

Driver's Training for Dating: Sex and Intimacy in Healthy Relationships

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Small photos of BV and GP

The authors are Gayla Postma and Bill Veenstra. Yeah, we know, they look old enough to be your parents. That's because they are old enough to be your parents.

Gayla and her husband Gary live in Morrisburg, Ontario, and they have raised three sons. Bill and his wife Lucy live in Chilliwack, British Columbia, and they, too, have raised three sons. They are all grandparents now, too.

Bill is the senior pastor at Chilliwack (British Columbia) Christian Reformed Church. Gayla is a writer and the news editor of *The Banner*. Both Gayla and Bill are passionate about teenagers and have worked with them for several years. They also both understand the dynamics of healthy relationships, and how valuable that understanding is in avoiding abuse and promoting healthy relationships in the lives of young people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

INTRODUCTION

One of God's good gifts to us is relationships. From the very beginning, God created us to be in community. "It is not good for man to be alone," God said in Genesis 2. So God created Eve to be with Adam and they experienced unity, shameless communion and intimacy.

God also created you to be in relationships, to be in community. He created you with a longing for intimacy, with Him and with others.

One form that intimacy takes is sexual activity. Unfortunately, culture today has separated sexuality activity from intimacy. Everywhere you look, sexual images bombard you: from billboards, movies, television shows, computer screens. It's a sex-saturated world but intimacy and community are a challenge to find. In today's society, sex has often been reduced from a God-given intimate life-union to an activity only slightly more special than eating pizza.

As a teenager, your body is awakening to sexual feelings, merging with the longing for intimacy God created in you. As you are being bombarded by sexual messages from the outside, the road to Godly intimacy and sexuality can start to feel as chaotic and out of control as a downtown intersection at rush hour with no traffic lights working.

You need to know the rules of the road, and you need a GPS system to guide you where you are headed. You need to know where the potholes are and how to drive defensively, even if the cultural traffic lights are askew and the other drivers aren't paying attention.

That's what these lessons are about. It isn't as much a rule book as a guide that can help you see what God-given intimacy can look like, and how you can navigate your way in a spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally and sexually safe way.

It is our hope and our prayer that the stories, questions and information you find in this manual will help guide you as you navigate this complicated road to adulthood.

KNOWING YOUR DESTINATION

If you are going to embark on a journey, one of the most helpful things you can do is learn about where you are going.

If you were planning a trip to Australia, you would read about the country. You would check internet sites to find out what the culture is like, what you should wear, what you should expect.

On this journey to adulthood, what is the destination for Godly sexual intimacy? It is marriage.

You have many miles to travel, many experiences to explore, before you arrive at marriage. But in navigating your way there, it is helpful to know why marriage is so special, why God intends for sexual intimacy to flourish within marriage.

Waiting for marriage to be sexually intimate is no longer the norm in our culture. But as Christians, we are called to live by God's design and desires, not those of our culture.

From the very start, God created man and woman to be together, to be joined in a life-union. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh," we read in Genesis 2:24. Jesus reaffirmed that when he was on earth. (Matthew 19:4-6).

Why did God set it up that way? Why do Christians today believe that marriage is still the proper place for sexual intimacy? Marriage is the lifelong exclusive relationship that gives both partners the freedom to flourish, to learn to give and take, to accept each other completely, to experience mutual trust and dependence.

Within marriage, there is no need to compete with others for affection. Marriage allows the time and the freedom to learn about each other emotionally, spiritually, physically and sexually. The security of marriage offers a safe playground for joyful spontaneous exploration.

When two people marry, their physical intimacy is something that grows out of the emotional and spiritual intimacy they already share. And all facets of their relationship can grow and deepen over the years.

Does that mean marriage will be perfect, or that sex will be perfect within marriage? No! Marriages have ups and downs just like all relationships. But because it is a permanent lifelong union, partners learn to weather the waves.

LESSON 1
TAKING CARE OF YOUR VEHICLE

Grace just didn't get it. Ling already had a date for the homecoming dance, with a popular guy, before anyone else had even been asked. Ling isn't even that good looking! It's not like she's ugly, but she doesn't wear make-up or do anything special with her hair. She plays basketball and volleyball and eats just like the guys and half the time she's just wearing a sweat shirt and track pants.

Grace was forever starving herself, skipping lunch to make sure she stays as thin as she can. She spends an hour getting ready for school in the morning and she knows she gets on the bus looking pretty good. And she makes sure she stays looking good all day, even if it means cutting out of gym class so she doesn't get all hot and sweaty.

What was it about Ling that makes guys, and other girls for that matter, always want to be around her, Grace wonders.

Why do people like being around Ling? What Grace is struggling to grasp is that Ling is confident in herself. She *likes* herself for the most part. She might wish sometimes that she were prettier, or taller, or had curly hair. But she sure doesn't have time to spend hours on hair and make-up. There are practices to attend, tests to write, tournaments to be played!

It isn't easy to be confident when you're a teenager, and your body is changing, and your feelings change sometimes faster than you can change your clothes. And the pressure to look like the people on television and magazines, to measure up to some digitally enhanced ideal, can cause even the prettiest girl or the best-looking guy some self doubt.

But confidence like Ling's doesn't come from looking in the mirror. It comes from inside, from being less focused on what you look like and more focused on who you are as a person.

First and foremost, Grace, and Ling, and you, are made in God's image, you are His 'workmanship, created in Christ Jesus,' (Ephesians 2:10) which means you are already perfect in His eyes. That might be small comfort when your face has broken out just before a big date. But it's a good, solid piece of information to hang on to. *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (1 Peter 3:3-4).*

Confidence like Ling's also comes from focusing on things you are skilled at rather than trying to conform to a media stereotype. Confidence comes from throwing yourself into activities that you enjoy, rather than staying on the sidelines wondering if you look pretty enough. Joy and enthusiasm are infectious and attractive, and people who are joyful and enthusiastic are seldom alone at the side of the road.

It's like taking care of a car. If you think of your car as your older brother's ugly, old cast-off, and you wish your parents would spring for a nicer one, you aren't likely to care all that much if someone puts a dent in the door or spills pop on the carpet. But if you bought that old car with your hard earned cash and you wash it and vacuum it and just love it because it's *yours*, you'll be much less likely to put up with people denting the doors or spilling on the carpet.

Relationally speaking, people with a healthy self-image are more likely to be in satisfactory relationships, for a couple of reasons. First, a person with confidence is likely to attract someone else with confidence and respect. And secondly, a person with a healthy self-image is less likely to tolerate being treated with less than respect from someone else.

As you think about how you view yourself, spend some time contemplating Psalm 139: 13-16: *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.*

How often do you think of yourself as someone made perfect in God's eyes?

Are you like Grace, spending more time worrying if you look right than getting involved with life?

What are some activities or interests that give you joy? Write down one or two new activities you could pursue at home, at school, at church or in the community that will help you feel good about the gifts God has given you.

LESSON 2

RELATIONAL DRIVER'S TRAINING

Tyrell has a goal. He wants a shot at making the NBA. He's only 16, so he knows it's a long way off. But he runs. He works out with weights. He follows the instructions of his coach. He avoids alcohol and cigarettes and other habits that will make it harder to reach his goal. He's in training.

Sally wants to be a computer engineer. She knows that to do that, she has to get into a good college program, and to do that, she has to have good grades in high school. Sally studies hard; she avoids activities that will cause her grades to fall. Her career goal is still years away, but she's in training.

Adam plans to be a concert pianist and to teach music at a university. He knows it will take years to be successful at it. He takes lessons twice a week. He practices every single day, scale after scale. He's in training.

Every goal worth attaining requires planning and training, coaching and instruction, discipline and commitment.

One dream Tyrell, Sally and Adam all have is to be happily married some day, to raise a family. You probably also expect to be married some day. At sixteen or seventeen, marriage seems as far off as a career in computer engineering or a shot at the NBA.

