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# PREPARING CHILDREN



FOR



# MARRIAGE



How to Teach  
God's Good Design for  
Marriage, Sex, Purity, and Dating

JOSH MULVIHILL

FOREWORD BY TEDD TRIPP

Parenting is serious business. We live in a crazy, messed-up world—especially when it comes to marriage, dating, sex, and family. Satan and the demons have kicked their attacks on God’s institution of the family into high gear. Is there anything we can do to help our children reject the lies of the world and prepare themselves to follow God’s plan for manhood, womanhood, marriage, and the family? That is what *Preparing Children for Marriage* is all about. Let me warn you: this book is not for the faint of heart. It is real, honest, candid, and courageous. It will make you think, rattle your cage, drive you to have needed conversations with your kids, and, most importantly, cause you to dig into the Bible for a practical plan to help your children love and follow Jesus.

—**Rob Rienow**, Founder, Visionary Family Ministries

Josh Mulvihill has done a great job of explaining dating and what a Christian marriage should look like. Parents will find thought-provoking guidance to use with their children when discussing dating, sexual issues, and marriage. Divorced parents struggle to find ways to teach their children what a God-designed marriage looks like, but this book lays it out very clearly. It will also open readers’ eyes to the sinful challenges our children are currently facing regarding sexual issues and what is being taught in many schools today.

—**Linda Jacobs**, Founder, DivorceCare for Kids

*Preparing Children for Marriage* will equip you to sharpen your thinking, increase your impact, and influence young people to apply the truth of God’s Word to their lives. This book is biblical and practical and is a valuable tool for parents and grandparents.

—**Kevin Leman**, Author, *Have a New Kid by Friday* and *The Birth Order Book*

This eye-opening book shows what is missing and what is needed in order for our children to have a biblical view of marriage. With insight, Josh Mulvihill shows parents and ministry leaders how to proactively seize developmental milestones in order to help prepare

the next generation to embrace and uphold God-honoring marriages and be bright, shining stars in a very dark world.

—**Pat Cimo**, Director of Marriage and Family Life, Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois

Josh Mulvihill has written a thought-provoking book to help parents prepare their children for marriage. As a pastor, Josh delivers insight and experience in addition to unpacking God's truth in creative ways. His "courageous conversations," or talks parents should have with their children, are worth the price of the book alone. For parents and those working with children, Josh's book will be an excellent resource as we prepare the next generation for lifelong marriage.

—**Ken Canfield**, Founder, National Center for Fathering

*Preparing Children for Marriage* is a lifeline in a sea of sexual and marital confusion. Every parent, pastor, and educator who is serious about helping the children in his or her care to develop a biblical worldview should read and use this book.

—**Jeff Keaton**, Founder and President, Renewation

By default our kids get plenty of sex education these days, and most of it is not only wrong but very harmful. Josh Mulvihill has given us the antidote: a beautifully written and very practical guide for parents who want to make sure their children have a strong biblical foundation not only for making wise choices but for building healthy marriages. I urge all Christian parents not only to read this book but to put it into practice right away!

—**Wayne Rice**, Cofounder, Youth Specialties; Director of Conferencing, The Legacy Coalition; Author, *Generation to Generation*

In a day when young people invest the greater part of their time in their wedding event itself, they need more time to prepare for marriage.

Parents can powerfully engage their kids with the topics that will set them up for success in their marriages, the way God intended.

Waiting until marital counseling is too late—this book needs to be in the hands of every parent with children!

—**Ron Hunter Jr.**, Director, D6 Conference; Author, *The DNA of D6*

Parents, if you're wondering how to talk to your kids about sex, you will not find a better resource than this book. Josh Mulvihill's approach is straight from the Bible, full of great insight and advice, and incredibly helpful. If you think it's not time for "the talk" yet, better think again—Josh's argument for a childhood-long approach to teaching your child about sex and marriage will change your mind and at the same time equip you for many talks. You will want to read this book and then put it somewhere handy so you can refer to it again and again.

—**Larry Fowler**, Founder, The Legacy Coalition

In *Preparing Children for Marriage*, Josh Mulvihill has given parents an invaluable resource to help them present a biblical worldview of sexuality, marriage, and dating to their children. This book is practical, biblical, and chock-full of great discussion-starting questions. *Someone* is going to shape your children's views on these topics—so take my advice, get this book, and allow Josh to help you be the one to disciple your children in these critical areas.

—**Marty Machowski**, Family Life Pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania; Author, *The Ology*

Wow! What a great book to empower parents to have early-and-often discussions with their children about love, sex, and marriage. Josh Mulvihill has created a biblical tool that parents can use to help their kids challenge the worldly version of "normal" that they are exposed to regularly. I will commend this book to all parents and encourage them to use the Courageous Conversation sections at the end of each chapter to engage their kids in specific conversations in order to embed convictions in their hearts.

