

Sacred Sex

Rhythms of Discipleship: Embodied Devotion

In November of 2023 Covenant's preaching series is called "Sacred Sex," teaching about the goodness and seriousness of sexuality from the perspective of the Bible. Although it might not be immediately obvious, this series is connected to Covenant's Discipleship Rhythm "Embodied Devotion."

By way of reminder, here is how we have described "Embodied Devotion."

EMBODIED DEVOTION

Our bodies are how we interact in the world for good or ill. With them we speak, touch, approach, or withdraw. Our bodies learn habits and are formed by behaviors. We are committed to dedicating our bodies to God's work and Kingdom. Examples include:

- Baptism at the beginning of our Christian journey
- Regular eating and celebrating of the Lord's Supper
- Practicing self-control with sex
- Practicing self-control with food and drink
- Growing in emotional intelligence and health
- Exercising our bodies
- Using dress, speech, and gestures for honoring God and edifying others

The above paragraph is taken from the Covenant Discipleship Rhythms brochure, it is merely an introduction, and much more must be said. Even in this short guide we won't be able to sketch a full picture of all the Bible says about our bodies, how we might think about them, and the many historical misunderstandings about the body. But we can outline a few themes, so consider the following:

- The human body was designed by God, and he was very pleased with what he made (Gen. 1:26-31)
- Human bodies were made male and female from the beginning of creation (see above)
- Both male and female bodies are "made in the image of God," a phrase that connotes the dignity and responsibility of being a human person, made by God for his purposes in the world (see above)
- Bodies are not prisons for the soul as many philosophies have argued (and still do), but a person *is* a living soul that can be destroyed by death and raised back to new embodied life by God (Gen. 2:7, 1 Cor. 15, 2 Cor. 5:1-5)
- God indwells his people by the Holy Spirit, and so material bodies are not detestable to God, rather the people of God individually and corporately are called "temples of God" (Rom. 8:9-11, 1 Cor. 3:16-17 & 6:19-20)
- The Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, the Second Person of the Trinity, in his incarnation (meaning "embodiment"), took on a human body, made like us in every way except for sin, he died and was raised, and he is now a resurrected human in a "glorious body," the "first-fruits" of the resurrection, for all eternity the representative, savior, and King of humanity (John 1, Heb. 2:10-18, 1 Cor. 15:20, Phil. 3:20-21)

SOME IDEAS ON USING THESE RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

While it would be impossible to offer guidance for each individual or family's unique situations in a resource guide like this, the Covenant staff pulled together a few ideas to help you get started. And some of the resources below offer conversation guides and plans for parents to help you with those especially daunting conversations with your children.

- **Answer what they ask** – sometimes the best policy is to answer questions with a matter-of-fact answer. Kids can handle a lot, especially with loving and supportive parents or guardians who normalize honoring honest questions with honest answers and frank conversation.
- **Don't cover too much, too fast** – We've heard an anecdote of a parent going into a long explanation about sexuality when their child was simply asking "What is sex... i.e., how do I answer the blank on this form that asks for my sex?" It's always ok to clarify a question before responding and it isn't always necessary to go farther, faster. Clarifying the question gives you more agency over when and how to discuss sexuality. Plus, it gives space to take a breath, calm nerves, and make your age-appropriate response.
- **Normalize discussing bodies and sexuality in the family** – In fact, normalizing talking about all kinds of hard topics is good for couples and families. There is still plenty of room for age-appropriate filters, but talking about bodies, sexuality, and safety from an early age is proven to deter abuse by giving children agency and a voice about their bodies. Normalizing uncomfortable conversations also makes them more comfortable and natural feeling, in many cases.
- **Which is why we recommend sprinkling conversations throughout life, not having "The Talk" one time only...** Kids and parents both need time to process new information, especially information that is awkward, hard, new, or personal. Giving space for these conversations to breathe and be normalized in the family life leads to greater comfort and confidence that the adults in the family can be trusted and returned to for help later.
- **Read ahead and talk to your spouse first.** There are a lot of books and resources on the list below. You may end up taking one or two and reading more deeply. We recommend parents always read what they give to their kids ahead of time **and** not merely offer a book to a child but lead them well by reading with them and conversing with them about what they are reading. This is a guided process, not an information download. Some of us have lived with deep personal hurts from well-meaning parents simply handing over a book about sexuality and expecting we'd figure it out. Plus, make sure you and your spouse are on the same page with a plan. Raising healthy kids and remaining personally healthy in a sexually perverse world is not a solo activity.
- **Be courageous and lead your family.** In today's world, there is not much use hoping that kids will remain sheltered for long. Make plans to lead, knowing that kids get a lot of bad information and information that comes too early. God has made you equal to this task! With his help, all things are possible!