When you were 14 years old and wanting to drive, it felt like 16 was never going to come. When it finally did, you had to take driver's training.

Even though that destination of marriage seems very far off, you are already in training. "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training," writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:26. "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly..."

If one of your life goals is a healthy, Godly marriage, keeping that goal in sight will help you be aware enough to keep your training on track today. Some Christian leaders feel that the best way to train for marriage is to not date anyone until you know you've found the person you are intended to marry. We don't agree with that approach. To us, that would be akin to taking a car out on a busy highway the first time you ever sat behind the wheel. But training requires planning and discipline.

What are some of your long-term goals?

Do you see your relationships today as training for marriage?

Are there relationships in your life today that could be detracting from that goal?

Lesson 3

CRASH TEST DUMMIES

Janie and Jason have been going out for a few months. And Jason enjoys being around Janie. But he worries about how she acts sometimes. Lately she seems to be pushing more and more for them to go further sexually. If he puts on the brakes, she gets moody, asking him if she's not attractive enough. He and Janie are both Christians, and he isn't sure why she's acting that way. And he's afraid other guys will think he's crazy to not go along with Janie's advances.

Janie doesn't understand Jason. She really likes him, and she's pretty sure he likes her. But he resists her attempts to be sexually intimate. Even if she dresses provocatively, it doesn't seem to make a difference. It makes her wonder if she's not attractive enough, or if he really doesn't like her as much as he says he does.

Is Janie just looking for sex?

It looks like Janie is confusing sex with closeness and intimacy. Longing for closeness with someone else is normal. God created us for community, for intimacy. But looking for sex to fill her natural need for intimacy will only leave Janie feeling emptier. Sexual activity cannot force true intimacy.

Such damaging sexual encounters will only turn Janie and Jason into crash test dummies. Dummies are made of materials meant to be used, abused, broken, analyzed and measured. Human beings are not. Human beings need tenderness, care and love.

The best thing for both Janie and Jason is if they can be open and honest and talk about what is happening in their relationship. If Janie can express her need for closeness, and Jason can give her that tenderness without sexual intimacy, they will both have mastered a very important lesson in relational driver's ed.

Janie seems to have a lack of the self-respect we talked about earlier. There can be many reasons for that. Perhaps she doesn't feel loved and cared for at home. Maybe she lacks confidence in her ability to love and be loved for the person she is.

What should Jason do in a situation like this?

Do you sometimes act like a crash test dummy?

Are some of your behaviors damaging you instead of nurturing you for healthy relationships?

Are there deeper reasons Janie might be acting the way she is?

Sometimes the reasons a person acts like Janie can be much darker. People who are abused when they were younger will often treat their bodies as if they are worthless, things to be easily given to another because they have no value. Sometimes people who were sexually abused learn to treat their growing sexuality as a powerful tool, to be used to get what they want.

If Janie has experienced unwanted touching or sexual abuse at any age, she has issues she needs to address apart from Jason. She needs to talk to a competent Christian adult who can help her find the help she needs.

Lesson 4

GETTING OUT OF GRIDLOCK

Have you ever been stuck in a traffic jam? Cars are pretty much bumper-to-bumper and it appears you have no option but to just keep inching forward with the rest of the traffic, whether you want to or not.

Sometimes the sexual behavior of your peers can feel like that traffic jam. Sometimes it seems like most of your peers are moving further and further down the road of experimenting sexually, getting more and more physically intimate with boyfriends or girlfriends.

And the media just reinforces that gridlock. When you turn on the television, characters portrayed as the same age as you are engaging in sexual intimacy within relationships that are casually romantic. Movie characters who are just 16 or 17 years old prove their love for a boyfriend or girlfriend by having sex with them. Young women and young men who choose not to engage in sexual activity are portrayed as prudish or freakish.

Peer pressure is one of the most difficult issues teens face. Christian teens are just as subject to peer pressure as any other teens, and sometimes it is other Christian teens who are putting pressure on them to participate in behavior that makes them feel like they are being sucked along in gridlocked traffic.

But no matter who is putting on the pressure, Christian teens need to remind themselves that they are set apart, called to a higher standard than what they see around them in the media and in society. Christian teens know that they bear God's image. They know the instructions of Paul in Romans 12:2: *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed..."*

Just as it can be difficult to resist pressure to try cigarettes or drugs or alcohol, it can also be difficult to resist becoming more sexually intimate than is appropriate. But it can be resisted. Just like teens for decades have been taught to 'just say no' to drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, so too can teens say no to sexual activity that they don't want or are not ready for.

You do have choices. You can change lanes and pull off to the side of the road. You can put the car in park and let other traffic go around you. And most importantly, you can pray for guidance. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."* (James 1:5)

It's never easy to get out of gridlock. Just going with the flow is almost always the path of least resistance. Before you follow the traffic, be sure it isn't taking you somewhere where you don't want to be.

*For we are the temple of the living God. ...
Therefore come out from them and
be separate, says the Lord. (2 Corinthians 6:16-17)*

In your circle of peers and friends, does it feel like just about everyone is venturing further and further into sexual intimacy?

Do you feel pressured to keep moving forward in that direction to keep up?

When you are stuck in traffic gridlock and you don't want to go where the rest of the traffic is going, what are some things can you do?

Lesson 5
RUMBLE STRIPS

Jamal and Kellie have been going together for about four months. They like going to hockey games together and doing homework together. It's fun to have a special someone to sit with at lunch every day, having someone to hang out with on the weekends.

They like hanging around at each other's houses. Kellie's mom and dad are really cool about her having a boyfriend. Kellie's mom talks to her about when she had boyfriends in high school, too. Jamal is often there for dinner. Jamal's parents like Kellie and think the two of them are cute together. Kellie likes games night at Jamal's house where they play cards or board games with Jamal's parents and younger brothers.

Lately, though, when they hang out in Kellie's room, watching television or working on homework, things are getting a little intense. They used to kiss a little and flirt a little and it was fun. But lately, the kissing has gotten more prolonged; hugging has gotten closer and more intimate. Last week, Jamal put his hand on Kellie's breast, outside her sweater. And then they heard Kellie's sister outside the door, so they quickly separated and picked up their history books.

The experience has heightened the sexual tension between them. At first they were a little embarrassed the next time they saw each other. But now they look for chances to be alone in private. When Jamal's brothers asked them to play cards, they begged off and said they had too much homework, even though they didn't. When they went to the hockey game on Friday night, they left early so they could make out in the car for a while. They just want to be alone, but now instead of talking and having fun, they can't seem to keep their hands off of each other.

But they both feel guilty, too. Even though they know other people their age are going further sexually, they feel like they might be pushing the lines.

What is happening to Jamal and Kellie's relationship?

Most major highways have rumble strips (a strip of bumpy pavement) along the edges now. Motorists on those highways are traveling at such high speeds that even small errors can have grave consequences. Those rumble strips keep drivers alert and give early warning if they are straying out of their lane. That sudden loud whiny roar as the tires hit the rumble strip are a driver's wake-up call that danger is imminent.

In many ways, what is happening to Jamal and Kellie is understandable. As two people become closer and more emotionally connected, they start to grow more intimate. However, the hormones and arousal levels are akin to speeding along a major highway, and errors can have lifelong consequences.

Have their relational wheels touched the rumble strip?

The first thump of the rumble strip could be that Jamal and Kellie have questions about whether they are going too far. The fact that they stopped what they were doing when they hear Kellie's sister outside the door or that they lied to Jamal's brothers about having homework is already an indication that they had ventured across the line. Our consciences are God's gift of an early warning system and we do well to heed his voice

when he speaks through our conscience. (*“I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.”* Romans 9:1)

What is happening to Jamal and Kellie’s relationship outside their sexual activity?

