



CAN WE _____ ?

Part 10 of Real Marriage

Pastor Mark Driscoll | March 18, 2012

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 10 in the book is the one that has gotten me, and us, in all the trouble. I was at a soccer match not long ago. I don't usually watch soccer, but they gave me free tickets, so I took my family. It was actually super, super, super fun, really, really, really cool to go. And they had something called a free kick. Have you seen a free kick in soccer? It's where one guy is trying to kick the ball into the net, and the other guys stand in front of him, and their goal is to block the ball, but they know it's coming, and it will hurt. So, the men tend to stand like this. I should probably preach this sermon from that position. This is the one that gets me into all the trouble. It's the "can we" question. I'll say that—oh, boy—pray for me as I teach this session. If I do this wrong, I have to fire myself.

Here's the big idea. The Bible is perfect, God-inspired, and true. It answers lots of questions. It doesn't answer every question. And the question then is, "Well, if we have a question, particularly about our marital intimacy, and it's not in the Bible, where do we go for an answer?" And that's where we're trying to help on this issue of "Can we blank?" Married couples have questions, and sometimes the Bible does answer them. Sometimes the Bible may answer them in principle. Sometimes the Bible might not answer them in such a specific way, so as to give you clarity.

I've taught this content in multiple nations. I've taught it all around the United States of America. I have used some of it in co-hosting *Loveline* with Dr. Drew. We've done a ton of media interviews. The issues that we are hitting are not issues that are uncommon; they're just uncommon in church. The magazines in the grocery store line facing children, written for women, tend to answer many of the same questions, and we're just trying to help people with the Word of God and give them options other than pornography, and culture, and base men's and women's magazines.

You say, "Why is he making such a preface? It seems like he's afraid." Yes, he is. Okay, so—

OUR MOTIVES

Here are some of the motives for the writing of this chapter and the preaching of this PG-version of the chapter. Number one, sex is a unique aspect of the marriage relationship. It's not part of any other relationship, so it's a distinguishing feature of marriage, and it's important.

As I said, number two, the Bible answers many questions, but not every question we have.

Number three, we want couples to think, talk, and pray about their intimacy in their marriage. We want you to talk about some things. And the truth is a lot of couples, they're thinking, "Well, I'd like to try this or talk about that, but I feel a little awkward, and maybe you should bring it up, or maybe I should bring it up. No, the Driscolls brought it up for us. They've removed the awkwardness, and now we can just talk. Hey, I was reading the book. Did you notice on page blankety-blank, have you ever thought of that? Maybe we should talk about that."

In addition, number four, we want to help people know, in marriage, what they may do, not what they must do. There's a big difference. We're saying, "Here's all your freedom—and you don't need to use it all—but here's all your freedom. Feel free to, according to conscience and conviction, the two of you in agreement, prayerfully, carefully considering, 'We'll do this, not that, because we're okay with this, not that.'"

Additionally, number five, we believe public and private ministry should be the same. The questions that we answer are questions that people ask their counselor, they ask their pastor in private; we want to take those issues public, so that more people can get answers and help. And so we do not distinguish between public and private ministries.

Number six, these questions that we'll answer are a starting point, not an ending point. We're not saying everything the Bible says. We're saying, "Here are some beginning places for the two of you to study and discuss."

Number seven, we don't think anything should happen in a marriage bedroom unless God, the government, the husband, and the wife all agree.

Number eight, we believe the what and the why are important. It's not just what you want to do, but why you want to do it. Motivation is very important.

And number nine, we believe that parents need to be more precise in speaking about sexual matters with their children. The average first porn exposure is at age eleven via the Internet. The number one consumer of pornography is twelve- to seventeen-year-old boys, and the average person loses their virginity by age sixteen. It is not uncommon for junior high and high school students to be sexting and sharing explicit photos of their boyfriends and

girlfriends with one another. And many students in junior high and high school do not consider anything to be sex other than one act, and they will do all kinds of other things, while still wearing the purity ring that their father gave them, not knowing that they are, in fact, sinning. So, we have to be specific in instructing our children early.

THE CORINTHIANS

Okay, there's the preface. Here's the issue. The sexual questions that people have, including you, are, generally speaking, not entirely new. Technology, the Internet, and some things have created new questions, but many of the questions are very old.

So, there was a city in the Bible called Corinth. Paul wrote multiple letters there. We have 1 and 2 Corinthians. He wrote at least one additional letter. We don't have it. He was so angry. He was not under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and so the Holy Spirit lost that one for us. Yes, Pastor Paul got a little frustrated.

And they had a list of questions for him. They were in a highly sexual city. They had questions about cross-dressing. Can men dress like women and women dress like men? They had questions about homosexuality, fornication, which is sex before marriage. They had questions about adultery and incest, and one guy was living with his apparent stepmother, and they didn't think it was a problem, because they were open to tolerance, diversity, and all had rainbow bumper stickers on the back of their camels and chariots.

