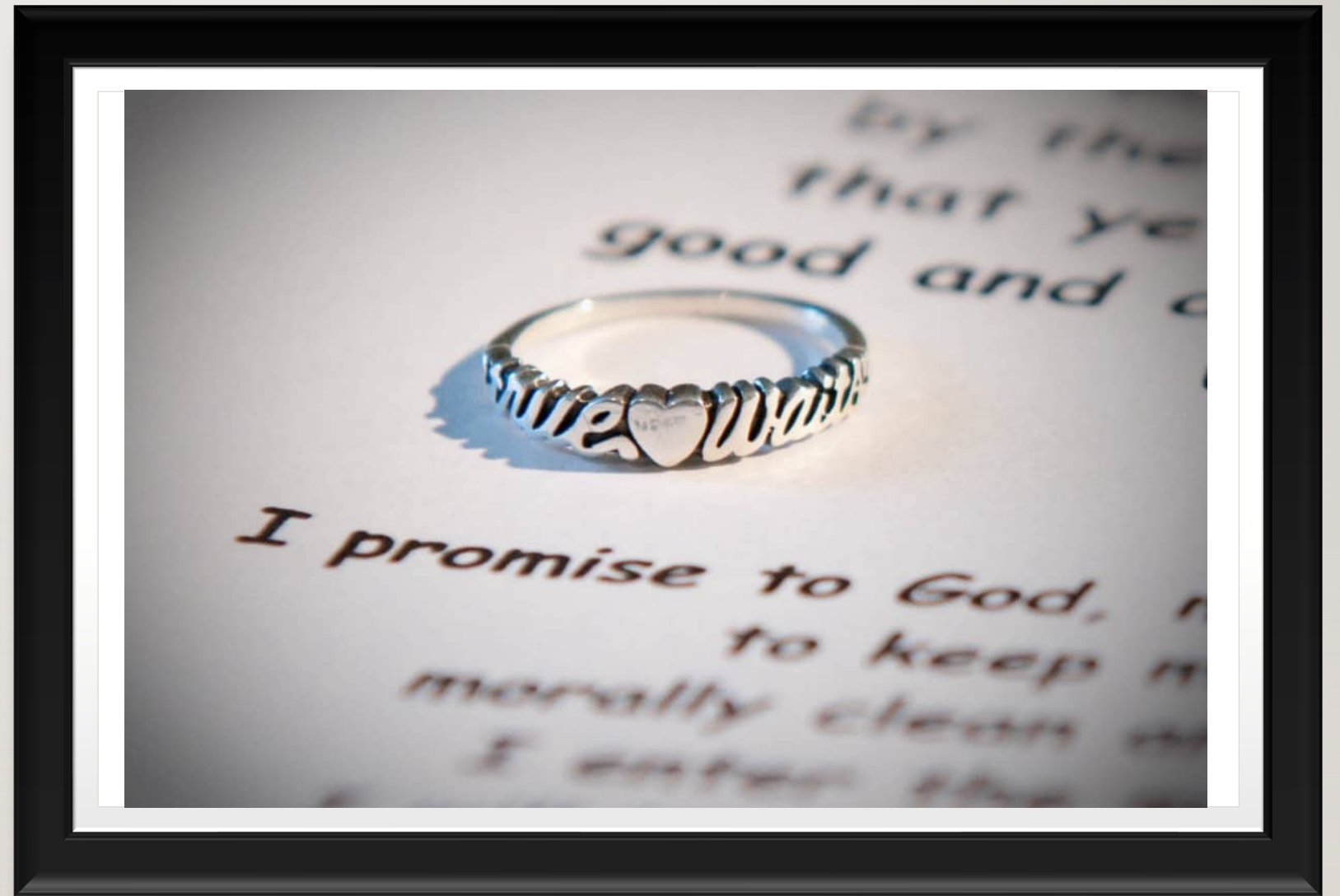


PURITY  
CULTURE:  
A CORRECTIVE

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# GOD MADE SEX GOOD

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- “Our relationship to sex speaks of our relationship to God. And because our relationship with God must precede our relationship with everything else, including our own selves, working from this first relationship changes everything.”