SOME IDEAS FOR GROUP LEADERS

While we did not provide discussion questions for this month's series, we are hoping that the resources below help people apply the biblical teachings from the sermons to a wide variety of life situations. A recommendation for leaders is simply to introduce this resource, read through it as a group, and pray for a variety of prayer points together:

- Pray for Steve and the sermons to be clear, helpful, accurate, and God honoring
- Pray for healing, help, and grace for all in our church and community
- Pray for our world to honor God's plans and purposes for human sexuality
- Pray for the Moms and Dads who will read these books and talk to their children
- Pray for the kids who have questions and need safe and biblical responses
- Pray for the kids who are overexposed, abused, or otherwise hurt by sexual sin in our culture or from those who should be their protectors
- Pray for all people who live with pain from abuse or addiction
- Pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven

The brief "theology of the body" at the bottom of page 1 is a good scripture introduction to what God says and thinks about our bodies. That, along with these prayer points, would make for a good small group meeting. I'll also recommend a few other resources for leaders below that you may want to use for a more general small group meeting, since the issues each person faces around sexuality might be better suited for a gathering of 2-3 individuals than the entire small group.

I recommend every group leader buy and refer to the [Spiritual Disciplines Handbook](#) by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. It has many excellent chapters on disciplines like prayer, silence, bible reading **but also a great chapter on chastity and one on accountability.** These make for excellent small group resources if the leader copies a chapter (3-4 pages) and guides a reading of the material and discussion over it in the group setting.

I also recommend [Sacred Rhythms](#) by Ruth Haley Barton. It is not directly about sexuality, but there is a chapter on Honoring the Body that trusted friends advise would be helpful reading, plus Barton's work in spiritual disciplines is very good anyway.

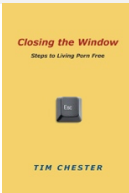
Finally, for group leaders. Here are a few ideas/pointers to help you navigate future conversations and ministry about sexuality, embodied devotion, and the sensitive conversations that accompany them:

- Consider having a change in pace one month where the men meet once, the women meet once, and everyone meets together once. This alleviates some pressures and may allow for greater openness and transparency.
- Lead by setting the tone for confidentiality and safety. People need to discuss these topics, but it can feel very vulnerable or unsafe to many. Prepare by thinking about how to honor each person, ensure listening will occur and not advising or criticism, and think about the various life situations in your group (married, single, divorced, other).



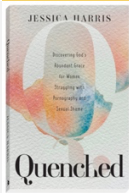
[Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation \(CCEF\) Resources](#)

CCEF provides counseling and resources from a Christian perspective (with roots close to Covenant Church). There resources include blog, podcast, and video posts, a professional journal, books and mini-books, curriculum and more. All searchable on their website. Mini-books on [Renewing Marital Intimacy](#), [Sexual Addiction and Freedom](#), [Teaching Teens about Sex](#), and many other topics are available.



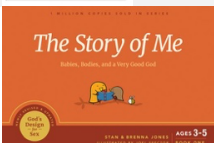
[Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free](#) by Tim Chester

Adults. This book is direct and clear in diagnosing the porn epidemic and offering practical biblical help for living porn free. It is written by a male pastor and clearly with men's issues in view but may be helpful to women also. Highly recommended for individuals or accountability partners.



[Quenched: Discovering God's Abundant Grace for Women Struggling with Pornography and Sexual Shame](#) by Jessica Harris

Adults. Written for women by a woman who speaks about suffering with sexual addiction and shame. This book offers a roadmap to restoration that shows God's grace and love for women. Highly recommended for individuals or accountability partners.



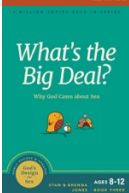
[The Story of Me: Babies, Bodies, and a Very Good God](#) by Stan and Brenna Jones

Ages 3-5. A book designed to help small children develop a wonder and appreciation for God's marvelous gifts of pregnancy, birth, and growth. It also discusses what makes boys and girls different, bodily autonomy, and safety.



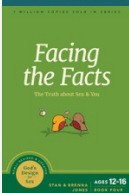
[Before I was Born: God Knew My Name](#) by Carolyn Nystrom

Ages 5-8. A tactful explanation of the basics of sex, bodily change, pregnancy, and birth is offered from a faith-based perspective.