So, Corinth was a very modern city. They also had a temple to pagan religion that employed upwards of one thousand male and female prostitutes, and so they basically turned a strip club into, quote/unquote "a church." I mean, this is a very confused city filled with new Christians. And in that day, if someone was a woman and very morally loose, they would actually call her, the slang was, "a Corinthian girl." I'm not saying that's good, but I'm saying that that was the case in their day.

Paul led a church there, and he had left for a season, and they asked him a bunch of questions, many of them in regards to sex and gender. And he writes them a response, 1 Corinthians, and in particular in a section about all of their sexual questions, he writes this, 1 Corinthians 6:12: "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated—' some of your translations will say, 'mastered,' 'by anything.'"

And so I'm not saying that this is all the Bible has to say, but I am saying that out of this we can get three good questions to get us thinking, praying, studying, and discussing with our spouse about the particular questions that we have regarding what we can do.

1. IS IT LAWFUL?

So, the first question is, "Is it lawful?" And here we're looking at, number one, what does the government say? If it's illegal, we are to, Romans 13, obey the government. So, if you're thirty-five, and you want to date somebody who's fifteen, it's illegal. Right? It's illegal. So, we ask questions like that, because some things are illegal. So, we ask questions regarding, "What does the government say?"

But in addition, what does God say? Because there are some things that are not illegal, but they are sinful. The government does not see them as wrong, but God does, like adultery. Like if your spouse tragically commits adultery on you, you can't call 911. "Hello, what is your emergency?" "My spouse committed adultery." They will say, "We do not send the police out for that. It's not a crime. You can't fill out a form or press charges. It's not illegal." It's not illegal, but it's sinful. The government doesn't see it, necessarily, as wrongdoing, but God does.

So, we have to ask the two questions, "Well, what does the government say? And what does God say? Is it, in fact, lawful?"

Now, here are the things that the Bible says, the Word of God says, the God of the Word says are sinful. Sexual sin includes homosexuality, erotica, bestiality, bisexuality, fornication, friends with benefits, adultery, swinging, prostitution, incest, rape, polygamy, polyandry (which is one woman with multiple husbands), sinful lust, pornography, pedophilia, sexually touching someone else in any way with or without clothes on that you're not married to, and sexually viewing or talking to someone else, that is other than your spouse, including via technology.

And I know one of you is like, "I've got one you missed." That is nasty. That counts, too. Okay? And the Bible uses a big word called "pornea," and Jesus uses that word, and it's translated "sexual immorality." It's a big category for all kinds of sexual sin, because if God only lists things, sinners will find a way around them, because of their sinful heart, and so God says "et cetera." And that Greek word "pornea" is the root word from which we get our word, of course, pornographic or pornography.

So, if you want to do any of these things, you say, "Can we blank?" or "Can I blank?" The answer is no, you can't. You can't and be faithful to God. You can't worship God and do those things, because in doing those things, you're worshiping sex as god, and you're sinning against the real God.

So, basically, what we're talking about is that marital intimacy is for a husband and a wife in the covenant of marriage without anyone else involved in any way—just a husband and a wife. Okay? Those are the limitations, restrictions, and protections that God puts on this gift of sex, so that it doesn't become god-like, and we don't view it as gross, but we receive it as a gift to be enjoyed and stewarded to God's glory and our pleasure.

2. IS IT HELPFUL?

Second question, is it helpful? That's Paul's question. Is it helpful? So, let's say you answer the first question. You say, "Well, it's not illegal, and the Bible doesn't forbid it. Can we do it?" Next question, "Is it going to help or harm the marriage?" There are things that may not be sinful, but for your marriage may not be helpful. Do you see the difference?

So, back to why God created sex. There are six reasons, according to the Bible. Pleasure. In the Song of Solomon, children are not mentioned, though they are a blessing; it's all about the pleasures of marital intimacy. If one of you has pain, discomfort, is harmed, or hurt, or abused in any way, the answer is no.

It's also for children. The Bible says be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it. Children are a blessing. Not every time a couple is together need there be the possibility of child conception and bearing, but, yes, it is perfectly acceptable to say, "We want to start a family, and one of the reasons we want to be intimate is we would love to be parents." That's perfectly acceptable in the sight of God, and that can, in fact, be helpful.

It's also for knowledge. Genesis 4:1 says that Adam lay with his wife, Eve, and he knew her. If this allows you to know one another at a deeper level of intimacy, to treasure, to enjoy, to explore one another, and your consciences are both clear, it's not a sin against God, and it's not a violation of government, then perhaps it could be something that would be helpful. But if what it does is it pushes you apart, if it makes one of you feel taken advantage of, or abused, or mistreated, or neglected, or used, then that is not building knowledge between the two of you. It's not drawing the other person out and getting to know them. It is using and abusing them.

