

PERSONAL FOUL

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX [WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?]

THE HURDLE

You would think having a successful relationship, whether sexual or not, would be an easy thing these days. People have been hooking up for thousands of years, and today we've got books, magazines, and endless talk shows that discuss how to be happy in a relationship. So why are broken relationships the norm? Seems like marriage ceremonies are really only a first stage of the divorce. I sometimes wonder whether a genuinely loving relationship with the same person is possible. But I'm still holding out hope that it is—but I'm not sure where to look for help. The crazy thing is, Christians don't seem to be much better at maintaining relationships than non-Christians.

If you have seen or could imagine a loving relationship with the opposite sex, what would it look like? Describe it.

Even if deep down you wanted meaningful, loving relationships, given the current divorce rate and culture, do you think it is possible? Why or why not?

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Whenever I date a guy, I think, “Is this the man I want my children to spend their weekends with?”

Rita Rudner
Writer and Comedian

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What unique relational challenges or temptations do athletes face in light of popularity, power, money, and the sport itself? Are men different than women in these areas?

I HEAR YA

The Bible has much to say about relationships and sexual expression.

God created relationships: “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

Relationships express sexual intimacy: “I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.” (Song of Solomon 7:10)

Uncontrolled lust turns to lies and murder: “David...saw a woman bathing; and the woman was beautiful in appearance ... so David sent and inquired about the woman.” (2 Samuel 11:2-3)

God owns your body: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord.” (I Corinthians 6:13, 19-20)

Our culture sends plenty of messages about relationships and sex, but it's easy to forget that God created them both. He offers a plan to experience life at its fullest, even in the sexual area.

LISTEN UP

Read I Thessalonians 4:3-8.

1. What is your initial reaction to God's command to "abstain from fornication" (sexual immorality)?

Definition of sexual immorality: The word fornication (sexual immorality) comes from the Greek work, porneia which means *sexual practice that lies outside the circle of God's revealed will, namely adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, and homosexuality.* - The Bible Knowledge Commentary

2. What criteria do you use about whether or not sex will be a part of your relationship? How might men and women differ in their approach to sex?
3. The apostle Paul challenges the Thessalonians in this text to live out God's will by being different (sanctified), set apart from the world's standards and way of living. According to these verses, how and why are we to be different?
4. God's negative commands ("Don't do this...") exist to protect us and provide for us. How might God's admonition to us about sexual immorality both protect and provide?
5. The New International Version in verse 4 says that we are to control our own bodies in a way that is holy and honorable (pure, different). In a culture where we are constantly encouraged to participate in sexual pleasures, what is wrong about lustful passion and what are the consequences to you or others?
6. What does it communicate to another person when you are self-controlled and other-centered? How would this contribute to a meaningful, loving relationship?

FOR THE RECORD

God created relationships and sexual expression for human fulfillment, but when we don't follow His plan, it results in brokenness and confusion. When you introduce sex into a relationship outside of marriage, it's self-serving and destructive, even if it doesn't immediately feel that way. Sex outside of marriage unites you another person in a way that is irreversible. Ironically, when we care more about the welfare of others than

ourselves, we honor God and ultimately get what we're after in the first place—real love. To rid ourselves of the world's view of sex takes a lot of work and courage to follow God against the norm. Our attempts to fulfill legitimate needs illegitimately always end in ruin for us and for others, but God promises the possibility of a different ending for those who listen to His leading.

YOUR MOVE

- List three ideas from this study that you have never heard previously or something that just challenges your thinking or behavior.
- In your own sexual experience, whether limited or extreme, what has been your primary motivation?
 - It makes me feel loved or valued
 - It makes me feel powerful or respected
 - It just plain feels good
 - I don't want to miss out
 - I have to test it before getting married
 - Just another trophy on my shelf/ just wanted to see if I could get him/her
 - I love this person and wanted to show it
 - Pressure from partner

While the above motivations are legitimate human needs or longings, if we pursue them illegitimately (sex outside of marriage), we won't get what we really want in the end (loving, meaningful relationships).

- Why is it important to be dating someone who shares the same Christian values?
- What boundaries do you need to set now and for your future relationships in order to have other-centered relationships and to remain sexually pure? Who can you share this information with who will encourage you and hold you accountable?

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To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.

C.S. Lewis
Author, *The Four Loves*

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Visit **The Training Room** on the next page so that you can continue to grow in godly, fulfilling relationships.

AS YOU ENTER

**“WE HAVE INSTRUCTED YOU HOW TO LIVE IN ORDER TO PLEASE GOD.”
(I THESSALONIANS 4:1)**

Becoming the Right Person

A good relationship is more about becoming the right person than finding the right person. What do these verses say about the person God wants you to become?

Romans 12:1, 2

Micah 6:8

Colossians 3:1-10

Philippians 2:3, 4

I Corinthians 15:33

30 Day Challenge!

For 30 days, “sensitize yourself” to all of the messages you see and hear about sex and relationships (friends, television, computer, magazines, etc.) and identify the messages being sent. Are they godly or self-centered? Do they invite self-control or unrestrained passion?

Codependency

Codependency is not just about same-sex relationships. In many ways, we are all codependent since we are trying to meet our needs through other people. Look at the list below to see if you may be codependent to the degree that it affects your daily life.

Melody Beattie, author of *Codependent No More*, developed this check list:

- Do you feel responsible for other people--their feelings, thoughts, actions, choices, wants, needs, well-being and destiny?
- Do you feel compelled to help people solve their problems or by trying to take care of their feelings?
- Do you find it easier to feel and express anger about injustices done to others than about injustices done to you?
- Do you feel safest and most comfortable when you are giving to others?
- Do you feel insecure and guilty when someone gives to you?
- Do you feel empty, bored and worthless if you don't have someone else to take care of, a problem to solve, or a crisis to deal with?
- Are you often unable to stop talking, thinking and worrying about other people and their problems?
- Do you lose interest in your own life when you are in love?
- Do you stay in relationships that don't work and tolerate abuse in order to keep people loving you?
- Do you leave bad relationships only to form new ones that don't work either?

AS YOU LEAVE

- » ASK GOD TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT HEALTHY, GOD-HONORING RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE AND TO PROVIDE YOU WITH EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW.
- » PRAY FOR STRENGTH AND SELF-CONTROL AS YOU FACE THE SEXUAL TEMPTATIONS OFFERED BY THIS WORLD.
- » MEMORIZE A FEW VERSES THAT WOULD REMIND YOU OF THE TRUTH AND FORTIFY YOUR SOUL IN TIMES OF STRUGGLE.