church. You can find these resources at [www.birds-bees.com](http://www.birds-bees.com) and follow on Instagram @birds\_bees / FaceBook @ The Birds and The Bees.



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# What to Say AND When to Say It

Pornography, gender confusion/dysphoria, same-sex attraction, masturbation, peer pressure, the casual hookup culture, the “sex talk”... these are hard topics! Like every parent that’s ever lived, we nervously wonder about sexual conversations: *“What should I talk about with my kids?”* and *“When should I talk to them?”*

The following is based on HARVEST USA’s seminar, *Raising Sexually Faithful Kids*



## Young Children (Ages 2-7)

### The Grammar Stage: Introducing

- Teach the parts of the body and their function
- Teach safety and appropriate privacy about touching
- Affirm your child’s gender: God created us male and female
- Be wise about technology usage and access
- Begin conversations on sex and sexuality (like answering questions “Where do babies come from?” in age-appropriate ways: see Birds & Bees material for this age stage and the next stage, Older Children and Tweens)



## Older Children & Tweens (Ages 8-12)

### The Logic Stage: Teaching

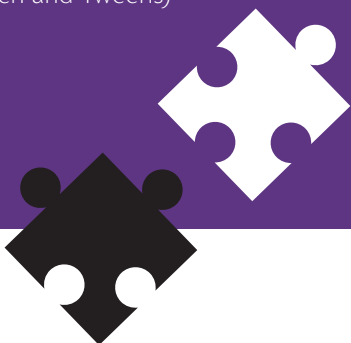
- Deepen conversations on sex and sexuality (specifics about body parts, mechanics, etc.)
- Shepherd into puberty: discussing body changes and the emergence of sexual desire
- Introduce the dangers of pornography
- Solidly implement safe technology usage
- Affirm marriage between a man and a woman
- Teach about sexual brokenness in all its forms
- Teach respect for all people while affirming biblical norms



## Teens (Ages 13-18)

### The Rhetoric Stage: Dialogue

- Increased focus on discussions about sexuality with same-gender parent (when possible)
- Increased openness about their current challenges and your sexual history (relating appropriately as they grow older toward adulthood)
- Engage discussions on culture and Scripture
- Find out what they really believe
- Encourage them to follow Christ and Scripture
- Assist them when they stumble and fall, and encourage openness with others in the Body for help
- Show the need for daily dependence on Christ for sexual integrity



# 6 Dangers

to Teach  
Your Kids  
About

# PORN

By Nicholas Black






Pornography is everywhere on the internet. Everywhere. Type just about any word in a search engine and the chances are good you'll strike something sexual. The links to pornographic posts, images, and videos are embedded in this medium.

The impact this has on your kids is devastating. Two forces are at work to make avoiding pornography next to impossible.

First, its accessibility. Because of technology, we are awash in 24/7 anonymous and accessible pornography. We've gone from the public realm of convenience stores and adult bookstores, to the anonymity of computers, to the instant accessibility of mobile devices. We now carry around the entire contents of an adult bookstore in our pocket.



Second, we live in a culture of hyper-sexuality. It's the air we breathe. We are increasingly deadening our sensitivity to the biblical boundaries that actually protect what is good about sex. Many people (including Christians!) say, "There's just nothing we can do about it," or even, "What's the big deal?"

Here's the big deal: Porn is a worldview, and like any worldview, it becomes a set of "lenses" through which we look at the world, interpret what we see, and then live it out. Porn teaches a destructive message about sex, human relationships, and what life is all about.

Christians have long been in the forefront of sounding the alarm about the effects of pornography on children, marriages, and relationships. But now even those outside the church are seeing what is happening and are reacting with concern.

The June issue of *Philadelphia Magazine* featured an article on Al Vernacchio, a sex education teacher in the Philly suburbs, who teaches a popular high school class about "porn literacy." Here's how the article describes his class: "The emerging subject is exactly what

it sounds like: It's grounded in the understanding that kids (whether we like it or not) are watching porn, and that we need to provide them with the critical thinking necessary to understand its messages." Vernacchio clearly recognizes the reality of porn in the lives of students.<sup>i</sup>

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It is one of the  
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in all its forms.**

While Vernacchio isn't telling his students not to look at porn, he does talk with them about the harm it can do. "Is porn harming our culture? Yeah, I think it is...and we have to find ways to stop that harm."<sup>ii</sup>

As parents are the chief disciplers of their children, we have to start—and continue to have—age-appropriate discussions with them about how viewing pornography will harm them deeply and profoundly. But first, we need to keep the conversation centered on this point: Christians do not have a negative view of sex. The Bible is extremely positive about sex and sexuality when expressed within God's wise boundary lines. God created it for us, and God knows how it should best be used. Walls are for

protection, and God wants us to enjoy his gift of sex and sexuality. When sex is used properly, individual lives and a whole society flourishes.

But something so profoundly good is incredibly powerful. The Bible acknowledges the fact that sex can be dangerous. Dangerous when it is misused; dangerous when it is out of control in one's life. There are victims when sex is used wrongly.

Here are the six messages your kids need to hear about the dangers of porn.

