



A Q&A WITH PARENT & PASTOR
ANDY STANLEY

Andy Stanley, the founder of North Point Ministries, is perhaps most well known for carrying on his father's legacy as a prolific preacher and author. His latest book, "The New Rules For Love, Sex and Dating," boldly pushes past the Church's typical playbook when confronting young people about their sex lives. He didn't hold back when we asked him what youth ministers, youth workers and parents should know about teen dating and sexual purity.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU RECEIVED ABOUT TEACHING TEENS TO ABSTAIN FROM SEX UNTIL MARRIAGE?

When I was moving through the maze of adolescence, a different question brought this whole issue into focus for me: how far will I want the woman I spend the rest of my life with to have gone with the person she dated right before meeting me? I really hated that question. It may have been difficult for me to determine how far I should go, but I knew exactly how far the person I would one day marry should go – not very far.

WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN WHILE PARENTING YOUR OWN TEENS THROUGH THE DATING YEARS?

I have three children, two boys and a girl. They're all in college. When my sons got to the magic age when traditional fathers have the traditional talk, I informed them we were going to handle the situation a bit differently. Instead of an awkward 15-minute talk, we were going to begin an awkward 15-year conversation. And we did.

Why this approach? Well, most boys are introduced to the topic of sex before they are actually interested in sex. By the time they're actually interested in sex, they've forgotten all those fascinating insights their fathers shared. Every year or two requires some review and something new. So I do my best to keep the conversation alive and current.

TEENS OFTEN DO ANYTHING POSSIBLE TO AVOID TALKING ABOUT SEX OR DATING WITH THEIR PARENTS. WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS MENTORS AND YOUTH MINISTERS CAN INFLUENCE A TEEN TO HAVE HEALTHY DATING RELATIONSHIPS?

The message we have sent to the students in our churches is "wait." That is translated by many of our students as just another big NO to go along with all the other NOs we have cast their way.

I think we need to change our focus. There is nothing enticing, stimulating or motivating about "wait." For many of our kids, "wait" sounds like the desperate cry of a generation looking to leverage its last bit of control.

Besides, "wait" brings an immediate outcry of "Why? Why wait?" So why not shift the focus of our message to the "why" behind the "what?" For it is there that we find a compelling reason for students to reserve sex for marriage.

FEWER STUDENTS TODAY SEE THE NEED TO WAIT FOR MARRIAGE. HOW CAN YOUTH LEADERS INFLUENCE THEM TO RECONSIDER AND SEEK GOD'S PLAN FOR THEIR RELATIONSHIPS?

If I could drill one simple principle into the minds and hearts of students as it relates to sex, it would be this: purity paves the way to intimacy. When we ask kids to wait, we are really asking them to remain pure. So the questions we must answer are "Why remain pure?" "What's the big advantage of pu-

rity?" "What do I gain by remaining pure that balances what I give up if I choose not to?"

The answer to all three questions is intimacy. Intimacy is the joy of knowing someone fully and being known fully without fear of rejection. Again, purity paves the way to intimacy. Impurity erodes one's capacity to experience intimacy. Consequently, impurity diminishes sexual satisfaction.

Our students need to know that when they sin sexually, they hurt themselves. Furthermore, they are robbing their future spouses of intimacy as well. Purity now paves the way to intimacy later. Great sex is the byproduct of maximum intimacy.

HOW CAN YOUTH LEADERS AVOID USING SHAME AS A PRIMARY MOTIVATOR WHEN TEACHING BIBLICAL PURITY TO THEIR STUDENTS?

Whenever I talk to students about sex, I always remind them that regardless of what has happened in the past, they can begin again. The fact that they have gone "too far" is no reason to give up the fight and give in to temptation. I remind them that someday they will meet someone they would like to spend the rest of their lives with. When they do, they will have one of three stories to tell:

Story One: When I was a teenager, I messed up. My boyfriend/girlfriend and I got carried away sexually. I reasoned that since I did it once, it really didn't matter if I did it again. So I slept with several other people along the way.

