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MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND CHRISTIAN PARENTAL  
INSTRUCTION: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF  
PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Jennifer Rose Garrison

May 2016

**APPROVAL SHEET**

MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND CHRISTIAN PARENTAL  
INSTRUCTION: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF  
PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

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## PREFACE

This journey began as I lay flat on my back for six weeks following a surgery. With no ability to flee, I was a “captive audience” for my husband, who began nudging me toward pursuing this degree. It was he who first planted this idea into my mind; it was he who first told me I could do it. It was he who, after reading my acceptance letter, put me straight into the car and took me to buy a new laptop computer.

My husband has worked endlessly to ensure that this dream would become reality. He has made certain that books were purchased, tuition was paid, and encouraging words were spoken. He has proofread every paper I have written and has helped me develop into a better thinker and writer. He has lovingly fulfilled his roles as husband to me and father to our children, and many times has stepped in to assist me fulfill my roles as mother to our children and caretaker of our home. For the past fourteen years I have had the privilege of calling Shane Garrison my husband. I am blessed to be his bride.

Our sons, Isaac and Ethan, never complained when Mama had to do school work. And though they were never happy when I spent weeks away for seminars, they made the best of it by creating “Boy Conference”—special time with just Daddy. They have endured this entire process like little champions. They have demonstrated honest, simple, childlike love for me. I am so proud and honored to be their Mama.

My parents have encouraged me endlessly. They continued to remind me I would finish this degree. It was a reminder I needed to hear often. I am grateful for their encouragement, and I am thankful to be their child.

My classmates, Bill Allen and Gabe Etzel, have been an encouragement throughout this educational process. Our cohort began shrinking from the first semester

until finally just the three of us remained. It has been a pure delight to learn alongside of each of them. I am honored to know them both.

The School of Theology faculty at Campbellsville University has been my very own cheering section. They have encouraged me, lent me books, participated in my projects, and answered my questions. They have always offered me a smile, a kind word, and a helping hand. For that I am grateful.

Jeremy Echols has provided me a window through which I could complete this research. I am thankful for his generosity and kindness.

Dr. Hal Pettegrew has been my teacher over the past four years. He has demonstrated kindness, compassion, and Christ-likeness in the classroom and has provided me with an example of fine teaching to strive toward. As my dissertation supervisor he offered guidance and direction and has been generous with his time and thoughts. I am thankful for his leadership. Dr. John David Trentham and Dr. Shane Parker, as second and third readers, have helped in fine tuning this project and have offered much time and thought toward helping me bring this to completion. I am grateful for each of these teachers and the gifts they have used on my behalf over the past years. I am a better reader, writer, thinker, and researcher because of this group of outstanding teachers.

God has been so gracious to me. He has loved me with an everlasting love and claimed me for His own. He has called me to work in His Kingdom. He has consistently provided me with places of service. He continues to bless me beyond measure. My life is His—may He be glorified through it!

Jennifer Garrison

Campbellsville, Kentucky

May 2016

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage and sexuality have long been considered foundational building blocks of society. This is especially true for Christian families who hold to the conviction of being created by God and in His very image (Gen 1:27). The biblical guidelines regarding sexuality and marriage provide instruction for living across the human lifespan. The ordering of society has been largely structured around these guidelines from the beginning of recorded human history.

Yet cultural changes in recent years have extended various alternatives to marriage and sexuality which contradict the biblical model. In opposition to the biblical idea of marriage, the American culture has become, by the estimation of some experts, “a culture of non-marriage”<sup>1</sup>—openly embracing divorce, cohabitation, and gay marriage. Traditional marriage has become “less dominant as a societal institution in the United States than at any time in history.”<sup>2</sup> During the past fifty years alone, the median age for marriage has risen,<sup>3</sup> the divorce rate has continued to remain steady,<sup>4</sup> and cohabitation

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<sup>1</sup>Council on Families, *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1995), 10.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *The Future of Children* 15, no. 2 (2005): 34.

<sup>3</sup>D’Vera Cohn, “Marriage Rate Declines and Marriage Age Rises,” *Pew Research Center*, December 14, 2011, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/14/marriage-rate-declines-and-marriage-age-rises/>. Cohn reports current marriage rates have declined dramatically in comparison to census data from 1960. In 1960, 72 percent of adults age 18 and above reported to be married. By 2010, that number had dropped to 51 percent. Additionally, the median age for first marriage has risen. In 1960, the first marriage for men and women occurred in their early 20s. By 2011, the median age of first marriage had increased to age 28.7 for men and 26.5 for women.

<sup>4</sup>R. Kelley Raley and Larry Bumpass, “The Topography of the Divorce Plateau: Levels and Trends in Union Stability in the United States after 1980,” *Demographic Research* 8 (2003): 245-60. A

outside of marriage has significantly increased.<sup>5</sup> In addition to losing dominance as a societal institution,<sup>6</sup> the very meaning of marriage continues to undergo a public redefining process in the nation's highest court.<sup>7</sup> While children in Christian families will likely retain an understanding of the traditional or conjugal view of marriage, the revisionist view<sup>8</sup> will be the reality with which they live. This view opens marriage and relationships to become whatever, and among whomever, the partners would desire. By societal standards, traditional marriage is no longer necessary. Instead,

One may fit marriage into life in many ways: by first living with a partner, or sequentially with several partners, without explicitly considering whether to marry; by having children with one's eventual spouse or with someone else before marrying; by (in some jurisdictions) marrying someone of the same gender and building a shared marital world with few guidelines to rely on.<sup>9</sup>

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cursory search of divorce rates reveals a variation in the percentage of marriages that end in divorce. However, Raley and Bumpass hold that as determined in prior studies over the past twenty years (as of their 2003 study), "approximately half of all marriages will dissolve" (256).

<sup>5</sup>Cherlin, "American Marriage," 35.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>7</sup>Reporter of Decisions, "United States v. Windsor, Syllabus" (Supreme Court of the United States, 2013). At issue in this case was Section 3 of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), enacted by the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1996. This act, for the purpose of governmental regulation, defined "marriage" and "spouse" in a manner to specify traditional, heterosexual marriages only, to the exclusion of homosexual unions. The majority opinion from the Court struck down Section 3 of DOMA, proclaiming it unconstitutional, in violation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment. In the written majority Opinion of the Court, Justice Kennedy declared the community to have an "evolving understanding of the meaning of equality" (20). He stated the purpose of DOMA was to "impose disadvantage, a separate status, and so a stigma" (21) on those who enter into same-sex marriages, "to impose inequality" (22). He further stated that DOMA creates "second tier marriages" which "demeans the couple" and "humiliates tens of thousands of children" (23). Kennedy further held "the effort to redefine 'marriage' to extend to homosexual couples is truly a radical proposal that would fundamentally alter the institution of marriage" (21).

<sup>8</sup>Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, "What Is Marriage?" *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 43, no. 1 (2010): 246. Girgis, George, and Anderson define the conjugal (traditional) view of marriage as "the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together." This type of marriage is consummated by conjugal acts. They define the revisionist view of marriage as "the union of two people (whether of the same sex or opposite sexes) who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life" (246). This type of marriage is enhanced by "whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable" (246).

<sup>9</sup>Cherlin, "American Marriage," 41.

Children have been so exposed to alternate views and displays of marriage and relationships that they have “developed more accepting attitudes toward cohabitation and pre-marital sex.”<sup>10</sup> In essence, expressions of marriage and relationships outside that which is “traditional” have become normative for children and teens.

This identified shift in marriage is only a portion of the change that has swept through the nation. A significant shift has also occurred in the public understanding of human sexuality and sexual relationships.

In contradiction to the biblical ideas of created and intentional gender, the American culture now embraces gender as less of an either-or state and more of a continuum.<sup>11</sup> The idea of alternative gender identity is supported by numerous groups and institutions across the nation, many of whom advocate for acceptance of alternative gender identity among the nation’s youngest inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> These organizations encourage individuals, some as young as grade school children, to live out their lives as a different gender than that to which they were born.

The common understanding of purity and chastity has also undergone

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<sup>10</sup>Paige D. Martin, Don Martin, and Maggie Martin, “Adolescent Premarital Sexual Activity, Cohabitation, and Attitudes toward Marriage,” *Adolescence* 36, no. 143 (2001): 607.

<sup>11</sup>Diane Ehrensaft, *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children* (New York: Experiment, 2011), 37. Brandon Griggs, “Facebook Goes beyond ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ with New Gender Options,” CNN, February 13, 2014, accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/13/tech/social-media/facebook-gender-custom/>.

<sup>12</sup>Gunner Scott, ed., “Best Practices for Serving Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students in Schools,” Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, November 2012, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.masstpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/MTPC-2013-K-12-Best-Practices.pdf>. This set of best practices is intended to help provide “active school support and protection for the physical, mental, and educational wellbeing” (2) of transgender and gender nonconforming students enrolled in grades K-12 in Massachusetts schools. Another example is found in Human Rights Campaign Foundation, “Welcoming Schools Starter Kit,” accessed October 15, 2014, [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org). Also coming from Massachusetts, the kit describes a program which was established to ensure that all children felt welcome in school, with specific emphasis on LGBT students and students coming from LGBT-headed families. Support groups for LGBT are also forming around the nation, as exemplified by a recent television documentary, Bailey Fenton and Randy Barbato, dir., *Becoming Chaz*, TV documentary (Los Angeles: Oprah Winfrey Network, January 23, 2011).

tremendous change. In opposition to the biblical ideas of sexual purity and chastity, the American culture now widely accepts various forms of sexual encounters including pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, gay sex, and polyamorous sex.<sup>13</sup> It has become accepted and expected for young teens, even preteens, to engage in such types of sexual encounters.

Changes to the fronts of marriage and sexuality result in more than isolated alterations to social arrangements. Alteration to the larger, biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality brings forth change to the most intricate areas of human life. These trickle-down changes affect the individual, the family, the church, and society at large.

The guiding premise for this study was that the current cultural environment presents a challenging environment in which Christian parents must raise their young. This study sought to determine, through analysis of parental perspectives, resources, and teaching practices, to what extent, if any, Christian parents are teaching their young about marriage and sexuality, and to what extent if any, these parents are influenced by the local church in their endeavors.

### **Research Problem**

Christian parents are biblically mandated to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4), and all Christian people are instructed to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:18). Yet Christian parents find themselves living in a society that embraces alternative forms of marriage, encourages various expressions of sexual immorality, and no longer holds the traditional family as singularly normative. Thus, a significant problem has emerged, which is represented by two sides. On one side are Christian parents who desire to biblically teach and direct their children toward God-

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<sup>13</sup>Logan Levkoff, *Third Base Ain't What It Used to Be: What Your Kids Are Learning about Sex Today—and How to Teach Them to Be Sexually Healthy Adults* (New York: New American Library, 2007).

honoring practices in regard to marriage and sexuality. On the other side is a culture which has become increasingly hostile to the biblical worldview and seduces children and teens with immoral practices and ideologies. What then, are Christian parents to do?

Societal changes to marriage and family structure and the American hyper-sexualized culture present blatant distortions to God's instructions for living. These distortions threaten children, adults, the family, the church, and the projection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is imperative that Christian parents provide direct, biblical, ongoing instruction to their children regarding God's design for marriage and sexuality. It is essential that the church equip parents to recognize how and where God's plans have been distorted by the world and to counter these distortions by teaching biblical truth to their children.

A distinct contradiction exists between what has become socially acceptable regarding marriage and sexuality and what is biblically permitted. The cultural climate surrounding these issues is becoming increasingly more difficult for Christian families to weather. The principles put forth by Bible believing churches are considered unfriendly and offensive among many non-Christian people. In such a culture, it is possible parental convictions towards biblical marriage and biblical sexuality have become lax.

A more worldly view of marriage and sexuality, in fact, has become normative throughout the nation:

Our culture offers an extensive, nonstop, confusing mix of messages on how to understand and experience one's developing sexuality. The reality is that voices promoting a biblical sexual ethic and God-glorifying sexual experience (in other words, one that takes place between a man and woman within the covenant of marriage) are increasingly smothered in by a barrage of images and messages telling kids that when it comes to sexuality, they can do whatever, whenever, however, and with whomever . . . no limits.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of limitation placed upon sexual expression now extends far beyond the boundary

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<sup>14</sup>Walt Meuller, *The Space Between: A Parent's Guide to Teenage Development* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 41.

set in prior generations of saving oneself for marriage.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the singular issue of premarital sex now lies the explosive issues of homosexuality and gender identity. These issues are compounded by pressing statistics regarding marriage and divorce.<sup>16</sup>

What is being done at large to address the moral crises which threaten to bring ruin upon a nation of families and children? What are the experts advising parents to do? What strategies do experts suggest parents employ to help guide their children through the perilous, sexualized culture that embraces an “anything goes” mentality? Churches and para-church organizations have responded with programs seeking to equip parents for the task ahead of them.

Churches are addressing this issue of equipping parents with a variety of methods. Some churches have initiated parent education groups which help parents learn to teach and lead their children in the areas of marriage and sexuality. These groups may read and discuss a popular and relevant text<sup>17</sup> or they may make use of other materials intended to guide parents into partnership with the local church in the task of marriage

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<sup>15</sup>Jeff Brumley, “True Love Waits Turns 20,” *Associated Baptist Press News*, February 11, 2013, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://www.abpnews.com/culture/social-issues/item/8204-true-love-waits-turns-20#.UmbnqRA7DRg>. This report documents the twentieth year of the world-wide True Love Waits movement, initiated by Jimmy Hester and Richard Ross. The movement encouraged teens to sign a card, which signified their pledge to Christ to remain sexually pure until marriage.

<sup>16</sup>Raley and Bumpass, “The Topography of the Divorce Plateau”; Cohn, “Marriage Rate Declines”; The Barna Group, “Divorce Rate No Lower among the Born Again,” *Christian Century*, October 4, 2004, accessed October 8, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2004-10/divorce-rate-no-lower-among-born-again>. In addition to the consistently high divorce rate among Americans in general as reported by Raley and Bumpass, Cohn adds that that rate of marriage among young people in America is declining, while the age at which they first marry is increasing. Added to these issues is the finding that the divorce rate among evangelical Christians is no less than that among non-Christians. This finding, reported in the *Christian Century*, was exposed by The Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians,” September 8, 2004, accessed October 22, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/194-born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians#.VCrGJxaKVEM>.

<sup>17</sup>One example of a popular and relevant text for parent-based discussion groups is Kevin Leman, *A Chicken’s Guide to Talking Turkey with Your Kids about Sex* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).



and sexuality education.<sup>18</sup> Churches may focus solely on parent education, or they may opt to offer instruction directly to children<sup>19</sup> and teens<sup>20</sup> in addition to or in lieu of parental offerings. Many churches, in addition to offering family education on marriage and sexuality, opt to direct parents and families toward para-church organizations for additional help.

Para-church organizations can provide additional support for families as they seek to lead and teach their children about marriage and sexuality. Organizations, such as *Pure in Heart* and *Secret Keeper* provide conferences for mothers and daughters to attend together.<sup>21</sup> *Family Life* offers a broader resource useful for parents of either sons or daughters. This curriculum is intended for a parent-child weekend-getaway to help “build heart-to-heart communication” between parent and child “while laying a foundation of purity that will prepare them for the turbulent years ahead.”<sup>22</sup>

Ministers may recommend that parents access these para-church resources to help them adequately teach their children. Many parents, however, will seek out additional helps and resources without consulting a professional minister or pastor. These parents may be unaware of smaller and more specifically focused organizations and may be more likely to encounter a more widely known Christian entity for help. Organizations such as Focus on the Family, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association,

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<sup>18</sup>Jimmy Hester, *Path of Purity: A Family Guide* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2010).

<sup>19</sup>Jennie Bishop, *The Squire and the Scroll* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2004); idem, *The Princess and the Kiss* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 2000); James H. Ritchie, *Created by God: Tweens, Faith, and Human Sexuality* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010).

<sup>20</sup>Clayton King and Sharie King, *True Love Project: How the Gospel Defines Your Purity* (Nashville: B & H, 2014).

<sup>21</sup>Susan Henson, “Pure in Heart Ministries,” accessed January 19, 2015, <http://pureinheartconference.com/>. Dannah K. Gresh, “Secret Keeper Girl,” accessed January 19, 2015, <http://secretkeepergirl.com/index.php>.

<sup>22</sup>Dennis Rainey and Barbara Rainey, *Passport2Purity Getaway Kit*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Little Rock, AR: Family Life, 2012).

and Christianity Today are known both inside and outside of mainstream evangelicalism. These organizations could be sought out by parents in need of prescriptive resources to aid them in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.