### **ONE: Porn teaches a false view of sex and relationships.**

Porn turns real people into fantasy objects to be used for my needs. It objectifies and demeans. Whole people are deconstructed into body parts, commodities to be used and discarded. On to the next encounter!

Porn teaches that the sexual act is what most matters, not building a loving relationship with the *person*.

Porn teaches radical self-centeredness—the images or video caters to you, feeding the lie that people exist to serve your wants and desires. You begin to live more and more in a fantasy world—but the tragedy is the more you spend time online, the lonelier you become in real life. Porn becomes a substitute for real relationships.

Sex was designed for real relationships, but relationships take work, and the work of a good relationship takes years. Love is about giving, not getting. And sex is merely a part of it. While important in marriage, it is just one of many parts



You cannot immerse yourself in this stuff  
and not have it affect you in some broken way.



that work together to slowly shape a life and a relationship into something beautiful. Porn doesn't teach that.

## **TWO: Porn slowly drains vitality out of reality — and can lead to addictive behavior.**

Here's something that is universal: My life, your life, is never entirely what we hoped it would be. We live in a fallen world that dashes our dreams and gives us "thorns and thistles," bringing suffering and hardship into our lives.

Sex involves the release of powerful brain chemicals that trigger intense pleasure. In many ways, we are wired to seek pleasure, even when our minds say it might be harmful. That's what happens when people become addicted to substances, even though they know they're destroying them.

Engaging in porn, with its objective of sexual release and pleasure, triggers the same "reward/pleasure centers" of the brain. As porn use increases, the mind and heart keep looking for a greater "high." Like drugs, there are "diminishing returns." You need more and more to get from it what you did at the beginning. This leads to greater depravity.

Our children need to know that viewing porn can be just a step away from enslavement. At HARVEST USA, we see men and women who have lost years of their life to compulsive porn use, while losing spouses, friends, careers, and sometimes even faith. What the world proclaims as sexual freedom, the Bible knows as slavery.

## **THREE: Porn disconnects sex from love and respect and encourages aggression and abuse.**

A great deal of porn is filled with images of aggression and violence—especially toward women. I'm not saying that all porn does this. But it is terribly easy to find violent and demeaning images online.

Vernacchio's class is learning this. "While there's little definitive cause-and-effect research on adolescents and porn... studies have shown that kids are often first exposed to porn—some of it depicting violent or criminal behavior—in their early teens. And analysis has correlated pornography usage with sexual aggression..."<sup>iii</sup>

Vernacchio, when asked what he thinks kids learn from porn, goes on to say, "They learn that men are supposed to be sexually aggressive... They learn that women are objects. They learn that in the absence of consent, you

don't need a clear 'yes.' They learn that sex doesn't require communication."<sup>iv</sup>

Think about college campuses, where youth and sex and alcohol mix in dangerous combinations. Then think about the amount of pornography that's been consumed by college-age men in particular. Having grown up in an online world, they have been consumers of porn for more than a decade. You cannot immerse yourself in this stuff and not have it affect you in some broken way.

## **FOUR: Porn teaches a lifestyle of lies and deceit.**

Children will get this point because they've been doing it almost since they entered the world: hiding sinful behavior. The person looking at porn will cover his tracks. It may not be "active" lying, but over time you'll be living a double life. And making sure you keep that part of your life hidden takes work! You can never really relax and be yourself, because the secrecy of your behavior—and the isolation secrecy breeds—makes that impossible. Keeping a part of yourself hidden is tiring, deeply unsettling, and intensifies shame.

As a Christian, guilt and shame will dog your footsteps. And if you one day stop feeling guilty and shamed, then you are in a worse place—because you will have seared your conscience.

Ultimately, you'll be playing games with God. You will feel profoundly unsettled in your walk with God. You'll work hard to look good on the outside, all the while hiding what's on the inside.

Many in the world will argue for moderation in using porn (even for teens) so that honesty is not compromised, but we need to see porn

for what it is: poison. A destroyer of relationships, and the first relationship impacted is our relationship with God. The porn user who thinks it's "no big deal" needs to face what Jesus said about lust.<sup>v</sup>

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person.



## FIVE: Porn normalizes perversity and diminishes human dignity.

There is a general pattern of behavior for the porn user. The law of “diminishing returns” results in looking at edgier and more extreme images, thereby normalizing perversions. Perversity in pornography knows no bounds. Especially child pornography. Porn’s ugliest underbelly is its ability to push perversity to previously unimagined levels.



We have reached a point where we are no longer shocked by what we see. Paul’s encouragement to focus on “whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely...”<sup>vi</sup> is a crucial discipline to teach to our kids. Porn obliterates that, and it takes years to empty the mind of images after exposure.

## SIX: Porn makes you participate in abuse and global injustice.

Pornography is not a harmless, private activity. It is one of the major engines fueling the demand for sexual exploitation in all its forms.

Our children must know that many involved in the pornography industry come from abused and broken backgrounds. Not all of them. Sadly, pornography is seen by some participants as a more lucrative career than other forms of employment.