Number four, it's for protection. First Corinthians 7:2-5 says that a husband and wife are obligated to fulfill their conjugal rights, and they should not deprive one another, but by mutual consent and for a time to devote themselves to prayer, so that they may not fall into temptation because of their lack of self-control. Sometimes the husband is in the mood, and the wife isn't, and so they will be together. Later on, she'll be in the mood, and he won't. So, they will be together. And it is a couple lovingly serving one another without keeping a record, saying, "Well, you know, there's no excuse for sexual sin outside of the marriage, but if I serve you, and you serve me, that is a safeguard and protection against temptation." Right? And that is a perfectly acceptable reason. So, that could be helpful.

Number five, it is for comfort. The story is told in 2 Samuel 12:24, where a child dies, and a couple is intimate, to comfort one another, because, as I've said frequently, you sometimes can't fix it, and you don't want to talk about it. You just don't want to be alone in it, and so you're together. That could be a perfectly helpful reason for a couple to be together.

And number six, it's for oneness, Genesis 2:24, that the two shall become one flesh. So, the question is does it pull you together or push you apart? Do you both have a clear conscience, or does one of you want to do something that the other is not okay with in your conscience? Do you both feel like this is something that, together, you want to do, or do you feel like you're getting bullied or pushed, that you're getting abused or harassed, or maybe even you're getting assaulted and imposed upon? Does it cause you to be two or one? Does it cause your spouse to feel closer to you or to feel more dangerous with you, to feel put upon, taken advantage of, neglected, used and abused? And I don't know what the particular issues are in your marriage.

And for those of you who are single, you don't even know this kind of sex, if you've been fornicating prior to marriage and/or are into pornography. You don't understand the biblical reasons for sex. So, you need to have a renewing of your mind, so that as you prepare for a sexual married relationship, you're able to start to think biblically before you act practically.

First of all, is it lawful? What does government and God say? Secondly, is it helpful? Will this build our marriage or break our marriage? Will this make us closer or further apart? Do we both have a clear conscience or not? What is the heart motive? Why would we want to do this or not do this? Those kinds of questions.

And so what I'm asking the couples that are married and those who are engaged and preparing for marriage to do is get face-to-face, as friends, and you've got to talk about it. And some of you say, "I feel very awkward talking about it." Well, you're going to be equally awkward doing it, so you may as well talk about it first.

I know a lot of Christian married couples, sometimes because one or both of them has had the view of sex as gross, they don't talk about it. I've been in counseling sessions with embittered, frustrated, divided couples, and I'll just ask, "Well, what would you like to do?" And one person will say, "I'd like to do this." And the other person said, "I'm fine with that." "Really, you are?" "Yeah." "Why are you meeting with me? Like, I mean, I love you, and I'm glad to be here, but you want to do it, they are fine doing it. You could've settled this at your home on the couch." I'll just leave it at that. I meant talking about it . . . and some other stuff.

3. IS IT ENSLAVING?

All right, the third question, "Is it enslaving?" Now, this is going to be a weird question. Some of your translations will say, "mastered by it" or "dominated by it." This is the biblical language for slavery, and when we think of slavery, because of the horror of slavery in the US, we tend to think of one person overtaking and abusing another person, treating them as property, even though they're image bearers of God.

And there certainly is that kind of slavery, and that even continues today, tragically, in the sex slave trade, and the adult entertainment industry, and pornography, where particularly young women, oftentimes girls, are made slaves, and they are bought and sold. That is assuredly a horrific evil, and it is one form of slavery.

Another form of slavery, according to the Bible, is pernicious, and it is frequent, and it is subtler, and as a result is sometimes less seen, and that is that we choose our slave master. We will choose to enslave ourselves to someone or something. In our culture, we use the language of addiction. So, to be addicted, according to the Bible, is to be enslaved. That's the biblical language for addiction.

See, addiction is more a therapeutic term that, "I'm a victim, I'm weak, something has overtaken me." Slavery puts it in a gospel context of, "I belong to

God, but Satan has baited my hook,” if I could use a Puritan illustration. “I saw the bait. I ignored the hook. I bit, and now he is reeling me in to be his possession, to harm me and destroy me. He now controls me and is my master.”

And what we need then is not just to overcome an addiction, but we need Jesus to be our Savior, our liberator, our redeemer, to get the hook out of our mouth, and to get us away from our enemy, and away from our slavery, and away from our misery. We need Jesus. He came to set captives free. He reads from the scroll of Isaiah at the beginning of his earthly ministry, and part of what he says is, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news and to set captives free.” To set captives free, and that includes drugs, and alcohol, and sex, and gambling, and violence, and all kinds of slavery and captivity.