—Carolyn Weber, *Sex and the City of God*

PURITY IS GOOD.  
PURITY *CULTURE* IS NOT

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THE DAMAGING

EFFECT OF

PURITY CULTURE







## WHAT IS PURITY CULTURE?

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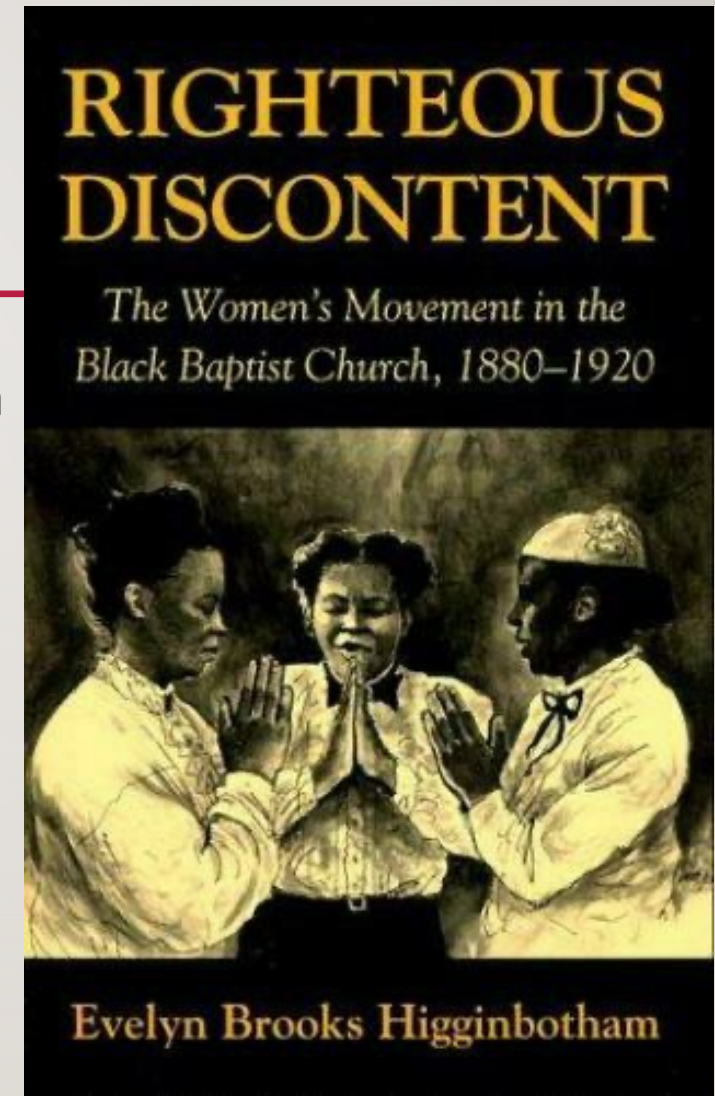
- Global. Cross-religious, and cross-cultural
  - . Mormons: “worthiness”
  - . Muslims: “honor culture”
- US evangelicals. Associated with white, American Christian purity movement with corollary industry launched in early 1990s



# CONTEXT FOR BLACK WOMEN

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- “Black women were already motivated by their Christian faith to instill virtue in their children, but the ‘politics of respectability’—the need to look respectable in the eyes of White people—drove them even harder to be virtuous.”  
—*Women in the Mission of the Church*, citing Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*