Yet, in the world of porn, from filming to production to posting and distribution, there are people who are being used and exploited, including the consumer. In the complex web of sexual distortions that pornography weaves among its viewers, the dignity of men and women made in the image of God is increasingly defaced. Viewing it, engaging in it, contributes to the entire system of broken sexuality throughout the world.

There *is* one more thing, however, beyond these six points that should undergird everything we say to our kids.

In talking about sex and the dangers of pornography, morality is not the main objective. We have to connect what we say to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul puts it perfectly in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him, who, for their sake, died and was raised.”

The motive for sexual faithfulness is rooted not simply in achieving good morality but in a vital, trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. To magnify him is the ultimate goal of our talking to our kids about sex, and seeing them grow up to follow him from the heart in this powerful area of life.

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i Claire Sasko, “Is Your Kid Porn-Literate?”, *Philadelphia Magazine*, June 2018, 40.

ii Ibid, 42.

iii Ibid, 40.

iv Ibid, 40.

v Matthew 5:27-28.

vi Philippians 4:8.





# AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION Parents Don't Have with Their Kids

By David White

The embarrassed cultural silence once surrounding masturbation has been replaced with loud, affirming voices. From an early 90s *Seinfeld* episode in which all the characters acknowledged their inability to refrain from this behavior to recent medical studies<sup>1</sup> affirming the potential health benefits, masturbation has gone mainstream with much acclaim.

In the Christian community, evangelicals have wrestled for years whether masturbation is a sin, with voices on both sides. The debate exists because it's a sexual behavior without a condemning "proof text." And although there isn't a specific passage forbidding solo-sex, if we have a robust understanding of God's design for sexuality and an awareness of what it means to be Jesus' disciples, it's clear that there's no room for masturbation in the life of a Christian.

Despite how outdated this position may be, parents must speak to their kids about masturbation. Most parents are confronted with a child's exploration of his/her genitals at a young age. Much could be said here, but how you respond is crucial! You must never shame your child. At very young ages, perhaps the best thing to do is distract and redirect. As they get older, share how God created our genitals for something special in marriage, opening the door to have positive discussions about God's design.

We must teach our children there is theological significance to our sexuality (read my article in the Spring 2017 issue of *harvestusa* magazine, "Just What is Godly Sex?", and my longer article on masturbation, "Solo Sex and the Christian", in the September 2018 issue of *Christian Research Journal*).

Two things are crucial to have at the forefront when talking about masturbation with your kids.

came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This is more than a proof text for the atonement; it is the culmination of Jesus' teaching on what it means to be his disciple.

As a solitary activity, masturbation is not rooted in relationship with another. There is no opportunity for deepening intimacy and knowing of another. Furthermore, far from selfless service, masturbation is a snapshot of selfishness. This behavior proclaims, "What matters most right now is that I experience the greatest pleasure possible." This is radically counter to the call of discipleship described above.

Parents must acknowledge the majority of teens are wrestling with masturbation. Are you willing to be vulnerable and discuss your own history with them? You can't read Proverbs 5-7 without an awareness that the father addressing his son understands the lure of temptation. Particularly, Chapter 7 depicts a scenario that would deeply entice any young man. The father clearly "gets it." Honesty with our children includes not shrinking back from the reality that sin is incredibly alluring, even to us. Although you will always be their parent, the teen years are the time to begin maturing the relationship, having side-by-side adult conversations, not speaking down to them as children.

This issue of masturbation is an invitation to a deeper level of discipleship with your teens, calling them to a fuller understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, pointing them to how he wants to meet them in the pain of their unsatisfied desires and empower them by his Spirit. Christ wants our children to learn the critical truth, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" because in our weakness "the power of Christ [rests] upon [us]" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). And it is a time when teens can learn that the Christian life and growth in holiness requires community. There is no

## The Bible always reserves sexual activity for marriage. It is designed to be inherently relational, a deep knowing of and intimacy between a husband and wife.

First, the Bible always reserves sexual activity for marriage. It is designed to be inherently relational, a deep knowing of and intimacy between a husband and wife. Second, the goal of sex is selfless service; it is a way of giving wholly to the other, providing pleasure and joy in the deepest act of mutual vulnerability. This latter point is particularly clear from 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, the only "how to" passage in the Bible prescribing sexual activity.

God designed sexuality to be like every other aspect of the Christian life: a turning away from selfish desires to honor God with my body and use it to serve others. Sex in Christian marriage should reflect the New Testament's ethic in general. Describing discipleship, Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man

significant sin struggle that God wants us to face with him alone. He placed us in the Body for a reason. This issue can help kids consider how they turn to false comforts to cope with the challenges of life (what the Bible calls idolatry) and how to increasingly bring their pain to God and others.

Some parents say masturbation isn't a big deal because it doesn't hurt anyone. Let me point out a very real danger that has only been around for the last couple of decades: Internet porn is a whole new beast, and masturbation is the goal of much pornography use. It is overwhelmingly likely today that your child will see online sexual images, some violent and degrading, and this can radically shape their hearts and attitudes about sex and relationships.