What do these organizations offer to parents seeking out help in this area? Focus on the Family, one of the most consistent pro-family voices of the past twenty years, offers parents a sampling of textual resources to help teach biblical sexuality.<sup>23</sup> The *Focus* resources offered online for marriage, however, are fully directed at the *doing* of marriage rather than the *teaching* of marriage. Another major voice which has long proclaimed support of biblical marriage and sexuality is that of Billy Graham. His organization, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), offers some helps for parents, yet it does not offer prescriptive literature to assist with parental instruction.<sup>24</sup> The popular publication *Christianity Today* addresses issues of marriage and sexuality as deeply as such issues can be addressed in a popular magazine and web forum.<sup>25</sup> Yet the

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<sup>23</sup>Focus on the Family, "Search: Sexuality," accessed October 23, 2013, [http://search.focusonthefamily.com/search?q=Sexuality&site=focusonthefamily\\_com&client=focusonthefamily\\_com&output=xml\\_no\\_dtd&getfields=description&proxystylesheet=focusonthefamily\\_com&btnG=Search&entqr=0&ud=1&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Adl](http://search.focusonthefamily.com/search?q=Sexuality&site=focusonthefamily_com&client=focusonthefamily_com&output=xml_no_dtd&getfields=description&proxystylesheet=focusonthefamily_com&btnG=Search&entqr=0&ud=1&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Adl). At the time of this writing, the following web articles were available on the website under the heading "Sexuality": "Healthy Childhood Sexual Development" (2004); "Teaching Children Healthy Sexuality" (2004); "Talking about Sex and Puberty" (1999); "Prevent the Sexualization of Your Daughter" (2008); "When Children View Pornography" (2004). Under the heading "School Age Children" the following article addressed sexuality: "Talking about Sex and Puberty" (1999). A search of parenting resources for sexual education revealed 58 books available for purchase.

<sup>24</sup>Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, "Grow Your Faith," accessed October 23, 2013, <http://billygraham.org/grow-your-faith/topics/>. This site offers a variety of "Grow Your Faith Topics" that address, through question and answer forums, a variety of questions touching on parenting, sexuality, homosexuality, premarital sex, marriage, divorce, relationships, and others. Articles that address the topic of marriage are also offered.

<sup>25</sup>*Christianity Today*, "Search: Marriage," "Search: Sexuality," accessed October 23, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/>. A cursory search of the term "marriage" on this site garners 975 matches while the search term "sexuality" reveals 977 matches. These matches provide a variety of articles and other readings on the topics. Perhaps the most comprehensive instruction for marriage and sexuality on this site is found under the heading "Discipleship" and "Today's Christian Woman." Here are found tabs labeled "marriage+sex" and "parenting," each which link to related articles. As found on other sites, these are largely not prescriptive in nature to assist with parental instruction.

presentation of these issues is more popular in nature and not necessarily prescriptive for parental instruction. A perusal through an online book store may garner more solid results for prescriptive helps for parents. Though, parents who go in search of resources to guide their teachings on marriage and sexuality may come away overwhelmed.<sup>26</sup>

Within Southern Baptist culture, the most prominent and popular voices which would be recognized by the masses provide little in the way of assisting parents with easily recognizable, in-depth, practical, and prescriptive teaching helps for instructing their children in the areas of marriage and sexuality. It is possible that the secular world may provide more tangible offerings for parents who desire to take on the responsibility to teach their children about these important issues. The material provided in secular offerings, however, will not likely align with a biblical worldview.

Some secular writers who have successfully addressed the issues of marriage and sexuality have done so from particular vantage points. One secular text hones in on the idea of equipping parents to *protect* their children from the sexualized world.<sup>27</sup> Other texts highlight the idea of raising *sexually healthy* children.<sup>28</sup> Still another makes mere *survival* of the teen years its focal point.<sup>29</sup> These secular texts are filled with interesting and provocative information, and some of them meet the standard of encouraging at least a minimal level of morality. However, these texts do not address the issues of marriage and sexuality from a biblical worldview. Yet this is of no matter. Whether or not

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<sup>26</sup>A 2013 search of a Lifeway.com reveals 653 items under the heading search “marriage” and 181 titles under the heading search “sexuality.” The number of these resources directed at providing instructional assistance to parents is unknown. Lifeway.com, “Search: Marriage,” “Search: Sexuality,” accessed October 23, 2013, www.lifeway.com.

<sup>27</sup>Diane E. Levin and Jean Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon: The Sexualization of Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (New York: Ballantine, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>Debra W. Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent’s Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens-From Middle School to High School and Beyond* (New York: New Market, 2001); Levkoff, *Third Base*.

<sup>29</sup>Andrea Warren and Jay Wiedenkeller, *Everybody’s Doing It: How to Survive Your Teenagers’ Sex Life (and Help Them Survive It, Too)* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

prescriptive faith-based writings exist, or whether or not secular texts contain a biblical worldview, still other important unknown factors will only be determined with new research.

It is, in fact, the unknown factors which illuminate the need for this study. Direction may be provided to parents by churches seeking to equip families for the current cultural struggle, but parents may or may not seek out such direction. As previously mentioned, there are faith-based writings on the topics of marriage and sexuality such as those offered by Focus on the Family, the BGEA, and Christianity Today.<sup>30</sup> However, few of these noted resources are in-depth and prescriptive in nature and thus do not provide parents with instructional help for teaching their children. There are many secular texts in the areas of marriage and sexuality which provide concrete suggestions to guide parents through some level of instruction with their children,<sup>31</sup> yet these texts do not hold a biblical worldview.

Even among recent research studies, the dilemma of the Christian parent striving to preserve and teach their children about marriage and sexuality according to a biblical worldview is not exactly represented. Recent studies have been conducted on the broad topic of marriage,<sup>32</sup> yet these studies do not address the teaching of marriage to children by Christian parents. As far as the topic of sexuality is concerned, recent

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<sup>30</sup>See nn. 23, 24, and 25 in this chap.

<sup>31</sup>See nn. 27, 28, and 29 in this chap.

<sup>32</sup>Maria Teresa Trascritti, "Marriage Mentoring with Couples in Marital Crisis: A Qualitative Study" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); John Kevin Coffee, "An Analysis of Attitudes and Practices of Southern Baptist Pastors toward Premarital Education" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); Gina A. Svendsen, "How Does the Fictional TV Marriage Influence a Young Adult's Own Perceptions about Marriage?" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2011); Michelle Van Groningen Anthony, "The Relationship between Marital Satisfaction and Family Cohesion among Evangelicals" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007); Charles Andrew Zuppann, "Contraception, Dating, and Marriage" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 2011).

research has indicated the need to educate younger generations on sexual values,<sup>33</sup> and other studies have addressed the issues of school-based and parent-based sexual education,<sup>34</sup> the comfort level of parents who provide sex education to their children,<sup>35</sup> and the practice of sexual activity among teens.<sup>36</sup> From a Christian perspective, effective practices for family discipleship have been established<sup>37</sup> and the interaction of parents and the church in Christian education have been analyzed.<sup>38</sup> Further research has addressed why parents do<sup>39</sup> and do not<sup>40</sup> become involved in their children's formal education, yet these studies do not address the less formal, social and values-based education. The literature base is in need of research which incorporates the perspectives of Christian parents regarding the targeted teaching of marriage and sexuality to their children.

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<sup>33</sup>Byron Scott Weathersbee, "An Analysis of the Effectiveness of Applied Preventive Strategies on Chastity prior to Marriage in a Christian Context" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

<sup>34</sup>Kathleen Ann Dowell, "Impact of Exposure to School-Based and Parental Sexuality Education on Adolescent Sexuality and Pregnancy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2001).

<sup>35</sup>Sherie Hawkins Malcom, "Parental Sex Education Training and Parent-Child Sex Communication Comfort" (Ph.D. diss., Regent University, 2014).

<sup>36</sup>Amy Lynn Karnehm, "The Effects of Parental Practices on Adolescent Sexual Initiation prior to Age 16" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 2000); Sinikka Gay Elliot, "Not My Kid: Parents, Teenagers and Adolescent Sexuality" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008).

<sup>37</sup>Wesley Ryan Steenburg, "Effective Practices for Training Parents in Family Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); W. Ryan Steenburg and Timothy Paul Jones, "Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation: Family Discipleship in Modern and Postmodern Contexts," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

<sup>38</sup>Johnny Ivy Duke, "The Interaction of Parents and the Church in the Christian Education of Children" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

<sup>39</sup>Kellie J. Anderson, "Understanding Parents' Decisions to Become Involved in Their Children's Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2005).

<sup>40</sup>Margaret L. James, "Parental Involvement in Their Child's Education" (Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2008).

Several factors illuminate the need for this study. It is unknown if Christian parents are aware of available resources, whether those resources are in the form of textbooks, conferences, or help offered through the local church. Further, it is unknown if parents make use such resources, if they address the issues of marriage and sexuality at all with their children, and if so, how they address these issues. The current parental perspectives towards marriage and sexuality are unknown, as is the level of influence held by the local church over these issues. New research is needed to explore the current perspectives of parents towards marriage and sexuality and to address if and how these parents, within their own homes, are instructing their children. This study sought to discover if and how Christian parents are teaching their children about marriage and sexuality by exploring their own perspectives towards marriage and sexuality, the resources and teaching practices they utilize with their children, and the level of influence impressed upon them by the local church.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the proposed research.

1. What perspectives do Christian parents hold toward marriage and sexuality?
2. What resources, if any, are Christian parents utilizing to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
3. What teaching practices, if any, do Christian parents employ to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
4. To what extent, if any, does the local church influence Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality?

## **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was framed by the following delimitations. The research sample was drawn from parents who are members of a church which attended CentriKid Camp at the Campbellsville University site during the summer of 2014. I have not been granted access to all attenders of all CentriKid Camp locations, but only those who were in attendance at the Campbellsville, Kentucky, site. The rationale behind the choice of location, therefore, was access. The parents participating in the study were limited to those who are classified as evangelical and have at least one child between kindergarten and sixth grade.

## **Terminology**

The following terms are clarified to assist the reader in understanding the current study.

*Androgyny.* A double or balanced gender identity which is “distinct from the sex of the body.”<sup>41</sup>

*Age compression.* This term used by media professionals describes “how children at ever younger ages are doing what older children used to do.”<sup>42</sup>

*Cisgender.* This term is descriptive of one whose “gender identity and expression align with cultural notions of their sex assigned at birth.”<sup>43</sup>

*Civil union.* A domestic partnership for same gender couples,<sup>44</sup> a “secular alternative” to marriage.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Brenda Mae Woodhill and Curtis A. Samuels, “Desirable and Undesirable Androgyny: A Prescription for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 16.

<sup>42</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*.

<sup>43</sup>Elizabeth J. Meyer, *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools*, Explorations of Educational Purpose, vol. 10 (New York: Springer, 2010), 37.

<sup>44</sup>Alison Avery et al., “America’s Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality, Civil Unions, and Same-Gender Marriage: 1977-2004,” *Social Work* 52, no. 1 (2007): 71.

<sup>45</sup>Cyril Ghosh, “The Casualty of America’s Same-Sex Marriage Fight: Civil Unions,” *The*

*Cohabitation.* *Cohabitation* refers to two romantically committed individuals, regardless of gender, who share living quarters and a sex life.<sup>46</sup>

*Conjugal view.* Also known as the traditional view of marriage, the conjugal view of marriage defines marriage as “the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together.”<sup>47</sup>

*Evangelical.* Christians who affirm key doctrines of the Christian faith.<sup>48</sup> Namely, these doctrines include the inspired and infallible nature of the Bible, and the deity, personhood, and second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>

*Family ministry.* *Family ministry* “is the process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a ministry’s proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children’s lives.”<sup>50</sup>

*Gay marriage.* Also known as “same-sex marriage,” gay marriage is the legal union of two persons of the same gender.<sup>51</sup>

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*Guardian*, February 19, 2014, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/19/same-sex-marriage-or-civil-unions>.

<sup>46</sup>Linda J. Waite, “Cohabitation: A Communitarian Perspective,” in *Marriage in America: A Communitarian Perspective*, ed. Martin King Whyte (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 13.

<sup>47</sup>Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What Is Marriage?,” 246.

<sup>48</sup>Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 121.

<sup>49</sup>Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 478.

<sup>50</sup>Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 33.

<sup>51</sup>Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, *A Shifting Landscape: A Decade of Change in American Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and LGBT Issues* (Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, 2014), 8-24.



*LGBT*. An acronym referring to “lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals.”<sup>52</sup>

*LGBTQQ2IA*. An abbreviation referring to persons classified as “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual.”<sup>53</sup>

*Perspectives*. “Frameworks by which people make sense of their world.”<sup>54</sup>

*QUILT BAG*. A “more inclusive” and “memorable” term than LGBT, or LGBTQQ2IA. This acronym is representative of persons who classify themselves as “queer and questioning, unidentified, intersex, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, bisexual, asexual, gay, genderqueer.”<sup>55</sup>

*Revisionist view*. The revisionist view of marriage is defined as “the union of two people (whether of the same sex or opposite sexes) who commit to romantically loving and caring for each other and to sharing the burdens and benefits of domestic life.”<sup>56</sup> This type of marriage is enhanced by “whatever forms of sexual intimacy both partners find agreeable.”<sup>57</sup>

*Real marriage*. Also known as traditional marriage, this term is indicative of the marital union “of husband and wife.”<sup>58</sup>

*Transgender*. This term is descriptive of one who is not cisgender, or “one whose gender identity is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Allan Metcalf, “LGBTQQ2IA,” *Lingua Franca: The Chronicle of Higher Education*, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/lgbtqq2ia>.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Peter Woods, *Sociology and the School: An Interactionist Viewpoint*, vol. 209 (London: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, 1983), 7.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>Girgis, George, and Anderson, “What Is Marriage?,” 246.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>59</sup>Meyer, *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools*, 37.

## **Research Assumptions**

I assume respondents accurately responded to the line of questioning regarding marriage and sexuality.

## **Procedural Overview**

Through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study sought to gather data from Christian parents which describes the perspectives, resources, and teaching practices of parents regarding marriage and sexuality, and to what extent if any these parents are influenced by their local church in these matters. The research was conducted in the following sequence: (1) obtain access to the churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during summer 2014,<sup>60</sup> (2) invite children's ministry group leaders from attending churches to participate in the proposed study and obtain personal contact information from each volunteer,<sup>61</sup> (3) create the interview protocol, (3) validate the interview protocol through a four to five member expert panel, (4) conduct a pilot study of three interviews and adjust interview protocol as necessary, (5) from the pool of volunteers, purposefully select a minimum of 10 churches and a sample of Christian parents representing 25 to 30 families, (6) contact selected volunteers and obtain a Dissertation Participation Form from each participant, (7) conduct, transcribe, and code 25 to 30 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, (8) complete content analysis of data, and (9) evaluate findings and draw conclusions.

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<sup>60</sup>During summer 2014, I was granted a two-minute time slot per camp cycle at the CentriKid Camp church leader meeting to announce the prospective study and invite churches to participate. Church leaders who chose to volunteer for the study provided their personal contact information for future use.

<sup>61</sup>After being invited to participate, 52 volunteers responded by providing their personal contact information. These volunteers represent 45 family units.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEDENT LITERATURE

Marriage and sexuality play significant roles in human life and society. As displayed through the biblical metanarrative from creation to consummation, both marriage and sexuality hold a unique purpose in God's revelation of Himself to humanity. It is imperative, therefore, that Christian parents examine the biblical content related to marriage and sexuality and evaluate cultural trends in light of the biblical text. Alteration to either marriage or sexuality away from God's design brings change to the very structure of human life upon earth, and alters the human visibility of God's revelation of Himself through and to His creation.

The following research describes the influences and perspectives of Christian parents towards marriage and sexuality and the teaching practices these parents utilize with their children. The study also describes what influence, if any, the local church holds upon these parents concerning their personal attitudes toward, teaching practices of, and resources used in teaching their children.

The purpose of the literature review is threefold. First, an overview of the theological groundings for marriage, sexuality, and parental instruction found within Scripture is provided. Second, key cultural trends and evolving sexual ethics surrounding marriage and sexuality are outlined. Third, an evaluation of popular literary materials set forth as parental helps for teaching on marriage and sexuality is offered.

#### **Marriage, Sexuality, and Parental Instruction: Theological Foundation**

Marriage and sexuality were established by God at creation, as described in the creation account from Genesis 1-3, and as supported throughout the biblical text. The

responsibility of parental instruction is clearly established in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and is supported by other Old and New Testament passages. From the biblical establishment of human life, marriage, and parenting come the theological basis of marriage, sexuality, and parental instruction. Beginning with an anthropological foundation will prove helpful to assessing marriage, sexuality, and parental instruction.

### **Anthropological Foundation**

The most basic anthropological truth of human existence is that human beings are *created* beings, and as created beings, human beings have a creator. God is the Creator; men and women are His created creatures.<sup>1</sup> As God’s creatures, human beings were given the privilege of living and working in creation, serving the Creator within creation itself. Though humanity is given this privilege, “this never diminishes the absolute sense in which God, and God alone, possesses rightful ruler-ship, authority, and power over the whole of creation.”<sup>2</sup> As Creator, God is owner; His creatures belong to Him. As God’s creatures, they are mere stewards acting on God’s behalf in and through the creation. As God’s stewards, human beings ought to “support and defend what God stands for, and should promote what God promotes.”<sup>3</sup>

God created human beings with physical bodies—this is “how we begin to know that He cares how we order our sexual lives.”<sup>4</sup> The importance of the human body is further reflected in God’s incarnation of Himself into a human body.<sup>5</sup> “Jesus was

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 68.