And so there are certain things that may not be sinful, but for you they might be slavery. I’ll give some general examples. Some of you should not drink any alcohol; not because it’s a sin, but because for you it becomes a master, and it enslaves you, and it rules you, and it dominates you. You can’t control it; it controls you. And so you may have the freedom to drink: according to the government, if you’re over the age of twenty-one; according to the Bible, not getting drunk and tempting others to do the same and glorying in your liberties. But for some of you, you will say, “I have freedom, but I do not exercise my full freedom, because, for me, I am weak, not strong, and it would lead to slavery.” Does that make sense?

I came from a long line, for example, of very severe alcoholism, and, as a result, men of violent tempers, and bad dispositions, and abuse, and lots of horrific things. And so I did not drink. When I became a Christian, I knew what the Bible said, and that was that Jesus made alcohol, and drinking wasn’t necessarily a sin; but, for me, it was a conscience issue. So, I did not drink. I never had a drink until I was thirty years old, and I just felt, “I don’t want to be enslaved to something.”

And now, occasionally, I’ll have a glass of wine with dinner. And I don’t want to make anyone stumble, or glory in my liberties, or get drunk, or anything of that nature, but it was a conscience issue for me to where, for many years, I didn’t use my full freedom because I was afraid that I would lose my freedom and find myself enslaved. Does that make sense?

So, let me take that principal and come back to the issue of sexuality. There may be things within marriage that are permissible, but they’re not beneficial, because they would be things you could not master. They are things that would master you. And the reason is this: Your body, with certain pleasures, releases what is called a biochemical love potion. This is sort of the common language for a lot of things that happen biologically and neurologically in your body; and the reward biologically, and chemically, and neurologically, produces the same kind of euphoria as opium or heroin. You ever seen somebody addicted to opium or heroin? People who are addicted to sex experience a very similar high in a very similar part of the brain. As a result, they can become similarly addicted. This is particularly true of pornography.

And so God created this great pleasure to connect us with, to bind us to, to cause us to be desirous of our spouse, that it’s like gravity pulling a husband and wife together. So, if you have chastity before marriage, fidelity in marriage, you have two servant lovers who are friends and obey the Word of God, and live within their freedoms, and enjoy one another.

They are absolutely, inexplicably connected at every level. Theologically, they worship God. Emotionally, they love each other. Financially, they’re doing their life together. Physically, they’re spending time in one another’s presence. Verbally, they’re talking to one another. And sexually, they’re enjoying one another. They’re connected at all levels in a deep and profound way. That was God’s glorious, good intent.

And when we sin, we take that same powerful connection, and we bind ourselves to someone we’re dating, we bind ourselves to pornography, we bind ourselves to various kinds of sexual sin, and it results in slavery and addiction. So, you’re playing with something, sexually speaking, that is very powerful, for good or evil, so you need to be a wise steward of this great gift. It can absolutely connect a couple or take one or both persons in the marriage covenant and connect them to someone or something else in a deadly, destructive, and damnable way.

This is why Job 31:1, he says, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look upon a woman lustfully.” What he’s saying is, “I’m not going to connect myself with anyone else.” This is why the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, also called a pastor in the New Testament, the highest spiritual leader is to be, quote, “the husband of one wife.” In the Greek, literally translated that means “a one-woman man.” He’s thinking about her. He’s talking to her. He’s pursuing her. He’s enjoying her. His desires are for her, and that those spiritual leaders are to set the example for all of God’s people, that all men are to be one-woman men, and all the women are to be one-man women. That’s God’s intent.

And so you’ve got to ask this question. “If we do this—” and let’s say it’s lawful in the sight of God and government. Secondly, let’s say that it is potentially helpful for one of the six reasons that God gave us the gift of sex. You have to ask that third question. Basically, are we going to get ourselves in trouble? Are we going to get addicted to something that will be unholy, unhelpful, and consequently make us unhappy?

Because what happens is you create something called a neural pathway when you’re going for that kind of pleasure. There’s a Christian biopsychologist named Struthers, who has done some helpful research in this area. And he says, “If down a path there is a pleasure, then we will find ourselves venturing down that path frequently. Eventually, we make it into a well-worn rut, that pleasure path, until invariably we become consumed by it, perhaps addicted to it.”

Now, in a very good and healthy sense, that could be your spouse. You’re like, “I need my spouse. I like my spouse. I think about my spouse. I’m attracted to my spouse. I desire my spouse. I want to be near my spouse.” That’s not bad. Amen? That’s a good thing.

But if down the pleasure path, someone or something else is there, then you create a biological, physiological, neural pathway, and that’s your addiction cycle. That’s your enslavement cycle. So, you’ve got to understand this. Now, some of you know what I’m talking about, because you’ve slept with a

lot of people. You've looked at pornography. You've become addicted to certain toys. Now you're no longer able to just enjoy your spouse, and they're not really the object of your affection and the place of your strongest desire. That's what has happened.