—**Scott Turansky**, Cofounder, National Center for Biblical Parenting

PREPARING  
CHILDREN  
FOR  
MARRIAGE

How to Teach God's Good Design  
for Marriage, Sex, Purity, and Dating

JOSH MULVIHILL

  
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To Jay, Asher, Kate, Jon, and Emily.

Remember four things:

Marry only in Christ.

Pursue holiness, and happiness will follow.

Marriage is the joining of two sinners, not two saints.

You are loved.

*If you were going to live in a foreign country, would you prepare?  
If you were going to become an astronaut, would you prepare?  
If you were going to become a concert pianist, would you prepare?  
And so how do your sons prepare for the mystery of marriage? . . .  
Are they just making time until it “happens” to them?  
—Douglas Wilson, Future Men*



- Happy are the marriages which observe three rules:*
- 1. Marry only in the Lord and only after God’s approval and blessing.*
  - 2. Do not expect too much from your spouse, remembering that marriage is the union of two sinners, not two angels.*
  - 3. Strive for one’s growth in Christ. The more holy people are, the more happier they are.*
- J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*





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## FOREWORD

“Okay, kids, we’re going to Auntie’s house. You should take a good book along, because you know she doesn’t have any toys for you to play with. Amusing yourselves quietly is one of the ways we can show love and respect for Auntie.”

Good parents are always preparing their kids for what comes next. We do this in both great and small ways. We prepare them for a new brother or sister. We talk through new expectations as their educational journeys unfold. We prepare them for driving or for their first job. Whether in the little things like a visit with a maiden aunt or the big things like going off to college, parents are always getting their children ready for what comes next.

No transition has greater significance than marriage does. The Bible captures the magnitude of this transition in the statement “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). There is no way to overstate the importance of helping our children to find their life partner and prepare to leave home in order to establish a new family.

In his role as a pastor and discipler of children and young people, Josh Mulvihill has thought deeply about marriage and the biblical truths one must understand and embrace before embarking on it. He has developed this comprehensive guide that will equip you to help your kids get ready for the joys and challenges of a one-flesh relationship.

Mulvihill understands a fundamental truth that many parents miss: Parents must provide their children with a fully populated Christian culture of understanding if the callings of Christian living are to make sense. Simply telling them what to expect and what to do is not enough. One has to work out the implications—not only of our callings, but of the foundational truths that make sense of those callings.

What *Preparing Children for Marriage* provides is a comprehensive picture of marriage. Who is marriage for? How does it work? Why did God create marriage? How does one prepare a son or a daughter for marriage? What does the Bible teach about sexuality and moral purity? How can we help kids avoid the temptations that potentially damage marriage? How do the differing roles of men and women in marriage change what a boy or a girl must understand? These and many related topics make this a comprehensive paradigm of what our children must know in order to be prepared for marriage. There is even a section on preparing our children for singleness, if that is God's plan for them.

While there is nothing here that breaks new ground theologically, the value of *Preparing Children for Marriage* is hard to overstate, for at least three reasons. (1) Josh Mulvihill has thought more comprehensively than most of us about these issues. (2) He has organized his study into helpful conversational topics (at the end of each chapter you will find a valuable guide to conversations with your children). (3) He reminds us that getting our kids ready for marriage is not something that we do in the months before they take that big step. Preparing them for marriage is a life-long proposition.

I have three adult children. I have always been fairly self-conscious about childrearing issues, and I would have benefitted from this book. I am sure you will as well. I look forward to giving it to my children so they will be equipped to prepare their children for marriage.

Tedd Tripp  
August 2017



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Preparing Children for Marriage* has been a decade-long project that began when Leah King asked a middle school pastor, who had only a toddler of his own, to have “the talk” with her teenage son. Little did I know that request would eventually lead to this book. Thank you, Leah, for blessing me with the opportunity to speak into your son’s life. It was a joy to work with you on the early stages of this project and to create a small booklet to equip parents for the gigantic task of teaching God’s truth to their children.

Amanda Martin, thank you for your steady and diligent editing efforts. Your high standards were both a blessing and a curse, but I trust that the finished product will honor God and help many young people. Thank you for your patience in working with a new author and for your dedication to seeing a text that is faithful to Scripture and fruitful for families. You are an excellent editor and have made me a better author.