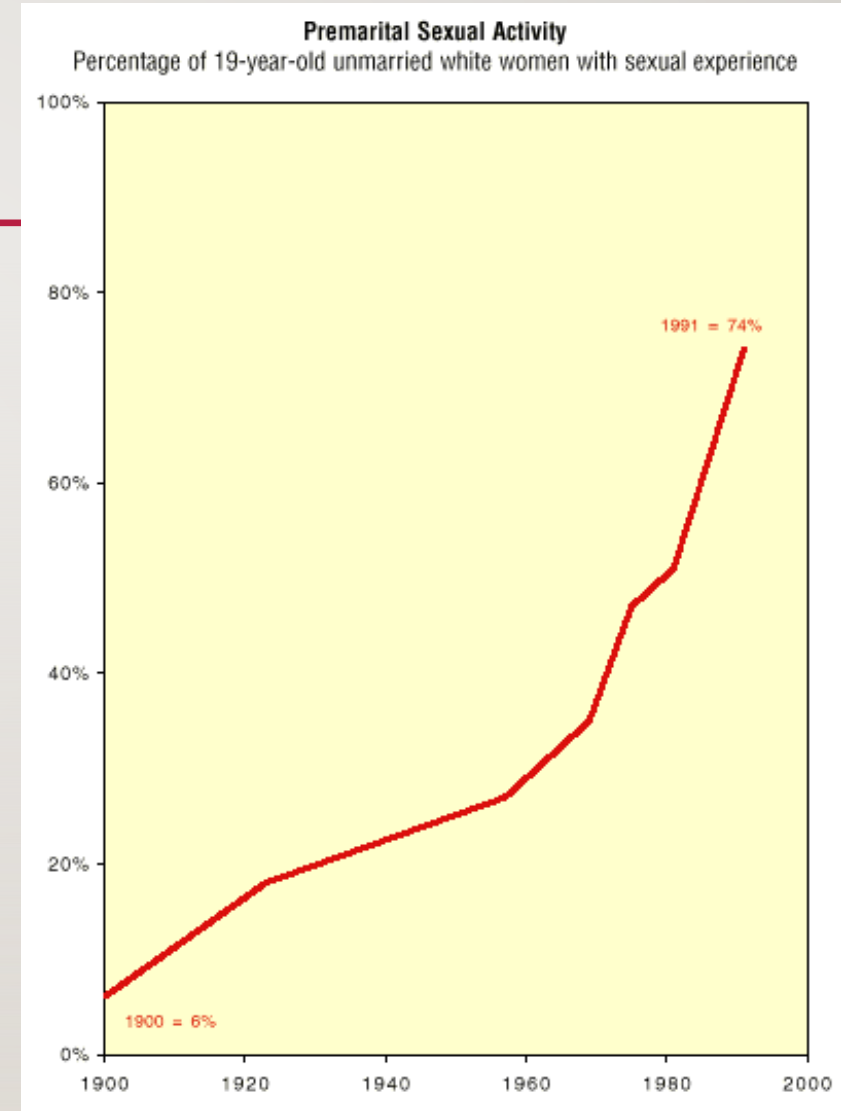
PURITY  
CULTURE  
IN US CAME  
OUT OF A KEY  
CULTURAL  
MOMENT

- **In 1990s, Christians who grew up during Sexual Revolution had children and teens**
- **AIDS #1 cause of death for US men ages 25–44**
- **Teen pregnancy rate at all-time high**

# THE TREND

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- Number of premarital sex partners in US skyrocketed since 1970s
  - 1970s: 2% of women had more than 10 partners before marriage
  - 1990s: 10%





# GOOD INTENT TO PROMOTE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SEXUAL PURITY

- <sup>3</sup>This is the will of God: your sanctification, that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup> Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit (I Thess 4:3–8).

A detailed architectural model of a classical building, likely a temple or a grand public structure. The model features a prominent portico with several columns, each topped with a decorative capital. A wide, grand staircase leads up to the entrance. The building is constructed from light-colored stone or plaster, with intricate details in the carvings and architectural elements. The background shows other parts of the model, including more columns and architectural structures, suggesting a larger complex.

“...who gives you the Holy Spirit”  
Paul’s image of a new believer

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# WHAT TO DO?

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- Evangelicals concerned re. sex outside of marriage, sought to ground sexuality in biblical ethics.
- 1992: A youth ministry consultant at LifeWay presented theme of “True Love Waits” in brainstorming session for potential Christian sex-ed campaign



# LIFEWAY/ SBC

SBC set goal of 100,000 signed commitment cards (i.e., purity pledges) by the time of their next annual convention

1993

1994

True Love Waits held DC rally with 25,000 youth; displayed 210K commitment cards on National Mall

# PLEDGES



**PURITY PLEDGE**

“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.”  
2 Timothy 2:22 NLT

From this day forward, I, \_\_\_\_\_, vow before God and a witness, in obedience to God’s Word, to keep myself pure and to give myself, only after marriage, to the mate God is preparing for me.