<sup>4</sup>Lauren F. Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 33.

raised again from the dead with a body; and one day we will be resurrected with our bodies. That is the beginning of any Christian ethic—any moral theology—of how human beings in bodies interact with other bodies.”<sup>6</sup>

As *Creator* of human life, God fashioned man and woman in His image and likeness (Gen 1:27). There are many aspects to the image of God in humanity. One reflection of the image and likeness of God is found in the manner in which man and woman function together. God exists as a being in fellowship and humanity too exists in fellowship.<sup>7</sup> The fellowship of man and woman acting as husband and wife is fundamental to the continued existence of humanity and to the projection of the Creator throughout the earth. By God’s design, the marriage relationship would bear fruit through which man and woman could carry out the command to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth (Gen 1:28). Also through the marriage relationship humankind would come to mimic God’s own creative process as husband and wife would bring forth children after their own image and likeness.<sup>8</sup>

Crafting beings in the likeness of His own communal image, God created gender—male and female persons (Gen 1:26-27). This marked the first distinction of both human diversity and human community<sup>9</sup> and represents another manifestation of the image of God in humanity.<sup>10</sup> “The fact that God created two distinct persons as male and female, rather than just one man, is part of our being in the image of God because it can

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<sup>6</sup>Winner, *Real Sex*, 33

<sup>7</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 14.

<sup>8</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 444.

<sup>9</sup>Nonna Verna Harrison, *God’s Many-Splendored Image* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 177.

<sup>10</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 14.

be seen to reflect to some degree the plurality of persons within the Trinity.”<sup>11</sup> God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three in one. Man and woman were created to be two in one, unified together. In this way they would resemble the Creator. Further, as a communal institution, marriage is intended to be more than “pairs of people in love; they are institutions out of which cultures and societies are formed.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, community throughout the earth is established by and through marriage.

The theological groundings for marriage, the very essence of marriage, is rooted in the one creative act of forming man and woman.<sup>13</sup> Adam and Eve, male and female, were created as companions for one another, and they imaged God through their fellowship together.<sup>14</sup> Male *and* female were created because man, who found no other being like himself (Gen 2:18-23), was in need of the companionship of woman. Human beings were created to be social beings complementing one another.<sup>15</sup> The story of the creation of man and woman reveals much about God and also provides the necessary structure by which humanity is to interact with one and another and the created world. The instituting of the first marriage relationship, also described in the creation story (Gen 1:26-31, 2:21-25), further clarifies for men and women how they are to relate to one another.

The anthropological foundation upon which marriage and sexuality are formed indicate that both marriage and sexuality are intricately designed with specific and intended meaning. It matters how human beings express their own sexuality; it matters how human

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<sup>11</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 455.

<sup>12</sup>Winner, *Real Sex*, 57; Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Community, and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 120; idem, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1986), 117-18.

<sup>13</sup>Andreas Kostenberger and David Jones, *God, Marriage and Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 22.

<sup>14</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 14.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

beings approach marriage. It matters how and what Christian parents teach their children pertaining to these issues. The following sections provide a sound theological basis for each issue.

### **Institution of Marriage**

Biblical marriage “is not a human contrivance or arrangement, but God’s ordinance, something instituted by God, something that God in His infinite grace and kindness has appointed and ordained and prepared and established for men and women. It is of God and not of man.”<sup>16</sup> “At its very heart, marriage is not a human custom, variable according to changing times; it is a divinely created institution, defined for all ages and all cultures in our shared, primeval, perfect existence.”<sup>17</sup> This ordinance of marriage is “governed entirely and solely by the teaching of Scripture- the Old Testament and the New Testament, both.”<sup>18</sup> Established at creation by God Himself, the ordinance of marriage institutes the beginning of the first family (Gen 2:21-25).

### **Marriage Is Good**

Prior to the creation of Eve, God, for the first time, deems something is “not good”—“man’s lack of a corresponding companion.”<sup>19</sup> God determined to make man a helper who was suitable for him (Gen 2:18-22). He created Eve as the “suitable helper” and presented Adam with his wife (Gen 2:22). In Eve, “Adam discovered what he had

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<sup>16</sup>D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit: In Marriage, Home & Work—Ephesians 5:18-6:9* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 97.

<sup>17</sup>Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship Genesis 1-3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 101.

<sup>18</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 97.

<sup>19</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 175.

lacked before.”<sup>20</sup> God provided him a companion that corresponded to him in every way, one with whom Adam would find earthly fulfillment.<sup>21</sup> With this marriage, God established a relationship which would provide the deepest known physical and spiritual unity between a man and a woman.<sup>22</sup> Adam rejoiced at such a gift: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23). In this statement Adam revealed his recognition “that he and the woman belong to the same family.”<sup>23</sup> God looked upon man and woman and declared “it was very good” (Gen 1:31).

### **Marriage Is a Covenantal Relationship**

Belonging now to the same family—to one another—Adam and Eve were part of a covenantal relationship, as detailed by Malachi 2:14.<sup>24</sup> The covenantal element of the marriage relationship deems that marriage is not only a “bilateral contract” between a man and a woman, but is “a sacred bond between husband and wife, before God as a witness.”<sup>25</sup> From the beginning, marriages have been patterned after this model: “A man and woman make a public agreement (or covenant) to live together in a sexual and social union until death parts them. To this agreement God stands witness.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 171.

<sup>21</sup>T. B. Maston and William M. Tillman, *The Bible and Family Relations* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1983), 38.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Cornes, *Divorce & Remarriage* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 56.

<sup>24</sup>Michael S. Lawson, “Old Testament Teachings on the Family,” in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 72.

<sup>25</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 73.

<sup>26</sup>Christopher Ash, *Marriage Sex in the Service of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 341.



Jesus reaffirmed the sacred bond of marriage established by God in the beginning. Matthew 19:1-9 and 22:30 “make clear that Jesus considered marriage to be a sacred bond between a man and a woman, established by and entered into before God.”<sup>27</sup> Matthew 19:6-9 reveals Jesus holding to the truth established in the created order, and to the original intent of the Lawgiver.<sup>28</sup>

God designed marriage to be heterosexual, life-long, and monogamous. Further, Jesus clarifies the issue of divorce about which He is questioned. The original allowance for divorce came as a result of sin, but from the beginning “it was not so” (Matt 19:8). Thus, it was never God’s intention for divorce to occur in the marriage relationship. Marriage, then, is more than a civil or social arrangement. It is a life-long, covenantal relationship entered into before God and sealed by Him.

### **Marks of Marriage**

Specific characteristics of marriage are identified in Genesis 2:24, the most important verse in Scripture regarding the marriage relationship:<sup>29</sup> “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Found within this one verse are “many of the foundational marital norms that are expanded throughout Scripture.”<sup>30</sup> This verse describes the marriage relationship as God intended it to be carried out in the first marriage and in all subsequent marriages. The marriage relationship is to be a monogamous, heterosexual, indissoluble bond that lasts until earthly death.<sup>31</sup> It is to be characterized by complementarianism and the bearing of

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<sup>27</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 52.

<sup>28</sup>Maston and Tillman, *The Bible and Family Relations*, 209.

<sup>29</sup>David Jones, “Marriage Theses” (class handout, *97010-Theology of Marriage and Family*, Fall 2012). Used by permission.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

children.<sup>32</sup> Marriage is to be a relationship in which intense loyalty and affection are displayed.<sup>33</sup>

### **Purposes of Marriage**

There are multiple purposes for the marriage relationship. The most important purpose for this relationship is to glorify God.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the marriage relationship provides companionship (Gen 2:18; Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14), sexual fulfillment (1 Cor 7:3-4), and the opportunity for procreation (Gen 1:28, 2:24, 9:1, 7).<sup>35</sup> The aspect of sexual fulfillment not only provides physical pleasure and intimacy through the reunification of two beings into one flesh,<sup>36</sup> it also serves both husband and wife by protecting them from sexual sin (1 Cor 7:2, 5, 9).<sup>37</sup> In addition, marriage purposes for the creation and development of spiritual offspring through the production of godly children (Mal 2:15; 1 Cor 7:3-4).<sup>38</sup> Marriage also establishes ordered and disciplined sexual behavior which is for the public good.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the marriage relationship provides a visible model to the world of the “holy and permanent bond” within the relationship between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:21-33).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Jones, “Marriage Theses.”

<sup>33</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 195.

<sup>34</sup>C. J. Mahaney, *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); Jones, “Marriage Theses.”

<sup>35</sup>Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 61; and Jones, “Marriage Theses.”

<sup>36</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 77-84.

<sup>37</sup>Jones, “Marriage Theses”; Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 110-11.

<sup>38</sup>Jones, “Marriage Theses.”

<sup>39</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 110-11. Ash describes the ordered and disciplined sexual behavior as a benefit to the public good. This benefit is achieved in avoiding “a detachment of sexuality from stable family structures.” Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 58.

<sup>40</sup>Jones, “Marriage Theses.” This analogy is also present in Isa 54:5, Isa 62:4-5, and Jer 2:2, as

## Roles within Marriage

Following the creation of Adam and Eve, God issued orders regarding how this couple was to relate to one another.<sup>41</sup> First they were instructed to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth (Gen 1:28), creating the first kind of human community.<sup>42</sup> This command was to be accomplished through a sexual relationship, which would be a re-union of what was originally and literally one flesh.<sup>43</sup> Through this relationship the couple would produce offspring, further populating the earth with beings reflective of God's image.

Second, the couple was instructed to have dominion over the earth and all living creatures (Gen 1:28). Their family life as married partners was to consist of procreating and ruling the earth. In these tasks both Adam and Eve had unique roles to play—his role was to lead, hers was to assist his leadership.

Ephesians 5:22-30 and Colossians 3:18-20 offer instructions to husbands and wives providing further support for the roles established in the created order. The wife is instructed to submit to her husband (Col 3:18) as to the Lord as the husband is her head, even as Christ is the head of the church (Eph 22-24).<sup>44</sup> Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved and sacrificed Himself for the church (Eph 5:25-30; Col 3:19). Comparisons are drawn between husbands to Christ and wives to the church, between husbands to the head and wives to the body.<sup>45</sup> These comparisons are direct parallels to the order established by God at creation. Adam was created to lead as the head; Eve was

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noted by Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 52.

<sup>41</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 155.

<sup>42</sup>Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image*, 177.

<sup>43</sup>Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 101.

<sup>44</sup>George W. Knight III, "Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:21-33 and Colossians 3:18-19," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 575.

<sup>45</sup>John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 77.

created as a help mate for Adam, to help and support him in his work (Gen 2:18-24).<sup>46</sup> Marital roles, then, are not arbitrarily assigned and they are not reversible.<sup>47</sup> They are rooted in the distinctive roles of Christ and the church.<sup>48</sup> If one is not clear about the Lord Jesus Christ and the church, and the relationship of the church to Him, one cannot understand marriage.<sup>49</sup>

John Piper describes the eternal relationship that marriage represents:

Marriage is like a metaphor or an image or a picture or a parable or a model that stands for something more than a man and a woman becoming one flesh. It represents the relationship between Christ and the church. That is the deepest meaning of marriage. It is meant to be a living drama of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and the church.<sup>50</sup>

The living drama of marriage is intended to be played out in the everyday lives of men and women as a testimony of the faithfulness of God to His church.

The marriage relationship is clearly defined in Scripture. Alterations to this relationship will affect the intended meaning marriage is to convey to the world; it will affect the visible demonstration of God's relationship with his people, as evidenced through the relationship of husband and wife. For these reasons it is imperative for Christian parents to provide accurate biblical teaching of marriage to their children. Scripture provides the clear instruction needed by Christian parents on this issue. Likewise, Scripture provides clear teaching on the issue of God-designed human sexuality. While sexuality is intended to serve real purposes in the lives of human beings, it also, as does marriage, portrays something beyond itself. Human sexuality is intended to demonstrate another aspect of the image of God upon humanity. As with marriage, it is

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<sup>46</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 99.

<sup>47</sup>Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 79.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, 97.

<sup>50</sup>Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 75.

vitaly important for Christian parents to possess a biblical understanding of human sexuality and to teach their children from that basis.

### **Human Sexuality**

The umbrella term “human sexuality” is a wide term with numerous potential avenues to explore. For the purposes of this research, the discussion of human sexuality includes discussion of gender, sexuality and marriage, and sexual morality. Theological groundings are established for each of these subcategories.

#### **Expression of Gender**

Gender originated with God who created man and woman in His own image as described in the creation account in Genesis 1-3. The account of this portion of Scripture provides “a context for reading the rest of Scripture. . . . And what we learn about God’s vision for sexuality in Genesis shapes how we understand words about sexuality in the rest of the Bible.”<sup>51</sup>

At various points in history social trends have suggested gender is meaningless. However,

gender difference matters very much to God. He is the one who made Adam a man and Eve a woman, he is the one who declared that Adam alone needed a relationship that only creating a woman could satisfy (Gen. 2:18), and he is now the one who still insists that honoring gender difference really matters not only biologically but morally as well.<sup>52</sup>

To dilute roles of gender into androgynous ambiguity “militates against God making humanity as distinctly *male* and *female*.”<sup>53</sup>

The Bible is clear on this issue of gender expression. As man and woman were each created to fulfill different roles within a marriage, each was also created with

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<sup>51</sup>Winner, *Real Sex*, 41.

<sup>52</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 198.

<sup>53</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 39.

distinctive sexuality. After creating Adam and causing the man to recognize his solitary state, God declared that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18). He then created Eve and brought her to Adam as a suitable mate and helper (Gen 2:22). In doing so, God instituted marriage, “the most basic and fundamental relationship between a man and a woman.”<sup>54</sup> Both man and woman displayed God’s glory with equal brilliance<sup>55</sup> yet their equality did not constitute an undifferentiated sameness.<sup>56</sup> Differing sexuality was not an “accident of nature” or a “biological phenomenon” but a “gift of God.”<sup>57</sup>

Certain cultures have, at times, determined that gender places unwanted limitations upon men and women. The extension of these thoughts has led to societies which embrace androgyny, gender denial, and even alteration of gender. However, “there is no such thing as an androgynous human person; there is only the human male and the human female.”<sup>58</sup>

God prohibits the types of attitudes and actions associated with androgyny and gender confusion. From its brief address in Scripture, it is clear that God objects to the confusion of gender, calling those who practice cross-dressing an “abomination to the Lord your God” (Deut 22:5).<sup>59</sup> While the practice of cross-dressing is specifically identified here, the larger moral issue addressed is “trying to confuse gender differences and acting as if they do not really matter.”<sup>60</sup> Gender is static, unlike “race, which is

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<sup>54</sup>Jones, “Marriage Theses.”

<sup>55</sup>Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality,” 97.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>57</sup>Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 138.

<sup>58</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 114.

<sup>59</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 197.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

miscible, or class, which may change.”<sup>61</sup> This truth is evident from the creation account of Genesis 1-2.

The prohibition against confusion of gender is also associated with “prohibitions against homosexual sex and lust.”<sup>62</sup> While cross-dressing or confusing gender may not involve sexual intercourse with another person “it does stir up sexual thoughts and desires that lead in the direction of homosexual activity” which God also prohibits (Lev 18:22).<sup>63</sup>

### **Sexuality and Marriage**

When considering the theology of sexuality and marriage, the element of God’s glory must not be overlooked. Both marriage and sex have been established to display God to the world,<sup>64</sup> and are instructive of God’s richest teaching regarding His relationship to His people—a “spiritual union that believers have with God through Christ.”<sup>65</sup> The marriage relationship and the sexual union of husband and wife serve as “a living portrait”<sup>66</sup> of that relationship and are pleasing to God. Thus, the marriage relationship is complex, carrying meaning beyond the immediate interactions between husband and wife. The sexual relationship, in the same way, is complex, carrying meaning beyond the immediate and temporal acts of physical intimacy. This

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<sup>61</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 114.

<sup>62</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 198. Though Lev 18:22 prohibits homosexual relations between men specifically, this prohibition also extends to homosexual relations between women, as supported in Rom 1:26. For greater detail of sexual prohibitions outlined in Scripture, see *ibid.*, 175-223.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 21.

<sup>65</sup>Jay Thomas and Gerald Heistand, *Sex, Dating, and Relationships: A Fresh Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 18.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

relationship, when carried out according to God’s intention, will glorify God.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note that the first marriage, through which God demonstrated to the world the pattern for the marriage relationship, was between one man and one woman. Genesis 2:24 explains that a man is to “leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Thus, Adam and Eve, who were created man and woman, were to express themselves as man and woman through the reunification achieved through the physical union of sexual intercourse.

**Sexual intercourse.** Wrapped into marriage is the one flesh union, a sexual relationship (Gen 2:24), which was never intended by God to be experienced in any other manner than within the bounds of marriage.

Sex outside of marriage is always wrong, no matter how it happens, whether before, during or after marriage. Without marriage, sex is simply wrong, and God takes it so seriously he makes adultery the ultimate paradigm for breaking faith with himself.<sup>68</sup>

Sexual intercourse within marriage serves several purposes. “In the history of Christian thought the major candidates for the purpose of sex and marriage have been procreation, relationship, and what we may call public order.”<sup>69</sup> Sexual intercourse within marriage is procreationally good. “Sexual union leads naturally to children and this is to be valued.”<sup>70</sup> The married couple who gives birth to children fulfills God’s mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28), thereby filling the earth.

Christopher Ash notes that human beings are incapable of asexual reproduction.<sup>71</sup> By God’s design, procreation would require a relationship with another.

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<sup>67</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 137.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>69</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 106.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.



This creative process through which God deemed human beings to multiply is reflective of the manner in which God Himself created man and woman. “Then God said, Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:27). God the Father, in relationship with God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, created male and female in His own image. Husband and wife likewise come together in the communal act of sexual intercourse in order to bring forth children.

