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## Why Purity Matters:

In 2011, the release of one particular fiction title took the publishing world by storm.

What began as a short run book in the United Kingdom quickly became a word-of-mouth phenomenon. Both ABC News and the New York Times dubbed the book, “Mommy Porn,” and the controversy surrounding it escalated beyond anything book professionals had previously experienced. By early 2012, electronic sales skyrocketed the title to the NY Times bestseller list. Read on an electronic device, with the cover missing, ordinary housewives enjoyed the book without fear of judgement. When the time came to bring the book to the United States, a frenzied bidding war preceded the contract for a United States publisher.

I became aware of the book more recently, when a cousin challenged me to read it. As an author, I usually respond to such requests by buying the book. I like to know what gets readers excited. In this case, after reading the reviews, I declined my cousin’s invitation. With all the books available to me, I chose not to read that particular title. I began to publicize that decision on social media, among my close friends, posting links to other bloggers who had written about their concerns. I was surprised by how many young Christian women had already purchased and read the trilogy.

Why does it matter? Certainly, pornography isn’t new. Adult bookstores have long made big money in the United States. Is this kind of fiction really something new, or different? Why should anyone care?

Unlike other sexually graphic novels, *50 Shades of Grey* (by author EL James) became mainstream. This book, which features detailed depictions of sadomasochistic sex, had found its way into the hands of very ordinary women. Readers who had never considered this kind of fiction devoured the trilogy in record numbers. The New York Times reported a surge in the sale of rope in New York City hardware stores. Stores which sell sex toys began to feature “Fifty Shades Kits,” providing all variety of sadomasochistic toys.

Never before had pornography made such a strong entrance into the mainstream.

And unlike no book before it, *50 Shades* has generated controversy even among the most liberal of critics. Doctors, authors, women’s rights experts, and even news reporters have expressed concern. Yet, women of all stripes, even conservative Christian women see no harm in reading the books. After all, what happens in the bedroom is my own business, right?

You’ve heard it too, an expression so often repeated that you might think it was written into the United States Constitution. You’ve probably heard it referred to as the “right to privacy.” Pastors and teachers, politicians and pundits, everyone seems to have an opinion about what is right or wrong, permissible or absolutely private in the area of human sexuality.

Over the years, the world has used this privacy right to grant cultural permission for premarital sex, for adultery, for “open marriage,” and for no-fault divorce. The phrase has even been used to advocate the equality and social acceptability of gay and lesbian sexual relationships. Our culture has extended the issue of bedroom privacy to the privacy of a woman’s body—a viewpoint which has since been generalized to justify the abortion of approximately 52 million children since the *Roe vs. Wade* supreme court decision in 1973 (according to Alan Guttmacher Institute).

But I ask you, is it true? Does your sexual relationship belong to you alone?

**Interestingly, when the issue of human sexuality arises, almost no one seems to care about the one opinion that really matters. *What does God think about your sex life?***

Perhaps you thought God's concern ended at the wedding ceremony. Once you managed to get married, all that "sexual purity" stuff went out the window, right? After all, God only cares about getting you to the altar as a virgin. If you managed that, great. If you didn't, well, that's what forgiveness is for, right? But what about after?

Does He care? Does your sexual relationship with your husband matter to Him? Or does He limit His concern only to those who behave in deviant or frankly sinful ways?

### **God Cares —Deeply—About Your Sex Life**

It matters to Him. In fact, the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife is so intimate, so important, so exclusive, so mutually fulfilling that God has chosen that one relationship as a word picture for His own relationship with his people. In deep and meaningful ways, God's relationship with his people is also exclusive, rewarding and intensely intimate.

But your sex life is not private—at least no more private than any other area of your life. In Psalm 139:7–12, King David makes this declaration:

I can never get away from your presence!  
If I go up to heaven, you are there;  
if I go down to the grave, you are there.  
If I ride the wings of the morning,  
  
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

Pure Sex, Great Sex

even there your hand will guide me,

and your strength will support me.  
I could ask the darkness to hide me

and the light around me to become night—  
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day.

Darkness and light are the same to you.

David understood that even bedroom doors could not separate us from the God who watches over us. While some might view God's all-seeing eyes as invasive or punishing, David's words later in the same Psalm, show us God's oversight as a sign of God's loving care:

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God  
They are innumerable.

Your loving God is watching.

### **Time for Reflection**

Have you ever found yourself watching or reading something more graphic than you expected? What was it?

How did that experience affect you?

Did that experience change your view of this concept? How?

Does it bother you that God sees everything you do, even in your most private and sexual moments?

Are there things you wish He didn't see?

### **What to Expect**

In the course of this study, you will learn that God cares about your sex life for very specific reasons. He cares because:

- Your married sexual relationship directly reflects his care for and relationship with his people.
- Your sexuality affects every other area of your relationship with Him.
- He made you, and He knows what is best for you.
- Your sexuality is a foundation for the bond you share with your spouse.
- Without sexual purity, the family has no protection.
- Your healthy sexuality is the foundation for the health and strength of your family.