To maintain purity I pledge to abstain from the following: viewing pornography, making out, foreplay, anal sex, oral sex, phone sex, cybersex, strip clubs, making porn, golden showers, finger banging, dry-humping, role-playing, cross-dressing, masturbating, spooning, stripping, spanking, sounding, streaking, sexting, scissoring, kissing, docking, peeping, pegging, licking, lusting, necking, rimming, fisting, sex parties, water sports, hickies, asphyxiation, copulation, vaginal penetration with foreign objects, anal penetration with foreign objects, autofellatio, autocunnilingus, erotic torture, bestiality, foot-play, nipple-play, wax-play, spit-play, anal-play, scat-play, knife-play, blood-play, necrophilia, and hand jobs.\*

Dated this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2015  
Witness \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_



**DAY OF PURITY**  
Promoting Purity in Mind & Action \*Please email any additions for the list to: [jake@saveportlandfromhell.com](mailto:jake@saveportlandfromhell.com)

- “Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, those I date, and my future mate to be sexually pure until the day I enter marriage” (original pledge from 1993 “True Love Waits”)

# THE RING

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- Purity rings sometimes worn as outward symbols by those who made purity pledges, popularized “The Silver Ring Thing,” which promoted abstinence primarily through music events.







## EVENTS

- Pledge retreats, conferences, ceremonies
- Purity balls (or Father-Daughter Purity Balls): formal dance events attended by fathers/daughters promoting virginity until marriage for teen girls. Fathers often signed pledges to be examples of purity, model integrity for their daughters.

# PRODUCTS

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- True Love Waits: Bible study, leader's guide, video series
- T-shirts like "True Love Waits"
- "Modest Is Hottest"



truelovewaits.♥

# LIFEWAY/ SBC

SBC set goal of 100,000 signed commitment cards (i.e., purity pledges) by the time of their next annual convention

1993

Josh Harris published *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*

1998

1994

True Love Waits held DC rally with 25,000 youth; displayed 210K commitment cards on National Mall

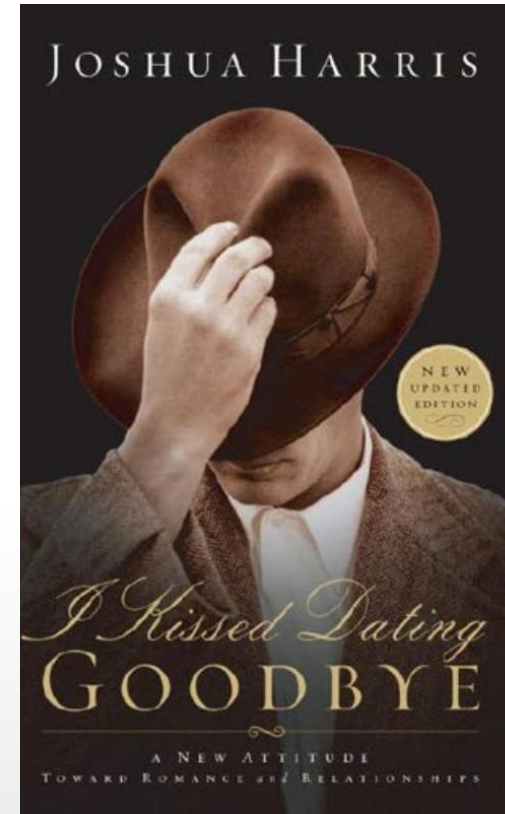


# JOSH HARRIS

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## *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*

- Promoted abstinence
- Popularized “courting” as alternative to dating
- Sold more than a million copies
- Became a primary text of movement



# CELEBRITY BUY-IN

## PARENTAL APPROVAL, RECORD SALES

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- Jessica Simpson
- Britney Spears
- Miley Cyrus
- Demi Lovato
- Selena Gomez
- Jonas Brothers