Sexual intercourse is intended to both require and benefit the marriage relationship. “Man is a social creature, made for relationship, and the creation of woman is—it is said—God’s primary provision for his social need.”<sup>72</sup> The sexual relationship between husband and wife may benefit the couple in various ways. This relationship may provide comfort, companionship, mutual affirmation, acceptance, and unconditional love.<sup>73</sup> The sexual relationship between husband and wife may also meet “deep felt needs and may contribute to the healing of past hurts.”<sup>74</sup> Essentially, the sexual relationship experienced between husband and wife re-unites that which was once one flesh in the physical sense, and contributes to the cleaving together as one flesh psychologically and emotionally.

Sexual intercourse in marriage serves the public good. The public good refers to the “wider dimension of sexual order or disorder, looking outwards beyond the couple.”<sup>75</sup> Ash notes, “Undisciplined and disordered sexual behavior must be restrained, for it carries with it a high social and personal cost in family breakdown, destructive jealousies, resentments, bitterness, and hurt.”<sup>76</sup> This high social and personal cost is

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<sup>72</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 107.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-8.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

exemplified in Proverbs 6:20-35 “with its reference to the destructive jealousy of the husband and his fury at his wife’s lover.”<sup>77</sup> Ordered sexual relations, by contrast, provide benefits that “extend beyond the couple to children, neighbors, and the wider networks of relational society” as they provide a “safeguard against the disorder of ‘cases of sexual immorality’” as described in 1 Corinthians 7:2.<sup>78</sup>

Proper expression of sexuality and marriage are important for Christian parents to understand and to demonstrate within their homes. It is also imperative that Christian parents demonstrate a sexually moral lifestyle, displaying to their children and to the world God’s design for living out godliness. The theological basis for sexually morality is expressed through Scripture.

### **Sexual Morality**

The apostle Paul strongly addresses sexual morality with the Corinthians, words which provide relevant and clear guidance for modern Christian men and women. Paul instructed men and women to have their own spouses as a safeguard against the disorder of sexual immorality<sup>79</sup> (1 Cor 7:2, 9). He further instructed husbands and wives “not to withdraw from normal marital sexual relations,”<sup>80</sup> except for an agreed upon amount of time, so they will not be tempted by Satan due to the lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:5). Two simple truths emerge from this teaching. Men and women are to marry,<sup>81</sup> and are to participate in a sexual relationship with their spouse. God has provided, through the marriage relationship, a place for sexual fulfillment, pleasure, and physical intimacy.

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<sup>77</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 110.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>80</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 55.

<sup>81</sup>In this passage on marriage, Paul is also addressing a “false asceticism that values singleness as more spiritual than marriage.” Ibid., 54. Paul seems to place high value on singleness, though the passage is clear in his “strong affirmation of marriage.” Ibid.

God did not leave room for sexual relationships outside the bounds of marriage. Rather, He deemed extra-marital sexual relationships immoral. Christian persons are urged to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 7:18) and are instructed instead to glorify God in the body (1 Cor 7:20). Sexual sin, Paul explained, is a type of sin against one’s own body (1 Cor 7:18) which is the very temple of the Holy Spirit within (1 Cor 7:19).

Letters from the apostle Paul provide necessary guidance for the manner in which human beings are to handle their own sexuality and sexual desires. The Galatians were encouraged to live by the Spirit rather than gratifying the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). The Colossians were instructed to put to death sexual immorality, impurity, and lust, reminding them to follow after Christ rather than the flesh (Col 3:5-7). The Thessalonians were urged to avoid sexual immorality and to learn to control themselves with holiness and honor rather than lust (1 Thess 4:3-6).

Christian men and women, then, must not only be mindful of their actions and desires, but also of what is within their view. Being mindful to set no unclean thing before their eyes (Ps 101:3), Christ followers must follow the instruction of Paul to the Philippians, remembering to think on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute (Phil 4:8). By placing intentional focus on Christ, on holiness and purity, Christian persons will be better positioned to maintain biblically supported relationships which demonstrate God’s intention for marriage and sexuality. It is critical for children and teens to view and experience these types of relationships. In this way parents are to demonstrate godly relationships to their children. Just as critical, however, is the instruction they provide their children on an ongoing basis. The following section provides a biblical theology for Christian parental instruction.

### **Christian Parental Instruction**

Even before the words of Genesis 2 declare that the two shall become one, God connects the creation of Adam and Eve in His image with the command to be

fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. Husband and wife now have new roles as mother and father.<sup>82</sup>

As parents, the first family and all subsequent families are to educate their children as described in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This passage, the single most important biblical text related to parenting,<sup>83</sup> describes the responsibility of parents to their children. This responsibility is centered on teaching, including ongoing conversations about God, about His love for humankind, and the duty of men and women to return His love with their entire being.<sup>84</sup>

In the Old Testament, theological education was a family experience that occurred as life happened.<sup>85</sup> Much of education, both theological and practical, is now regulated to a formal classroom setting outside the bounds of the home. This is not God's intention for the family. Parents are responsible to theologically educate their children as life happens. Making the most of every opportunity in daily life, parents are to teach their children when they sit in their homes, when they walk along the road, when they lie down at night and when they arise in the morning (Deut 6:7). The implication of this passage "is that teaching obedience to God's commands is to be done at all times, in all places, with intention, as parents are being obedient to God's commands."<sup>86</sup> For parents, opportunities for informal teaching will "occur more often than those of formal teaching, and these moments allow for practical application at the level the child is ready to learn."<sup>87</sup> Parents are responsible, whether through formal or informal forums, to instill in their

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<sup>82</sup>Lawson, "Old Testament Teachings," 75.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>86</sup>Leon M. Blanchette, Jr., "Spiritual Markers in the Life of a Child," in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 121-22.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 122.

children’s hearts and minds the truths of Scripture,<sup>88</sup> to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

### **Discipline and Instruction**

As Ephesians 6:4 prescribes, Christian parents are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Discipline, or *paideia* in the Greek, “has the basic idea of training one’s external life.”<sup>89</sup> “Instruction, or *nouthesia* in the Greek, speaks to one’s internal training—to ‘place or set in the mind.’”<sup>90</sup> Christian parents who train their children both internally and externally not only follow the commands of Scripture, they also equip their children to think inwardly and behave outwardly like Jesus Christ. Outward training better equips children to deal with the culture’s outer moral chaos, while inward training assists children in warring against the inner pervasive sinfulness of the soul.<sup>91</sup> This type of training is a comprehensive process that parents are to work toward achieving with their children each day, all times of the day, using every opportunity.<sup>92</sup>

**Discipline.** The term *paideia* is a broad one “that encompasses some sort of structured guidance and restraint, whether by practical guidelines for living,

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<sup>88</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 329.

<sup>89</sup>Martha Peace and Stuart Scott, *The Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 8; Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 753-58.

<sup>90</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 10; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 544-45.

<sup>91</sup>Richard Holland, “Christian Parenting and Homosexuality,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 19, no. 2 (2008): 218.

<sup>92</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., “That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord: Family Discipleship in the Old Testament,” in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 34-38.

encouragement, reproof, or chastisement (for either disobedience and/or sinful attitudes and, of course, as appropriate for the age of the child).”<sup>93</sup> Discipline is from God (Heb 12:5 ff), and “all training and discipline must be His discipline in that it reflects the discipline that He exerts over the parent who is His child.”<sup>94</sup> Christian parents, therefore, should use the same disciplinary methods with their own children that God has exerted over themselves.

Jay Adams describes the term “discipline” from Ephesians 6:4. Discipline is training with structure that

involves setting forth a program by aiming at goals and using methods that will succeed in reaching them. It contemplates patient, persistent, and consistent effort until the discipline produces a right way of life in that child. . . . It involves a conscious desire and calculated effort to change something in the life of the child or to build something into the life of a child. . . . Scripture is the standard for all such training.<sup>95</sup>

Such discipline will produce in the child a willingness to work toward living in an honorable and right fashion before the Lord. External training, however, must be coupled with instruction.

**Instruction.** The idea behind *nouthesia* is to address the internal mind or heart.<sup>96</sup> Parents must teach their children “to think biblically about God, man, Satan, the world, and life.”<sup>97</sup> This directive to biblical thinking is accomplished as Christian parents teach their children biblical truth diligently and consistently (Deut 6:7). Old Testament parents, specifically fathers, were “commanded to embrace the theological confession

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<sup>93</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 9-10.

<sup>94</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 120-21.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 10.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

that the Lord alone is God (Deut 6:4). They were to love Him (Deut 6:5), know His Word so they could obey (Deut 6:6), and they were to repeat God’s words to their sons.”<sup>98</sup> Parents were called not only to “repeat” these specific truths to their children but also to “talk about them”—this implies that fathers were to explain to their children what these teachings meant, to have ongoing discussions with their children.<sup>99</sup> Applying this principle of ongoing instruction today, Christian parents are to teach children on an ongoing basis “about God, man, sin, the law, and salvation ‘in accordance with the Scriptures’ (1 Cor 15:3).”<sup>100</sup> This will ensure the ongoing worship of the Lord.<sup>101</sup>

Discipline and instruction are synonymous with a biblical pattern of parenting. Yet, there are other specifics that parents must not neglect in their teaching. Christian parenting must also emphasize teaching of the gospel. Their worldview, in fact, should be established with the foundation of the gospel.

### **Teaching the Gospel**

Christian parents who carry out the command to discipline and instruct their children demonstrate a deep love for them. Part of this deep love “includes a desire for them to know and respond to the Gospel—a concern that a Christian is to always have for all persons (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1),”<sup>102</sup> and the greatest desire for any believing parent.<sup>103</sup> Parents must remember “there is not one gospel for adults and another for children.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Hamilton, “That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord,” 37.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 16.

<sup>101</sup>Hamilton, “That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord,” 37.

<sup>102</sup>Robert L. Plummer, “Bring Them Up in the Discipline and Instruction of the Lord: Family Discipleship among the First Christians,” in *Trained in the Fear of God*, 51.

<sup>103</sup>Holland, “Christian Parenting and Homosexuality,” 222.

<sup>104</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 15.

“All elements of the Gospel must be taught, understood, and embraced with a new heart for God before there is true conversion.”<sup>105</sup> Carried out practically, this means Christian parents must teach their children “about the person, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” and then call them “to respond to these facts in faith and repentance.”<sup>106</sup>

Through instruction, children can learn to properly fear God—a necessary path into the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7).<sup>107</sup> Parents should teach children in small bits, within the context of the gospel, the overarching narrative of Scripture. Through the accounts of creation, the fall, redemption, and consummation, children should be instructed about their own sin and need for the Savior. This critical teaching in the faith should remain gospel-oriented even if parents are fairly certain of the child’s professed commitment to Christ.<sup>108</sup> Such an approach will help with doubt often associated with early professions of faith,<sup>109</sup> and will direct the child’s focus toward a growing relationship with Christ, rather than “a list of do’s and don’ts.”<sup>110</sup>

Raising children in the fear and admonition of the Lord and teaching children the gospel message is a lengthy process requiring commitment and intentionality on the part of parents. Scholars have recognized that this type of education—religious education—is best learned by the model of ‘walking in the shadow of parents who live out their teachings.’”<sup>111</sup> Children see and imitate their parents. For this reason, “parents

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<sup>105</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 16.

<sup>106</sup>Holland, “Christian Parenting and Homosexuality,” 222.

<sup>107</sup>Peace and Scott, *The Faithful Parent*, 16.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>111</sup>Blanchette, “Spiritual Markers,” 122; Donald Joy, “Why Reach and Teach Children?” in *Childhood Education in the Church*, ed. Robert Clark, Joanne Brubaker, and Roy Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 6.



who intend to communicate traditional moral values to their children need to be conscious of how they, as parents, live, speak, and behave.”<sup>112</sup> Parents must present their “values in action.”<sup>113</sup> They must become the primary modelers of faith for their children.

### **Primary Faith Modelers**

The best scenario for effective teaching and training is within the “natural flow of daily life.”<sup>114</sup> The demonstration of this truth is evident in the *Shema*, which instructs parents to remain focused on teaching their children as life happens (Deut 6:4-9). The church of recent past generations allowed and even encouraged parents to “abdicate” this role of spiritual leadership in their home “by creating structures that enabled mothers and fathers to outsource religious and spiritual training to the ‘professionals.’”<sup>115</sup> Recognizing the failure of this ministry model, twenty-first century churches are developing models which are more effective for family ministry. “One of the most profound impacts this fresh approach to ministry has brought is that has challenged parents to assume their biblical role in spiritually nurturing their children.”<sup>116</sup>

Spiritual nurture within the home involves both teaching and demonstrating. Michelle Anthony describes the environment of modeling, which parents can create within their homes to foster spiritual teaching, learning, and growth within the family as

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<sup>112</sup>Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel, *Passing on the Faith: A Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers, 2000), 89.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup>Steve W. J. Kozlowski and Daniel R. Ilgen, “Enhancing the Effectiveness of Work Groups and Teams,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 7, no. 3 (2006): 183.

<sup>115</sup>Michelle Anthony, “Equipping Parents to Be the Spiritual Leaders in the Home,” in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 182. The professionalization of religious teaching and instruction is also addressed in Steve Wright, *A Parent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest, 2008), 83, and Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 150-60.

<sup>116</sup>Anthony, “Equipping Parents,” 182.

life happens.<sup>117</sup> The element of modeling is the foundation piece through which all other types of parental teaching are accomplished. Modeling demonstrates to children the *how* and the *what*.<sup>118</sup> Through modeling, parents successfully teach their children *how* to live according to *what* the parents are teaching.

It is through modeling, in fact, that parents demonstrate the greatest teaching with their children. Parents can model proper theology to their children by allowing them to see and experience how the role of mother and father are worked out in conjunction with one another.<sup>119</sup> Children are then privy to learn how God moves in everyday situations and how they should move in response to Him. In developing this type of teaching and learning environment within the home, parents are positioned to develop a rich heritage of faith among their children. As described in the following section, a family heritage of faith is possible for all families to achieve when they become focused on spiritual training and biblical teaching within the home.

### **Heritage of Faith**

Tedd Tripp states God's desire regarding the heritage of faith: "God has an objective. He wants one generation to follow another in His ways. God accomplishes this objective through the agency of parental instruction."<sup>120</sup> Parental instruction occurs in a number of ways during the course of daily life. Thus, the actions and teachings of parents living "genuine lives of repentance and faith" alongside a faith community will be "both 'caught by' and 'taught to' each generation."<sup>121</sup> Parents who desire to establish

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<sup>117</sup>Anthony, "Equipping Parents," 204-5.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>119</sup>Holland, "Christian Parenting and Homosexuality," 222.

<sup>120</sup>Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), 30.

<sup>121</sup>Plummer, "Bring Them Up," 59.

a heritage of faith must begin by thinking generationally.<sup>122</sup> Generational teaching is evident within the pages of Scripture as well as the history of the early church.

When asked by their children the meanings of certain testimonies, statutes, and rules, Old Testament parents were to teach their children about God's deliverance and revelation (Deut 6:20-25).<sup>123</sup> Further, "the Pentateuch, the Old Testament historical books, and the book of Psalms are pervaded by the consciousness that parents (and especially fathers) must pass on their religious heritage to their children."<sup>124</sup> The New Testament echoes these sentiments as Paul instructs parents to bring up children in the fear and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). This type of training and admonition "is that which is in the sphere of the Lord or has the Lord as its reference point."<sup>125</sup> It is an instruction to raise children "in a distinctively Christian way."<sup>126</sup>

Early Christians placed great focus upon generational teaching. In his letter to Roman Christians, Clement urged his readers to "instruct the young with instruction that leads to the fear of God,"<sup>127</sup> to let the "children receive the instruction that is in Christ."<sup>128</sup> Polycarp, as had Clement with the Romans, instructed the Philippians to teach "their children with instruction that leads to the fear of God."<sup>129</sup> Ignatius, in the second century,

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<sup>122</sup>Wright, *A Parent Privilege*, 92.

<sup>123</sup>Kostenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage and Family*, 93.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>125</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 408.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>127</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *First Clement*, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, trans. Michael W. Holmes, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 75.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>129</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 285.

identified himself as a beginning disciple. Yet he expressed an understanding of generational teaching as he addressed his fellow students in the faith, encouraging them to “run together in harmony with the mind of God.”<sup>130</sup> *The Didache* further instructs Christians in their teaching duties: “You shall not withhold your hand from your son or daughter but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God.”<sup>131</sup> Christians of the early church were clearly committed to developing a heritage of faith in Christ as they taught their young the truths of God.

Parents who follow the Ephesians 6:4 instruction to bring up children in the fear and admonition of the Lord must teach children God’s truth according to the Deuteronomy 6 model; teaching diligently, using every opportunity, at all times of the day.<sup>132</sup> This leaves no space for parents or children to segment out certain portions of their lives that will not be affected by His teaching. God’s truth is to be applied to every area of living.

Parents must provide purposeful instruction to their children in the area of sexuality.<sup>133</sup> They must recognize that the right training regarding marriage can prepare their child’s heart for the gospel.<sup>134</sup> The perimeters and expectations outlined in Scripture are those which God has established. These biblical perimeters and expectations stand in direct opposition to current cultural trends which encourage individuals to live out lifestyles that are more worldly than godly. Such trends and lifestyles will present difficulty and confusion to children who have not been properly anchored in the teachings of God. The

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<sup>130</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 185.