God cares.

Today, more than any time in history, the value of sexual purity is under attack. The evidence is everywhere in American culture: Designers make sexually explicit clothing for elementary-aged children. Modesty is no longer a consideration in fashion. Even wedding dresses are made with see-through fabrics in

revealing styles. Today popular magazines tout the arrival of Hollywood's newest infants, many born to happily unwed parents. Extra-marital affairs no longer damage the reputation of politicians or stars. Even family films now depict sex acts in more and more graphic ways. Novels like the 50 shades trilogy, depicting violent sexuality, are marketed as a way to add excitement to boring sexual relationships.

### **God Has a Better Way**

In the first half of this book, you'll be asked to look at God's biblical standard for married sexual purity. You'll look for it in stories and proverbs and psalms. You'll look at commands and instructions and consequences. Then, in each section, when you've studied the principles involved, you'll reflect on your own life.

Don't worry. I won't ask you to reveal personal details about your sexual relationship. But you will be asked to think about them.

You can choose to do this study on your own, in the privacy of your own living room. Or, you can study together with a close friend. You might want to get a small group together and tackle this subject with the help of others struggling with the same issues. You could choose to work through the book with your spouse. I've grouped the studies so that you can complete the work in as many sessions as you'd like.

Though I understand that this subject is highly personal, I encourage you to work through this material with at least one other person. Over the years, I have discovered that I process my feelings and thoughts most clearly in the context of discussions and conversation with other believers. It helps me to focus my thoughts, to give words to my fears. If you can, invite someone you trust to work alongside you.

In some of the lessons, I've closed with a simple assignment. Try to do the assignment whether or not you are studying with a



group. If you are working with a group, come prepared to discuss what happened and how your work made you feel. You will learn much from your fellow students.

For the sake of understanding, I've chosen to quote all scriptures using the New Living Translation. I won't be arguing technically difficult passages. Instead, in this simple translation, the truth of God's wisdom sings out with simplicity and clarity.

This study seeks to accomplish more than simply protect the purity of your sexual relationship. In the last half of the study I will show you ways to cherish and grow your sexual relationship with your spouse. By the time you finish, you will discover that there is much that you can do to build satisfaction and fulfillment—even fun— into the sexual relationship you share.

If you are unsatisfied, this study will show you how you can begin to bring change. If you want to re-think your past choices, now is the time. If you want to build a fence around your own marriage, you will find suggestions here. As you study and reflect on the issue of sexual purity, you can be confident that the God who made you is there to help.

If you struggle with guilt and shame, this study will show you how to experience freedom.

Because after all, He cares.

### **Time For Reflection**

What one thing do you hope to accomplish in the course of this study?

If you could change anything about your sexual relationship with your husband, what would it be?

Use the space below to turn your hope for this study into a prayer. Simply ask God to accomplish your hopes for you.

### **A Changing Point of View**

Over the last hundred years the moral standards for women have dramatically changed. At the turn of the 20th Century, only immoral women allowed their ankles to show beneath their skirt. A woman needed a chaperone to spend time alone with a man. By the 1920s, specific styles of dancing were immoral. By the 1950s, my mother-in-law's church viewed women who wore make-up as having questionable morals. In the 1960s women's liberation and the sexual revolution brought an entirely new set of values. For the first time, women claimed their right to enjoy their sexuality in whatever context they chose—married or not.

Because God's principles never change (his declaration against premarital sex, for instance), people chose to protect themselves from sin by declaring certain specific behaviors off-limits (spending time alone with a man). By defining additional limits, society hoped to protect young people from progressing into real sin.

Looking back you can see that the line of approved moral behavior became a moving target, changing at the whim of society. For the most part, culture and the church wrote their own definitions of morality, dictating the line of appropriate behavior to young people. Today, our culture has come so far as to reject God's moral standards completely.

That kind of external control can be detrimental in two ways: External controls tend to incite rebellion. After all, no one wants to be told what to do. Rebellion is a natural human reaction to rules and regulations.

External controls also undermine what may be the most important aspect of a living relationship with Jesus Christ. When we rely on what others define as right and wrong, we stop asking God what He thinks of our choices and behaviors. When we stop asking, we stop listening. **When we no longer listen, we may miss out on His specific instructions for our own morality—ones that may actually be more restrictive than that given to the rest of the goup.** Let me give you an example:

About 35 years ago, I was in physical therapy school at the University of Washington. My husband was in dental school. His first quarter demanded that he carry 35 quarter hours of classes; most college students carry 15-17. With that kind of schedule, Kim actually chose which subjects to focus on, and which ones he would let slide. When he wasn't in class, he lived in the dental lab, practicing techniques with new instruments on plastic teeth. I rarely saw him, other than when we fell into bed at night. He was endlessly exhausted, entirely focused on dentistry, and not at all on matrimony. It was a hard season in our relationship. I was working hard in school as well, but I missed him.

Then I got a virus. At the time, we'd agreed to care for his young cousins while their parents were away. My throat was so sore that I had it swabbed twice in five days for strep. I stayed home from school, camped out on the couch and slept most of the week.