Another whine of the rumble strip is that Jamal and Kellie have started neglecting other aspects of their relationship, and sexual activity has become the driving force behind it. This shows a discernable lack of health showing up in their relationship. Becoming focused more and more on their physical relationship is like driving into a one-way tunnel that closes off all the other facets of their friendship.

They have started avoiding things they used to enjoy, like playing cards or going to hockey games. They are talking less about all the things they used to talk about, reducing their relationship a great deal to the sexual aspect of it.

Could Jamal and Kellie’s relationship withstand the light?

One of the great biblical metaphors is the shining of God’s light into the darkness. *“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts...”* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Could Jamal and Kellie’s relationship be seen in the light of their parents’ kitchen? Or under the front porch light? If the activity Jamal and Kellie are engaging in is something they would be embarrassed to have their parents know about, that’s another whine of the rumble strip.

How do Jamal and Kellie get back into the correct lane?

Jamal and Kellie need to take a step back and talk openly about what they are doing. If they consider themselves in training for marriage, like we talked about in a previous chapter, they should ask themselves, ‘how would my future husband or future wife feel about what I am doing right now?’ And if they decide that they wandered over the rumble strips into territory they shouldn’t have been in, they need to repent of that. (*“Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret ...”* 2 Corinthians 7:9-10)

Does it really matter if Jamal and Kellie occasionally venture over the rumble strips?

Think about the tires on a car. Every mile those tires are driven, an infinitesimal amount of rubber is worn off the tread. If you drive 100 miles (160 km) on those tires, they aren’t going to look any different, but you can never get back the tread that has been expended.

Just like the tires don’t really look any different, it would be easy to think that a little sexual messing around here or there isn’t going to make a difference. In fact, any sexual activity Jamal and Kellie engage in will have a lifelong effect. Sexual activity is a

union. The Bible isn't kidding where it says, "the two shall become one." Our bodies and souls are so intricately knit together that any union of the body is also a union of souls

Sex isn't just about having intercourse. It isn't just about touching genitalia or other body parts. Any sustained or prolonged physical and intimate contact is a union of the whole being. When you engage in intimate physical contact with another person, you are giving a part of yourself, a part of your soul, to that person.

And that is a permanent gift. Just like you cannot gather up the rubber along the 100-mile stretch and put it back on the tire, neither can you get back any part of you that you've given away. That's why it is so important to know where your boundaries are, and to preserve the wholeness of your body and soul to give to your life partner in marriage.

Therefore, I urge you ... in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1)

Lesson 6

STRAYING FROM YOUR LANE

Jessica had her date for the homecoming dance. She had been hinting around with her friends to hint around with their friends that she wanted to go with Scott, and finally he asked her!

She was so excited. They knew each other from a few classes and sometimes hung out in the same group. She couldn't believe her luck that he had asked her out. She shopped till she found the perfect outfit, a strapless blue dress that she knew made her look really good.

Finally the night of the dance arrived. Scott arrived to pick her up and he was just so handsome. Jessica had butterflies just thinking about him. Her parents took pictures of the two of them and made the usual embarrassing remarks about behaving, and finally they were off. They had dinner with two other couples and then they were off to the dance.

The gym had been transformed into a tropical paradise. Twinkling stars, palm trees, tables under straw umbrellas. It was all just too romantic. Scott danced with her all night and Jessica thought she'd died and gone to heaven.

Scott was pumped. He was surprised when he found out Jessica wanted to go to the dance with him, but he was more than happy to ask her. He was on top of his game, having a great time with Jessica. What he really wanted was to be alone with her, to kiss her ...

Finally about 11:00, Scott suggested they go for a drive. They drove up to a park where Jessica knew a lot of couples go to make out. Those butterflies were dancing in her stomach again.

Scott started kissing her and telling her how beautiful she looked. She couldn't believe this was happening to her, with Scott of all people! She kissed him back, a little surprised when he put his tongue in her mouth.

When he put his hand on her breast, a little warning bell went off in her head, wondering if she should let him do it, but this was Scott. She didn't want to ruin such a perfect date.

Scott was so aroused, he could barely help himself. All he could think of was Jessica, how good she smelled, how soft she felt. But when Scott started to undo the zipper at the back of Jessica's dress, she pulled back. Because her dress was strapless, she knew that once that zipper was loose, her bare breasts would be exposed. She pulled away from Scott and said that made her feel uncomfortable.

Scott backed off a little, but pleaded with her to come back. "You're just so beautiful," he said. So she kissed him some more, but kept his hands from straying where she didn't want them.

After a few minutes of that, Scott sat back, totally frustrated. "What is the matter?" he asked. "You seemed to have a great time tonight, you're dressed in this hot little number, and now you're going to cut me off at the pass?" He knew he sounded harsher than he meant to. She could tell he was angry.

Jessica didn't know what to do. She didn't want to ruin their date. But getting more physically intimate with him was making her really uncomfortable.

Scott didn't know what to do either. He didn't want to hurt Jessica's feelings or ruin their date. But all he could think about was how much he really wanted Jessica, and it felt like suddenly she had changed gears.

What should Jessica do?

For Jessica, the rumble strips have roared loud and clear. She knows this car is going off the road and she isn't happy about it. But what can she do to get back in her lane?

Jessica can remind herself that giving in even a little way to Scott, to keep him happy, will be giving away a piece of herself that she will never get back. The sexual encounter she has with him, at whatever level, will always be imprinted in her psyche. That price is too high just to keep a cool guy happy or to stay popular with him and his friends.

Jessica can remind herself that she is in training for a godly marriage and that this activity could seriously detract from that training. She can remind herself that just because other people her age are traveling down that gridlocked road, she has choices about staying on that road.

What should Scott do?

Scott is having some trouble hearing the rumble strips over the roar of his own hormones at the moment. But Jessica's resistance to his advances should give him pause to see if he's missing some warning signs.

Scott, too, can remind himself that he is in training for a godly marriage. He can remember that, as good as it might feel right now, any further intimacy with Jessica will be imprinted in his life. He will give away a piece of himself that he can never get back. Would that be worth the lifelong price? Scott should remember that Jessica is first and foremost a child of God, and he owes her respect.

What can Jessica do RIGHT NOW?

1) Jessica can give in to Scott's demands, partially or completely. But she should do so only knowing that the emotional and psychological consequences will be great. And the physical consequences could be life-long if there are any issues of subsequent pregnancy or sexually-transmitted diseases.

2) Jessica can make sure her dress is zipped and tell Scott, "I like you a lot and I've had a really good time tonight, but I'm just not ready for this. Let's go find Jeremy and Adam and the rest of the gang and see what they are doing?"

3) Jessica can tell Scott, "I like you a lot and I've had a really nice time, but I'm not ready for this level of involvement. Please take me home."

Either of those last two answers will require that Jessica has enough self-esteem to stand up for herself. She will have to have enough belief in herself to know that she made the right decision, even if she gets a hard time about it from others at school.

It will help Jessica if she can remind herself that no one should feel forced or coerced into intimacy that they are not ready for. If she says no, that should be respected. That is not love; it's not even 'like.' It's one person putting their own urges and desires ahead of the other person's well-being.

What can Scott do RIGHT NOW?

1) Scott can continue to pressure Jessica to become more intimate. But he should do so knowing that the emotional and psychological consequences will be great for both of them. And the physical consequences could be life-long if there are any issues of subsequent pregnancy or sexually-transmitted diseases.

2) Scott can take a deep breath and suggest to Jessica, "Let's go find Jeremy and Adam and the rest of the gang and see what they are doing."

3) Scott can apologize to Jessica and tell her, "I like you a lot and you're right. We need to put the brakes on."

Either of those last two answers will require that Scott has enough self-esteem and maturity to control his desires.

It will help Scott to remember that no one should feel forced or coerced into intimacy that they are not ready for. No means no. If he puts his own urges and desires ahead of Jessica's well-being, he isn't showing her that he loves her, or that he even likes her.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Jessica's?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do?