Dad, thanks for intentionally teaching me the truth of God’s Word as it relates to marriage and for being the kind of parent this book describes. Your intentionality, consistency, and faithfulness are gifts that continue to keep giving. Many of the things I encourage parents to do in this book were learned from you. Thanks for the informal conversations, gentle guidance, needed correction, and enforced boundaries. And I’ll even say thank you for drawing a diagram of fallopian tubes in the snow when we were squirrel

## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

hunting. I hope I can train my own children as well as you trained yours.

My dearest Jen, I could not ask for a better wife. Your grace, godliness, gentleness, and wisdom are gifts to so many people. I am delighted that our children have an Ephesians 5 and Proverbs 31 woman to look to and learn from. What a joy it is to see you pointing our children to the cross and calling them to live a life that matters for Christ. Thanks for helping to write the courageous conversation questions, for your editing advice, and for having the patience to see this project to the end. If our sons married women who were anything like you, it would be a true blessing.

And lastly, thank you P&R Publishing for believing in the message of this book and taking a chance on a new author. I have been blessed by the ministry heart that drives the decisions at P&R and am happy to have my name associated with such a wonderful organization.



## INTRODUCTION

In all my years as a pastor, I've found that few topics generate more interest or angst than dating and marriage. Parents regularly contact me for guidance and resources to help them prepare their children for this critical time of life.

Many years ago, a number of single mothers approached me and asked me to take their sons away for a weekend to have "the talk." I agreed and began the task of finding resources to help equip these young boys for marriage. What I found was a lot of resources about purity and puberty. I found books that taught young people to remain sexually pure and to expect physical changes in adolescence, but I couldn't find a resource that taught young people the biblical principles of marriage.

If you search the market, you will find plenty of books about marriage for adults, but you will have a difficult time finding a book that helps parents teach the biblical truths of marriage to their children. In addition, you can find very good books on dating and purity, but you won't find all these topics in the same book.

Parents already have the most valuable tool for preparing their children for marriage. The Bible is sufficient for all matters of life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3), but few parents use it to address this subject. Most overlook it. Few know how to apply it to preparing their children for marriage. Many look to sources outside Scripture for dealing with this subject, using the Bible as a seasoning. Yet the Bible

contains the foundational truths parents need in order to successfully train children for marriage, dating, and purity. If children know the basic foundational truths of Scripture, they can apply those truths in any and every scenario that confronts them.

While I can't touch on every subject related to marriage, dating, and purity in this book, I have four main goals:

- to see young people treasure Christ and live in a God-honoring way
- to equip parents, grandparents, pastors, and Christian educators to teach the biblical principles of marriage to children, and at the earliest possible age
- to provide a one-stop shop on these topics for young people of all ages
- to generate discussion that will drive parents and their children to God's Word

### **Are You Prepared?**

The Bible teaches that God created marriage for his glory and man's good and that marriage is the expected norm for men and women. God has placed within us the desire to love and to be loved. This desire is good and should be pursued in its proper time. It may be strange for a young person to think of himself or herself as a future married person; however, it is also one of the most profitable thoughts that young people can have.

This is a foundation-laying book that will provide theological training for a critical area of parenting. I will provide a biblical definition for marriage and will explore the primary passages that can be used to train children in this area. If you are unclear about the meaning and purpose of marriage, you cannot provide the proper guidance to young people or effectively prepare them for a marriage that pleases God.

Too often, the church addresses these topics with young people and does not include the parents in any significant way. This robs



parents of an opportunity to nurture their children's faith and minimize children's interactions with their parents during an important milestone of life. It is my desire to see parents and grandparents taking an active role in the preparation of children for marriage, and this book is a tool for that purpose.

While it is the role of parents to train their children, their discussions of marriage in the home do not negate the need for discussions in the church as well. The church has an important role to play itself in the preparation of children for marriage. God has given the church the mission of discipling all its members and teaching them the full counsel of God. Churches cannot neglect teaching this topic to children, but they do need to be discerning in how they address it, and this book will provide some direction.

Churches and families must work together in presenting a unified message because society makes it exceedingly difficult to be holy. Culture communicates powerful messages about dating and marriage, and young people without strong, consistent biblical teaching and parental example are likely to be influenced toward unbiblical views. Homosexuality and divorce are inconsistent with God's plan for marriage, yet young people are confronted with the argument that marriage between one man and one woman for an entire lifetime is outdated and closed-minded.

Young people are also in danger of making marriage into a me-focused, romance-intoxicated, Christ-neglecting "thing." We must protect against and root out this culturally contaminated view by teaching the truth of Scripture to our children. It is my prayer that your child embraces an eternal, high, Christ-glorifying view of marriage. The days of "first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage" are long gone in American culture. Even Christian children are getting the order wrong. It is critical that parents teach a correct biblical order to love, marriage, and sex through words and actions. Chances are, your children are not hearing this anywhere else.