So, you need to avoid that old path, and you need to create a new path. For those of you who are single, there's no path, all right? For those of you who are married, it is creating new, healthy, holy paths of pleasure, so that you can have that connection solely with your spouse, and avoiding old ruts.

For some of you, you like to do that which is forbidden, that which is taboo, that which is sinful, or dirty, or maybe you could even get caught, because not only do you enjoy the pleasure, but with that guilt and shame comes an adrenalin rush that makes you more addicted as your body becomes more strongly attached to receiving that high.

You ever heard of somebody who has a runner's high? That's because at a certain point, their body drops a ton of adrenalin, and they love that high. It's why certain people get addicted to things like skydiving, or motorcycle racing, certain high-risk activities that I would say to you are not always sinful, but you can get addicted to the adrenalin rush.

And when you combine that with the pleasure of intimacy, you add that element of the forbidden and the adrenalin high. Now you've got somebody who can become incredibly addicted, and some of you are in that place, and some of you are finding it hard to get out. And my encouragement would be to come clean before you get caught and to get help, so that you can get out of your slavery.

Sexual Addiction

Patrick Carnes is a researcher who has done some of the earliest and most longstanding research on sexual addiction. Many of the celebrities continue to go to him today. I do not know whether or not he knows Jesus, but he has laid out a few steps and warnings, and I submit them to you for consideration.

Number one, a pattern of out-of-control behavior. That shows you're enslaved.

Number two, severe consequences because of sexual behavior. That indicates you're enslaved.

Number three, an inability to stop, despite negative consequences. Bad things keep happening, but you keep going. Enslaved.

Number four, severe mood changes around sexual behavior. If you don't get what you want, you're like an addict who's jonesing for a fix. If you do get what you want, you feel high for a while. It indicates you're enslaved.

Number five, persistent pursuit of high-risk behaviors. You keep pushing the envelope. You're never satisfied. It gets more dangerous, more dark, more deadly. You're enslaved.

Number six, an ongoing effort to stop or limit behaviors. "I'm never going to do that again. I did it again. Okay, I'm not going to do it as often. I'm going to cut back and control it." You don't master it. It masters you. It's indicative that you've enslaved.

Number seven, inordinate amounts of time spent on sexual matters. All of a sudden, you're thinking about it all the time. You're on the Internet. You're spending tons of time e-mailing, texting, looking at stuff, obsessing. Now you're spending money. Now you're acting out. Now you're escalating. All of a sudden, it's becoming a very large percentage of your life. It's indicative that you're enslaved.

Number eight, increasing amounts of sexual experiences. "I'm bored with that. I need to do more. We need to push it. We need to go further. That's not enough for me. More, more, more, more." And we're not talking about someone who is neglected in their marriage, but someone who is unhealthy and pushing it beyond what is reasonable. They are moving into a position where sex is like god, and ultimately they are a slave.

And number nine, sexual obsession and fantasy is a primary coping tool. You become obsessed. "I have to do this." And you can't let it go. And then it leads you into fantasy. You start thinking about other people and things and obsessions. And what's bizarre to me is, in our culture, people don't even see this always as sinful.

Grace and I did the Dr. Drew show on television here a while back, and this was one of the things that we got into a bit of a disagreement about with the non-Christian sex therapists. They said, "What's wrong with fantasy? Are you saying it's wrong for a married couple to just be fantasizing about somebody they're not married to and all the things they'd like to do with them?" Yes, because it's lust of the heart, Jesus says. They said, "Oh, that's ridiculous. That's wrong. That's way too conservative. That's unreasonable." No, it's not.

If you have desires, they should be for your spouse. If you have interests, talk about them with your spouse. There are things you want to do? Lovingly, prayerfully, biblically discuss those with your spouse. Don't be thinking about anyone else, and certainly don't be talking about anyone else, and certainly don't be doing anything with anyone else.

I hope you're seeing that I want to take those of you who have sex as god, or you have an addiction cycle, or you're enslaved, or heading toward slavery, or you've got a neural pathway toward a pleasure that's very unhealthy, and you're hoping that I would get your spouse on that path with you— "Tell them to do it! Tell them to do it! Tell them to do it! I want to do it! Tell them to do it!" I want you to pull back and ask, "Is this godly? Is this holy? Is this humble? Is this what Jesus wants?"

Some of you say, "The Bible doesn't say it's wrong!" It may not be, but it may be for you, as long as your heart is in this condition. Because, for you, it could be enslaving. I don't want to, in any way, be someone who empowers one spouse to abuse another. That's exactly what I'm trying to avoid.