What would you do differently the next time?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Scott's?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do?

What would you do differently the next time?

Part of being in training is having a plan. A sprinter visualizes every step of a race in her mind before she sets foot on the track. A racecar driver knows and anticipates the twists and turns of a race course before the checkered flag drops.

Being in training for a Godly marriage means anticipating what is to come, and making a plan ahead of time to know what your boundaries are.

Do you have a plan? Write down what your personal boundaries are.

Lesson 7
ROAD RAGE

Ryan didn't understand why Kyleigh was so mad at him. They had been planning to go over to Jeff's tonight and hang out with some friends, maybe play some cards or watch a DVD. Then at lunch time, Kyleigh said she'd rather go to the mall tonight. Ryan suggested that they go to the mall tomorrow since Jeff and the others were counting on them tonight.

Kyleigh threw a fit. She even yelled at Ryan right there by his locker, saying he always had to everything his way. And ever since then, she was just freezing him out, barely acknowledging his existence between classes. She made a point of talking to everyone on the bus around them except him. When he asked her if he should still pick her up at 7, all she said was 'whatever.'

Ryan really likes Kyleigh, except when she gets like this. He doesn't understand why she gets so angry over little things, especially when she doesn't get her way. Ryan hates fighting with Kyleigh so he usually just gives in. He picked her up at 7 and as soon as he told her he'd called Jeff to say they were going to the mall, she was her same old self. Jeff was mad at him for canceling at the last minute, but at least Kyleigh was happy tonight.

Do you think Kyleigh and Ryan should have gone to Jeff's house or to the mall?

Do you think the problem here is whether they went to Jeff's house or the mall, or is there a more serious issue here?

Kyleigh is attempting to control and manipulate Ryan, using her anger as a tool. This is called emotional bullying. Some teens call this 'drama.' The Bible has plenty to say about using and abusing anger. One example is in Psalm 27:8: "*Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; ... —it leads only to evil.*" And in Ephesians 4:26-27: "*In your anger do not sin... do not give the devil a foothold.*" Ephesians 4:26-27

Bullying and control can take many, many forms. You have probably seen traditional bullying in the schoolyard where someone older and bigger intimidates someone smaller and younger into handing over his recess snack or her lunch money. The bully gets his/her way because the other person is afraid of getting hit. Fear of physical pain is what controls that person.

But emotional bullying is much more subtle, and much more damaging. In the case of Kyleigh and Ryan, one of the ways Ryan is controlled is that he never knows what is going to set Kyleigh off on one of her rages. He is also controlled by his fear of losing her as his girlfriend, so he gives in to her anger.

Whether Kyleigh realizes it or not, she is exerting her power in this relationship with anger as her tool. Perhaps there is a relationship at home where she has seen this, or perhaps she has been on the receiving end of such anger from someone else. Regardless of the cause, she is being abusive in her relationship with Ryan.

Are control, power, anger or bullying ever acceptable, healthy elements in a relationship?

The longer Kyleigh and Ryan stay in this relationship with its current pattern, the more damage will be done to both of them. For Kyleigh, the damage is that it reinforces in her the instinct to use anger and rage to control someone else and get her way. It's as if she is learning that she can get where she wants to go on the road by cutting people off, running them out of their lane, and yelling out her window at them. While it may work in the short term, it is bound to land her in a world of trouble eventually, with either the police or another driver who does not take kindly to her antics.

For Ryan, the longer he is controlled by Kyleigh's rage, the less he will think of himself. He will become very unsure of himself as a driver, letting people cut him off, staying always in the slow lane, taking longer routes home because he's become too timid to try to merge into the passing lane. Being continuously beaten down by someone else's anger or control reduces self-esteem very rapidly. Ryan will start to doubt his own actions, and will start blaming himself for everything that goes wrong in the relationship.

And even if he and Kyleigh eventually break up, the damage to Ryan's self-esteem will already have been done.

What would be a healthy way for Ryan to deal with Kyleigh's anger?

Ryan could break up with Kyleigh and extricate himself from the whole situation. That might be the healthiest option for him.

If he chooses to stay with Kyleigh, he will need to confront her about her rages and the effect they have on him. This will not be easy. In fact, it may even trigger Kyleigh's anger again. What is imperative is that Ryan not keep giving in to Kyleigh just because she gets angry. They need to break the pattern of abuse that has gotten started.

These are extremely complicated issues, and teenagers like Ryan and Kyleigh might not be emotionally equipped to really cope with the roots of Kyleigh's behavior. One or both of them may need to seek out an informed and trustworthy Christian adult to help them sort it out.

If you are Kyleigh's friend, what could you do to help her?

If you are Ryan's friend, what could you do to help him?

Do you see shadows of Ryan or Kyleigh in any of your relationships?

If you see some of Kyleigh in yourself, how does that make you feel?

What should you do about it?

If you see some of Ryan in yourself, how does that make you feel?

What should you do about it?

Lesson 8

NO, YOU WON'T GO BLIND

Jeremy felt so guilty. He'd become aroused in the shower this morning so he took matters in hand, so to speak. He masturbated until he had an ejaculation. He didn't know if it was really that bad or if it was pretty normal. And he sure couldn't ask anyone! He was too embarrassed to ask his dad, and he was afraid his older brother would laugh at him. He'd heard the old jokes about masturbation making you go blind and he knew those weren't true. But was it right? Was it wrong? It isn't like he's going to hear a sermon about in church to help him find the answer!

How can Jeremy deal with his feelings in a healthy manner?

The Bible does make mention of Onan '*spilling his semen on the ground.*' (Genesis 38:9) But the issue in Onan's case was his refusal to due his duty to keep his brother's family line intact.

Masturbation is one way to relieve sexual tension, for men *and* for women. The question is whether God created our bodies to seek sexual pleasure outside of relationships. God created our bodies with the capacity to enjoy sexual arousal and its consequences. If that arousal is relieved outside of the marriage relationship, that does not automatically result in a sin and it certainly does not lead to blindness

The truth about masturbation is that it will never completely satisfy our longing, even though it brings sexual relief temporarily. It is a little like being allowed to back the family car up and down the driveway. You get to experience pushing the accelerator and the brakes and switching gears, but it isn't really driving.

The reason masturbation cannot be entirely satisfying is that God didn't create us to be alone. Right from the start, in Genesis 2:18, God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*" Our physical biology is but one example of how He created male and female to complement each other and fit together. Just as God himself is a communal being (with the Son and the Spirit), so too are we made to be in communion, in communion with God and in communion with each other. The gift of sexuality created in us is meant to be shared and explored in a lifelong relationship with our husband or wife. "... *each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.*" 1 Corinthians 7:2

Are there dangers to masturbation?

Physically, no. There are no inherent dangers to masturbation. It won't physically affect your ability to perform sexually, it won't change you physiologically, and you won't get sick or catch any diseases from it.

Do you think there could be emotional dangers to masturbation?

There are some emotional dangers if you tend to masturbate to the point of obsession.

You could condition yourself psychologically, emotionally and physically to equate sexual intimacy with the motions and reactions of masturbation. This can close you off to a great variety of types of intimacies with your future spouse.

It is like only ever driving the car up and down the driveway, and conditioning yourself to only respond to those conditions, hampering you later on when you have the maturity to go out on the road exploring with your life's partner in a safe and healthy way!

Is it addictive?

It can be, for some people. Some people can smoke a cigarette or two and never become addicted to smoking. Other people can become hooked after that first or second smoke. Masturbation can also be addictive for some people, especially if used out of boredom or to relieve other stresses in life. Like just about everything, healthy conduct is based on a good understanding of how our Creator wants us to live out His design.

What if I think I'm masturbating too often?

If you worry that you are masturbating too often, you probably are. It might be time to do some deep thinking about how your activity and habits are affecting you. Ask yourself, 'why am I doing this?'