Preparation for marriage can begin today as you teach your child biblical principles about marriage, pray for your child's future spouse,

## *INTRODUCTION*

and help your child protect his or her heart from sexual immorality. Knowing what God desires for a young person will help that young person to prepare for one of the most important decisions of his or her life.



## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The lessons in this book should prove helpful for children of all ages, from early elementary through high school, and can be used by parents, grandparents, pastors, small groups, Sunday school classes, health curriculums, and college classes. Anyone who has a spiritual influence in the life of a child can use this book to teach that child the truths of God's Word and point him or her to Christ.

Children's grade school years are the ideal time to begin in-depth discussions with them about marriage, dating, and purity. Biologically, children will be interested in members of the opposite sex when they are around nine or ten years old. Preemptively addressing this subject allows parents to be the first and loudest voice that their children will hear on it. Paul David Tripp refers to the preteen years as "the age of opportunity"<sup>1</sup> and encourages parents to intentionally utilize this time of life. Parents have a window, prior to the teenage years, when children are open and receptive to parental guidance. Wise parents capitalize on this opportunity and reinforce the same truths as children age.

Parents are often unaware of the need to address this topic early. I continually hear from parents about sexual experiences their children have had much sooner than the parents anticipated. A high

1. Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001).

percentage of parents expect that the middle and high school years will be filled with dating and purity challenges, but many do not realize that this happens for many students as early as kindergarten. This book will help parents teach the truths of God's Word to a young child and a teenager in an age-appropriate and comprehensive way.

## **A Note to Church Leaders**

If you are a pastor (or a children's or youth director) and you work with young people, I want to point out that you have a responsibility to address these topics with children as well. Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, and Paul all taught children about marriage and sex. However, in each instance, parents were always present. I have taught on these topics many times, on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings, with young people ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grade. I have found that three things make this a success.

### **Communicating Plans to Parents in Advance**

I do this by email a few weeks before tackling the topic. If anything, you should overcommunicate. Surprising parents with this topic is not a good idea. You want to avoid a scenario in which parents learn what their child was taught on the car ride home.

### **Including a Word-for-Word Manuscript of the Talk**

This eliminates fear and builds trust with parents. If you are interested in what this looks like, appendix B is one of the lessons that I teach kindergartners through sixth graders on marriage. I send this as an attachment to parents.

### **Inviting Parents to Join You**

Many parents will learn along with their children. One of my most memorable moments came when I invited parents of fifth and sixth graders to join me as I taught through Genesis 2 and the meaning of marriage. A room that seated almost three hundred was filled to capacity, and about a half dozen parents brought video cameras

and tripods to record the teaching. I invite parents because I want to honor them as the primary spiritual influence in their children's lives, but I also teach on the subject in order to be faithful to God and the responsibility he has given me as a pastor.

## **Part 1: Getting Started**

Parents often ask, "What subjects should I address with my child, and at what age?" and "When is it appropriate to talk to children about marriage, sex, and dating?" To answer these questions, I explore the pattern of what the Bible teaches to young people at what ages, and I encourage you to follow God's example. I also provide communication guidelines in order to help you avoid major land mines and create fruitful discussion as you navigate the rest of the topics in this book with your child.

Once children understand biblical principles and are given applications of them, they can apply Scripture as their life situations demand. One of our jobs as parents is to teach the biblical principles that children need to know and help children make wise, God-honoring decisions as opportunities arise.

## **Part 2: Marriage**

Part 2 focuses on teaching children the biblical principles of marriage. Young people will learn what marriage is, what it is not, and why God created it. This section will also equip parents to prepare their children for the roles of husband and wife. Each chapter ends with a series of Bible study questions for generating discussion.

## **Part 3: Sex and Purity**

Part 3 demonstrates how to teach a child about sex from a biblical perspective and teaches parents how to have "the talk" with their children using Proverbs 5. The section also addresses how a young person can remain sexually pure in a hypersexual culture.

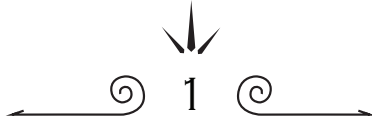
## **Part 4: Dating**

In this last section, I help parents and children to think about dating in a biblical and balanced way, answering the following questions: What's the purpose of dating? How old should a person be in order to date? What is a parent's role in a child's dating life? What kind of person should you date? And what are the biblical criteria for choosing a spouse?

Many adults have regrets about the dating decisions they made themselves while in middle or high school. Your children have the opportunity to avoid this fate and to look back on their dating days with fondness because their actions were pleasing to God, to you, and to their future spouses. Most importantly, your child has the opportunity to choose a spouse who loves Jesus and to display the gospel through his or her marriage.