<sup>131</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Didache*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 351.

<sup>132</sup>Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 34-38.

<sup>133</sup>Holland, “Christian Parenting and Homosexuality,” 226.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

following section provides an overview of key cultural trends which threaten children and families by altering the gospel message.

### **Key Cultural Trends**

Certain cultural trends in recent years have extended various alternatives to marriage<sup>135</sup> and sexuality which veer far from a biblical and traditional understanding of these issues. Marriage has been generally understood by Christian people as a voluntary sexual and public social union between one man and one woman who originate from different families.<sup>136</sup> This is no longer the case for the secular world. Marriage and the family have undergone a public redefining process, and have become open to all sorts of variations such as cohabitation, divorce, and gay marriage. The following section addresses each of these cultural trends, specific to their occurrence within the United States.

#### **Cohabitation**

Due to the social acceptance of other relationship avenues, according to Andrew Cherlin, “marriage is less dominant as a social institution in the United States than at any time in history.”<sup>137</sup> Cohabitation has taken its place of dominance alongside marriage in America as a viable and preferable manner of maintaining a romantic relationship. Cohabitation, in fact, “is far more common today than it was at any time in the early or mid-twentieth century,”<sup>138</sup> having increased 900 percent over the past 50 years.<sup>139</sup> This

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<sup>135</sup>Roc Morin, “Up for Polyamory? Creating Alternatives to Marriage,” *The Atlantic*, February 19, 2014, sec. Health.

<sup>136</sup>Ash, *Marriage Sex*, 63.

<sup>137</sup>Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *The Future of Children* 15, no. 2 (2005): 34.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>139</sup>Lauren Fox, “The Science of Cohabitation: A Step toward Marriage, Not a Rebellion,” *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2014, sec. Health.

diverse, evolving phenomenon is for some, a “prelude to marriage” or a “trial marriage.”<sup>140</sup>

**The confusion of cohabitation.** All forms of cohabitation are not equal. Unlike traditional marriage which holds certain rules and expectations, the rules of cohabitating relationships will vary greatly from couple to couple. This variation is evidenced by the attempt by experts to describe cohabitation. Linda Waite and Michael Lawler each describe cohabiting couples in two categories: those who are committed to marriage and those who are not committed to marriage.<sup>141</sup> David Scott differentiates from Waite and Lawler by identifying three types of cohabiters: the engaged couple living together before marriage, the unengaged couple experimenting with a trial marriage, and the couple who live together with no intention of marrying.<sup>142</sup> Each form of cohabitation has a different level of commitment and a different set of rules. The expectations and rules may differ not only by form but also among cohabiting partners within the same relationship.

Amidst such confusing terms it will prove beneficial to grasp some common ideas for cohabitation in general. At its most basic level, cohabitation occurs when romantically involved, unmarried persons live together. It has been defined as “a relationship between a man and woman which extends over a period of time based on commitment and fidelity,”<sup>143</sup> though it may now likely consist of persons of the same

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<sup>140</sup>Cherlin, “American Marriage,” 35.

<sup>141</sup>Linda J. Waite, “Cohabitation: A Communitarian Perspective,” in *Marriage in America: A Communitarian Perspective*, ed. Martin King Whyte (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 18; Michael G. Lawler, “Quaestio Disputata Cohabitation: Past and Present Reality,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 627-28.

<sup>142</sup>David Scott, “Living Together: Education for Marriage?” *The Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 18, no. 1 (1983): 47-55.

<sup>143</sup>Keith Warrington, “Cohabitation and the Church,” *Churchman* 111, no. 2 (1997): 139.

gender. It has also been defined as “promiscuity in slow motion.”<sup>144</sup> Each of these definitions leaves unspoken specific relationship terms such as the duration of the relationship and the level of commitment and fidelity. These definitions underscore the reality that many partners in cohabiting relationships write the rules as they deem necessary through the progression of the relationship.

**The reality behind convenience.** The cohabiting relationship may outwardly appear convenient. The idea of a less committed relationship could translate into partners having more freedom to pursue personal desires and interests. The convenience and freedom, however, may also lead to complications. Some cohabiting partners experience confusion over commitment level, creating complication from loosely defined relationship terms.

Complication may also appear as the partners become isolated from networks of friends and family. Waite reasons the phenomenon of isolation occurs when friends and family are not in full support of the status of the relationship.<sup>145</sup> In such a situation friends and family may distance themselves from the cohabiting couple, fearing the ramifications that would follow a break-up of the relationship, which would ultimately demand a break in the relationship between the extended family and the unrelated cohabiting partner.<sup>146</sup>

In addition to friends and family, distancing also often takes place between the cohabiting couple and those within their circle of religious influence.<sup>147</sup> This idea is supported by other experts who hold this type of distancing occurs due to both the

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<sup>144</sup>Greg Forster, *Cohabitation and Marriage: A Pastoral Response* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 3.

<sup>145</sup>Waite, “Cohabitation,” 16-17.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 15-17.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*

experience of a less rewarding encounter from religious services while cohabiting, as well as the deterioration of the relationship quality shared with religious peers during this time.<sup>148</sup>

For couples who choose to marry following cohabitation, complication continues. Booth and Johnson report that marriages which were preceded by cohabitation experience lower levels of marital interaction and higher levels of instability and disagreement than those couples who marry having had no experience with cohabitation.<sup>149</sup> Cohabiting couples, in addition, are reported to experience lower commitment levels to the institution of marriage, and are “more likely than noncohabiters to dissolve a problematic marriage.”<sup>150</sup> The increased likelihood of marriage dissolution may be a result of the couples holding a lower value of marriage prior to the cohabiting relationship, but could also be related to the altering of values because of the cohabitation experience.<sup>151</sup> In either scenario, the potential complication of a future marriage ending in divorce looms before couples who choose cohabitation.<sup>152</sup>

Even among late adolescents, cohabitation has become more common, especially among those who are college age.<sup>153</sup> Divorce is one reason that cohabitation has become so popular. Children have experienced divorce in their families and they live

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<sup>148</sup>Arland Thornton, William G. Axinn, and Daniel H. Hill, “Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 3 (1992): 632.

<sup>149</sup>Alan Booth and David R. Johnson, “Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success,” *Journal of Family Issues* 9, no. 2 (1988): 255-72.

<sup>150</sup>Elizabeth Thomson and Ugo Colella, “Cohabitation and Marital Stability: Quality or Commitment?” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54, no. 2 (1992): 259.

<sup>151</sup>Catherine Cohan and Stacey Kleinbaum, “Toward a Greater Understanding of the Cohabitation Effect: Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Communication,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, no. 1 (2002): 181.

<sup>152</sup>Thomson and Colella, “Cohabitation and Marital Stability,” 259-67.

<sup>153</sup>Debra W. Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens-From Middle School to High School and Beyond* (New York: New Market, 2001), 207.



in a culture of radically changing morals. “This has resulted in a growing number of people who are ready to live together and have families, but they do so without a willingness to commit to it legally and permanently.”<sup>154</sup>

Some parents may feel unthreatened by the issue of cohabitation, thinking it could represent a period “settling down” for their child which could eventually lead to marriage. However, this type of relationship presents pseudo-stability. Parents should recognize cohabitation as non-married individuals who are participating in a sexual relationship with someone other than their spouse. Cohabitation does not represent commitment or fidelity, but convenience.<sup>155</sup> It presents significant dangers to future marriage relationships.<sup>156</sup> Parents, as with other issues surrounding marriage and sexuality, must establish their own boundaries on the issue of cohabitation. Once personal values have been identified, parents will be in a better position to communicate those values to their young. Along with cohabitation, other social trends continue to hold influence over adults and youth alike. Though it has now become commonplace in the United States, divorce is one such issue parents must responsibly discuss with their children.

## **Divorce**

Most fashionably known now as “conscious uncoupling,”<sup>157</sup> divorce is a reality that most Americans are all too familiar with—it is the number one affliction of family

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<sup>154</sup>Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 44.

<sup>155</sup>Waite, “Cohabitation,” 13.

<sup>156</sup>Booth and Johnson, “Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success,” 255-72; Thomson and Colella, “Cohabitation and Marital Stability,” 259-67. Booth and Johnson report that marriages which were preceded by cohabitation experience lower levels of marital interaction and higher levels of instability and disagreement than those couples who marry having had no experience with cohabitation. In addition, cohabiting couples, as reported by Thomson and Colella, are reported to experience lower commitment levels to the institution of marriage, and are “more likely than noncohabiters to dissolve a problematic marriage.”

<sup>157</sup>Gwyneth Paltrow, “Conscious Uncoupling,” *Goop*, March 25, 2014, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.goop.com/journal/be/conscious-uncoupling>; Tracy Miller, “‘Conscious Uncoupling’: Gwyneth Paltrow Explores Spiritual Side of Divorce on Goop,” *New York Daily News*, March 26, 2014,

life.<sup>158</sup> This nation, in fact, has shifted from a culture of marriage to a culture of divorce; it has become a nation where divorce is viewed as a path to liberation.<sup>159</sup> A 2003 study found that divorce rates over the previous twenty years indicate approximately half of all marriages will dissolve.<sup>160</sup> This level of prevalence has brought about change to the age of first marriage, as young adults who seek to avoid divorce are choosing to marry at later and later stages in life.<sup>161</sup> Many of these young adults are seeking to avoid what their parents have experienced first-hand.

Parents who experience divorce often endure a set of specific struggles resultant to the broken marriage. One struggle is the personal adjustment to the divorce itself.<sup>162</sup> A second struggle is the adjustment “to the new and different role of divorced parent.”<sup>163</sup> Many parents are so stressed from the divorce that their “child-rearing behavior” suffers as a result.<sup>164</sup> Robert Emery reports that parents undergoing such personal and family turmoil often alter their parenting behavior, ranging from rigid to permissive and from

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sec. Lifestyle; Jessica Grose, “Gwyneth Paltrow’s ‘Conscious Uncoupling’ from Chris Martin Sounds So Lovely. Can I Have One?” *Slate*, March 26, 2014.

<sup>158</sup>Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 60.

<sup>159</sup>Council on Families, *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1995); Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 43.

<sup>160</sup>R. Kelley Raley and Larry Bumpass, “The Topography of the Divorce Plateau: Levels and Trends in Union Stability in the United States after 1980,” *Demographic Research* 8 (2003): 256.

<sup>161</sup>Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “Socialization in Emerging Adulthood: From the Family to the Wider World, from Socialization to Self-Socialization,” in *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, ed. Joan E. Grusec and Paul D. Hastings (New York: Guilford, 2007), 113.

<sup>162</sup>Patrick F. Fagan and Robert Rector, “The Effects of Divorce on America,” *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder: Executive Summary*, June 5, 2000, 17.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup>Judith Wallerstein, *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce* (New York: Basic, 1980), 224-25; Fagan and Rector, “The Effects of Divorce on America,” 17.

emotionally distant to emotionally dependent.<sup>165</sup> The issue of parenting quality after divorce looms large over parents. Post-divorce parenting quality has been found to have great influence on the child's ability to cope successfully with the family change.<sup>166</sup> In addition to the potential change in parenting quality there are additional indicators of oncoming struggle.

Research has shown that real trouble could lie in the path for children coming from divorced families. Anger, loneliness, loyalty conflicts, guilt, depression, fear, grief, and difficulty with trust are some of the issues children of divorce may personally deal with as they grow.<sup>167</sup> Additionally, children whose parents have divorced often experience changing attitudes regarding their own sexual behavior.<sup>168</sup> These children often become more approving of premarital sex and divorce and less approving of marriage and childbearing.<sup>169</sup> Once they enter adulthood children of divorce may meet even more struggles as they struggle against repeating the divorce pattern in their own lives.<sup>170</sup>

Issues stemming from divorce will likely not be the only issues with which children and teens are faced. Other matters may also usher in confusion such as the trendy issue of gender identity. Public discussion of gender identity is, of course, nothing new. The biblical text reveals that social issues regarding gender identity were cropping already

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<sup>165</sup>Robert Emery, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children's Adjustment* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 81-86; Fagan and Rector, "The Effects of Divorce on America," 17.

<sup>166</sup>Clorinda E. Velez et al., "Protecting Children from the Consequences of Divorce: A Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Parenting on Children's Coping Processes," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 244-57; Brenda Clark, "Supporting the Mental Health of Children and Youth of Separating Parents," *Pediatrics & Child Health* 18, no. 7 (2013): 373-77.

<sup>167</sup>Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women & Children a Decade after Divorce* (New York: Tickner & Fields, 1989), 10-15, 60-61, 298-300.

<sup>168</sup>Fagan and Rector, "The Effects of Divorce on America," 23.

<sup>169</sup>William G. Axinn and Arland Thornton, "The Influence of Parents' Marital Dissolutions on Children's Attitudes toward Family Formation," *Demography* 33 (1996): 66-81.

<sup>170</sup>Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *Second Chances*, 15, 288-308.

up during the Old Testament era (Deut 22:5). Even in American society, the idea of androgyny has been creeping to the front of the social stage since the post-World War II era.<sup>171</sup> Today's youth, however, may be forced to think through sex roles at an entirely different level than did their American predecessors. The issue of gender identity has exploded, for some, into a state of full confusion as they must determine not only how they will behave, but whether or not they will accept their own psyche, and their own body as being male, female, or some variety of intersex.

### **Gender Confusion**

While previous generations “approached life with many unquestioned assumptions” about gender, “the rigid sex roles of the past have been changing for many years.”<sup>172</sup> The discussion has gone beyond the idea of “assertive men” and “sensitive women”<sup>173</sup> to choices about sex roles and gender identity, expressed both privately and publically. Public expression of alternative gender has recently stirred controversial discussions within public school systems in Kentucky<sup>174</sup> and Minnesota.<sup>175</sup> In specific

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<sup>171</sup>Charles Winick, “The Beige Epoch: Depolarization of Sex Roles in America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 376 (March 1968): 18-24.

<sup>172</sup>Brenda Mae Woodhill and Curtis A. Samuels, “Desirable and Undesirable Androgyny: A Prescription for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 13, no. 1 (2004): 15.

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup>Antionette Konz, “Transgender Controversy Re-Opens Louisville Schools Discrimination Debate,” *The Courier Journal*, May 14, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/education/2014/05/13/transgender-controversy-prompts-atherton-rethink-policy/9040585/>; *idem*, “Transgender Controversy Reopens Discrimination Debate,” *USA Today*, May 13, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/13/ky-school-transgender-controversy-discrimination-policy/9043331/>.

<sup>175</sup>Kim McGuire, “New School Bathrooms Seek to Ensure that All Genders Feel Safe and Welcome,” *StarTribune*, December 25, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/local/west/286850241.html>; The Associated Press, “St. Paul Schools Working on ‘Gender Inclusion’ Policy to Protect Transgender Students,” *Daily Reporter*, January 14, 2015, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/view/story/f67548887fb441dc82548cc54d3657eb/MN--Transgender-Policy-St-Paul>.

schools within these states, problems have developed related to student gender and restroom usage. In the case of the Minnesota schools, the issue has also migrated into the athletics department, bringing forth discussions toward eliminating gender distinctions among sports programs.<sup>176</sup>

The confusion of gender is a subversion of one of humanity's most basic categories.<sup>177</sup> With gender currently considered a "plastic social construct,"<sup>178</sup> children and teens will be encouraged to consider what identity they will present to the world and as they mature, and to consider the extent to which they will go to achieve that identity.

Even for those who do not question their gender in any way, the issue of gender identity, or one's internal sense of being male or female,<sup>179</sup> can be a confusing issue for teens and children to navigate. This issue is especially present when the idea of alternative expressions of gender is pervasive. Even within the seemingly safe zone of children's literature, gender issues are presented.<sup>180</sup> Authors of children's and teen's literature are publishing texts addressing young people who do not feel as though they fit into the traditional ideas associated with binary gender.<sup>181</sup> For children who have not considered

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<sup>176</sup>Stella Morabito, "Minnesota Plans to Eliminate Gender Distinctions for High School Sports," *The Federalist*, December 1, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://thefederalist.com/2014/12/01/minnesota-plans-to-eliminate-gender-distinctions-for-high-school-sports/>.

<sup>177</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *Desire and Deceit: The Real Cost of the New Sexual Tolerance* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), 136.

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 212.

<sup>180</sup>Meghan Cox Gurdon, "Heather Has Two Genders," *Wall Street Journal*, September 14, 2014, sec. Opinion.

<sup>181</sup>Many children's books address gender issues. Among current popular choices are Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, *I Am Jazz* (New York: Dial, 2014); Michael Hall, *Red: A Crayon's Story* (New York: Greenwillow, 2015); Amy Fabrikant, *When Kayla Was Kyle* (Lakewood, CA: Avid Readers, 2013); Sarah Hoffman, *Jacob's New Dress* (Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 2014); and Jennifer Carr, *Be Who You Are* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010). Other texts, such as Susan Kuklin, *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2014), and Arin Andrews, *Some*

any possibility outside of their birth gender continued exposure to such ideas may result in confusion. For those who have long been thinking about alternative gender, exposure to such a variety of voices on the matter may not help to elucidate the issue with which they struggle. Clarity on the issue of gender is critical to the growing child and maturing teen.