# BENEFIT OFFERED

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Abstinence before marriage

=

Guarantee of mind-blowing  
sex within marriage for those  
who wait (prosperity gospel)





## UNDERLYING MESSAGING



- Based on stereotype-based double-message binary.
  - Men are the **leaders** around which women revolve as pretty, feminine, sweet, support. But men also **can't control themselves**.
- Within marriage: wife has responsibility to be gorgeous, sexy so husband won't sin
- Responsibility falls on her for his purity
- She is his at-home p\*rn star
- Wives publicly objectified by pastor/husbands: "Red-hot smokin'" or "smokin-hot" wife (Talladega Nights)



## UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

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Men's *thoughts* evil, uncontrollable

Women's *bodies* evil

Men's *thoughts* pure or impure

Women *themselves* pure or impure



## MEN AND WOMEN

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- Women responsible for men's thoughts, feelings, choices
- Walk, talk, dress to keep from evoking mental “stumbling blocks” between hetero males and God
- Cleavage shameful, but shirtless men or men in Speedo swimwear okay because “women aren't visually oriented”





**WOMEN ARE VISUAL TOO**

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# JESUS AND RESPONSIBILITY

- To the disciples: If **your** right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you.

—Jesus (Matt. 5:29)



# OBJECTIFICATION VS COMPASSION

- (As an aside, Joy Pedrow Skarka's dissertation research on sexual shame:

- More than 1,000 Christian women surveyed
- Biggest factor in married women overcoming sexual shame was a supportive, kind, accepting spouse
- Contrast with: "She let herself go...")



A hand holding a white flower, serving as a background for the text.

## METAPHORS FOR “PURE” WOMEN

- Shiny, new car with one driver
- Perfect flower
- Delicious burger

What metaphors for female purity have YOU heard?

# METAPHORS FOR “IMPURE” WOMEN

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- Used car that has had many drivers
- Wilted flower
- Last bite of burger with slobber on it
- Chewed gum







## RACIAL ELEMENT

- White women born with purity; can lose it
- Women of color must attain it

One expert: “Asian women have a transcontinental history of being hypersexualized and fetishized”





## RACIAL ELEMENT

- White women born with purity; can lose it
- Women of color must attain it

“Those entrenched in white evangelical culture frequently imply that women of color are innately impure—particularly Black women, whose perceived sexuality is seen as both worthy of punishment and pity.”

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# SOME GOOD TRENDS FOLLOWED

## 1995–2002

Significant decline in premarital sex among girls ages 15–17, boys ages 15–18

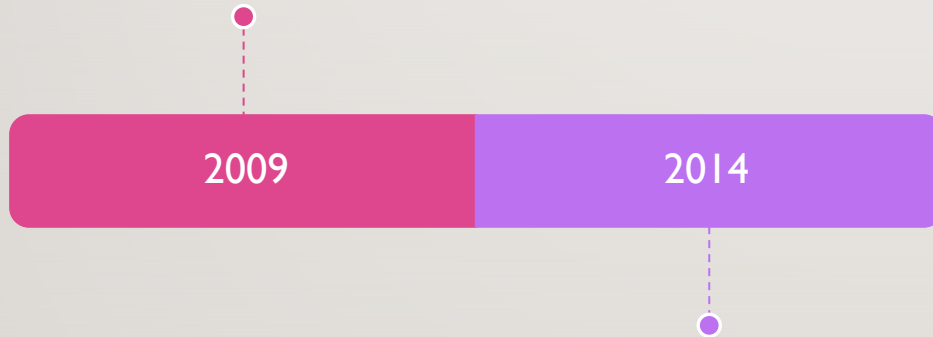
Proportion of never-married females ages 15–17 who'd had sex dropped from 38% in 1995 to 30% in 2002

Percent of never-married male teens ages 15–17 dropped 43% to 31% ; from 75% to 64% at ages 18–19

Teen pregnancies dropped dramatically over the next 30 years

BUT: Unclear how much credit the movement deserves for these trends. More video games? More porn?