◆◆◆ PART 1 ◆◆◆

# GETTING STARTED



# DON'T BE A CONVERSATION SHORT

## Raising Your Child in a Sex-Saturated Culture

“Help!” the parent of a sixth grader said to me. “Last night my son was video chatting with a female classmate of his and was exposed to something he shouldn’t have been.” The sadness in her words told me that something unfortunate was coming.

“Someone joked that she should flash him. He didn’t expect that she actually would. He feels so bad about what happened that he threw up this morning.”

The parents of this sixth-grade child are good parents. They long to be faithful to Scripture and are passionate to see their son grow up to love the Lord. Both mom and dad had engaged spiritually in their son’s life and taken specific, proactive steps to protect his purity and prepare him for the challenges he would face. Unfortunately, it had not occurred to them that a sixth-grade girl might bare herself live on a video call.

“I knew things like this could eventually be an issue,” the mother continued, “but I didn’t expect them until high school. I also thought we had prepared for this, but I found that we were one conversation short.”



*One conversation short.* That is an unfortunate statement when it comes to issues that affect our children as much as marriage, dating, and purity. There isn't a single parent who aims to be one conversation short, yet many well-intentioned parents find themselves in this same unexpected place.

Many young Christians are not adequately prepared to handle the sexual tidal wave and the unbiblical views of marriage that are presented to them, and often they are left to discern for themselves whether what they hear is true. To compound the problem, children are confronted at a formative age by adults with well-thought-out arguments that sound plausible. The combination can be lethal for children who are naturally trusting, are unsure of the Bible's teachings, and lack a strong parental voice that is speaking God's truth at home.

Children are met with unbiblical views of sex and marriage through the Internet, in the media, in education, from peers, and even by some trusted religious leaders or family members. Take a moment to explore with me what our children are being exposed to and at what age. It is critical that you know the messages that are being communicated so you can counter those messages with the life-giving truth of God's Word.

Although many examples could be chosen, I will introduce you to two books and one organization that embody the essence of the unbiblical teaching that confronts children today. All children, including yours, will have to contend with these ideas at some point. The fact that these messages are being communicated necessitates a proactive posture from every parent.

## **Two Books**

*King and King*, a picture book by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland, is read in many public school classrooms around the country. Written for children as young as kindergarten, it follows a familiar story line—that of a queen finding her king—except with a twist: two men fall in love and get married. The pictures in the book are descriptive and present the two men as happy and their marriage as

normal. There are pictures of the men holding hands, participating in a wedding ceremony, and kissing. No overt arguments are made; a story is simply told. It is a powerful way to teach young children an unbiblical view of marriage.

Another potent picture book, *My Princess Boy*, tells the story of a young boy who wants to wear a dress to school but fears being made fun of by his classmates. Cheryl Kilodavis, the boy's mother, wrote the book to convince young children to accept, and not question, people who want to dress and act like those of the opposite gender. Children are encouraged to view cross-dressing transgender individuals as no different from others, suggesting that gender confusion is normal. As Christians, we do not want our children to tease or bully anyone but to love them unconditionally as God has loved us. However, this storybook seeks to normalize transgenderism and can lead to gender confusion by suggesting that it is acceptable to reject our God-given gender.

By introducing you to these two books, I want to show you firsthand how our children are being taught an unbiblical view of marriage, purity, and sex. Ideas are introduced when children are young, then reinforced through different avenues as children age. Parents are often unaware that this is happening. From the child's point of view, he or she is being read a picture book just like Mom or Dad would read before bed. It seems harmless. But subtle, dangerous, unbiblical world views are being taught, and parents must know about them and be proactive.

As you'll see, *King and King* and *My Princess Boy* are just the tip of the iceberg.

## Meet SIECUS

I want to introduce you to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). More than likely you have never heard of this organization, but, if you have a child in the public school system, you are being impacted by its curriculum. For over a decade, SIECUS has published *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten–12th Grade* to help educators teach a robust sex education curriculum. SIECUS claims that “the *Guidelines*

have become one of the most influential publications in the field and a trusted resource for educators, curriculum developers, and school administrators.”<sup>1</sup> It goes on to say, “It is our sincere hope . . . to ensure that all young people receive the comprehensive education about sexuality they need to become sexually healthy adults.”<sup>2</sup>

The words “sexually healthy adults” should catch your attention. What is a sexually healthy adult? According to whose standards? And on what authority? You’ll soon see that a sexually healthy adult defined by SIECUS looks very different from the sexually healthy adult who follows God’s teaching in the Bible. SIECUS encourages children to seek pleasure, explore desire, reject external ethics, and decide for themselves what is right.