While many young people have a “firm sense of their maleness or femaleness prior to adolescence” it is during the adolescent years that clear identification emerges.<sup>182</sup> Gender identification includes an understanding of themselves as male or female, and the roles, values, duties, and responsibilities of being a man or a woman.<sup>183</sup> Thus, it is typical during the adolescent years for teens who perceive themselves to be completely “normal” to become confused by all the discussion among friends and media regarding gender identity.

In America, gender has become another marker by which young people and adults uniquely distinguish themselves on the public stage. Social media giant Facebook, recognizing the desire among young people to uniquely identify themselves to the world, has added gender options from which users may choose as they personalize their online profiles. Among these more than 50 options are transgender, cisgender, gender fluid, and intersex.<sup>184</sup> In addition to choosing from a variety of gender choices, Facebook also allows users to choose the pronoun by which they would prefer to be identified—he or

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*Assembly Required* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), are aimed at addressing non-traditional ideas of gender among teenagers.

<sup>182</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 53.

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup>Brandon Griggs, “Facebook Goes beyond ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ with New Gender Options,” *CNN*, February 13, 2014, accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/13/tech/social-media/facebook-gender-custom/>.

his, she or her, or they or their.<sup>185</sup>

Many parents struggle with knowing how to handle a child who is considering a classification beyond the traditional binary gender. Authors have addressed this parental struggle with a barrage of texts dedicated solely to this particular issue.<sup>186</sup> Some authors address the issue as one of many within the realm of sexuality-related issues.<sup>187</sup> Secular experts offer a variety of recommendations for parents. Among these recommendations, parents are encouraged to listen to their children, remaining involved in their lives whether or not they approve of the child's choices,<sup>188</sup> and to allow children to "express themselves any way they see fit."<sup>189</sup> These suggestions may allow children to feel supported by parents. However they are unlikely to offer children and teens guidance as they attempt to reason through their own value system, the value system of the family, and the alternative options presented by the culture at large. Some of these children and teens may come through the struggle certain that their sexual identity is consistent with their physical gender. Others may remain uncertain for years to come, and may enter into a struggle with sexual orientation as a result.

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>The following texts address gender issues in children and teens: Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper, *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (San Francisco: Cleis, 2008); Diane Ehrensaft, *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children* (New York: Experiment, 2011); Rachel Pepper, *Transitions of the Heart: Stories of Love, Struggle, and Acceptance by Mothers of Transgender and Gender Variant Children* (Berkeley, CA: Cleis, 2012); Kuklin, *Beyond Magenta*; Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>187</sup>The following texts address to varying degrees the issue of gender identity in conjunction with other issues related to sexuality: Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 212-15; Logan Levkoff, *Third Base Ain't What It Used to Be: What Your Kids Are Learning about Sex Today-and How to Teach Them to Be Sexually Healthy Adults* (New York: New American Library, 2007), 82-102; John T. Chirban, *How to Talk with Your Kids about Sex* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 32-36; Laura Berman, *Talking to Your Kids about Sex: Turning "the Talk" into Conversation for Life* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2009), 20-21.

<sup>188</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 216.

<sup>189</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 96.

## Homosexuality and Gay Marriage

Various court battles have brought forth the issue of gay marriage to the public in the past several years. Gay marriage was first addressed on a national scale in 2003 in the state of Massachusetts when the practice became legal for the first time within the United States.<sup>190</sup> The next ten years showed a swift progression toward nationwide acceptance of gay marriage, with seventeen states and the District of Columbia legalizing gay marriage by the year 2013.<sup>191</sup>

Even among the most culturally and religiously conservative in the country, gay marriage is becoming accepted.<sup>192</sup> By the estimation of some experts, this era may be defined as a “marriage spring.”<sup>193</sup> Among those who are most accepting of gay marriage are Millennials<sup>194</sup> who have, in some areas of the country, an acceptance rate of gay marriage nearly 30 percent higher than that of their older counterparts.<sup>195</sup>

According to one legal mind, “Gay marriage in all 50 states, as a matter of constitutional right, is coming.”<sup>196</sup> Yet some parents have yet to breach the subject of homosexuality with their children. These parents are already a step behind in addressing the issue of gay marriage. No doubt they find themselves in a struggle with various media

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<sup>190</sup>C. J. Marshall and J. Greaney, “Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health” (Massachusetts Supreme Court, 2003).

<sup>191</sup>Robert P. Jones, “The South’s Stunning Embrace of Gay Marriage,” *The Atlantic*, March 3, 2014.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup>Erik Eckholm, “Wave of Appeals Expected to Turn the Tide on Same-Sex Marriage Bans,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 2014, sec. US News Analysis.

<sup>194</sup>Jones, “The South’s Stunning Embrace”; Emma Green, “Lots of People Who Support Gay Marriage Think Gay Sex Is Immoral,” *The Atlantic*, March 3, 2014.

<sup>195</sup>Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, *A Shifting Landscape: A Decade of Change in American Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and LGBT Issues* (Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, February 26, 2014), 13.

<sup>196</sup>Nathan Goetting, “Gay Marriage Is a Fundamental Right,” *National Lawyers Guild Review* 70, no. 3 (2013): 137.



venues. Popular television shows such as *Modern Family* from the mid-2000s or *Will and Grace* from the 1990s present homosexuality and gay marriage in a fun and endearing way,<sup>197</sup> guiding adults and children alike to accept such relationships on a moral level. Headlines of national news programs, newspapers, and magazines are often awash with homosexual and gay marriage issues.<sup>198</sup> These and other similar media productions offer a display of the entertainment industry’s “homosexual agenda.”<sup>199</sup> This agenda aims to “normalize homosexuality by portraying it as simply an alternative, though wrongly maltreated, lifestyle.”<sup>200</sup> The concept of sexual orientation is now “firmly rooted in the national consciousness.”<sup>201</sup> As a result it is nearly impossible to shield children from constant exposure to the issue of homosexuality and by default the issue of gay marriage. For this reason Christian parents must be on the offensive, becoming aware of the cultural changes and providing necessary education to their young.

Homosexuality and gay marriage are controversial cultural issues. For Christian parents, however, the pressing nature of these issues far exceeds their level of cultural controversy—as both homosexual lifestyle and gay marriage stand in direct opposition to biblical teaching. Children who remain uneducated regarding God’s design of humanity and marriage are themselves positioned to fall into cultural and personal acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage. They are endangered by a septic morality, an ever-evolving sexual ethic which continues in an anti-biblical bent.

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<sup>197</sup>Katie Rogers, “With Looking, RuPaul and *Modern Family*, Is LGBT Life Now Mainstream?” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2014, US ed., sec. Culture.

<sup>198</sup>Holland, “Christian Parenting and Homosexuality,” 219.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*, 224; Green, “Lots of People.” According to Green, “gayness has become more normal.” Green cites the abundance of gay television and movie characters as one reason for this new normalcy.

<sup>201</sup>Mohler, *Desire and Deceit*, 63.

## **Evolving Sexual Ethics**

Sexual ethics have long been evolving, but never so radically than in recent years. For in one generation there has been “a total revolution in the way most people think of sex, and this in turn is creating a demand for monumental revisions affecting every social institution at almost every level.”<sup>202</sup> When compared with the more sexually quiet time of previous eras, the “dramatic cultural transformation”<sup>203</sup> within America is evident. Various types of pornography are instantly available, same-sex relationships have been normalized, the limitation of sex within marriage is now considered abnormal, and sexual identity has never been more confused.<sup>204</sup> It is safe to say that current culture is a sexualized culture.

### **Sexualized Culture**

William Struthers accurately describes the present American culture as one which has been captured by sexualization.<sup>205</sup> This reality is evident in the media and television, in video and computer games, online virtual communities, children’s toys, music, and contemporary commercial culture in general.<sup>206</sup> Eroticism has been woven into “the very heart of the culture.”<sup>207</sup> Sexual imagery surrounds consumers via product labeling and advertisements at the supermarket, the shopping mall, the gym, and along the highways in the form of billboards.

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<sup>202</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 30.

<sup>203</sup>Jones, “The South’s Stunning Embrace.”

<sup>204</sup>Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 30.

<sup>205</sup>William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy. How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 11.

<sup>206</sup>Diane E. Levin and Jean Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualization of Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (New York: Ballantine, 2008), 4-6, 30-50.

<sup>207</sup>Mohler, *Desire and Deceit*, 27.

Some parents may consider whether or not this sexualized culture could have reach within their homes. The answer is yes. “Children growing up today are bombarded from a very early age with graphic messages about sex and sexiness in the media and popular culture.”<sup>208</sup> These messages can both confuse and frighten children.<sup>209</sup> Even parents who make every attempt to protect their children from such messages cannot provide complete shielding 100 percent of the time. This reality has created a need for adults to take extra measures to ensure children are properly educated about sex and sexuality.

**Early public sex education.** In light of the sexualization of the culture, many parents and educators thought it a good idea to provide children formal sex education in the public school system. A document drafted by family scholars and family life educators in 1990 identified “earlier and more effective sex education” as one need that should be addressed through family life education.<sup>210</sup> This document entitled *2001: Preparing Families for the Future* was prophetic in its title. As the twentieth century ended, the onslaught of sexualization ramped up. Key family life educators recognized the cultural shift. These educators sought to prepare parents and children for life in the twenty-first century, an admirable aim. As a result, some parents no longer provide sex education in the home, permitting instead for their children to receive sex education from instructors who may not share the value system of the family.

Family life education professionals are still calling for stronger sex education in schools. Levin and Kilbourne state, “Starting in elementary school, our children should be receiving honest, accurate, age-appropriate sex education that includes skills needed

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<sup>208</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 4.

<sup>209</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>210</sup>Margaret E. Arcus, “Family Life Education: Toward the 21st Century,” *Family Relations* 41, no. 4 (1992): 392.

for successful relationships, not just the mechanics of sex.”<sup>211</sup> The question of age-appropriateness cannot possibly be determined on a child-to-child basis, but is more likely to be decided upon by a curriculum developer, an expert other than the parent, and other than the school teacher. The worldview of the curriculum developer as well as that of the teacher, then, will impact the content and quality of sex education for school-aged children.

Levin and Kilbourne also call for parenting skills and basic early childhood development to be taught in the school system “so that young people will become parents better equipped to deal with their children’s needs and to confront the exploitative culture.”<sup>212</sup> To their credit, they recognize the need for children to be taught about the exploitative culture in which they live. However, the parenting skills taught and the manner in which child development issues are presented may conflict greatly with the worldview of the families these children represent. Regardless, early sex education in public school systems is not going away. It is becoming an expected portion of the curriculum at almost every level of childhood education. What is yet to be determined is how Christian parents will respond to this reality.

**Pornography.** Another pertinent issue with which Christian parents must contend is that of pornography—which represents, according to Albert Mohler, “one of the most insidious attacks upon the sanctity of marriage and the goodness of the one-flesh relationship.”<sup>213</sup> The influential pornography industry has been successful at desensitizing even dedicated Christian parents to the dangers it presents. Struthers writes,

It’s hard to be a Christian in the United States and not be sensitive to the pervasive influence of pornography and the warped views of sexuality that saturate our

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<sup>211</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 182-83.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>213</sup>Mohler, *Desire and Deceit*, 32.

culture. Pornography and the hypersexuality found in the media are almost impossible to avoid.<sup>214</sup>

Even within the home, families are susceptible to exposure through internet usage and media consumption. Children, especially, are in constant danger of exposure to sexual and pornographic imagery as they spend “increasing amounts of time in front of a screen, both at home and when they go out into the world.”<sup>215</sup> Many of these children have unlimited access to a variety of technological instruments which place them at risk. Material presented to children through various forms of media involves them “in an agenda not of their own making. Someone else (the creator of what is on the screen) is in control of what children see, what they think about, and even what they learn.”<sup>216</sup> What children encounter through this media exposure could be explicit and damaging.<sup>217</sup> Apart from parental supervision and controls, children could easily and repeatedly be exposed to pornographic images from toddlerhood. Repeated viewing of explicit sexual messages has proven over time to develop adult-like behaviors in children and teens. These behaviors are often centered on sexual activities.

**Sexual activity.** The sexualized culture is bringing about change in socially acceptable behaviors and attitudes of children and adults alike. No longer are children able to be free and innocent through the childhood years. Now, children desire to rush into adolescence as early as eight years old due to their exposure to “teen web sites, social media, reality TV, explicit movies, and unlimited time viewing data that beckon them

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<sup>214</sup>Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 11.

<sup>215</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 65.

<sup>216</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup>Tim Elmore, *Artificial Maturity: Helping Kids Meet the Challenge of Becoming Authentic Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012), 10. Elmore addresses the amount of information accessible to children, acknowledging the effects such information can have on children who are exposed to too much too soon. Children often encounter such information apart from the presence of a teacher or parent.

into the teen mentality.”<sup>218</sup> To make matters more difficult, children are now often viewed by society as miniature adults. Their behaviors are matching the societal expectation. Media professionals and marketers use the term “age compression” to describe “how children at ever younger ages are doing what older children used to do.”<sup>219</sup>

It is not surprising that early sexual behavior and experimentation among children and teens is being met with some level of social acceptance.<sup>220</sup> A 1999 study showed evidence of an earlier, rather than later, transition to adult-like sexuality was becoming normative among those studied, with adult sexual behavior being deemed acceptable for certain mid-to-late adolescents.<sup>221</sup> Among the predictors of early sexual activity for this group were age, opportunity, and sexually permissive attitudes.

It is a natural progression, in a hyper-sexualized culture, for early sexual activity to become more socially acceptable over time. From a business standpoint, many industries gain profit from such a change. One such industry is the sex industry itself. The “estimated financial size of the worldwide sex industry is around \$57 billion, with \$12 billion (just over 20 percent) coming from the United States.”<sup>222</sup> This industry does not limit itself to discreet movie viewing rooms and back alleys. Evidence of this industry is present in nearly every sales-driven business. Industries responsible for the sale of automobiles, clothing, soda, and fast food have all taken to using sexualized, and in some cases pornographic, images to peddle their products.

Few households remain unexposed to the reality of pornography. Many Christian parents no longer take notice or offense at the provocative nature of the images

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<sup>218</sup>Elmore, *Artificial Maturity*, 6.

<sup>219</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon* 69.

<sup>220</sup>Les B. Whitbeck et al., “Early Adolescent Sexual Activity: A Developmental Study,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61, no. 4 (1999): 944.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup>Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, 20.

to which they and their children are continually exposed. In this way, the sex industry has succeeded. It is no longer required for sexualized images to remain hidden and repeated viewing of such imagery is no longer deemed taboo. It is now publically visible in every American town, and in most American homes.

How do Christian parents deal with the current American cultural trends such as cohabitation and divorce, gender confusion, homosexuality, and gay marriage? How should parents address the evolving sexual ethics with which they and their children must daily contend? The sexualized culture in which Christian families now live presents a radically different environment from that of years past. New threats have been introduced to Christian families, and these threats have been permitted to enter into Christian homes. Parents must determine to tackle the intimidating issues surrounding marriage and sexuality with their children head-on. Many parents seek out resources to aid them in this endeavor. The following section addresses a sample of resources presently available to parents, and speak to the authors' address of pertinent content areas.

### **Parental Resources and Recommended Teaching Practices**

Online and brick and mortar book stores are teeming with help books for parents. The titles seem endless and their contents range from sensible and enlightening to wildly ridiculous. Christian parents seeking help in teaching their children will not lack for potential resources and may become overwhelmed by the number available. Parents choosing to access these resources may seek affirmation and guidance to questions such as, who is responsible to educate my child about marriage and sexuality? When should this education begin? What range of topics should be included in this education? These are among the most pertinent questions for many parents.

A survey of twelve widely distributed parental help texts from the current market follows. The authors of these texts represent a variety of worldviews ranging between secular and Christian. This survey reveals the broad range among the worldviews

and the inconsistency in the expert answers parents are being offered. The following texts are included in the survey:

1. Berman, Laura. *Talking to Your Kids about Sex: Turning “the Talk” into Conversation for Life*. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2009. Author Laura Berman “is a world renowned sex and relationship educator and therapist; popular TV, radio and Internet host; *New York Times* best-selling author; and assistant clinical professor of ob-gyn and psychiatry at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago.”<sup>223</sup> *Talking to Your Kids about Sex* offers families a “resourceful, reassuring, and comprehensive” resource built from Berman’s 20 plus years of “explaining and promoting sexual knowledge.”<sup>224</sup>
2. Burns, Jim. *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality: A Biblical Approach to Prepare Them for Life*. Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2008. Author Jim Burns, Ph.D. “is President of HomeWord and Executive Director of the HomeWord Center for Youth and Family at Azusa Pacific University. Jim speaks to thousands of people around the world each year. He has over 1.5 million resources in print in over 25 languages.” *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality* “is part of a larger curriculum called *Pure Foundations* which urges parents to teach their children to see their sexuality, not just as a physical act, but rather as a weaving together of our spiritual, physical, emotional, and character complexities.”<sup>225</sup>
3. Chirban, John T. *How to Talk with Your Kids about Sex*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012. Author John Chirban “earned his first doctorate in interdisciplinary studies in medicine, psychology, and religion at Harvard University and earned his second doctorate from the University Professors Program at Boston University in oral history and clinical psychology.”<sup>226</sup> “*How to Talk with Your Kids about Sex* prepares parents for healthy and ongoing conversation that will equip their kids to own their own sexuality and to understand the larger issues of relationships, love, commitment, and intimacy.”<sup>227</sup>
4. Eyre, Linda, and Richard Eyre. *How to Talk to Your Child about Sex*. New York: Golden, 1998. Authors Linda and Richard Eyre Richard and Linda Eyre “are among

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<sup>223</sup>Laura Berman, “Dr. Laura Berman,” accessed January 22, 2015, <http://laurabermanphd.com/>.