Masturbation, especially if it becomes a habitual behavior, is programming your child with a self-focused sexuality. If the Lord provides a spouse one day for your child, he or she will approach marriage to get personal “needs” met, not looking to selflessly serve another. An inner fantasy world, especially when amplified by pornography, relegates other image-bearers, loved by God, to objects for my personal consumption.

That highlights another problem. Many Christians justify masturbation because our culture elevates sexual desire to a physical “need.” But the hard truth is, no one has ever died for lack of sex. This is not to say that living with unsatisfied sexual desires is easy! Sex is a wonderful blessing, a good gift from God, but it is not a source of life. We need compassion for our children as they mature sexually and learn to live chastely.

Are Christians just too uptight about sex? Isn’t this repressive? Not at all. We believe God invented pleasure and gave us the capacity to enjoy it in all kinds of ways. But he also prescribed the ways certain pleasures should be expressed. All pleasures can entice our hearts to supplant the Giver to worship the gift instead.

Finally, most secular therapists agree that masturbation is a means of self-soothing and finding comfort. Here’s the problem: God declares himself to be the “God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He wants to meet us in our sadness, loneliness, and frustration. He promises to satisfy “you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psalm 103:5). There is a danger when we turn to things of this world to soothe the ache in our soul. Jonah 2:8 warns, “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them” (NIV). When we embrace the false and fleeting comforts of this world to satisfy the deep longings of our soul, we will not find lasting satisfaction or a balm for our yearnings.

**Let me point out a very real danger that has only been around for the last couple of decades: Internet porn is a whole new beast, and masturbation is the goal of much pornography use.**

Now, desiring comfort is not bad. But we must seek comfort in ways that can facilitate a deepening fellowship with God. A helpful gauge for whether or not your pursuit of comfort is drawing you closer to the Giver is the lens of Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Here’s a good question to ask your children: does whatever activity you are doing invite you to engage God and give thanks to him?

Wise parents will tread this road carefully; we don’t want to heap shame on our children for having sexual bodies and desires. It is important to affirm the inherent goodness of your children’s sexual desires as you call them to wise stewardship. Many young couples raised in Christian homes struggle when they transition to marriage: the repeated refrain of their childhood was “just wait,” but the focus on restraining the sin unwittingly sent a very negative message about sexuality. Tragically, now invited to experience this gift, some couples continue in a sense of guilt and shame.

As we call our kids to sexual obedience, the hope of the gospel must loom large overall. Their elder Brother who understands human frailty and temptation is also their Advocate interceding for them, having covered their failings with his own blood. We need to make clear that sexual perfection is impossible on this side of things. God’s love and mercy in Christ must be the most consistent message we proclaim to our children! If we are honest, masturbation is virtually universal at some life season. This fact should drive us to talk with our kids openly, frankly, with compassion, grace, and practical strategies to help.

**David White** is the Director of Discipleship at Harvest USA, and has worked with the ministry 18 years. He is a Teaching Elder in the PCA and is married to Jennifer. They have four children. To reach David with questions or comments about his article, email him at [david@harvestusa.org](mailto:david@harvestusa.org)

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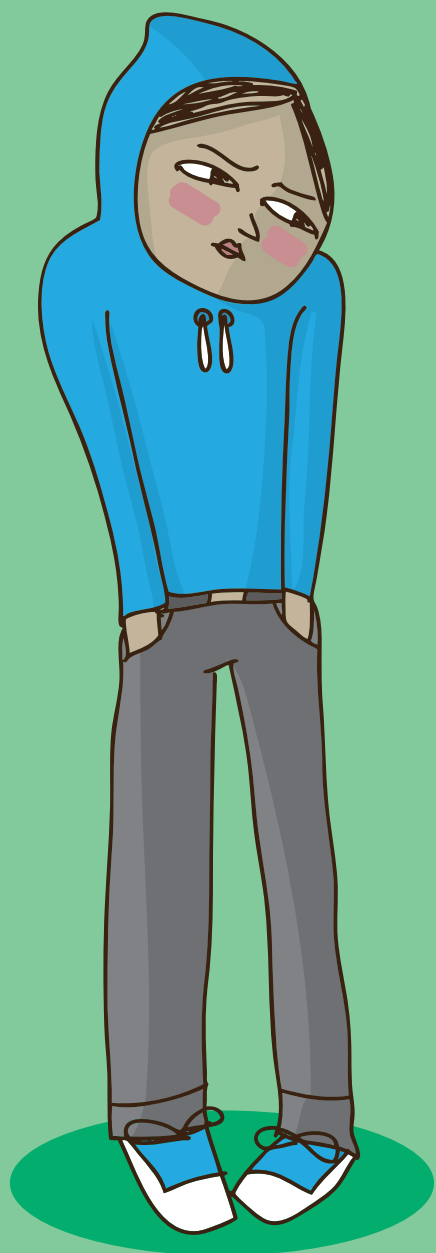
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i <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/behindtheheadlines/news/2017-07-06-frequent-ejaculation-may-decrease-prostate-cancer-risk/>



# A *Father's* STORY

## MY CHILD HOOKED ON PORN



It was halftime several years ago during the Super Bowl, and we were with extended family at our home. During the second quarter, my brother-in-law logged onto our family computer to catch up on business emails. When logging out, it's his custom to clear the history from the computer, so his company's passwords are not saved. In doing so, he brought up the recent history and found some websites that troubled him. He alerted my wife (his sister), and they both viewed several extremely graphic pornographic websites that had been saved in the computer's history. They discussed it for a few moments and decided to pull me away from the game to confront me about what they had found.