Study found sex behavior of pledging teens matched that of closely matched non-pledgers



82% percent of pledgers denied having ever pledged; STI rate of those who'd taken pledge matched that of non-pledgers

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## RESULTS OF PURITY MOVEMENT IN US?



- 2018: Expressed concerns about his book
- Asked publisher to pull it
- Produced documentary:  
[“I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye”](#)
- No longer identifies as Christian

## JOSH HARRIS LATER...

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# MOVEMENT'S CRITICISMS CAME FROM TWO CAMPS

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Critiques  
Rooted in  
Scripture

Critiques  
Rooted in  
Secularism

Some overlap



## FROM JOSH HIMSELF ON *I KISSED DATING GOODBYE*

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“The book emphasized practices (not dating, not kissing before marriage) and concepts (giving your heart away) that are **not in the Bible**... It instilled **fear** for some—fear of making mistakes or having their heart broken. The book also gave some the impression that a **certain methodology of relationships would deliver a happy-ever-after ending**—a great marriage, a great sex life—even though this is not promised by Scripture.”





# MORE BIBLICAL CONCERNS

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- Fear-based/shame-based (not Spirit-based) abstinence
- Morality, not Christ, central
- Overemphasis on sexual sin
  - Sexual failure “ultimate”; by implication, pride less serious
  - At times creepy hyper-focus on girls’ purity, Daddy’s protection