<sup>224</sup>Barnes & Noble, “Meet the Author: Laura Berman,” accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/talking-to-your-kids-about-sex-laura-berman/1117169276?ean=9780756657383>.

<sup>225</sup>David Mundt, “Christian Review of Books: *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality: A Biblical Approach to Prepare Them for Life*,” accessed January 22, 2015, [http://www.christianreviewofbooks.com/teaching\\_your\\_children\\_healthy\\_sexuality\\_by\\_tim\\_burns.htm](http://www.christianreviewofbooks.com/teaching_your_children_healthy_sexuality_by_tim_burns.htm).

<sup>226</sup>Psychology Today, “John T. Chirban, Ph.D., Th.D.,” accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/john-t-chirban-phd-thd>.

<sup>227</sup>John T. Chirban, “Publications,” accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.drchirban.com/publications.html>.



the most popular speakers in the world on parenting and families.”<sup>228</sup> “They are authors of numerous work/family balance and parenting books” and have “appeared on many national network shows including *Oprah*, *The Today Show*, *Prime Time Live*, *60 Minutes*, *Good Morning America* and once did regular segments on the CBS *Early Show*. Their parenting website [www.valuesparenting.com](http://www.valuesparenting.com) provides ideas, guidance and creative programs for families throughout the world.”<sup>229</sup> *How to Talk to Your Child about Sex* is one of twenty-five books the Eyres currently have in print.<sup>230</sup> This text “provides thoughtful, clear, specific guidance on when and, most important, *how* to help children begin to understand sex, love, and commitment from the most positive viewpoint possible.”<sup>231</sup>

5. Haffner, Debra W. *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent’s Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens—From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York: New Market, 2001. Author Debra Haffner is co-founder and acting President and CEO of the Religious Institute, a multi-faith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society.”<sup>232</sup> Haffner also formerly served as the CEO of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.”<sup>233</sup> She holds “a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, a Master of Public Health degree from the Yale University School of Medicine and an undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University.”<sup>234</sup> Haffner has written multiple books on the topics of parent and child sexuality education. *Beyond the Big Talk* was deemed by *Library Journal* to be “an excellent guide covering children’s and teen’s sexuality issues.”<sup>235</sup>
6. Jones, Stanton L., and Brenna B. Jones, *How & When to Tell Your Kids about Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child’s Sexual Character*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993. Stanton Jones is Provost and Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College. He “completed a B.S. in Psychology at Texas A & M University, an M.A. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Arizona State University, and an internship at the University of Mississippi Medical Center and Veterans Administration Medical

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<sup>228</sup>Linda Eyre and Richard Eyre, “TheEyres.com,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://theeyres.com/>.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid.

<sup>231</sup>Barnes & Noble, “Overview: *How to Talk to Your Child about Sex*,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-sex-linda-eyre/1100353030?ean=9781582380575>.

<sup>232</sup>Religious Institute, “The Rev. Debra W. Haffner,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.religiousinstitute.org/the-rev-debra-w-haffner/>.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid.

<sup>235</sup>Barnes & Noble, “From the Publisher: *Beyond the Big Talk: A Parent’s Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens*,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/beyond-the-big-talk-debra-w-haffner/1100378964?ean=9781557048110>.

Center in Jackson, Mississippi.”<sup>236</sup> He is a “nationally recognized Christian expert on sexuality”<sup>237</sup> and co-authored this book with his wife, Brenna Jones. *How & When* will help parents “establish a biblical view of sexuality” for their children, and to learn how and when to talk with them “about sexual curiosity, physical changes of puberty, dating, chastity, and more.”<sup>238</sup>

7. Ketterman, Grace H. *Teaching Your Child about Sex: An Essential Guide for Parents*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 2007. Author Grace Ketterman “is a practicing child psychiatrist, a frequent magazine contributor, and a popular lecturer on child development. She is the author of many books and lives in Leawood, Kansas.”<sup>239</sup> For more than twenty-five years she “has been helping parents give the best and most accurate information and guide their children in sexual responsibility.”<sup>240</sup> *Teaching Your Child about Sex* provides parents “the perfect words for explaining the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of sex, in age-specific increments from babyhood through adolescence.”<sup>241</sup>
8. Levin, Diane, and Jean Kilbourne. *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualization of Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids*. New York: Ballantine 2008. Author Diane Levin is “a professor of education at Wheelock College in Boston, where she has been involved in training early childhood professionals for more than twenty-five years.”<sup>242</sup> She is an author of multiple books and “helps professionals and parents deal with the effects of violence, media, and commercial culture on children.”<sup>243</sup> Co-author Jean Kilbourne is internationally recognized for her work in the advertising industry, especially her specialized emphasis on the “image of women in advertising.”<sup>244</sup> She “is internationally recognized as an expert

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<sup>236</sup>Wheaton College, “Dr. Stanton L. Jones,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://wheaton.edu/About-Wheaton/Leadership/Cabinet/Stanton-L-Jones>.

<sup>237</sup>Christianbook.com, “Author Bio: Stan Jones, Ph.D.,” accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.christianbook.com/lifelong-approach-shaping-sexual-character-revised/stan-jones/9781600060175/pd/060170?event=ESRCG>.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

<sup>239</sup>Amazon, “From the Back Cover: *Teaching Your Child about Sex: An Essential Guide for Parents*,” accessed January 27, 2014, [http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Your-Child-about-Sex-ebook/dp/B00B858AYE/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1422371608&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Your-Child-about-Sex-ebook/dp/B00B858AYE/ref=sr_1_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1422371608&sr=1-1).

<sup>240</sup>LifeWay, “Description: *Teaching Your Child about Sex*,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/teaching-your-child-about-sex-P005581809>.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid.

<sup>242</sup>Diane E. Levin, “Authors: *So Sexy So Soon*,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://dianeelevin.com/sosexysosoon/authors.html>.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid.

on addictions, gender issues, and the media.”<sup>245</sup> Their text, *So Sexy So Soon* “provides parents with the information, skills, and confidence they need to discuss sensitive topics openly and effectively-so their kids can just be kids.”<sup>246</sup>

9. Levkoff, Logan. *Third Base Ain't What It Used to Be: What Your Kids Are Learning about Sex Today-and How to Teach Them to Be Sexually Healthy Adults*. New York: New American Library, 2007. Author Logan Levkoff holds “a Ph.D. in Human Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Life Education from New York University as well as an M.S. in Human Sexuality Education and a B.A. in English from the University of Pennsylvania.”<sup>247</sup> She has dedicated her life’s work to “perpetuating healthy and positive messages about sexuality.”<sup>248</sup> Her book *Third Base* “empowers and encourages parents to start being honest with their children about sexuality,” stressing “that if parents don’t supply children with the information they need, they will acquire it from their peers, the media, or other potentially misinformed, misleading, or biased sources.”<sup>249</sup>
10. Maxwell, Sharon. *The Talk: A Breakthrough Guide to Raising Healthy Kids in an Oversexualized, Online, In Your Face World*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Author Sharon Maxwell is “a clinical psychologist in private practice, author, speaker, and consultant.”<sup>250</sup> She has designed community programs, curriculum, and workshops for parents, educators, and teens which address child development, sexual behavior, and values.<sup>251</sup> *The Talk* “demonstrates how dramatically the world of pre-teen and teen sexual exploration has changed” and “helps parents think through the message they want to give to their kids about sexual behavior and how that message must evolve, as their kids get older.”<sup>252</sup>
11. Warren, Andrea, and Jay Wiedenkeller. *Everybody’s Doing It: How to Survive Your Teenagers’ Sex Life (and Help Them Survive it, Too)*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Author Andrea Warren holds master’s degrees in British literature and magazine journalism from the University of Nebraska and the University of Kansas.<sup>253</sup> Her

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<sup>245</sup>Jean Kilbourne, “Full Bio,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.jeankilbourne.com/bio/>.

<sup>246</sup>Barnes & Noble, “Overview: *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualization of Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids*,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/so-sexy-so-soon-diane-e-levin/1100293455?ean=9780345505071>.

<sup>247</sup>Logan Levkoff, “About,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.loganlevkoff.com/>.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid.

<sup>250</sup>Sharon Maxwell, “Dr. Sharon Maxwell,” accessed January 27, 2015, <http://drsharonmaxwell.com/index.html>.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid.

<sup>253</sup>Andrea Warren, “About,” accessed January 27, 2015, [http://andreawarren.com/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=2](http://andreawarren.com/?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=2).

writing largely centers on historical, non-fiction stories about young people.<sup>254</sup> Co-author Jay Wiedenkiller held a master's degree in counseling psychology from Avila University. He was "founding director of the Child Development Center at St. Joseph Health Center" and was "a former president of the Mid-America Association for the Education of Young Children."<sup>255</sup> He spent more than twenty years "working at Responsive Centers for Psychology & Learning in Overland Park, Kansas."<sup>256</sup> Wiedenkiller died in 2005.<sup>257</sup> Their book *Everybody's Doing It* argues that "parents must accept responsibility" for open and honest communication with their children.<sup>258</sup>

12. Weill, Sabrina. *The Real Truth about Teens and Sex*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Author Sabrina Weill holds a BA in creative writing from UC Santa Cruz. She is "founder and editorial director of the Santa Monica-based content shop Weill Media."<sup>259</sup> Weill previously served as "founding editor-in-chief of Warner Bros.' MomLogic.com," "editor-in-chief of Seventeen magazine," "founding executive editor of CosmoGIRL! magazine," "senior editor at Redbook," and "editor-in-chief of Scholastic's teen health magazine Choices."<sup>260</sup> *The Real Truth* reveals what she, as a magazine editor, has been told by teens over the years, and "offers parents and other concerned adults insights into how to communicate with young people so they'll listen, open up, and think before they act."<sup>261</sup>

One pressing question with which parents are faced is, "Who is responsible to educate my child about marriage and sexuality?" This question is not answered by parental help texts as clearly as one might imagine. Rather, authors propose differing levels of parental responsibility. Table 1 demonstrates the range of answers found among the surveyed texts.

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<sup>254</sup>Warren, "About."

<sup>255</sup>Lawrence Journal-World, "Obituaries: Jay Wiedenkiller, 1948-2005, Kansas City MO," July 12, 2005, accessed January 27, 2015, [http://www2.ljworld.com/obituaries/2005/jul/12/jay\\_wiedenkiller/](http://www2.ljworld.com/obituaries/2005/jul/12/jay_wiedenkiller/).

<sup>256</sup>Ibid.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid.

<sup>258</sup>Amazon, "Editorial Reviews: *Everybody's Doing It: How to Survive Your Teenagers' Sex Life (and Help Them Survive It, Too)*," accessed January 27, 2015, [http://www.amazon.com/Everybody-s-Doing-Survive-Your-Teenagers/dp/0140171517/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1422377122&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Everybody-s-Doing-Survive-Your-Teenagers/dp/0140171517/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1422377122&sr=1-1).

<sup>259</sup>Sabrina Weill, "About," accessed January 27, 2015, <http://www.weillmedia.com/about-us/sabrina-weill/>.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

<sup>261</sup>Amazon, "Description: *The Real Truth about Teens and Sex*," accessed January 27, 2015, [http://www.amazon.com/Real-Truth-About-Teens-Sex/dp/039953198X/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1422379692&sr=1-2&keywords=Sabrina+Weill](http://www.amazon.com/Real-Truth-About-Teens-Sex/dp/039953198X/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1422379692&sr=1-2&keywords=Sabrina+Weill).

Table 1. Parental responsibility

Assumed but not stated	Stated outright	Shared between parents and others
Eyre and Eyre, 1998	Jones and Jones, 1993	Warren and Wiedenkiller, 1993
Haffner, 2001	Ketterman, 2007	Weill, 2005
Berman, 2009	Levkoff, 2007	Levin and Kilbourne, 2008
	Burns, 2008	Maxwell, 2008
		Chirban, 2012

Some texts presuppose parents already understand they are responsible for their child’s education, and offer structured methods for parent-child conversations for specific age categories or developmental levels. Other texts state outright the responsibility of the parent to educate their children. These texts describe how parents can build the foundation for discussion and propose suggestions to help parents in their discussions. Other authors offer the idea that parents are merely one part of the educational equation, allowing them to share responsibility with other entities. Still other texts offer parents a view into the world from their child’s perspective, providing them a glimpse of the types of messages with which children are consistently faced. These texts suggest broad categories which parents should address with their young.

The group of surveyed texts sends a varied message to parents regarding the responsibility they shoulder in educating their young. Unclear messages regarding parental responsibility will create confusion among parents, causing them to question if and how they should educate their young on the issues of marriage and sexuality. Resultant to the mixed message concerning the level of parental involvement in this vital education, some parents may avoid the burden of responsibility altogether, especially those parents who doubt their ability to successfully discuss such topics.

According to Levkoff, parents can become “wonderful sexuality educators” because they can teach from their own values and experiences and can engage with their

child on a daily basis.<sup>262</sup> Marriage and sexuality are values-based issues. Thus, “it is impossible to ever have value-neutral sex education.”<sup>263</sup> At its very worst, “value-neutral” sex education would take “the most meaningful of human actions and present it to the student stripped of its meaning.”<sup>264</sup> It is likely that Christian parents will find themselves troubled, unhappy, or even angry with what another educator has taught their child.

A second question and the most initially concerning one for which parents seek an answer is, “When do I begin teaching my child about marriage and sexuality?” There is no single answer agreed upon by experts. Table 2 presents the positions taken on the issue among the sample of texts.

Table 2. When to begin teaching marriage and sexuality

Birth/Infancy	Age Three	Elementary School	Adolescence
Jones and Jones, 1993	Eyre and Eyre, 1998	Levin and Kilbourne, 2008	Warren and Wiedenkiller, 1993
Ketterman, 2007	Burns, 2008		Weill, 2005
Levkoff, 2007			Haffner, 2001
Maxwell, 2008			
Chirban, 2012			

Though experts do not agree on a particular age for beginning education, one common sense answer simplifies the issue. Sex education begins at birth—everything you do and say matters.<sup>265</sup> Even the environment created by parents, claims sexuality educator Logan Levkoff, will send implicit messages to your children.<sup>266</sup> Jones and

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<sup>262</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 5.

<sup>263</sup>Stanton L. Jones and Brenna B. Jones, *How & When to Tell Your Kids about Sex: A Lifelong Approach to Shaping Your Child’s Sexual Character* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), 22.

<sup>264</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 9.

<sup>266</sup>*Ibid.*

Jones echo the notion of very early sexuality education, speaking of the cornerstone or foundational years being infancy through kindergarten.<sup>267</sup>

As reflected in table 2, some experts do not pinpoint birth as the beginning of their educational tasks. Linda and Richard Eyre, for example, have devised a plan in which parents begin talking to their children about sex and marriage at age three, with the “big talk” happening at age eight and follow-up talks and further discussions happening through age nineteen.<sup>268</sup> Burns echoes the structured beginning of sexuality education at age three<sup>269</sup> while authors Levin and Kilbourne broadly identify “elementary school” as the time when children should start receiving “honest, age-appropriate sex education.”<sup>270</sup> Haffner also speaks more generally about when parents should begin, focusing on the wide time frame of adolescence rather than identifying one specific age.<sup>271</sup> Sabrina Weill takes a similar approach by addressing how to communicate specifically with teens on these issues, though she does acknowledge that some children receive sexual education in schools beginning in the fifth grade.<sup>272</sup>

When comparing expert answers, the group of authors advocating education beginning at birth seems to provide the safest answer to the question of when parents should begin educating their children on issues of marriage and sexuality. Those parents who understand their role as educators begins the moment they become parents will experience greater success in teaching their children than those who begin in later stages.

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<sup>267</sup>Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 63.

<sup>268</sup>Linda Eyre and Richard Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child about Sex* (New York: Golden, 1998), 51-216.

<sup>269</sup>Jim Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality: A Biblical Approach to Prepare Them for Life* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2008), 72.

<sup>270</sup>Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 182.

<sup>271</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 45-69.

<sup>272</sup>Sabrina Weill, *The Real Truth about Teens & Sex* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 130.

These parents will have the luxury of instilling a Christian worldview into the child's ideas of physical growth and development from infancy forward.<sup>273</sup> Christian parents who begin teaching earlier rather than later have more time for the teaching process to become engrained in the family lifestyle, and will be afforded more time to practice the teaching.

Many parents, however, delay sex education to a point much later than that suggested by experts. Some parents, as students have reported, choose to avoid sex education altogether.<sup>274</sup> Parents must choose whether or not they will take an active role in providing this important education for their child, and if so, when they will begin. With these decisions made, parents may choose to consider a third question regarding what content should be included in their teaching.

A third question parents consider involves what content should be included in their teaching. Determination of content in this area is a complicated endeavor. Ideas on marriage and sexuality are shaped by one's faith, family background, culture, education, and experiences among other things.<sup>275</sup> Levkoff comments,

Even if we purchase every parenting book there is, sex is a subject all its own. For the most part, parenting books only skim the surface of sexuality because we all come to parenting (and quite frankly, sex) from different backgrounds with a range of values.<sup>276</sup>

The issue of content is essentially an issue of worldview. One's worldview is "colored by upbringing, class, ideology, and experience."<sup>277</sup> For this reason it is difficult for any

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<sup>273</sup>Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 80-81. Jones and Jones indicate direct sex education begins when parents begin teaching children the names of body parts. It is also at this time that parents can easily teach children about the God who created each body part.