I am in my mid-40's and a father of four children. Based on the ages of our kids and the graphic nature of the websites, my brother-in-law and wife assumed the websites were connected to me. After we settled that it was not me, I proceeded to view the websites and knew we had a big problem. These sites were not just topless women or partially nude couples but included sites with extremely graphic sexual videos. Although I was shaken up by the content, I was determined to find out who in our family was drowning in this stuff. I don't really know why, but I suspected that it was my youngest: my 10-year old son.

During the rest of the game, I was in and out of the family-filled TV room, pacing, praying and thinking of words to say, words that would both confront and also leave the door open for honesty. Near the end of the game, families began to pack up and head out. It was a school night, and our family was starting to fade; my 10-year-old son poked his head into the office where we keep our computer and said, "Goodnight." I said the same back.

Before he hit the stairs, I got up and said to him, "Hey, have you been looking at anything you shouldn't be looking at on the computer?" He quickly and confidently replied: "Me? No, I haven't at all." I said, "OK, good." He then started upstairs, but I gently stopped him and asked him to come back down into the office. He did. I said to him, "I'm going to ask you one more time; think before you answer. Have you looked at anything you shouldn't have looked at on that [pointing to the desktop computer]."

He paused, looked away from me to the floor and said "Yes."

When I tell you I have never seen a look of shame and guilt so clearly, I am being totally honest. I did not feel anger or disappointment. I reached out and embraced my boy, whom I later learned had been sucked in by the power of pornography for a long time. I hugged him; he wept, I wept, and we rocked as we had done so often when he was an infant. During the next several hours he confessed his daily habit of viewing pornography at certain "safe" hours when our daily family pattern would allow him time on

A photograph of an elderly couple and a young girl. The man on the left is smiling, and the woman next to him is also smiling. In the foreground, a young girl with blonde hair is smiling. They are all wearing casual clothing.

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## Through his tears he described how bad he felt about himself and how powerless he felt in trying to stop.

the computer while others were out of sight. Other times were with friends at sleepovers, where they would use their smartphones or internet capable game consoles to surf pornography websites. Through his tears, he described how bad he felt about himself and how powerless he felt in trying to stop.

The hour was now 2 am. We were both beat, and we were still embracing. Instead of disappointment and anger, I felt relief and a deeper love for my son who was almost asleep in my arms. As I carried him to bed I thought about God's yearning to have us in the same place every night: after a day of messing up, if we only felt the "ease" to tell it all as it really is and then find the peace to collapse in his arms, that's exactly where God wants us. He does not want us living a lie, running up the stairs, brushing our teeth, burying our secrets and going it alone. Once I placed him in his bed, he fell asleep and subsequently woke several times during the next hour, calling out my name to discuss and confess some more. Eventually, he got everything off his chest and finally fell asleep.

## This was a wake-up call, but instead of being a start to an ugly, downward cycle, it has opened our family to a better way of dealing with the ever-present world of pornography and, more than that, the relentless, never-ending love that God has for each of us.

I did not sleep that night, nor did my wife. We talked. We cried. We prayed. We argued. The weight on us was heavy. The next day was long; I was desperate to help my son, and I felt incompetent to do it myself. I reached out to several close friends, one of which was John Freeman from HARVEST USA.

John and I are close friends. I told him everything. There were long pauses, as I could not speak through the tears. John was patient. When I was done, all I could do was ask him, would my son be all right. John didn't take the role of an expert but rather a deep and close friend. He did not at this time encourage me to seek outside help, as he thought we had everything we needed within our family. He did not blithely point to Bible verses or books but instead reminded me of my close relationship with a God who loves me and would never turn His back on me.

John comforted me and gave me the courage to be a loving father to a hurting and scared son who was full of shame. He encouraged me to be a safe place for my son, someone to talk to and help interpret what he had seen and what he was feeling. He suggested that a remedy would not come instantly but would come over a long period of time as I grew into being a safe and loving place for my son to come and rest.

John's words, along with those of other men who know me well, helped me rise up to become the place where my son could find grace, forgiveness, and "ease," so he could move beyond the trap he found himself in.

Now that my son had felt the healing and cleansing power of confession and forgiveness, the days ahead became darker for me; they were filled with despair and discouragement in thinking about what my child had been exposed to for a long time. Conversations between my wife and I were nonstop about what to do now and how this could have happened. For one of the first times in our 24-year marriage, the conversations were starting to dramatically break down, and anger crept in. I did not know it at first, but I was slowly coming to terms with my guilt of removing our home internet filter years ago (because it was a nuisance). I started to admit to myself both that we had been lax in forming our daily schedule that allowed for consistent unsupervised time after school and our naïveté of allowing him full access to internet capable devices for his personal use at a very young age. I have been through dark seasons in my life, and I rank this as one of the most difficult.