If you are masturbating to relieve boredom, you may want to find a new healthy activity, preferably a physical one, to engage in. If you are masturbating because you are stressed out, it might be a good idea to look at what is causing your stress and how you can relieve it in a healthy way. Find a way to address the stresses in your life.

If you have tried those things and you are still concerned, you might want to talk to a person of your gender that you respect and trust. You could find a private time to approach them, saying, for example, "Can I ask you a personal and potentially embarrassing question?"

Psalm 139 tells us we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are knit together with such complexity that sometimes, we might need to talk to an informed person to sort out some of those complexities, much the way you would consult a mechanic when you have issues with your car.

Lesson 9

GOING TO THE AUTO SHOW

Ethan waited till he knew his parents were asleep and then he slipped out of bed and turned on his computer. He knew exactly which internet site he wanted to visit. Young, tanned, trim beautiful women, clad in bikinis, or less, awaited his viewing pleasure.

Ethan scrolled through the images, each one more suggestive than the one before. He felt himself becoming aroused. Finally after checking out several web sites, he shut off the computer. He went into the bathroom and closed his eyes, picturing those perfect bodies, and he masturbated until he ejaculated. Then he climbed back into bed and tried to sleep.

Ethan felt guilty about looking at pornography. He knew it wasn't right. But on the other hand, he didn't know any of his friends who didn't look at pornography. And he really wasn't hurting anyone, was he? Just because he didn't look at those pictures didn't mean millions of other people wouldn't.

And besides, it isn't as if he had to turn on the computer to find suggestive pictures. Scantily clad men and women were everywhere, in magazines, on billboards, on television, in movies. So it must not be that bad, right?

The fact that Ethan feels guilty is his first early warning from his conscience that what he is doing isn't healthy for him, not what God intended for him.

At the very least, viewing pornography is causing Ethan to lust, something he should be avoiding, not courting. It's like going to the Auto Show and looking at all those bright, shiny cars, all set up and specially lit to attract drivers. Mostly what happens is that drivers covet what is so close, yet impossible to have.

IT ISN'T REAL

What Ethan is seeing in pornography are digitally enhanced images that are completely disconnected with reality. Those images aren't any more real than the commercials showing cars racing along country roads at incredibly high speeds. There is a reason those commercials are required to have a disclaimer along the bottom of the screen.

Ethan is in training for a Godly marriage, but he's filling his mind with images that aren't real. Those images are about as connected to Godly marriage as a Formula One race car is to daily commuting. While a Formula One race car might look exciting and enticing, it would be completely useless in the real world.

Ethan also needs to realize that the making of pornography *does* hurt others. It exploits those involved, whether they are male or female. It is an industry that attracts people with the darkest of motives. It can involve violence, human trafficking, and forced prostitution.

Will viewing pornography damage Ethan?

Yes. The more pornography Ethan views, the more skewed his idea of reality will become. Pornography is about performance, men and women acting out a scene. It separates sexuality from living, growing and healthy relationships.

In contrast, true sexual intimacy is about communion, not performance. It is the joining together of two lives, two persons. It is a life union that goes far beyond mere physical satisfaction, something that cannot be captured in a visual image.

Does Ethan's viewing of pornography damage his future wife?

Yes. If Ethan equates sexuality with the images he's seeing, rather than as a God-given union with his life-long partner, he will not be able to see her as the God-created gift she is. Those other images will cloud his view.

And it isn't just men who are lured into the world of pornography. Though in lower numbers, women also view it. And pornography isn't just visual. It can also come in the form of erotic stories.

Pornography makes objects of people, objects that exist solely for the sexual viewing pleasure of others. And worse, pornography portrays potentially deviant, aberrant behaviors. That is a far cry from what God intended when he created men and women in His image as the crowning glory of his creation.

Is pornography addictive?

Yes. Pornography can snare young men and young women just as quickly and intensely as crack cocaine. And the more pornography is viewed, the more titillating it must become to have the same effect on the viewer. And the sheer availability of it almost everywhere makes it that much harder to break an addiction once it is started.

With pornography so prevalent and readily available, what would be the healthiest way Ethan could respond?

Are you being attracted by the siren call of pornography?

What are the dangers you face?

How can you best protect yourself?

Lesson 10
GETTING PUSHED OFF THE ROAD

Megan has a commitment to be in training for a Godly marriage and she's been pretty clear about that with Lucas. He said, yeah, he understands that, and he usually seems to respect it. But every so often, he tries to push her into further intimacy than she wants. Sometimes he can get quite angry or hurt when she pulls away and tells him to stop. Sometimes she wonders if she can make him stop ...

What if 'no' doesn't work?

No means no. Even if it's their 100th date. If Lucas has not heard the rumble strip warnings that Megan has, he still has to respect her decision. If Lucas tries to physically force further intimacy, this is no longer bullying. It's called sexual assault.

What can Megan do if she is in danger of being assaulted?

The first thing Megan should do is get out of the situation. It's always a good idea to carry a small amount of cash and a cell phone in case of any emergency, but especially in a case like this. Megan can flee to the nearest lit, public area and call her parents, call a friend or call a taxi.

Teens, especially young women, must prepare in advance for the possibility of date violence. You may think it could never happen to you. But statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice show that **one in three teenagers** have experienced violence in a dating relationships. And young women aged 16 to 24 experience the highest per capita rates of intimate violence (*Bureau of Justice Special Report, May 2001*).

Young women need a dating safety plan, just like a well-prepared driver needs an emergency kit. You may want to consider double-dating the first few times you go out with a new person. Make sure you know what the plans are for the evening, and make sure someone else (a parent or a friend) knows when to expect you home.

Be aware of your decreased ability to react under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you leave a party with someone you don't know well, tell a friend who you are leaving with, and ask your friend to call and see that you arrived home safely, making sure the person who's taking you hears that.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS! If a situation is making you feeling uncomfortable, stay calm and think of a way you can remove yourself from the situation.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Megan's?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do?

What would you do differently the next time?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like Lucas's?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do?

What would you do differently the next time?

If you have been sexually assaulted, you need to talk to a trusted Christian adult right away, even if it happened a while back, and even if it happened in the context of using drugs or alcohol. If you said “NO!” and were forced into intimacy anyway, you need to deal with it in a healthy manner as soon as possible. Denying that it happened will not make it go away. No matter how much you try to convince yourself otherwise, you will not forget with time. In fact, the longer you wait, the deeper the damage to you emotionally, psychologically and spiritually will be.

Lesson 11

ONLY DRIVE DOWN MY STREET

When Lindsay got back from the football game, Brody was waiting for her. She could tell he was in a bad mood, acting sort of sulky. “What’s the matter?” she asked. “Nothing,” he replied. She sighed inwardly. Sometimes Brody could be so moody. She knew he was mad that she’d gone to the game instead of hanging around her house with him.

She had asked Brody to come with her to the football game, but he didn’t want to go. He only wanted to spend time with her, alone. He was getting more and more possessive that way. He said her friends didn’t understand him, that he wasn’t comfortable around them.

Lindsay started seeing less of her friends, just to keep Brody happy. When it was just the two of them together, he was such a different guy: attentive, funny, smart. She wished he could be like that with other people, too. And if he doesn’t want to go out with other people, she wishes he wouldn’t sulk when she goes.

It looks as if Lindsay and Brody are learning to ‘drive’ in their dating relationship, but for some reason, Brody wants Lindsay to only drive on his street. While she wants to explore all the roads open to her, he seems to be putting roadblocks at the two ends of his road to try to keep her there.

What is happening in Brody and Lindsay’s relationship?

Are Brody and Lindsay building each other up, encouraging the other to flourish?

Is Lindsay being encouraged to develop separately from Brody, in addition to growing in her relationship with him?

What might be the trouble signs that Lindsay should be seeing?

