Sex and the Single Girl

Smart Ways to Care for Your Heart

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Katie waited nervously for Beth to respond. She had just admitted—again—to a weekend of messing around with her boyfriend. Josh was a nice enough guy. He said he loved God and he’d told Katie that he didn’t want her to do anything that made her uncomfortable. But being uncomfortable wasn’t the problem. She enjoyed their sexual encounters. The emotional and physical rush she experienced had become something she didn’t want to live without.

However, because she was a Christian, she wasn’t spiritually comfortable with what was becoming a big part of their relationship. She had talked with Beth more than once about how she believed that what she was doing was wrong, but deep down she wasn’t sure she wanted to give up the sexual part of the relationship. After all, she had stopped masturbating since she’d started dating Josh. That habit felt more shameful than what she did with him. What’s the big deal? Katie told herself. It’s not like we’re having actual “sex”—not really. Beth doesn’t understand anyway. She can lie down next to her husband Craig every night and have sex whenever she wants!

Emily and Beth had been close friends since college. They had been in each other’s weddings and hung out as married couples until two years ago, when Emily’s husband left her and their two kids for another
woman. Emily was crushed. Bitterness toward God combined with despair and loneliness to create a wall around her heart.

Beth had continued to check in with her friend and grown increasingly concerned about the “innocent” fun Emily said she was having late at night, in online chat rooms. Sure, she admitted, sometimes the chats turned pretty sexual, but so what? She didn’t trust men anymore, certainly not enough to deal with them in person. The online fantasy world seemed safe and harmless in comparison. Beth’s heart sank when Emily said, “One thing’s for sure: I won’t get my heart broken and I won’t get pregnant from these guys! When I’ve had enough, I just log off and drift off to sleep to my own fantasies.”

When Marissa visited a Thursday morning Bible study, she caught Beth’s eye. Marissa seemed confident and strong, yet gentle. When they got together for a walk a week later, Beth was intrigued to hear that Marissa had become a Christian just eight months earlier, after ending a five-year relationship that had become unhealthy and obsessive. In the loneliness that followed, Marissa had talked with a Christian coworker, and for the first time in her life, she trusted in God’s love for her. The past months had been a time of freedom from the guilt she had felt over her sexual
past. Beth asked Marissa, “How has God comforted you after ending such a long relationship with your boyfriend?”

“Beth,” Marissa quietly responded, “I broke up with my girlfriend of five years, not a guy. I know that’s not cool with a lot of Christians, but since my early twenties, I’ve only been involved with women. I don’t know if I’ll ever want to date a man. Is that my only option if I want to enjoy myself sexually?”

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Following Jesus while navigating life, relationships, and sexuality can be tough for single women these days. I know because I’m one of them! Singleness is not a one-size-fits-all category. You may be single for a short time before you marry in your twenties or thirties. You may be single once again—unexpectedly—after divorce or the death of your spouse. You may be single for most or all of your life, by choice or simply because you never met the right person. No matter what the reason for your circumstances, you have to learn how to deal with your sexuality as a single woman. And you have to do so in a social climate that gives little support to the Bible’s stance on these issues.

Not that long ago sex outside marriage was not the norm (you or your parents may remember that time). The ideal for a woman, if not for a man (that’s another whole story!), was to be a virgin on your wedding night.
Your husband would be your first sexual partner, and most people believed that your goal was to be married to him for life.

**Sex Is Everything; Sex Is Nothing**

Obviously, a lot has changed. Today society seems to have two gears when it comes to sex: (1) Sex is everything and (2) Sex is nothing. Neither attitude provides much help for a woman who wants her commitment to Christ to be reflected in her sex life.

The people who say sex is everything see sexual expression as fundamental to their identity. This is different from seeing sexuality—your identity as a woman or a man—as a building block for the way you see yourself, interact in relationships, and experience life. To say that sex is everything is to see **having** sex as the most important way to express who you are. For some people it’s even more than that—it is a way to **become** yourself. This obviously assigns a lot of meaning to sexual behavior. And interestingly it is most concerned with **you**—not your partner, not your relationship, not your commitment. It’s much more about feeling whole, alive, and fulfilled **yourself**. More about that later.

The people who say that sex is nothing don’t have such lofty ideas. Their point is that we **are** sexual beings so it’s only natural to act on our sexual desires. It’s simply who we are; we have a need, a desire, and an interest
so why not enjoy it? You don’t need to be concerned about commitment or identity or any of that. Lighten up, be smart, be careful, choose wisely, but choose—and enjoy yourself!

Isn’t it interesting that whether people assign a lot of meaning to sex or a little, their advice is to go ahead and be sexually active? In contrast, the Bible approaches sex in a very different way, for reasons that reflect a much deeper understanding of how we are made (and by whom) and what we need (and how we get it).

A Better Way to View Sex—From the One Who Made You

Anyone who thinks that God is anti-sex has clearly not read his book. One section, the Song of Songs, is focused entirely on sexual love between a man and woman in the context of marriage, which the Bible depicts as a lifelong union between a husband and wife. It’s not simply an allegory for something spiritual, it features the glories and pleasure of sexual love itself. And no one could accuse the Bible of downplaying the significance of sex when you realize that marriage, including the sexual relationship, is said to illustrate Christ’s relationship with his church. You can’t get much more exalted than that!

At the same time, there are limits to how much meaning God assigns to sex. For one thing, God would
never say that you need to have sex to become a whole, fulfilled person, as society does today. Jesus didn’t have sex while he was here on earth and this in no way prevented him from being the truest and fullest expression of what it means to be human. Although he didn’t have sexual experiences, he was no less a man, no less himself, no less whole. The same goes for many of his followers, like the apostle Paul and millions of other unmarried believers through the centuries who chose to follow the Bible’s teaching that sex is reserved for marriage. This meant that they abstained from sex. It may not have been their first choice, but they found meaningful ways to live out their humanness and their purpose for life without sex.

The Bible clearly acknowledges our sexual appetites as part of the good way God created us, but God’s Word does not assume that because the appetites are present they must be satisfied. This is because God understands the power of appetites that go unchecked by his standards for their expression. The Bible is extraordinarily candid about the power of sexual attraction and activity. It tells lots of stories and offers lots of counsel about the ways this reality can be used for good and bad.
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