Although SIECUS states that parents should be a child’s primary sex educator, it either assumes that parents are not teaching children on this topic or believes that trained professionals can do a better job. Certainly a percentage of parents are failing to train and prepare their children, but I have found that Christian parents are very concerned about this topic, know it is their job to prepare their children for marriage, and desire to be effective in this area of parenting. In most instances, it is far more effective to work with a parent than to try to work around a parent. SIECUS’s school-based sex education is meant to replace parents’ teaching at every grade level.

Although I’ll provide a brief overview of the *Guidelines* here, I encourage you to look up this sex education material online (see footnote 1) so that you can see for yourself what concepts children are exposed to in American culture. Here is a brief summary.

*Marriage and divorce.* SIECUS defines marriage as a legal agreement between the married couple and the government<sup>3</sup> and teaches

1. National Guidelines Task Force, *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten–12th Grade*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 2004), 5, available online at [http://www.siecus.org/\\_data/global/images/guidelines.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/_data/global/images/guidelines.pdf).

2. Ibid.

3. See *ibid.*, 39.

children that there is no real difference in commitment between married and cohabiting couples.<sup>4</sup> Divorce is simply what happens when people decide to split up.<sup>5</sup> This is very different from the Bible's description of marriage as a lifelong covenant made by a man and woman before God (we'll explore this more in part 2).

*Gender roles.* Starting in kindergarten, SIECUS wants to discredit the idea that "boys and girls behave in certain [gender specific] ways."<sup>6</sup> By middle school, students are being told, "Individuals should be allowed to make their own choices about appropriate roles for themselves as men and women."<sup>7</sup> As for gender identity, this comes from a person's "internal sense" of whether they are male, female, or a mix of both.<sup>8</sup> We'll look at God's good design for men and women in chapters 8 and 9.

*Homosexuality.* SIECUS instructs children about homosexuality from the very beginning, teaches that "people of all sexual orientations can have relationships that are equally fulfilling,"<sup>9</sup> and wants children to believe that some of them are homosexual and "can be attracted to and fall in love with someone of the same gender."<sup>10</sup> It also normalizes two-dad and two-mom families.<sup>11</sup>

*Masturbation.* Children as young as kindergarten are introduced to the idea of "touching and rubbing one's own genitals to feel good."<sup>12</sup> Later they learn that "many" young people masturbate.<sup>13</sup>

4. See *ibid.*

5. See *ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 72.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 31.

9. *Ibid.*, 29.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See *ibid.*, 34.

12. *Ibid.*, 51.

13. *Ibid.*, 52.

*Pornography.* In high school, students are told that “some people” use pornography to “enhance their sexual fantasies.”<sup>14</sup> Rather than flee from sexual urges, grade-school-aged children are encouraged to embrace sexual feelings and fantasies and are told that sexual desires are natural.<sup>15</sup>

*Sexual activity.* Middle schoolers learn that they can “give and receive sexual pleasure” in “many ways,” even without sexual intercourse.<sup>16</sup> In high school, young people are taught that “many teenagers have had sexual intercourse and many have not.”<sup>17</sup>

*Avoiding parental oversight.* Young people are pointed in the direction of organizations and websites<sup>18</sup> where they can discuss homosexuality without their parents’ knowledge. Middle schoolers are told that “some agencies . . . provide services for teenagers that do not require parental permission, are confidential, and cost little or no money.”<sup>19</sup> Seventh and eighth graders are also told that, depending on their state, they may not need parental permission to be prescribed contraception.<sup>20</sup>

These guidelines should trouble Christians at every age level. First, they contradict the Bible and often teach the opposite of what God instructs in his Word. Children are being taught an erroneous definition of marriage, a faulty understanding of who may marry whom, and an unbiblical view of the roles of men and women in marriage. Children are encouraged to explore sexual desires at very young ages and are given damaging guidance about gender identity, abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation, and divorce.

14. Ibid., 56.

15. See *ibid.*, 51.

16. Ibid., 54.

17. Ibid.

18. See *ibid.*, 30.

19. Ibid., 49.

20. See *ibid.*, 59.

Second, these guidelines encourage certain behaviors and plant ideas in children's minds, suggesting that the behaviors are normal and good. The statements are subtle, but many of them equate to an immoral how-to manual. They imply that young people can and should use porn, touch themselves for pleasure, take emergency contraception, and contact organizations to talk about homosexuality without their parents' knowledge. These are presented as "options" or "ideas," but they are more than that. Why would you give children options that you don't want them to act on?