Some people are naturally more socially outgoing than others, and it could be that Brody is just very shy. But anytime one person tries to put limits on another person’s activities, interactions, or social relationships, it could be a sign of a much more serious problem.

Those roadblocks Lindsay is encountering should cause her to pause. What she might be seeing are the early warnings of an abusive person. One in three teenagers experiences some sort of dating violence or abuse.

Just like car crashes, abuse crosses all economic, racial and social lines, so Lindsay should never assume it can’t happen to her. In fact Lindsay must be aware that it might very well happen to her. That is why drivers are required by law to purchase insurance.

Early indications that Brody may become abusive are:

- his extreme jealousy of Lindsay
- his mood swings and controlling behavior
- his explosive anger and use of physical force if they have an argument

- Brody trying to isolate Lindsay from family or friends
- Brody blaming Lindsay for his problems and feelings.

What should Lindsay do if she sees these signs?

Lindsay needs to extricate herself from this relationship as soon as possible. Any further exposure to Brody may increase her risk of facing violence. Lindsay also needs to tell at least one trusted adult what is happening. She should be on her guard for further signs of anger or violence from Brody in response to her breaking up with him.

Lindsay may feel a strong desire to try to help Brody, but she must realize that this problem is bigger than she is equipped to handle.

And most importantly, Lindsay needs to remember that she is a beloved child of God, created in his image, and as such, deserves to be treated with respect.

Have you experienced a relationship like Lindsay's? What did you do about that?

Are you currently experiencing a relationship like Lindsay's? What should you do?

What if you are like Brody? Have you ever tried to control someone through moodiness, possessiveness, anger or jealousy? How did it make you feel? What was the result?

Are you currently behaving like Brody in a relationship? What should you do about it?

If you are currently caught in a pattern of behavior like Brody's, trying to control someone, you need to acknowledge that is what you are doing. There are many reasons a person might find themselves displaying unhealthy behavior. It might be that such behavior is what they see at home. But acknowledging it and repenting of it is the best first step.

Whatever the reason for your behavior, you need to talk with a trusted and competent Christian adult to help you discover why you are following that behavior pattern, just as you would consult a mechanic to find out why your car is tracking to the left. The sooner you get that help, the sooner you will be able to function in a relationship the way God intended. God is more than capable of forgiving your past behaviors and helping you grow into a person who doesn't need such behaviors in the future.

Lesson 12

GETTING OUT OF THE DITCH

Sienna and Brandon are over the rumble strips. They are right off the road and into the ditch. They had never intended to be here, but it just sort of happened. And once they ended up in the ditch the first time, it seemed like they end up here more and more, even though they know it's wrong.

They went to youth group and they had even made abstinence commitments back when they were in grade 9. That seems like so long ago. They recently went to a youth convention and heard a speaker on sexual purity. They want to restore their relationship to being a God-centered one. But where do they start and how do they keep from straying from their lane again?

Can Sienna and Brandon get out of the ditch? Can they restore their sexual purity?

Yes, they can get out of the ditch. Can they un-do what has already been done? No. They have both given pieces of themselves, body and soul, to someone else, and they can never get those back.

So what do they do now? They need to talk about it. They need to talk about the fact that they've gone off the road.

They need to both commit to staying in their lane in the future. But just making that commitment is not enough. Sienna and Brandon need to pray together, repenting of their actions before God, and asking him to restore his right balance to their relationship. God loves them and desperately wants them to be in a right relationship with Him. If they repent, he will gather them into his warm, forgiving embrace. Being forgiven does not erase what happened, but it will release Sienna and Brandon from shame and guilt that could cripple them if they are not forgiven.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ... We are buried with [Christ] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead ... we also should walk in newness of life. Knowing this, that our old [self] is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Romans 6:1-6)

What Now?

Sienna and Brandon have been permanently affected by their previous actions. It is like a road that has a groove worn in it. It will be difficult to keep their wheels out of that groove headed straight off the road.

If Sienna and Brandon are serious about restoring their sexual integrity, they should consider finding a driving instructor to help them break out of that groove. Their pastor, youth leader, Christian teacher, or any competent Christian adult committed to their well-being could be that instructor, holding them accountable and mentoring them on a new path.

Taking a Slower Road

Brandon and Sienna need to get off the highway where traffic is moving too fast for them to manage. They need to move their relationship back on to a slower city street,

where they spend time with family and friends, attend church and other activities together, and very much restrict their time alone together. (See the chapter “When the road is long” for more on how a couple in a long-term relationship can maintain sexual purity.)

What if only one of them wants the slower road?

If only one half of a couple wants to re-commit to sexual purity, the road will be filled with potholes. If only one person in the relationship repents and commits to staying in the proper lane, it will be a car with a broken steering mechanism with one wheel going straight and the other gone askew. *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Unless the person committed to sexual purity is strong enough to keep all the wheels in the proper lane, this car is headed for a crash. Either the pull of the previously worn groove will pull the car back into the ditch, or the car will crash and the relationship will be over. In the ditch or in a crash, there will be lasting damage to each of them individually.

Are you in a relationship like Brandon and Sienna’s?

Have you run into the ditch and tried to get back on the road?

If you haven’t been able to stay on the road, what might you try differently?

Are you and your partner both committed to returning your relationship to a God-centred one?

If not, what are you going to do?

Lesson 13

WHEN THE ROAD IS LONG

Andrew and Sarah have been dating their whole senior year in high school. They have fallen in love. They are even talking about attending the same college so that they won't have to be apart.

Andrew and Sarah are both Christians, and they both have always believed that they need to protect their sexual purity until marriage, even though they are pretty sure that they will be married to each other.

The problem is that the longer they are together, the closer they become and the more difficult it is to keep their sexual relationship in check. At a time in their lives when hormones are surging and sex is sometimes all they think about, it feels almost impossible to not give in to temptation.

What can Andrew and Sarah do to relieve the pressure and not drive themselves crazy with frustration?

First of all, they need to talk about it. Communication about the values that they share and cherish is crucial to any long-term relationship, and if they plan to spend their lives together, they need to be open and honest with each other. They need to keep their eyes on their Godly goal. *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Only when they are both committed to a higher good will they be able to keep their physical drives in check.

Secondly, they need to put the physical/sexual aspect of their relationship into perspective with the rest of their relationship. That can be difficult when sexual desire runs high. One the best ways to keep from letting their physical desire for each dominate their entire relationship is to make sure that all the other facets of their relationship develop at a similar pace: emotional, mental, social, recreational, spiritual.

How can Andrew and Sarah keep their physical relationship in balance with the rest of their relationship?

Andrew and Sarah can intentionally pursue the common interests that drew them together in the first place. It might be sports, history, politics, computers, music, or all of the above.

They need to keep talking, communicating about what they believe, what they want to hold to, what they are thinking and feeling, and challenging each other mentally. They need to worship together, reminding themselves and each other that the God they serve is much bigger than either of them. They need to pray together, including praying for protection of their sexual integrity.

Andrew and Sarah can pursue recreational activities and socialize with family and friends. All of these things help them develop their *whole* relationship, and help prevent the sexual aspect of their lives from swamping the rest of the relationship.

Both Andrew and Sarah should also continue to pursue their own individual interests and goals. Part of growing together is to also grow separately, encouraging the one you love to flourish in all dimensions.

Most importantly, Andrew and Sarah need to put what God desires for them, and what is best for the other person, ahead of their own urges or desires.

Follow the GPS

Sarah and Andrew can also look at the map to their destination of a Godly marriage. Sexual intimacy is not just a straight one-way road from kissing to intercourse. Viewing sexual intimacy like that robs a couple of much of the joy in the journey.

Sexual intimacy is a winding, scenic route, with many rest stops and cul-de-sacs along the way, which include varying levels of touching, kissing, caressing. Sarah and Andrew can decide that for now, their road trip will only go as far as a specific spot on the map.