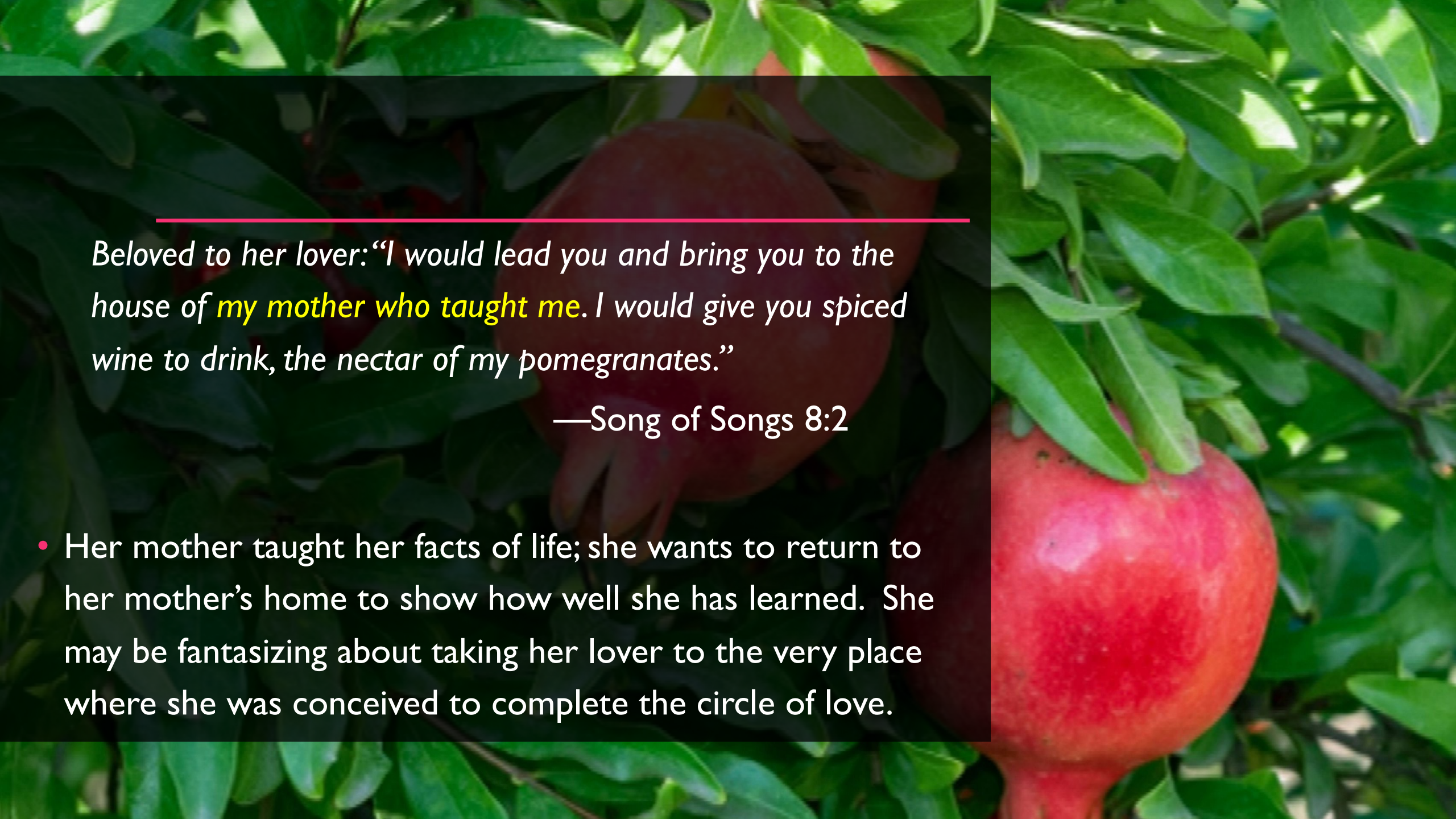
# BIBLICAL CONCERNS

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- Fathers pledge to model purity for daughters...
- Where are mothers?
- What about sons?
- Where are the parental partnerships?







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*Beloved to her lover: “I would lead you and bring you to the house of **my mother who taught me**. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates.”*

—Song of Songs 8:2

- Her mother taught her facts of life; she wants to return to her mother’s home to show how well she has learned. She may be fantasizing about taking her lover to the very place where she was conceived to complete the circle of love.



# BLESSED



A History of the American Prosperity Gospel

KATE BOWLER

## BIBLICAL CONCERNS

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- Grace de-emphasized
- Legalistic
- Steeped in prosperity theology mindset
- Responsibility for men placed on women
- Assumes only hetero attraction (“women causing *brothers* to sin”; never brothers causing sisters... or brothers causing other brothers...or sisters causing sisters...)

WHY WE NEED  
**TO TALK  
MODESTY**  
*with our boys too*



## CORRECTIVE ON TEACHING ABOUT MODESTY

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- Stop teaching: Dress in a holy way to keep others from stumbling
- Instead: “Let love and holiness dictate how you dress because you are Christ’s”
- Being holy in body is for every Christian.



## Revisiting Modesty Texts

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“I WANT WOMEN TO ADORN THEMSELVES WITH PROPER CLOTHING, *MODESTLY AND DISCREETLY*, NOT WITH BRAIDED HAIR AND GOLD OR PEARLS OR COSTLY GARMENTS, BUT RATHER BY MEANS OF GOOD WORKS, AS BEFITS WOMEN MAKING A CLAIM TO GODLINESS” —I TIM 2:9–10





## FOCUS ON THE INNER PERSON

- I Peter 3:3–4 to wives married to ungodly men: “Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.”

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**CONCERNS  
EXPRESSED  
BY EXPERTS  
OUTSIDE  
THE CHURCH**

“Abstinence before marriage an outdated concept”

“Purity Movement promotes gender-based stereotypes, self-righteousness, spiritual fear”

“Focus on heterosexual relationships wrongly excludes homosexual sexual relationships”



TORTURED  
PURITY-  
CULTURE  
VIRGINS  
IN MEDIA

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# HOW DO WE EMBRACE A CORRECTIVE?