### **The Missionary Zeal of Our Sexual Culture**

The culture we live in celebrates sexual sin by making it readily available to anyone, at any time, in any location. We should be diligent to shield our children from as much evil as possible for as long as possible. But there will come a day in every child's life when he or she is exposed to sexual sin or unbiblical teaching about sex and marriage. For most children, such as the boy in my opening story, this happens sooner rather than later. In my experience, major exposure of some form happens to most children by their early to mid elementary years. Barrett Johnson has made similar observations.

I used to say that parents need to "get these issues on the table," but the reality is that they are already on the table. Our kids are being exposed to a constant stream of messages from their friends and the media and the world about relationships and sex. Most of these messages are far from the truth. Okay, let me be blunt: they are outright lies. These lies have the power to create in our kids a worldview that will impact their sexuality and their marriages for the rest of their lives. . . .

Current research, common sense, and the Biblical directive all scream this one truth: parents have significant power and influence over this dimension of their kids' lives. Moms and dads must enter into the discussion early and start defining

some truths before the world begins to overwhelm their kids with lies.<sup>21</sup>

Due to our culture, children are exposed to a lot of sexual content. They receive a robust, secular sex education and are taught society's views about marriage. As a result, many children are absorbing a secular, self-indulgent, antibiblical worldview. At best, many young people are confused about what is good, right, true, and noble related to marriage, dating, and purity. At worst, they are being set on a trajectory away from Christ.

Much is at stake. These are life-altering, eternity-impacting, major worldview issues.<sup>22</sup> The health of your child's soul, marriage, walk with Jesus, and trajectory in life depend in part on what he or she believes and how he or she behaves when it comes to purity, dating, and marriage. Parents who spend most of their time talking about the body's biological functions and changes in puberty are addressing helpful subjects but are missing the most important topics.

The missionary zeal of our sexual culture is operating in full force. Young people hear messages such as "My body, my choice" and "If it feels so good, how can it be so wrong?" Parents must counter these cultural messages with the truth of God's Word or cultural confusion will seep into our children's hearts just as it did into the Corinthian church (see 1 Cor. 6:12–20).

Some people in the Corinthian church believed that religious prostitution benefitted the spiritual life and aided a person's relationship with God. Some believed that having sex was as natural and necessary as eating food. The church at Corinth had embraced the cultural belief that "everything is permissible" and used this to justify their actions (see 1 Cor. 6:12). They dismissed the importance of sexual purity due to the faulty belief that God would destroy the

21. Barrett Johnson, *The Talks: A Parent's Guide to Critical Conversations about Sex, Dating, and Other Unmentionables* (Atlanta: INFO for Families, 2014), 12.

22. For an explanation of the worldview behind the sexual revolution, see Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 142–46.

body, and so it didn't matter what they did with their bodies. Paul responded that, just because something is biologically possible, this does not make it morally permissible. His guiding principle is that our bodies belong to God and are to be used in a way that honors him.

The state of the church at Corinth sends a loud warning to parents today. That group of Scripture-loving, Christ-following people had their sexual practices all wrong. They couldn't differentiate what was right from wrong. They looked more like the city of Corinth than the people of Christ. What occurred at the church of Corinth can easily happen in the hearts of our children. Richard Pratt's comments on 1 Corinthians 6 are worth considering: "Christians are easily influenced by the standards of the world. When we grow up in a culture that tells us certain practices are good, we tend to embrace these practices even as we follow Christ. Every Christian has such cultural blind spots."<sup>23</sup>

Plenty of children—and possibly your own—are in danger of embracing our culture's powerful messages, even as they seek to follow Christ. Perhaps some of the SIECUS guidelines didn't seem alarming to you. It is challenging to recognize a cultural blind spot. Worldly influence in the hearts of our children is hard to detect, because it takes time for weeds to grow. With God's grace and proper training, our children can be Bible-believing Christians who are spiritual salmon, swimming against the current of culture.

Parents have the critical job of articulating and embodying a biblical vision of marriage to their children. Unless our children are well grounded in Scripture, they will look more like culture than like Christ. Our children need the soul-gripping, life-shaping words of Scripture to ground them, to guide them, and to guard them.

Take a moment and think about your child. When your child encounters a message about sex or marriage, such as the topics from SIECUS, is he or she able to test what is said against the Bible? Would he or she be swayed into believing and acting on the message being

23. Richard L. Pratt Jr., *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2000), 97.



taught, or would your child be able to spot the error and stand firm in his or her faith?

### **An Encouraging Note**

While there is much for us to be alarmed about, it is sinful for the Christian to live in a state of worry and fear. We instruct our children because we are motivated by love and want what is best for them, not because we are frightened.

