

Tim is looking for answers. He recently sent this text to his youth pastor:

Does God really think that sex before marriage is wrong? I know cheating on someone is wrong, but why would God say it's wrong to have sex if we love each other? Does the Bible really say no to sex before marriage?

Here's Tim's story: he accepted Christ at age twelve, and he started looking at porn at fourteen. Because he was so involved in the youth group and church activities, his parents and church had no idea that he was struggling with porn, sexual fantasy, and masturbation.

Tim felt really guilty and repeatedly prayed for God to help him. He would swear off porn and masturbation, but a few weeks later he would fall back into them. It was a vicious cycle, and most of the time Tim felt like a loser Christian.

Then at sixteen, Tim started dating Jenn, another Christian from his church. Their relationship has become steadily more physical. Even after Tim's mom caught them making out while "watching" a movie, they continue to make out when they are alone, and things are escalating.

Their bodies are saying, "Yes, have sex!" But both still feel pressure to resist. They are so confused.

They want to live for God, but they wonder, “What is so wrong about sex before marriage?” They are looking for some good reasons to say no.

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We live in a culture that endorses sex before marriage. In fact, most voices in the culture say that repressing your sexual desires squelches your personality and robs you of what life has to offer. If you're older and single, you may even be made to feel weird for not having sex.

Like Tim and Jenn, maybe you are confused. You've heard from the church that premarital sex is wrong, but then everyone else seems to say “Enjoy it!” “Go for it!” and “Follow your heart!” Our culture asks the same question as Satan, God's enemy and ours, did in the Garden of Eden—Did God really say not to eat of this forbidden tree?

Maybe you feel deep down that full-out casual sex is overboard. But maybe you also wonder, if two people love each other, why would God have a problem with a physical expression of it?

What Does the Bible Teach?

Tim and Jenn are tempted to rationalize having sex now, especially since they plan to go to the same college next year, get engaged their junior year, and get married after graduation.

Still they feel they need a green light of God's approval for premarital sex. This is the reason behind Tim's text. What does God really say?

A few days after getting Tim's text, Mark, Tim's youth pastor, took Tim out for coffee. Tim turned to Mark and asked, "So is there a verse in the New Testament that says premarital sex is wrong?"

Mark opened his Bible to 1 Thessalonians 4 and asked Tim to read verses 3 through 6.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

Tim looked up and said, "Well, this says that sexual sin is wrong, but it doesn't specifically say that premarital sex is wrong." Mark answered, "The word for sexual sin in the New Testament covers all sex outside of the loving marriage of a man and a woman—premarital sex, adultery, and a lot of other sinful sexual behaviors." Tim looked surprised.

Mark said, "Now, let's turn to 1 Timothy 5:1-2." Tim read aloud, "Treat . . . older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

Then Mark said, "The principle here is that you should treat any woman who isn't your wife as you would your mother or your sister. Can you in all purity make out with your sister?" Having two younger sisters, Tim cringed, and both Mark and Tim laughed.

Then Tim admitted, "Jenn and I make out any time we're alone." Mark didn't look shocked but he did ask, "When you two make out, what do you guys feel like doing?" Tim paused, then said, "Honestly, we want to tear off our clothes and have sex."

Mark said, "It was like that for me when I was dating too. You see, heavy kissing and full body contact makes you want more. God made sexual contact and foreplay to lead to sex."

Tim said in exasperation, "So why is God so against sex before marriage?!" Mark calmly said, "Let's be clear, God is not against sex. He created it. *We* ruin sex with our selfishness, foolishness, and rebellion."

Controlled by Lust

Mark is hitting on a very important point that applies to single people of all ages. God designed

sex for marriage. He wants us to be happy, but we won't be unless we live according to his wise and loving plan. Outside that plan, sex only hurts us. Think about it: If sex in marriage was designed by God to glorify him and bless Adam and Eve's descendants, then we shouldn't be surprised that Satan the Deceiver wants to flip the purpose of sex upside down, and use what was meant to be a blessing to curse us.

Let's make it more personal. Maybe you believe your sexual desires are okay to follow, so you let things escalate in your relationship and begin having sex. What could go wrong? The obvious danger to take into account here is an unplanned pregnancy. "Safe sex" may be a popular concept, but it's not always possible in execution. Birth control fails, condoms break, and sometimes things escalate quickly and people forget protection altogether. And for those who engage in sexual activity with more than one partner, there is also the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

But beyond the possible physical ramifications, there are also emotional and relational effects that tend to be unavoidable. No one goes into a relationship thinking about breaking up, but the reality is that break-ups often happen and they are usually painful. The closer you get to someone, the more it hurts when the relationship ends. And because God designed sex to bring people closer together,

There are so many reasons to say yes to premarital sex—everyone around you seems to be doing it and you are physically ready! Are there any good reasons to say “no,” and is there any good way to stick with your “no”?

Dan Wilson, a seasoned guide, gives young men and women an easy-to-understand primer on why they should say “no” to premarital sex and then walks them through key steps to make sure that their “no” sticks. Instead of moralism and hard-to-follow rules, Wilson offers the hope of gospel power to turn from what’s hurtful toward God’s best plan for couples.

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