FREE IN CHRIST

But let's say, "Question number one, it is lawful. God and government have no opposition to it or problem with it. Number two, based upon the six reasons that the Bible gives, it could be helpful to our marriage. And number three, we don't believe it'll become enslaving, or if we're doing it, it is not enslaving. It is under control. It does not control us. It is not the center obsession of our relationship. It's part of what we enjoy together." Then I would say be free in Christ to enjoy one another, and use whatever freedom the two of you prayerfully agree is acceptable to you.

Now, as soon as I say this, those who see sex as gross, "You've gone too far!" Those who see sex as god, "You didn't go far enough!" And I would say it's a gift from God to be enjoyed and stewarded in a way that is holy and helpful. It is meaningful and purposeful. It is passionate and pleasurable. And I don't want to be in your bedroom with a striped shirt and a whistle calling fouls. Throwing white flags, "Upon further review . . ." I just don't want to be that guy.

But some of you are already doing things that you haven't even prayed, or thought, or talked about, and I want you to be more considerate and contemplative regarding those things. And some of you have interests and I want you to prayerfully, carefully consider the why, not just the what, before you speak with your spouse against them.

Some of you have done things to your spouse or pressured them into things you need to apologize, repent for, ask their forgiveness of, and put to death. And some of you have been so fearful and timid that you haven't talked about much, or you haven't explored much, and as a result, you're kind of bored with one another, and I would encourage you to explore and enjoy your freedoms in Christ.

You're all coming from different places, and there's not one answer for everyone, but I want to lovingly open up these categories, based upon 1 Corinthians 6:12, to invite you to come to that place where sex is a gift, and your spouse is a treasure, and the two of you are working according to biblical conviction and loving compassion. Amen?

Q&A WITH GRACE

Okay. That being said, I'll go get Grace, and we'll answer your questions. I'm a little worried about what they might be, but we will see what they are in just a moment. So, we'll be right back. *[Applauding]*

Deep breath. Okay, we're going to do this, right? Thank you. Most stay-at-home mothers of five don't have to do this in front of the world, so thank you very, very, very much. We'll just get right to questions.

"Where do I channel my sexual passions while single or dating?"

Grace: You should start that one.

You want me to start that one? Okay. I would say a couple of things. Number one, we look at the Lord Jesus, and he was single and died a virgin, which is maybe one of his miracles, and rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, still having no sexual contact with anyone. And so that means a perfect life lived does not have to include marriage and sex.

So, for those of you who are single, I want you to hear that doesn't make you a second-class citizen. It doesn't restrict your ability to glorify God or to live a passionate, meaningful, purposeful life. And so sometimes when you're single, it just feels like you're in a holding pattern until life really begins. No, it doesn't.

So, you know, don't waste your singleness. Use it to the glory of God and the good of others. So, looking at the Lord Jesus, you see he spent his time to study. He spent his time to teach. He spent his time to work, spent time as a carpenter. He spent his time to pray. He spent time to serve others. He spent time fighting against injustice.

He spent time investing in children. A lot of singles, especially men, don't do that. My encouragement and exhortation and admonition to the single guys is always: Work in the nursery. Work in the nursery. Go to one service and serve in the other in the nursery. There's a bunch of kids in there that don't have a dad. They'd love to wrestle with you. In addition, working in the nursery is a bunch of single, young women who love children and aspire to be mothers. And while you're playing with children, and they're playing with children, you might actually get to the point where the two of you make children. After you're married. And, as well, that allows you to get to know and love children, so that even if you aspire to be a parent, it's a good way to open your heart. It's interesting how many kids were really interested and attracted to Jesus—a single guy—but it's because he loved and served children, as well.

So, those kinds of things, I know this is going to sound really simplistic. I would say read the gospels. Look at the life of Jesus. And even as a single person, ask yourself, "What did he give his time, talent, and treasure to?" Those are good examples of things to do.

I would say, as well, guard your heart against sinful lust, so avoid pornography and inappropriate relationships with others of a sexual nature. And if you're really feeling led toward marriage and desirous of marriage, then it's preparing yourself and putting yourself in a position where, you know, you can get married sooner than later. It's the reason that, you know, I was saved at nineteen, but we got married at twenty-one, because we had done it wrong, but once I met Jesus, and I knew I wanted to be with Grace, you know, I knew that for us, being married was our future, so I wanted to get to that at an early point, so that's what we did.

Grace: It's practicing self-control. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and even in marriage, you have to practice self-control

sexually at times, because after a child, or an illness—

Yeah, unpack that. That's really—I think single people think, "When you get married, then you have sex every day, right?" You laugh. "Why are you laughing?" So, what does that mean? Because self-control has to be practiced within marriage, as well.

Grace: Yeah, I mean, there are seasons—whether it's illness, or someone was hurt, or pregnancy, sometimes bed rest, or after pregnancy, four to six weeks, depending on doctors' recommendations. There's always—

Work-related travel. Military deployment.