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Avoid	Celebrate	Recognize	Practice
Avoid swinging pendulum the other way	Celebrate sex as a good gift	Recognize Christianity dignifies physicality	Practice spiritual discipline of chastity



# EMBRACE A CORRECTIVE

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## Refocus

Take focus away from enslavement to sin; focus on being alive to God; away from sex as bad to sex as sacred

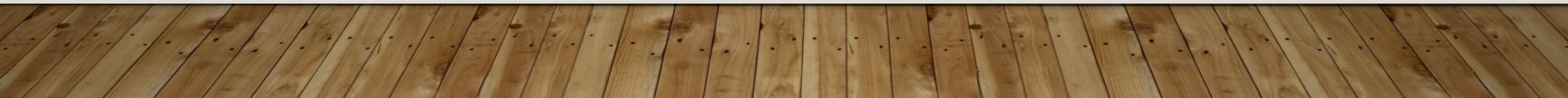
## Live in

Live in community; encourage healthy touch; know addicts need community accountability

## Emphasize

Emphasize **love for Christ**, not outward behavior, as central. Goal not preventing STI's or pregnancy, but magnifying **Christ**.







# HOW WE NEED TO ADJUST OUR THINKING RE WOMEN

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Acknowledge

Acknowledge women as sexual creatures.



Acknowledge women as visual creatures.

Acknowledge double-standards/stereotypes; pursue Christlikeness

# WHAT IS SEX NOT?

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Sex is  
not...

A need

# WHAT IS SEX?

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Get real

Sex is “knowing”

“Knowing” takes a lifetime

Sex is designed as a Christ/church picture of oneness



## PROVERBS 30:18–19

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Sex is a mystery

Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, **and the way of a man with a maid.**

# BAD REASONS TO LIVE HOLY IN BODY

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Because of  
prosperity-gospel  
thinking



Because my future  
sex life will rock if  
I abstain now

Fear: Only  
to prevent bad  
things from  
happening to me

Shame: It's my  
fault if  
a brother sins

Works: Earn  
points with God

# INSTEAD...

---

Present my body as  
an offering  
Why: in view  
of God's mercies

Focus  
on His glory

Identify with Christ's  
suffering

Be motivated by love  
of righteousness  
not fear of  
punishment

Offer grace for  
repentant sinners

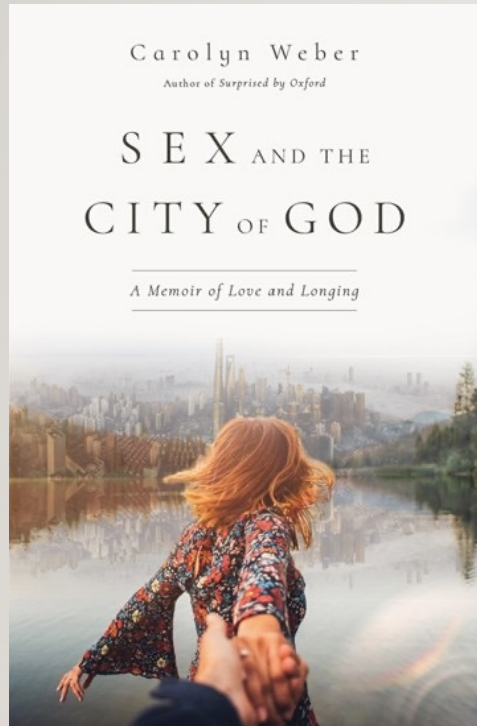
Evidence fruit of the  
Spirit, demonstrating  
love, self-control

Live in adoration and  
worship



# SEX AND THE CITY OF GOD

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Our relationship to sex speaks of our relationship to God. And because our relationship with God must precede our relationship with everything else, including our own selves, working from this first relationship changes everything. As a result, more often than not in a culture that neglects our dignity as spiritual beings, pursuing this fundamental relationship can feel countercultural, though it is God's norm... — Carolyn Weber



- 
- Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. **So, glorify God in your body.**  
—1 Cor 6:19–20

# THERE ACTUALLY IS A REWARD

THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD.—JESUS (MATT. 5:8)



- 
- “The sixth Beatitude [the pure in heart will see God] teaches us that our capacity to see God is connected with the purity of our own hearts. –Ryan Post, *Influence*

# PLAYLIST

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“Clean Heart”

Matt Maher

“Pure In Heart”

Lenny LeBlanc

“Give Me a Clean Heart”

Perfect Praise

“Create in Me a Clean Heart (English and Spanish)

Keith Green

“You’re My One Thing”

Rich Mullins