The more Andrew and Sarah discuss their route, then agree to and observe limits of physical intimacy, the easier it will be for them to deal with their longing, and the deeper their relationship will become emotionally and spiritually.

Lesson 14

LISA HAS A SECRET

Lisa has a secret. She has a new boyfriend. It sort of just happened. She was having all kinds of problems at home with her parents always hassling her about curfews and homework. Jared turned out to be a guy who really understood her and that she could talk to. And as they grew closer and she confided more in him, they started falling in love.

The problem is, she can't tell anyone about how she feels about Jared. He's older, about 30, and worse, he's married and has a little boy. Lisa knows she is mature for 16, so the age difference doesn't bother her. She knows she shouldn't be seeing a married man, but he's told her he's having problems with his wife, but he can't leave her because he would hardly ever see his little boy then.

Lisa feels guilty about lying to her parents, but she feels so bad that Jared is unhappy. She hates all the sneaking around. But Jared has told her there would be all kinds of trouble if anyone found out, so she has to keep it secret. And she really does love him.

So she keeps the secret. She and Jared continue to grow closer.

What is wrong with this picture? What should be the loudest warning bell for Lisa that this is not healthy for her?

Along with her God-given conscience giving her nudges of guilt, the fact that Lisa has to keep their relationship a secret should be warning her to stop as clearly as the flashing red lights and dropped gate at a railroad crossing. Proceeding under cover of secrecy is the relational equivalent of driving onto the tracks in front of a train.

The fact that Jared has asked her to keep their relationship a secret, that he has implicated her in his web of lies and secrecy, should be warning her off like the roar of an approaching train.

And of course, there are the obvious facts that Jared is married and has no business establishing an intimate relationship with anyone but his wife. Even if they are unhappy or they have problems, venturing outside the marriage is never a solution.

The huge age gap between Lisa and Jared is also a problem, even if Lisa doesn't see it that way. She is a teenager, whose identity is still forming. She is particularly vulnerable.

When there is a large disparity in age and one of the persons in the relationship is still under-age, it is a relationship of unequal partners, and could even be considered abusive. If it leads to intercourse, it could lead to criminal charges.

When one person who is older and in a position of trust and leadership (like a youth leader, a pastor, a teacher), pursues an intimate relationship with a much younger person, it is considered sexually predatory. Even if it seems like love to Lisa, it is a criminal offence.

You could change the names and make the older person in the relationship a woman, and the younger person a male teen, and the problem is still the same.

Jennifer read about Lisa's story and cried. She felt like it was her own story. Only now Jennifer is 29 years old and married. She too had a secret relationship like Lisa's.

She never told. After a couple of years, the man she thought she loved moved away and the relationship ended.

It is only now, when she is older, that she has come to understand that what happened to her was not love. It was abuse. She has many years of therapy ahead of her to try to un-do the damage that was done to her. She struggles every day to understand that in a relationship that was so unequal, she really wasn't at fault. She wishes desperately someone would have told her what was wrong with the picture.

Are you involved in a relationship that must be hidden? Are you heeding the flashing red lights warning of danger? Are you keeping a secret that shouldn't be kept? Please, get off the train tracks right away and talk to a trusted Christian adult.

Lesson 15

I THINK I'M GAY

Jackie didn't know what to do or where to turn. She had suspected for a while that she is a lesbian. When feelings of attraction arose in her, they were almost always for other girls. Guys didn't really interest her, at least not romantically.

"Why is this happening to me?" she wondered. "I've been a Christian my whole life, raised in a Christian home. How can this be?"

She wished she could talk to someone but she didn't know who. Her parents would just be angry or hurt or both, she was pretty sure. She couldn't talk to her friends. She'd heard the way they talk about people they think are gay, using that term as an insult.

She just wanted to die.....

If you were Jackie's friend, what would be your best advice for her?

Jackie is facing an extremely difficult and confusing time. Getting through the emotional, relational and sexual hazards of the teen years can be hard enough, without throwing in sexual orientation issues. And if Jackie has grown up receiving negative messages and attitudes at home about homosexuality, she might experience considerable anguish and doubt, even self-hatred. At the same time, she has to deal with her fear of being discovered, being 'outed', and the rejection and exclusion that could come with that.

The result is a teenager feeling very scared and very alone.

One important thing for Jackie to recognize is that an attraction to someone of the same sex does not necessarily mean that she is a lesbian. Sexual attraction happens on a continuum, a whole range of attraction. Some people are attracted *only* to people of the opposite sex, and at the other end of the spectrum, there are people who are attracted *only* to people of the same gender. Between those two extremes, there is a huge range of attraction, including those who fall somewhere in the middle. Sometimes those people who fall in that middle area are called bi-sexual.

Even more important for Jackie to remember is that first and foremost, she is a child of God, made in his image, and His love for her does not change, no matter where she is on that continuum.

There is so much about sexuality and sexual attraction that we don't know. We don't know why some people experience same-gender attraction and others don't. We don't know if it is something people are born with, or if it is affected by the circumstances of their childhood, or a mixture of both.

How society treats people with same-gender attraction has about as many variations as there are people. In some communities, same-gender attraction is celebrated, even flaunted, for example, in Gay Pride parades. In other circles, same-sex relationships are just quietly accepted. In Canada and in some European countries, same-sex relationships can now legally be formalized as marriages. Many gay Americans have traveled to Canada to be married. But despite legal recognition, gay people in those countries and many others still face discrimination, shunning, even hatred.

So unfortunately, there are no easy answers for Jackie as she struggles with her feelings and her attractions and what to do about them. What is she to do?

The first thing Jackie needs to do is pray. God loves her and accepts her and He will listen when she prays. She needs to ask God to show her someone she can talk to for support. *(If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. James 1:5)*

Finding support is crucial for Jackie. The suicide rate among gay teens is incredibly high, precisely because so many teens feel so alone and desperate when coming to terms with same-sex attractions.

Then Jackie needs to actively seek out an informed and competent Christian person she can talk to, someone with special expertise in what she is dealing with.

While mom and dad can teach the driving basics, sometimes special situations call for special training. It might be a pastor, a youth leader, a teacher, or someone she is related to like an aunt or an uncle. It might be an older, college-aged sibling or cousin. Whoever it is, it is essential that Jackie find someone to talk to. That adult can help her sort through her feelings, or perhaps put her in contact with a professional who can help her.

Would you be the kind of friend Jackie could turn to for support?

Have you said negative things about people you think are gay, or used the words gay, homo and lesbian as insults?

Would a friend think you would be a safe person to confide in?

Are you struggling with feelings similar to Jackie's?

Have you prayed about it?

Who is an adult you could turn to for help?

Lesson 16

CAN I BE HOMOSEXUAL AND A CHRISTIAN AT THE SAME TIME?

The short answer is YES!

How it plays out can get complicated. The Christian church is almost as divided over same-sex relationships as society in general. Some Christians believe that all homosexual activity is sinful and wrong, according to passages like Romans 1 and Leviticus 18. Other Christians believe that those kinds of passages pertain to only specific circumstances and cultures and that a committed monogamous lifelong homosexual relationship is acceptable to God.

Churches around the world are struggling with this issue. In 2003 the Episcopal (Anglican) Church in the United States ordained an openly gay bishop in New Hampshire. Then an Anglican diocese in Canada started openly blessing gay unions. Other Anglicans on the North American continent and especially in Africa were incensed, threatening divisions in one of the largest denominations in the world.

Even in the Christian Reformed church, when a congregation in Toronto suggested that it was considering allowing homosexual persons living in committed monogamous relationships to hold the offices of elder and deacon, it caused an uproar in the denomination.

Do you know anyone in your church, school or community who is homosexual? How is that person treated? How do you think he or she should be treated?