When I wasn't asleep, I watched the daytime soaps. Since I was half brain dead, I didn't think much about my choice. I didn't see any harm in it. However, one afternoon while lying on our cousin's couch, I remember watching a small television screen framed between my bare feet. I don't remember what show was

on at the time, but I was suddenly aware of a very clear instruction. “Turn it off.”

I hadn’t had much experience with the Holy Spirit in those days. I’d only committed my life to Jesus a couple of years earlier. Though it was not an audible voice, I knew, as surely as I knew my husband’s voice, that the Holy Spirit had put a final and permanent end to my daytime soap operas.

At the time, I didn’t understand why. Sure, they were cheesy. The writing was bad, and the acting was worse. But that wasn’t enough to offend the Holy Spirit, was it? At the time, I didn’t ask questions. I simply turned off the TV.

Today, so many years later, I can see the wisdom in His instruction. You see my poor husband didn’t stand a chance when compared to these actors. No one wrote his lines, or prompted him to come home with flowers. He didn’t have someone to write in perfect behavior—buying the perfect gift, or pouring me a hot bath surrounded by candles. **My husband was human, not an actor who pretended to be a human. I believe the Holy Spirit knew that if I fed that “actor stuff” into my brain, day after day after day, I would only breed dissatisfaction with my own very human, very exhausted, very non-Prince Charming husband.**

Though he is a caring and faithful man, my husband is no orator. Expressing love is difficult for him. He seldom brings gifts, or buys cards. He never writes poetry. Still, I’ve learned to appreciate all of his effort. Think how differently I might view my husband if, for these past 38 years, I had continually compared him with television’s professional husbands. Turning off the television protected me from having Prince Charming of the daytime soaps invade my exclusive relationship with Kim.

Because Jesus knows me intimately, I suspect that this one restriction has saved me from countless moments of dissatisfaction,

even outright resentment. It may even have saved my marriage. Only God knows.

During this study, we won't be talking much about human rules and regulations. However, I will ask you to think differently about your role in the morality of your church, of your friends, and of your marriage.

Instead of a moral, behavioral line in the sand (drawn by others), I'd like you to view morality in a new way—especially as it pertains to the body of Christ.

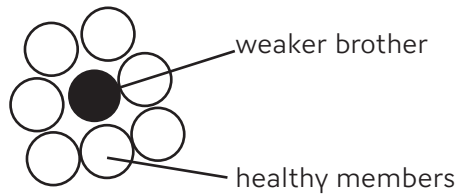
Think of yourself as a circle, nestled in the midst of a collection of circles. Each of these circles represents a person in your church (your local congregation). As with all things, each person is responsible for everything, every decision, every choice occurring in their own small circle.

You choose what you eat. How you exercise. How you pray. How you study the Bible. You choose what you wear. What television or movies you watch. You determine what you will read. All of these choices belong to you alone.

In the midst of your congregation are some who have been injured. Some are weaker. Some struggle violently with sinful habits. Perhaps one man struggles with pornography. One woman struggles with a disappointing marriage. Another is fighting to overcome immorality, or adultery. Perhaps another is deeply lonely and disconnected.

I'd like you to view your own morality—the moral choices you make—as a way to protect these weaker members in your congregation. By surrounding these struggling believers with strong, morally committed and confident believers, the weakest among us are protected from experiencing the very temptations which threaten them.

Making godly choices protects those who struggle with sin.



Viewed this way, you can visualize how your moral choices may have vast influence on others in the Body of Christ. What you watch might protect those who struggle with pornography. What you wear might protect a man struggling in his marriage. Viewed this way, your choices are not just your own. Your choices affect the health of your church. They still belong only to you; no one dictates them to you. But for the sake of others, or for the sake of some weakness you may not ever understand, Jesus just might ask you to limit the choices you make.

Keep this in mind as we work through our lessons. I won't tell you what to do; instead, I simply ask you to reflect on how your choices influence others.

And most importantly, I ask you to respond to the quiet, gentle voice of your Shepherd and Counselor. He alone knows all. His requests are never made to restrict your fun. Instead, he wants to protect you and the believers around you, to build you into the most effective, useful person you can become. Obedience, even when you don't understand, brings great fruit. Trust Him.

### **Time for Reflection**

Have you ever experienced a "God moment" where you were asked to restrict your own freedom? What was it? Did you obey? Looking back would you choose the same course of action?

In recent years, numerous public personalities from sports, entertainment and politics have admitted to moral failure. Though the details of the failure vary, the effect of the failure is profound. Both men and women have destroyed their marriages, lost contact with their children, lost professional support and in some cases lost millions of dollars in sponsorship. Thinking back, can you name some of these public personas?

Do you think their morality really mattered? Why?

Can you think of some simple steps these people might have taken to avoid this catastrophic fall?

Up until today, have you considered how you might avoid a similar fall? Or, have you always assumed that you would *never* do anything like that? Are you prepared to consider specific ways you can protect your own spiritual purity?