Grace: Yeah, exactly, all those things. So, you need to be able to have that self-control in the marriage; so, before marriage, practicing that is a great opportunity, so that you don't become embittered really quickly in the marriage. But it's not a bad thing. It's not like you can just take this and say, "I'm going to channel this sexual energy into this area." That is saved for marriage, and so it's not that energy that you're channeling into a different area of your life. It's that you're practicing self-control in that area. You're not turning off all your emotions, but you're just doing other things to serve the Lord until he brings someone into your life that is going to be your spouse.

And our encouragement, too, would always be don't kill your desire. A lot of singles would just say, "I just killed my desire, so I don't have temptation." Well, you're going to get married. If you hope to get married, and in the grace of God you do get married, you don't want your desires to be dead. So, it's not about deadening your desires, but directing your desires toward godly things until you get married, and then toward your spouse.

And the singles who have tried to just deaden their desires, it keeps them from sin while single, but it keeps them from joy while married. I think sometimes, even when we're instructing teenagers in the church, for example, we just sort of tell them, "Kill your desires, so you don't get in trouble," which might keep them away from certain trouble, while single, but it will cause other trouble in marriage. And so the desires are good. And then finding, as Grace said, a way of being passionate in your life for Christ, and then saving a certain expression of that passion for marriage is really the way to go.

Let's do another one.

"Can we marry without the intention of having children?"

I'll have the woman with five children answer the question. "We want to get married and have sex. We have no interest in kids."

Grace: I used to believe that everyone should have kids, no matter what, and I believe that everyone should desire kids, because that's what God commands, to be fruitful and multiply. But there are some situations, for sure, that people shouldn't have kids.

Explain that. Why would you say that? Because of the way they treat the kids?

Grace: Yeah, because they're terrible people. And, I mean, there's a lot of people that do have kids that are just horrible to their children. And, you know, God's grace can cover that and heal those children, absolutely.

But, yeah, I think the question goes back to the selfishness issue, for me. To not want to have kids is, I would say, selfish, because children are a blessing. God calls them a blessing, and they teach us so much. Women are saved through childbearing, which means we aren't saved eternally—our salvation isn't based on that as far as eternal salvation, but we are saved, we are redeemed day after day after day, through raising our children, because they show us our sin in a way that I don't know other things in my life that would show me my sin as much as my children. So, it gives us opportunity to repent and work toward the holiness that God intends.

So, for me, the question, it raises an issue of selfishness. And we've had a lot of people—I mean, we have tons of couples at our church, so we have a lot of people that have talked through this and have gone into marriage, saying, "There is no way I will ever have children." And they have several children and are thankful that they worked through that issue, because their life would be not as full and blessed as it is with the children that they have.

Yeah, and I think I would go pastorally to the why. Is it because you're selfish, and you both have your careers, and you don't want to be inconvenienced? Well, then the underlying issue is selfishness, and that's a sin to be repented of. And what you're saying is, "Children would force me not to be selfish, so rather than getting rid of the selfishness, I want to get rid of the children." I'd say go for the children and get rid of the selfishness.

If it is, "I was really abused and traumatized as a child, and I really struggle bringing children into the world because of safety and concern issues." I'd say, "Okay, well then that could be a fear that is rooted in a very painful reality, and let's get to the root of that problem and bring hope and help and healing to that, and see if then your heart doesn't change." And it may not, in those circumstances, be a selfish issue. It may be a protective issue. "I just don't want what happened to me to happen to any other child." I understand that. I mean, we work a lot with sexual assault victims, and that's why Grace was brave to write the chapter in the book regarding that issue.

If it is, "Well, I don't think that the man I'm marrying is dependable, or going to provide, or I can count on him," well, don't marry that guy. You know, if you don't trust him, don't marry him. If you can't depend on him, don't marry him.

So, it could also be that one of the persons is infertile, and we would say, you know, it's good to consider adoption. Jesus was adopted by his father,

Joseph. And adoption is a metaphor for salvation in the Bible. So, if there's an infertility issue, then perhaps adoption would be something meritorious of consideration.

So, these are pastoral issues, and this is where—we're going to say this a lot—we love the church. We want you to be in a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is loved. We want you to be in community with God's people to get counsel, and we want you to have godly, spiritual leaders to talk to and to pray with, because sometimes these questions are very complicated. When we get something like this, it's like, well, we don't know the person. It could be anything from selfishness, to unresolved abuse issues, to infertility. You know, there could be a lot of reasons. And so we don't want to come out legalistically and say, "If you're not pregnant, we're not happy." You know?

Grace: I also don't think everyone should have five kids. Because people ask me that question, "Well, how many kids should we have?" "That's up to you and your husband. So, it's not that we're saying, "Yes, you have to have kids; and, yes, you have to have five." Those are all things that the Holy Spirit leads us in, as we're praying and talking with our spouse, and seeking what the Lord has for us in our life.