The Christian Reformed Church believes very strongly that every person, gay or straight, has a place in the family of God. No one should be excluded from certain positions in the church or roles in the church family because of sexual orientation. The church's official position states, "Persons of same-sex attraction should not be denied community acceptance solely because of their sexual orientation and should be wholeheartedly received by the church and given loving support and encouragement. Christian homosexuals, like all Christians, are called to discipleship, to holy obedience, and to the use of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. Opportunities to serve within the offices and the life of the congregation should be afforded to them as they are to heterosexual Christians." (www.crcna.org/pages/positions_homosexuality.cfm)

At the same time, the Christian Reformed Church also states that homosexual activity is sinful, and just like all other sins, it should be confessed, and the Christian should turn away from such sin in the future. God created the gift of sexuality to be enjoyed only between a man and a woman, within the bond of marriage.

This is a hard truth for many people to accept or to live with. We are all made to be in community, for intimacy and love. To acknowledge and accept that your sexual orientation will always preclude you from experiencing the kind of sexual and relational intimacy the married couples enjoy can be very painful.

There are some people who are unable to live such a life of chastity. The Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 7:8-9, tells single Christians that it is good to stay unmarried, but if they cannot control themselves, better that they should marry than to burn with passion. But what about the person who is gay and unable to live a single life?

There are Christian Reformed scholars, such as Dr. Lewis Smedes, who have stated that in that case, it is better for that person to live in a life-long, monogamous God-

centered relationship with a person of the same gender. In his book *Sex for Christians*, Smedes wrote, “I believe that God prefers homosexual people to live in committed and faithful monogamous relationships with each other when they cannot change their condition and do not have the gift to be celibate” (p. 239). According to Smedes, such a relationship doesn’t match the created norm for marriage, but in a fallen world, perhaps it is the better option for a gay person.

Whether or not you agree with someone like Smedes, one thing is clear. Promiscuity is never the answer. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, sexual intimacy is a gift of God that is never intended to be abused or misused outside a life-long committed relationship.

How do you feel about people who experience same-gender attraction?

Are you able to view them as God’s children as equally loved as you are?

Do you experience same-gender attraction? Do you believe that you are still a much-loved child of God?

Do you think that people who are gay should *always* be expected to live a single, chaste life?

Do you think God allows for monogamous, lifelong committed gay relationships?

Perhaps you have strong opinions about these questions and answers. Perhaps you aren’t sure. Perhaps you would just as soon not have to think about the questions at all. That is pretty much the same struggle facing most adults in the Christian church today. We all need to continue to seek God’s wisdom and guidance to come to terms with these issues.

Lesson 17
SAFE SEX?

Jackson was barreling down the highway in his dad's Ford Explorer. He felt invincible, sitting there up higher than all the other cars, safely belted in, surrounded by 5900 lbs of vehicle. He was as safe as he could possibly be.

Then his cell phone rang. He knew he shouldn't be answering it while he was driving. But hey, he was as protected as he could be.

In that moment of inattention as he looked at the caller display on his phone, he strayed into the next lane and clipped the pick up truck driving next to him. After that everything happened so fast, he hardly even remembers it.

He bounced off the pick up truck and veered toward the median. Even as he tried to wrench the steering wheel to stay in his lane, he felt the vehicle start to roll. The next thing he knew, he was upside down in the median with ambulance attendants cutting him out of his seat belt harness. His airbag had deployed. There was a lot of blood and he was pretty sure he had broken his leg.

Automakers have spent millions of dollars building safety features into vehicles. And they have spent millions more telling consumers just how safe those vehicles are, that their vehicle should be a person's best choice for keeping her family safe. But just how safe was Jackson? Was he protected from all harm by the safety features he was sure would keep him well?

Practicing what is called 'safe sex' is like driving down the highway in Jackson's dad's SUV. Health teachers, doctors, and governmental health organizations have spent millions promoting sexual protection such as condoms, spermicidal agents, and birth control pills, telling teens how to use these forms of protection to STAY SAFE. Armed with such protection, teens can feel like they are invincible and it may even lead to moments of carelessness. The message is that any sex is okay, as long as it is consensual and protects the participants from disease and pregnancy.

But are you really safe?

What using condoms and birth control pills cannot protect you from is the effect on you spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and relationally. As we've talked about throughout these lessons, sexual union is a communion of two people, a giving of something that can be never be taken back. When that good gift of God is misused outside the life-long commitment of marriage, it damages the sexual purity of both the giver and the receiver. It puts an imprint on both people that is there forever.

Just like Jackson's accident shows, there is a huge difference between being kept safe from death and remaining undamaged.

Yes, condoms will reduce the changes of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Birth control pills or spermicidal agents used with condoms can provide some protection from an unplanned pregnancy, though no protection is always 100 percent effective. Like seatbelts and airbags, they can offer you some measure of safety in case of a rollover.

If you head out on to the highway and drive too fast, flaunting the speed laws, wisdom dictates that you at least fasten your seatbelt. If you are going to participate in

sexual activity in defiance of God's law, natural wisdom and deduction demands that you use basic protection.

But do not mistake protection from disease or pregnancy with safe sex.

. *Jackson survived the accident. His leg was broken in two places and required surgery to put pins in it. He had a couple of months of physical therapy because of that, and his days of playing football are over. He still has a scar along one side of his face where a broken glass shard pierced him. He's driving again, but never without nervousness, even fear.*

The steel construction and the air bag and the seatbelt kept Jackson alive. But did they protect him from damage?

Are you engaging in sexual activity with the basic physical protection of condoms and reliable birth control?

Are you feeling safe, even invincible, because you are using those forms of protection?

Do you think being protected simply from disease and pregnancy is enough?

What parts of you are not being protected if you are practicing what is considered "safe sex"?

Lesson 18

MERGING ON TO THE HIGHWAY

Jasmine is headed off to college. She'll be sharing an apartment with two other girls, in a city an hour away from her parents. She is really excited about her pending freedom: from curfews, from telling parents where she is going, from having to follow the rules of her parents' household.

She gets giddy just thinking about being on her own, making her own decisions. This is gonna be great!

Jasmine is headed out of city traffic and on to the main highway of life. For many young adults, college or university is the on-ramp that takes them from their teen years into full adulthood. It's a very exciting time, with lots of preparation, high expectations, some anxiety but yet delightful anticipation of what is ahead.

That on-ramp is very short and traffic picks up a great deal of speed in a very short distance. It is a good thing that Jasmine is not heading out on to that busy highway untrained. She knows the rules of the road. She's been through 'relational' driver's training. She has the Bible as her GPS and a Christian upbringing reinforcing her internal navigation system.

But Jasmine needs to also be aware that the highway can be a dangerous and unpredictable place. The best GPS system in the world isn't going to get her to her destination if her car breaks down or she gets off at the wrong exit.

And she has no control over the other drivers sharing that highway with her. Just like the city streets of high school, she could unexpectedly find herself getting pulled along in the gridlocked traffic of peer pressure.

However, Jasmine also knows that the rumble strips are there and will be her early warning system. She has a dating safety plan to avoid getting run off the road. She knows the road signs warning of relational danger ahead.

And if Jasmine runs into a problem, help is but a phone call away, literally and metaphorically. Jasmine can call her parents, her pastor or any other trusted Christian adult.

Are you getting ready to merge into adult life?

Have you had relational driver's training?

Are you remembering to take your GPS, the Bible?

Do you know what to do in case of gridlock?

Do you know the warning signs of danger ahead?

Who will you call if you break down along the way?

APPENDIX

Signs of abusive relationships

- When one partner believes he/she has the right to 'control' or 'possess' the other.
- Young men who believe that physical aggressiveness is 'masculine.'
- When one partner believes he/she can and should demand intimacy, and that attentiveness and support of their partner will cause them to lose their peers' respect.
- When one partner believes he/she is responsible for solving problems in the relationship.
- When one partner finds the other's jealousy or possessiveness 'romantic.'
- When couples believe abuse is normal because their friends are also being abused.
- When one partner believes he/she can 'cure' their abusive partner.