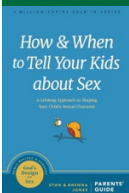
[What's the Big Deal: Why God Cares about Sex](#) by Stan and Brenna Jones

Ages 8-12. Provides kids and parents with help for topics they might find embarrassing. Topics include why God made adults to have sexual desire, what the Bible says about sex and marriage, dealing with social pressure, TV, early porn exposure, sexual abuse, puberty for girls and boys, and more from a Christian perspective.



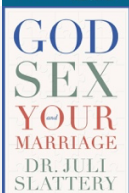
[Facing the Facts: The Truth about Sex and You](#) by Stan and Brenna Jones

Ages 12-16. Covers topics such as changing bodies, romance, dating, maturing relationships, purity and sexual health, introduction to different worldviews on sex, masturbation, sex addiction, gender identity, same-sex activity and more from a Christian perspective.



[How and When to Tell Your Kids about Sex](#) by Stan and Brenna Jones

For parents. All about developing healthy dialogue with your kids, how and when to explain the details of sex, preparing for the changes of puberty, dating, romance, sexual attraction, commitment to chastity and sexual health, how to catch up if you're late to the conversation and more, from a Christian perspective.

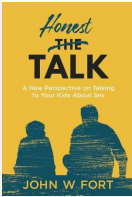


[God, Sex, and Your Marriage](#) by Dr. Juli Slattery

Married couples. A Christian guide for couples on sexual intimacy, integrity, and love. Help for addressing pornography, healing from past wounds, pursuing pleasure together, pursuing godliness, and living in the reality of God's covenant love.



[Authentic Intimacy & Sexual Discipleship: Digital Ministry Platforms](#) by Dr. Juli Slattery
Group Leaders, accountability leaders, individuals. In this monthly subscription service, you will find Dr. Slattery’s blog, podcast, e-course, small group curriculum, and other resources – all presented in a high-quality, accessible format.



[Honest Talk: A New Perspective on Talking to Your Kids About Sex](#) by John Fort
For parents. Adults will learn a lot for themselves as well in this guide for parents of kids ages 5-18. This book introduces a relational model that integrates emotional health and neuroscience with a Christian view of sexuality. Lots of tools and plans for parents to use to help make conversation more regular and less anxious.



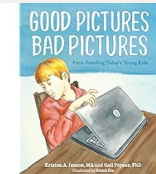
[Covenant Eyes: Screen Accountability](#)

Everyone. Get help and protection for your digital devices. Many Christian families and individuals use Covenant Eyes to make their phones, tablets, and computers safer. It’s one of the first things we talk about with people who are serious about getting help to quit porn or to protect their family from accidental exposure.



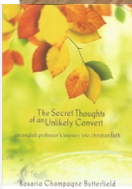
[Mobicip: Smart Parental Controls App for Busy Parents](#)

Parents. Special features designed to help parents limit screen time, filter internet, monitor social media, track location, and more. For iOS, Android, macOS, Windows, Chromebook, & Kindle



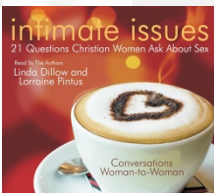
[Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today’s Young Kids](#)

Ages 6-11; Parents. Another highly acclaimed tool for promoting youth safety in a digital world, protecting young minds, and providing insights from neuroscience to help parents and kids understand the importance of protecting our minds.



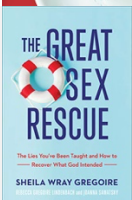
[Rosaria Butterfield Books and Resource Website](#)

Rosaria Butterfield was a lesbian English professor at Syracuse before her conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. Her story is informative and inspiring. She has also curated a website with many helpful links on transgenderism, LGBTQ+ questions, and more from a faithful Christian worldview.



[Intimate Issues: Twenty-One Questions Christian Women Ask About Sex](#) by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus

Women. Two Christian women and Bible teachers answer twenty-one questions collected from a nationwide poll, offering biblical perspective, testimonials, and hope. Written specifically toward married women.



[The Great Sex Rescue: The Lies You’ve Been Taught and How to Recover What God Intended](#) by Sheila Wray Gregoire, Rebecca Gregoire Lindenbach, and Joanna Sawatsky

A massive survey of 22,000 Christian women opens a window into the real-life expectations, experiences, and struggles of Christian women who grew up with messages about sex that made them feel dirty, used, or invisible.