The weight that was on our hearts lightened as time passed. In the weeks that followed the opportunities to speak to my son, my wife, and my girls about these topics and about God's unwavering love for us no matter what we do, think, feel or see, were many.

We now have a top rated content filter on our computer, are clear with our kids about the dangers of web-enabled devices, have set up "house rules" for our family and friends regarding those devices, and have kept this topic in the forefront of family discussion. This was a wake-up call, but instead of being a start to an ugly, downward cycle it has opened our family to a better way of dealing with the ever-present world of pornography and, more than that, the relentless, never-ending love that God has for each of us. Through this, I am reminded that there is nothing we can do that will cause God to withhold his love and affection for us. All he wants is for us to collapse in His arms, give him all of our troubles, shame, guilt, and secrets, and then to find rest in him.

This story was first printed in our Fall 2011 newsletter. The relevancy of the story remains as we continue to speak with parents whose children become hooked on pornography.



# Living as Spiritual Family

By Ellen Dykas



In the Body of Christ, we all need spiritual brothers and sisters, spiritual fathers and mothers, to help us follow Christ faithfully. In other words, we need a bigger, wider family than just the traditional nuclear family into which we were born or in which we now live.

But for those who struggle sexually, they especially need this wider family to come alongside them in the journey towards sexual redemption and integrity. For a variety of reasons, many of these individuals cannot look to their family for encouragement, accountability, and street-level discipleship regarding how to live as a Christian, much less how to live sexually-faithful lives!

The apostle Paul begins Colossians 3 teaching God's people that their new identity in Christ compels them to live set-apart lives, not as isolated individuals but together as brothers and sisters in the household of faith: "If then you [Plural!] have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

When I lived in Romania, immersed in culture and language learning, God opened my eyes to the beauty of spiritual family. The Romanian language has many ways of saying our simple English word "you", depending on the circumstance. What struck my individualistic, American heart was that *You (Plural)* was used many times in Bible passages which address the Christian life. When I began studying my Romanian Bible, passages that I had interpreted for years as *You (Singular)*, (or just to me) burst within me into a new understanding of life together as God's family.

Biological and nuclear families are indeed significant and a gift designed by God. However, Christians also believe that God establishes an eternal family only between those who are born spiritually through faith in Jesus Christ. He identifies

these people as his children, guiding us through his Word regarding life together as siblings in the household of faith.

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

John 1:12-13 (ESV)

Jesus responded this way when his "family of origin" requested his attention:

*"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 12:48-50 (ESV)

Desmond, one of our Men's Ministry staff, is a single man whose father died when he was a child. Experiences of sexual abuse introduced him to homosexual activity that confused, yet also intrigued his hurting heart. Though broken and disordered, these sex acts made him feel wanted. By the time he reached his teens, he was prostituting himself to men and spiraling into despair and darkness.

In the midst of deep pain and loneliness, Desmond sensed God calling him back, to turn again to his true life found only in Christ. He responded and began to walk forward slowly in faith and repentance. However, his past didn't just fade away. He needed help, and God provided men who loved and encouraged him as spiritual fathers by leading, exhorting, and admonishing him to walk in a manner worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:10-11). They spoke truth into his life, while living honestly before him. Desmond told me, "The authenticity of these men drove me to realize that no matter where we come from, God will use us; they became brothers



in Christ who loved and respected me rather than rejected and shamed me. The healing power of those relationships is hard to express.”

The brotherhood that Desmond experienced produced a redemptive trickle-down effect in his life. He didn’t want to hoard this spiritual blessing but wanted to share it with others who were hurting, alone and scared to reach out for help. Desmond has since invested his life ministering to others, including men who are ensnared in patterns of sexual sin. Many single and married men have benefited tremendously through Desmond being a spiritual brother and father.

*You (Plural)* is what the gospel is all about!

Leia is in her thirties and has been married for over 10 years. Her kids are under six years old and her biological family lives thousands of miles away. When her husband’s infidelity of many years came into the open, she was devastated, afraid, and wrestled with who to tell. Her parents wouldn’t understand; her guess was that they’d simply say “get out of the marriage”. Her husband demanded that she not go to the church leaders. She felt ashamed to open up to any women, as she had rarely ever heard sexual sin talked about by them.

Leia dug down deep into the Word and cried out to God for help. Eventually, she found out about HARVEST USA’s support group for wives and welcomed being in a circle of spiritual sisters in Christ who not only shared her pain but also helped her to see Jesus at work in her own heart. Then, when her husband was caught in adultery again, Leia’s group leader

urged her to bring their broken marriage situation into the light with a trusted pastor. She took this bold step of faith, even though it went against her husband’s wishes.

What was the result of Leia reaching out to a spiritual father? The Body of Christ got involved in this family’s life; the church lovingly confronted her husband and exhorted him to get serious about repentance. It’s been a long road, but Leia and her family are beginning to heal and move forward in part because the family of God entered in with care.

*You (Plural)*, life in community, is where repentance and freedom from sexual sin begins.