Story Two: When I as a teenager, I messed up sexually. I decided that God knew what He was talking about. Sex was created for marriage. So I decided to wait. I set new standards and have stuck with them. Since that day, I have saved myself for you.

Story Three: When I was a teenager, I realized that God knew more about sex than anyone. Since He created sex for marriage, I decided to wait. So I have saved myself for you.

Then I ask two questions: "Which story do you want to tell?" and "Which story do you want to hear from the person you choose to marry?" I tell them to make their decisions accordingly.

HAVE YOU SEEN YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING A STAND FOR PURITY?

Yes, my daughter Allie, for example. She is 18 and has served as a small group leader to some middle school girls in our church who began high school recently. She put together a list of "guidelines" to help them navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of high school. Here are 20 of her "Allie's Rules for High School:"

1. Surround yourself with people who build you up, not people who tear you down.
2. Treat your kisses like you have a limited supply.
3. Guard your heart. Seriously... your heart is precious.
4. Stay vertical, and no buttons and zippers (or Velcro). In other words, set your boundaries and stick to them.
5. Have an accountability partner and be willing to tell everything.
6. Be so so so so so so careful who you date.
7. If you're wondering if you should break up with him, break up with him.
8. If your girl gets broken up with, go buy her a stuffed animal, a blanket, candy, and lots and lots of ice cream. (Other gifts are acceptable.)
9. Pray, PRAY, PRAY! Don't ever forget how much you need God.
10. Have a quiet time. It may seem like a hassle, but it will help you stay close to God.
11. Be nice to your parents. They love you and want the best for you, so if you disagree with them, just realize that they are a lot smarter than you... sorry about it.

12. If you find yourself lying to your parents/other adults in your life, backtrack and get out of that situation IMMEDIATELY. You are somewhere you do not want to be.
13. Never be afraid to say no. It's better to be a wimp than dead.
14. When you fall on your face, get back up and keep moving (literally and figuratively).
15. Journal so you can look back and see what God has done in your life.
16. Even when you don't want to, GO TO CHURCH!
17. If it's not classy, don't do it.
18. Don't judge. Even when people are doing things you don't agree with, show them love.
19. Pause before you speak... This will prevent a lot of problems.
20. Selfies are for faces.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL ANSWER TO THE AGE-OLD QUESTION "HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?"

Think about the person you're looking for. How far is too far for them to go? I think you will find the answer is the same for you

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO TEENS WHO CLAIM SEXTING IS "OKAY" SINCE IT'S JUST DIGITAL?

Every time you entertain yourself with nude and erotic images you are at school. In this particular academy you are learning three very harmful lessons:

- One body isn't enough
- A real body isn't enough
- Your wife's body won't be enough

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL, PRODUCTIVE WAYS FOR PARENTS TO START DISCUSSING SEX WITH THEIR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS?

Discussing what we see on TV can be a great springboard for age-appropriate conversations about what seems inappropriate or makes you uncomfortable and why.

When our oldest was in ninth grade, everybody was watching "The Office." Everybody. No freshman dared show their face at school if they weren't conversant with the previous evening's episode. Like most everything on television, "The Office" was laced with sexual innuendo. This bothered his mother and me. We wrestled with the issue of age-appropriate entertainment. So I decided to use

"The Office" to introduce and hopefully sensitize Andrew to the sexual subtleties of prime-time television.

I handed him a pen and a 3x5 card and told him to watch one episode sitting beside his mom and to make a slash mark for every sexual reference. I walked in a few minutes after the show started. They were still flashing the opening credits and he already had five marks on his card. This became a great teachable moment.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THOSE WHO SAY PURITY IS AN UNREALISTIC DEMAND OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

Purity is possible if there is a willingness and desire to be pure. Giving up something now for something better in the future is not a sacrifice, it's an investment.



Andy Stanley is a pastor, communicator, author and the founder of North Point Ministries. Andy and his wife, Sandra, live in Alpharetta, Georgia, and have three grown children.