God is the God of hope who is sovereignly in control over all. Parents can rest in the God of refuge and turn to him for joy, strength, and peace. Enemies will attack our children's hearts, but this knowledge should not debilitate or discourage us. Instead, it should motivate us to action and remind us that there is a battle raging for our children's hearts. Parents and grandparents must intentionally live out Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and diligently train their children to know the truth and love the Lord.

The following email illustrates parents who are doing just that. It is my hope that you will be encouraged by this story and be given a vision, even if only a small one, for the role you must play in your child's life when it comes to the topics of dating, marriage, and sex.

Just wanted to share with you a cool conversation my daughter had with her close group of friends from school. There are four of them who have been hanging out together since sixth grade, one of whom has been a good friend since first grade. Anyway, she had a sleepover with them on Friday night, and at some point the conversation turned to prom night (a few years off yet, thankfully). Two of the girls said that they fully expected to rent a hotel room after prom and have sex, because it was expected and "everyone" does it. My daughter stood up to them and told them she wasn't planning on "doing it" because she wants to wait until her wedding night. Then she explained about the purity ring she was wearing and what it stood for. She said there was absolute silence in the room for at least thirty seconds while they thought

about it. Then someone asked, “What if the guy you date expects it? What will you do then?” To which she responded, “I plan on dating a guy who holds to the same values and morals that I do so that it won’t be an issue.” She was so excited because she had prayed, before going over there, that she would be a good witness for Christ. At some point she hopes to bring God into the conversation as to why she has the morals she does. I encouraged her to do so and said I was proud of her for stating what she believed. I think God will honor that step of faith.

Praise the Lord for parents who have prepared their children for this type of experience and have done so using biblical principles and proven methods. The purity ring was evidence that these parents took their role seriously, and it is obvious that what they taught their daughter made an impact. What if these parents had not taught their child God’s truth about marriage? What path might she have gone down later in life as a result of being influenced by her friends’ decisions?

There is an important point to be made here. Many of the decisions our children make today are a result of convictions they have formed months or even years beforehand. The manifestation of those convictions, or lack thereof, typically takes time to fully bear fruit. This is why it is critical that biblical truths are taught early in a child’s life. Notice that, at thirteen years old, these young people had already developed their convictions about what they would do in matters of purity. The early teen years are not the time to *start* the conversation. They are the time to put the finishing touches on a lengthy discussion that has already been happening since the child was very young. Training children early prepares young people properly when situations like this arise.

A second observation about this story is also worth noting. This daughter *talked* with her parents. She told them, in detail, what happened. For those without older children, this does not happen by chance. It happens because parents have cultivated an intimate and caring relationship with their children. How many of the other

girls in this story told their parents about the same conversation? My guess is none. If this were your child, would she feel comfortable and safe to share the content of this conversation with you? What is the health of the relationship between you and your child? A good relationship between parent and child is critical in order for biblical truth to be embraced.

If your child had been at this sleepover, how would he or she have responded? Would your child have caved and eventually made ungodly choices? Would your child have been quiet and not stood up for the truth? Or would your child have held to strong biblical convictions?

Of course, we all want our children to have strong biblical convictions, but getting there is the challenge. The great news is that God has already provided us everything that we need for the task. My goal is to convey that to you in this book.

“MY KIDS ARE WAY TOO YOUNG TO BE THINKING ABOUT DATING AND MARRIAGE ALREADY! WHY WOULD I BEGIN ‘THE TALK’ NOW, BEFORE THEY’VE EVEN STARTED ASKING QUESTIONS?”



Many parents find it difficult to broach these topics with their children, especially in age-appropriate ways. But our choice is no longer between teaching them now or later—if we do not reach them first, our culture is happy to step in with messages of its own. *Someone* is going to shape our children’s beliefs—so the time to start biblical conversations is now!

In this foundation-laying book, Josh Mulvihill offers theological training for a critical area of parenting. He walks parents through how to begin conversations, then teaches them God’s purpose for dating, marriage, and sex so they can pass this teaching on to their children.

The Bible says children are never too young to learn God’s plan for this area of their lives . . . so prepare yourself to prepare *them* for one of the most important decisions they will ever make.



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“Josh Mulvihill has given parents an invaluable resource to help them present a biblical worldview of sexuality, marriage, and dating to their children.”

**MARTY MACHOWSKI**, Family Life Pastor, Covenant Fellowship Church, Glen Mills, Pennsylvania; Author, *The Ology*

“Josh Mulvihill’s approach is straight from the Bible, full of great insight and advice, and incredibly helpful.”

**LARRY FOWLER**, Founder, The Legacy Coalition



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