Sister, brother, what about you? You might not have a family of your own, or maybe you do! Regardless, there are boys and girls struggling sexually, men and women all around us who need the family of God to be the family of God. We must grow in a mindset of what Rosaria Butterfield teaches in her recent book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*. Her exhortation is that we

open up our homes and lives as pathways to love God and our neighbors with all our hearts.

God’s people, knit together through the deep and wide love of Jesus, will share eternity together. His love gives us confidence to reach out and enfold struggling brothers and sisters into the fellowship of the eternal, wide, beautiful family of believers in Jesus Christ.

**Ellen Dykas** is the Women’s Ministry Coordinator of HARVEST USA. To reach Ellen with questions or comments about her article, email her at [ellen@harvestusa.org](mailto:ellen@harvestusa.org)

**What struck  
my individualistic,  
American heart  
was that  
*You (Plural)*  
was used many times  
in Bible passages  
which address  
the Christian life.**

# 4 Key Strategies

## for Parenting Children in Using Technology

By Nicholas Black

With so much capturing our children's attention—from smartphones to video games to social media—there are serious dangers they face in a world where problematic technology exists at their fingertips. The best solution is to jump in and manage all the technology that is used by everyone in the family. But for many parents, the mere thought of doing that brings up fear: fear of technological inadequacy and fear of World War III battles for control with their kids.

Sadly, tragically, the typical response most parents take is to ignore the threat and deny that their kids could look at porn: "Not my kids!" But such denial is leaving our kids defenseless, ushering them into a future of hidden sexual struggles, eroding faith, and relational brokenness. It doesn't have to be this way.

Here are four key parenting strategies that, once started, can set your family on a path of not just sexual integrity, but honesty, transparency, and mutual dependency upon God and one another.

### 1: You need to talk about the good and the bad of technology.

Technology is not the villain here. But you need to think of it as a gateway: what are you going to allow through? What you allow through that gate will, if you open it enough, take up residence in the minds and hearts of your children.

You need to talk with them about both the upsides and the downsides of technology in a way that communicates respect for technology. You want them to understand what using technology can do for good, but also for evil. So you need to talk about the dark side of technology, about pornography and the worldview it teaches, and why you want to protect them from that. They need to understand that looking at pornography is much more than staring at naked bodies, it's allowing in a corrupt and deviant worldview of sex and relationships that will erode the goodness of sex in the way that God has designed, and even, for some, entrap them in destructively addictive behavior.

### 2: You need to be their parent. Take charge.

You need to be their parent. You're in charge of guiding them. You need to implement boundaries and controls over the family's use of technology. That might not be popular, but it is absolutely necessary. Today, parents are





## Letting them roam the internet without supervision is like dropping a young child off in a major city and letting them get home on their own. You just wouldn't do that.

fearful of, well, being parents. Parents have the right and the responsibility to oversee and inspect their kid's devices and take them away if they misuse them. If you don't, one day in the future their employer will when they misuse technology at their workplace.

This means using more technology to oversee how they are using their devices. I'm talking parental filters, accountability software, imposing time limits, and regularly checking in on what they are looking at. Do not see this as being an impossible task! It's a bottom-line necessity. Letting them roam the internet without supervision is like dropping a young child off in a major city and letting them get home on their own. You just wouldn't do that.

Be their parent first, before trying to be their friend. They will one day thank you for that.

### 3: You are not their Big Brother (or NSA).

But being their parent does not translate into a license to control them or deny them any privacy. You don't want your oversight of their use of technology to be a Big Brother (or in current terms, an NSA—National Security Agency) experience. Supervising them is not secretly peering over their shoulder all the time.

So how do you not be a Big Brother? Basically, you will always tell them what steps you are taking, what you are doing, and why you are doing it. You will be checking up on them, but you will always be reminding them why you are doing this. You will keep them in the loop on everything. No secrets. No behind-the-back snooping

that they are not aware of. Everything should be out in the open.

### 4: We're all in this together.

Here is the "buy-in" that will help your children with this plan: We're all in this together. The blocking, the restrictions, and the oversight include you, too. Why is this important? One, kids resent things they think are unfair. It helps them when no one is excluded. Two, as a parent you're not free of this kind of temptation, either. When you visibly show that you also need help in managing sexual boundaries, you demonstrate how important it is to protect this gift that God has given to us.

You can't shield your children from the world, nor should you. Ultimately, you can't protect your children from the dangers of pornography unless you also teach them about God's good design for sex and sexuality. You don't want to teach about sex from an entirely negative slant, if all you do is talk about the dangers of misused sex.

There is a profound beauty about sex when it is boundaried in a committed, covenantal, self-giving relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. You need to do more than just tell your kids to wait; you need to talk, explain, and equip them to grow into the character of a future husband or wife for the glory of God.

And this involves you being a wise gatekeeper of technology.

**Nicholas Black** is the Program Resources Director at HARVEST USA. He has been with the ministry for 11 years, is a Ruling Elder in the PCA, and is husband to Nancy and father to two adult children. To reach Nicholas with questions or comments about his article, email him at [nicholas@harvestusa.org](mailto:nicholas@harvestusa.org)

iSnooping on  
Your Kid  
Parenting in an Internet World



## A minibook for parents and youth leaders

### iSnooping on Your Kid

In our increasingly wired world, your children have access to people, images, and media that you don't want them to experience. What's a concerned parent to do? What does wisdom look like when technology floods into your home bringing access to pornography and other Internet dangers?