Yeah, I would say, though, if you're two selfish people getting married, and you're so selfish that the selfishness compels you not to have children, don't think you're going to have an awesome lifelong marriage of servanthood, because it's two selfish people. That could be the case. And so at our church, I mean, if it was purely out of selfishness, I would not marry a couple who refused to have children for purely selfish motives. I would rebuke them, but I would not marry them. Some of you say, "Well, then I would not go to your church." Ah, you should still come. Because you need to be rebuked. So—

It's been so intense for me. I probably shouldn't share this, but there are a few people who, when they were single guys, they wanted to just sleep with as many women as possible, and not ever worry about having children, so they got vasectomies at like twenty. And then they get saved, and then they realize that they're selfish and sinful, and then they get a renewing of the mind through the Scriptures, and then they want to get married, and love a woman, and then they want to become a husband.

And I've actually counseled some guys, "I will not officiate your wedding until you get your reversal." So, you know— It got quiet. You should see the looks on the men's faces, like, "Whoa, wow, this was a very fun lecture until a moment ago." And I've just told the guys, like, if you've had a change of heart and mind, and you do want to marry this woman, and she wants to have kids, and you're telling her you want to have kids, I think even getting the reversal before the wedding is just one way of her knowing, "He's not going to trick me. He really has had a change of heart." You see what I'm saying? I made it better.

Okay, good. Next one.

"What can we do if we've already had sex before marriage? Is there more than repentance or confession?"

That was our story.

Grace: Well, I think being willing to talk through it to a place where you feel like you're at peace about it and actually moving into the healing process. I think we can admit it, confess it, stop, and then not say anything more about it, and still feel shame, and regret, and grief, and all those things. So, it's something that we've had to talk through. I mean, over and over, at different times, just different parts of it that God wants to heal in us. So, yeah, I mean repentance is the biggest part and then asking the Lord to just really heal those places of guilt and shame and give you strength to not— the enemy condemns us, and Jesus doesn't. He wants to free us from our sin. And so there's no condemnation in Jesus, so to live in light of that, and then trust that he's going to continue to heal that. But sometimes there are other issues, too, behind that from the past, that need to be brought up and talked about, as well. It can be an opening to other discussions that might need to happen.

Like what?

Grace: Well, like sexual assault or other relationships that you've put out of your mind, because you don't want to think of that as a sin, or you don't want to address it as an issue. There were things that I withheld from you, as far as information from my past, and didn't think that it would hurt you, or thought it would hurt you too much to tell you, and so I chose not to and lied for many years about it and tried to hide it, and that did horrible things in our marriage. And so, oftentimes, when we're sinning together, before marriage even, but in relationships, there's an opportunity for repentance for that specific issue, but it can also lead to the discussions of the past, if you're at a place where you know that you're going to move forward in your relationship, to be able to open up about those things honestly.

Yeah, and those kinds of conversations are for engaged couples heading toward marriage, because it's opening up your past, and confessing things, and getting it all out there, and you know who I am, and I know who you are, as we're approaching marriage. And to do that prematurely is really a dangerous, vulnerable, and unhealthy position to put yourself in.

I don't know if they've got another one. No, ma'am.

I want to thank you, honey, for being my girl, and loving me, and being my friend, and I want to thank you for being willing to take the risk of being honest with me, and writing the book, and answering people's questions. And I know that your heart is always to help people. And so, you know, we do this because we want to help, and we know we're not the Bible. We don't always get it right, but anything that is helpful, we're joyful to be able to

help. So, thanks. And just curious if perhaps you'd be willing to just close this session in prayer, especially for the singles who have a lot of renewing of the mind and repentance of the heart, and for those who are married, that have a lot to talk about.

Grace: Dear Lord, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the ability to proclaim your Word, and hear it, and then live what you ask, not just hearing the Word and so deceive ourselves, but do what it says. Lord, I pray for the singles here. I pray that, as they're discussing these questions and pondering these things that were taught, that they would just really seek you, Lord, that they wouldn't be distracted by the world's expectations, or the lies of the enemy, or the cultural standards, because those are all different from what you ask of us, Lord. So, we pray that you would renew their minds through your Word and through good, godly friends and relationships. Lord, we pray for the marrieds, that as they go home to discuss these important issues, that you would just allow them to be humble in their discussions and not bitter against each other. Lord, if there's any bitterness, please allow that to be healed, so that these discussions can be had in an uplifting way with each other, not a condemning way. Lord, I pray for repentant hearts. I pray for both the husbands and the wives to be able to come to a place where they are friends, and out of that friendship they can enjoy each other in intimacy and know that you've created it for that. So, thank you, Lord, that you will direct these people, as they leave, today. Thank you for them coming. In Jesus' name, amen.

Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.