Providing extensive practical suggestions, Nicholas Black directs you in making a plan with your family for safety and clear boundaries on technology use. By reminding you of how Christ leads you to repentance and faithful living, he offers helpful advice on how you can help your children grow in purity, integrity, and dependence on Christ, as they navigate the world of technology.

To purchase, go to [newgrowthpress.com/harvest-usa/](http://newgrowthpress.com/harvest-usa/)



I first met representatives of HARVEST USA at a church missions conference. It was many years ago, and it was at a time when the AIDS epidemic was all the news.

I believe that God was preparing my heart to hear about HARVEST USA. I had recently been at a church service where a number of believers were talking about AIDS and expressing their opinion that it was God's judgment on the gay community. (Some of you younger readers may not remember that initially AIDS was viewed almost exclusively as a gay or drug user issue.) I couldn't help but think that if we all got what we deserved, that none of us would survive or be saved. I wondered why it was acceptable to treat the people that were tempted with same-sex attraction as modern-day lepers unworthy of any grace. At the same time, aware of my own sinful nature, I wondered why heterosexual lust was viewed as "acceptable," almost normal, while same-sex lust was worthy of instant judgment. After all, isn't sin still sin before a fully holy God?

At the missions conference, I met John Freeman, the founder of HARVEST USA, and a young lady named Cara (not her real name). Cara had a rough history and was, I believe, a new Christian. Cara stood up, for the first time in her life, and told her story. She had struggled with attraction to other women. She, through working with HARVEST USA, had come to know the Lord and recognize that her same-sex attraction was not

in accordance with God's roadmap for biblical sexuality. She described how HARVEST USA had come alongside her, didn't judge her, and worked with her to see God's truth.

I was stunned. Not only by the courage Cara showed by standing up and sharing her story but even more so that a grace-filled ministry like HARVEST USA even existed.

I soon started to support HARVEST USA financially. As I continued to understand more about HARVEST USA, I became even more appreciative of the very difficult work that the staff of HARVEST USA does every day and the amazing example of God's grace that they model. It was a short step from here to serving on a Finance Committee, then the National Board of Directors, and finally becoming Chairperson of the Board.

I serve on the Board because I simply don't know a better way to have a heart for sexually-broken sinners and offer God's grace to the broken. My treasure follows for the same reason. I support HARVEST USA financially because I know that despite the huge need, resources are always tight and that this grace-filled work is incredibly important, especially now with our current culture.

Regards,  
Steve Bucklen  
Chairperson of the Board, HARVEST USA



# HARVEST USA'S PARENTS AND FAMILY MINISTRY

Do you have a child or family member who identifies as gay or transgender?

Our Parents and Family Ministry seeks to serve you by providing:



## Support

Our Biblical Support Group for Parents meets regularly to offer encouragement and help in the context of supportive community. This group is led by our Parents and Family Ministry Coordinator, Chris Torchia.



## Teaching

*Shattered Dreams / New Hope* is an annual seminar that we teach online or in churches to help you think biblically about sexual and gender struggles and suffering. We also teach you how to move toward your child or family member in love and compassion.



## Questions?

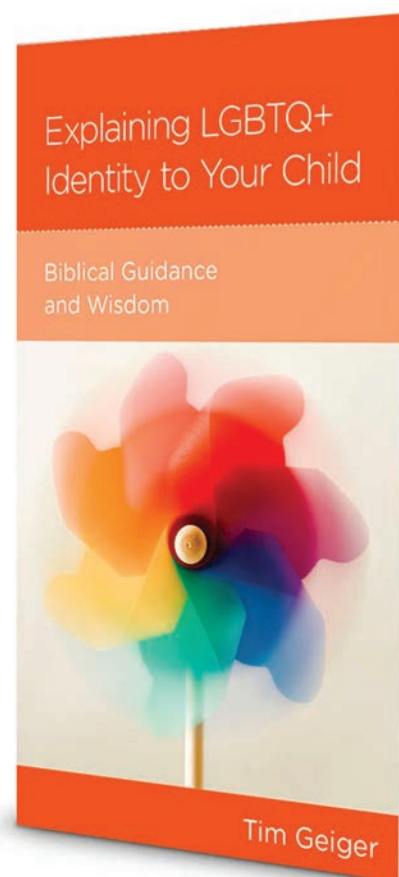
Contact our Parents and Family Ministry Coordinator, Chris Torchia, at [chris@harvestusa.org](mailto:chris@harvestusa.org) or 215-482-0111, Ext. 113



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## Understanding LGBTQ+ identities and struggles in light of Scripture

LGBTQ+ identities and their widespread acceptance have produced a host of questions and quandaries for Christian families. How do you help your child navigate a world where their classmate may be transgender and their neighbors a gay couple? How do you explain these issues and teach children to respond to LGBTQ+ identity with truth and love?



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