<sup>274</sup>Weill, *The Real Truth*, 66.

<sup>275</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 6.

<sup>276</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 7.

<sup>277</sup>J. Mark Bertrand, *(Re)Thinking Worldview* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 21.



parent to choose and follow a set of guidelines prescribed by any one expert. It is imperative that parents carefully consider what message they would like to send to their child throughout this educational journey. Deciding on the overall intended message beforehand<sup>278</sup> will help parents feel less intimidated in the task and will provide the child with clarity on parental beliefs and expectations.<sup>279</sup>

One idea regarding content is both explicitly and inexplicitly stated in several of the surveyed texts. The content parents should teach will depend upon the age, needs, and maturity of the child.<sup>280</sup> Even Eyre and Eyre, who provide a content specific time table for discussions view their plan as *ideal* rather than concrete, and provide suggestions for adaptation.<sup>281</sup> Key for Eyre and Eyre is the “big talk” which is recommended for children eight years of age. This conversation serves as the epicenter of the parent’s communication with their child about sex.<sup>282</sup> Other authors offer similar structured recommendations, though the degree of specifics varies.<sup>283</sup> Table 3 illustrates the time table for discussion as suggested by Eyre and Eyre.

Some authors within the group of surveyed texts were less specific about what content should be taught at specific developmental levels. Instead they offer topical ideas

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<sup>278</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 28; Weill, *The Real Truth*, 79.

<sup>279</sup>Weill, *The Real Truth*, 79.

<sup>280</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 22, 206; Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 23-26; Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*, 20; Berman, *Talking to Your Kids*, 12; Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, 26; Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 100-101.

<sup>281</sup>Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*, 13.

<sup>282</sup>*Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>283</sup>Berman, *Talking to Your Kids*, 10-53, 62; Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, 72-82; Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 64-259; Grace H. Ketterman, *Teaching Your Child about Sex: An Essential Guide for Parents* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2007), 97-188; Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 45-218.

to address more generally. Table 4 provides an example of a broad and general content timeline for parent-child discussions.<sup>284</sup>

Table 3. Eyre and Eyre’s age specific content

<i>Age</i>	<i>Recommended Content</i>
3 to 8	Body appreciation
8	“Big talk”
8 to 13	Puberty, maturation, and other “sex-related” subjects
11 to 16	Behavior, dangers of adolescence
15 to 19	Personal standards

Table 4. Chirban’s age specific content

<i>Age</i>	<i>Recommended Content</i>
Birth to 8	Hygiene, touch, and sexuality
9 to 11	The “talk”
12 to 21	Sexual behavior

Many of the surveyed texts recommend teaching children about their own physical development as well as the mechanics of sex.<sup>285</sup> Various authors agree that parents should teach general appreciation for the body, though they may differ in their focus of ages.<sup>286</sup> Another point of agreement is that parents should determine what

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<sup>284</sup>In addition to Chirban, the following authors offer more broad suggestions of content for parent-child discussions. Levkoff, *Third Base*; Weill, *The Real Truth*; Andrea Warren and Jay Wiedenkeller, *Everybody’s Doing It: How to Survive Your Teenagers’ Sex Life (and Help Them Survive It, Too)* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

<sup>285</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 9-22; Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 77-88; Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 32-33, 35-36; Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*, 25-77; Ketterman, *Teaching Your Child*, 15-17, 74-78, 97-172; Berman, *Talking to Your Kids*, 7.

<sup>286</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 45-71; Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*, 25-216. While Haffner’s focus is sexuality education in adolescence, Eyre and Eyre suggest beginning much earlier, outlining age three as the beginning point in their suggested educational structure. This type of difference between authors is common among the group of surveyed texts, as each author offers his or her own recommendations.

messages they wish express to their children<sup>287</sup> and children should be taught to consider the messages they wish to send with their choice of clothing, make-up, and behavior.<sup>288</sup>

Several authors from the surveyed texts addressed abstinence education. Some hold that while sexual education is overall positive, abstinence-only education is not helpful<sup>289</sup> and may even be harmful.<sup>290</sup> Abstinence was encouraged by some authors,<sup>291</sup> only lightly addressed by another<sup>292</sup> and discouraged by another who maintains abstinence is less effective because it sounds like “a diet.”<sup>293</sup> Mixed messages are sent from authors and experts to parents who are seeking help in educating their children on the important issues of marriage and sexuality. The issues described display a sample of what parents must contend with when providing this critical education for their children. Still other content-related issues provide greater difficulty for apprehensive parents.

### **Authors’ Address of Key Cultural Issues**

For those parents who seek out help texts for teaching children about marriage and sexuality, other issues regarding content arise. It is important for parents to assess

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<sup>287</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 28; Weill, *The Real Truth*, 79; Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 22.

<sup>288</sup>Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*, 35.

<sup>289</sup>Levin maintains that abstinence-only education programs have not met her recommended criteria of including parenting skills, early childhood development, and relationship skills in addition to teachings on the mechanics of sex. Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*, 183. Berman states abstinence-only sex education, which offers no teaching on contraceptives, is less effective than abstinence-based sex education, which may teach about both abstinence and contraceptives. Berman, *Talking to Your Kids*, 148.

<sup>290</sup>Weill, *The Real Truth*, 130. Weill suggests that abstinence-only sex education may be harmful as it places focus on avoiding sexual experiences and does not generally teach about birth control and STD prevention, and condoms or other contraceptives are only explored in terms of failure rate.

<sup>291</sup>Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, 83-99; Ketterman, *Teaching Your Child*, 80-93; Weill, *The Real Truth*, 100-2, 184-85; Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 216-24.

<sup>292</sup>Chirban, *How to Talk with Your Kids*, 229.

<sup>293</sup>Sharon Maxwell, *The Talk: A Breakthrough Guide to Raising Healthy Kids in an Oversexualized, Online, In Your Face World* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 62-63.

the authors' teachings on key cultural issues which have been previously addressed. Statements within these texts on the issues of divorce, homosexuality and gay marriage, gender identity, and cohabitation provide glimpses into the worldview of the author—a worldview which may or may not be in line with that of the parent.

**Divorce.** Within the group of twelve surveyed texts, only two authors allot space to discuss issues surrounding divorce, such as the effects divorce has on attitudes toward future relationships and sexuality, and the teaching of marriage and sexuality.<sup>294</sup> Though the focus of these texts is to assist parents in teaching their children about sex and relationships, many of the surveyed authors have forgone the opportunity to address the issue of divorce and its numerous effects on current and future families. Christian parents who personally deal with the family ramifications of divorce will not, therefore, find some texts as helpful as others which have considered how divorce affects the teaching of marriage and sexuality within the family. However, divorce is not the only issue with which parents must contend. Parents may also struggle in discussing with their children the topics of homosexuality and gay marriage. Should Christian parents determine to seek out literary helps for this discussion, they will likely be confronted with experts who are likely not in line with biblical teaching on the matter.

**Homosexuality and gay marriage.** Homosexuality and gay marriage are no longer issues with which Americans are unfamiliar. Even the youngest of children are exposed to these issues through a variety of media venues. Christian parents find themselves in an intense struggle between what the culture now widely accepts and the teachings of their Christian faith. Among the group of surveyed texts, four authors address homosexuality in an accepting and affirming manner.<sup>295</sup> Two of the four authors

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<sup>294</sup>Chirban, *How to Talk with Your Kids*; Jones, 69-72; Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 37-38.

<sup>295</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 82-102; Warren and Wiedenkeller, *Everybody's Doing It*, 94-123;

offer explicit commentary on sexual orientation. The clear view expressed by these authors is that sexual orientation is not a choice.<sup>296</sup>

At the opposing end of the spectrum stand three authors who address homosexuality from a biblical perspective. These authors are not accepting of same sex orientation<sup>297</sup> and by default would be not be accepting of the practice of gay marriage. In the middle ground between the previous polar opposites lies one author who presents sexual orientation as a continuum, rejecting the notion that all individuals fall neatly into the heterosexual or homosexual category.<sup>298</sup> One author left the issue of homosexuality unaddressed as a show of respect to the varying worldviews of different religions.<sup>299</sup> Finally, three authors leave the issue of homosexuality entirely unaddressed.<sup>300</sup> Table 5 illustrates the authors’ difference in worldview regarding the issue of homosexuality.

Table 5. Authors’ views of homosexuality

<i>Affirming of Homosexuality</i>	<i>Sexuality exists on a continuum</i>	<i>Un-affirming of Homosexuality</i>	<i>Issue of choice unaddressed</i>
Warren and Wiedenkeller, 1993	Chirban, 2012	Jones and Jones, 1993	Eyre and Eyre, 1998
Haffner, 2001		Ketterman, 2007	Levin and Kilbourne, 2008
Weill, 2005		Burns, 2008	Maxwell, 2008
Levkoff, 2007			Berman, 2009

Weill, *The Real Truth*, 146-60; Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 181-88.

<sup>296</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 183; Levkoff, *Third Base*, 89,100.

<sup>297</sup>Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, 37-49; Ketterman, *Teaching Your Child*, 211-230; Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 75.

<sup>298</sup>Chirban, *How to Talk with Your Kids*, 224.

<sup>299</sup>Maxwell, *The Talk*, 64-66.

<sup>300</sup>Eyre and Eyre, *How to Talk to Your Child*; Levin and Kilbourne, *So Sexy So Soon*; Berman, Laura, *Talking to Your Kids*.

Christian parents who are not firmly grounded in biblical teaching could easily be swayed by many of the expert voices represented within the surveyed texts. Thus, Christian parents could fall into the trap of endorsing for their children anti-biblical practices and lifestyles that are socially and culturally accepted. Still other cultural issues present difficulties to parents who seek to educate their young on marriage and sexuality. The issue of gender identity is one such example.

**Gender confusion.** Gender identity is an issue that most authors within this sample of texts do not address. Those who do address it do so in a manner inconsistent with a biblical worldview. Haffner recommends parents need only listen to their children and remain involved in their lives, with no suggestion of how to lovingly redirect the child back to the accepted family value system.<sup>301</sup> Levkoff claimed there are “men and women whose biological gender does not match their gender identity,” and recommended allowing children to “express themselves any way they see fit.”<sup>302</sup> Berman lightly addressed gender confusion with remaining “judgment free” as the best tool for parents to help the child “comfortably navigate gender identity or sexual identity considerations.”<sup>303</sup>

Children and teens live in a society which questions and reconsiders established norms such as gender. As the trend of alternative gender gains in popularity, parents are encouraged to remain judgment free listeners and watchers. This is inconsistent with how God has directed Christian people to live (Gen 18:19; Deut 6:4-9; Eph 6:4; Col 2:8, 3:5-6; Heb 12:7-15), yet Christian parents are pressed to remain accepting in a society which is rapidly altering God’s established order. Christian parents who seek help in educating their children on gender identity issues will likely have difficulty locating a likeminded voice among the multitudes of popular help texts. As with educating their young on the

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<sup>301</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 184.

<sup>302</sup>Levkoff, *Third Base*, 96.

<sup>303</sup>Berman, *Talking to Your Kids*, 22.

issue of gender identity, the issue of cohabitation is also illuminated as a socially acceptable modern practice with which Christian parents will struggle.

**Cohabitation.** As compared to the previously discussed issues, the issue of cohabitation may appear to Christian parents quite tame. To live with someone prior to marriage, after all, has become a frequent practice. Even among late adolescents, cohabitation has become more common, especially among those who are college age.<sup>304</sup> Societal acceptance of a practice, however, does not determine parental permissiveness on the issue. Christian parents who wish to educate their children may seek help from leading experts—though they are unlikely to find a wide selection of expert comments.

Of the surveyed texts, only three authors addressed the issue of cohabitation. Haffner briefly addressed the issue, acknowledging that most cohabiting relationships last “two years or less” and encouraged parents to think through their own values on the issue.<sup>305</sup> Jones and Jones, along with Burns, cited biblical teachings on marriage and discouraged parental acceptance of the practice.<sup>306</sup> While cohabitation may be a non-issue to many experts, for Christian parents the issue is urgent. The practice of cohabitation will lead children away from the teachings of their Christian faith. Parents must clearly communicate their values to their children on this and previous issues. Many parents will seek help through easily obtainable popular books that address the topics of marriage and sexuality. The powerful messages parents receive from these texts are diverse and inconsistent, and may lead parents to accept modern practices which are not biblically supported.

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<sup>304</sup>Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk*, 207.

<sup>305</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup>Jones and Jones, *How & When*, 245-46; Burns, *Teaching Your Children Healthy Sexuality*, 139-40.

## **Summary**

Marriage and sexuality were established by God as evidenced in the creation account (Gen 1-3) and as supported throughout the biblical text. Likewise, the responsibility of parental instruction is clearly established in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and is supported by other Old and New Testament passages. From the biblical establishment of human life, marriage, and parenting come the theological basis of marriage, sexuality, and parental instruction.

However, cultural trends in recent years have extended various alternatives to marriage and sexuality which veer far from a biblical understanding of these issues. The common understanding of marriage is being redefined, as are the concepts of sexuality and acceptable sexual practices. Issues such as cohabitation, divorce, gender confusion, homosexuality, and gay marriage are pressing in on Christian families. The evolving sexual ethics have resulted in a sexualized culture, early public sex education, a booming pornography industry, and increased sexual activity among children and teens. In the midst of this environment, parents may experience confusion in where to turn for help in the task of educating their children about biblical marriage and sexuality. A plethora of parental help texts have emerged which encompass diverse worldviews, many of which are incompatible with the worldview held and appreciated by Christian families.

## **Profile of the Current Study**

The guiding premise for this study was that the current cultural environment provides a challenging environment in which Christian parents must raise their young. This study sought to describe, through analysis of parental perspectives, resources, and teaching practices, if and how parents are teaching their young about marriage and sexuality, and to what extent if any, these parents are influenced by the local church in their endeavors.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This chapter provides a description of the procedures and methods which were be used to complete the proposed qualitative research. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. Included in the following pages are the research questions which framed the study, design overview, population, sample, delimitations, limitations of generalization, and instrumentation.

#### **Research Question Synopsis**

The following research questions framed the proposed research.

1. What perspectives do Christian parents hold toward marriage and sexuality?
2. What resources, if any, are Christian parents utilizing to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
3. What teaching practices, if any, do Christian parents employ to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
4. To what extent, if any, does the local church influence Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality?

#### **Design Overview**

The proposed qualitative research took a phenomenological approach in order to identify the essence of the lived experience<sup>1</sup> of study participants. The study sought to

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 13.

“capture and describe” how participants perceive, describe, judge, and make sense of<sup>2</sup> their own influencers, attitudes, and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality. This approach permitted the researcher to enter into the perspective<sup>3</sup> of the study participants and to gain the “perceptions, perspectives and understandings”<sup>4</sup> of those within the specified population. Through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews of Christian parents, research data was gathered from 28 families associated with churches which attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. The use of a semi-structured, one-on-one interview protocol ensured each interview maintained the same line of inquiry, and afforded the researcher the ability to ask differing probing questions as the interviews unfolded. The interview protocol was designed under the supervision of the dissertation committee. The interview protocol was validated by an expert panel and field tested prior to the beginning of formal interviews. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded.

A stratified purposeful sampling technique was applied by identifying a population of 22 churches from the total number of 166<sup>5</sup> churches which attended CentriKid Camp at Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. Churches were selected based upon the greatest number of volunteer participants. From within the 22 churches, 28 families were selected for interviews. The families were selected from a pool of parents<sup>6</sup> who, during the summer of 2014, volunteered to participate in the study. In the event that the required number of interviews could not be conducted among the

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 104.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>4</sup>Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design* (Boston: Pearson, 2010), 141.

<sup>5</sup>See appendix 3 for a list of participating churches.

<sup>6</sup>Both married and single parents may be among the research participants. Except in cases of a single parent, the participation of both parents will be invited and preferred.

initial pool of parents selected, the research design allowed for the pool to widen including parents who volunteered for the study during the summer of 2014 but were not initially included in the final selection. If necessary, the research design also allowed for the pool to be further widened to include any parent who (1) is associated with a church which attended CentriKid Camp at Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014, (2) is a church member (3) is the parent or guardian of at least one child who is currently between kindergarten and sixth grade, and (4) agrees to participate in the study, whether or not the parent previously volunteered to participate in the study. In this case, new volunteers would have been recruited from among the 166 churches, beginning with the minimum initial 22 churches selected for the study and moving outward among the 166 total churches as needed. The stratified sample was grouped according to (1) current state of residence, (2) marital status, and (3) the parents' reported strength of association with their local church.

### **Population**

The population for the proposed study consisted of Christian parents associated with churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. CentriKid Camp is owned and operated by LifeWay Christian Resources of Nashville, Tennessee. Access to the population was granted by Jeremy Echols, team leader for LifeWay Kids and coordinator of CentriKid Camp.

Churches attending CentriKid Camp, by necessity, have an active ministry to children, and are historically known to vary in state of origin. Denominational variation has also been evident, as shown by attendance of churches other than those associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Tables 6 and 7 display the variation of churches in attendance at the Campbellsville University site of CentriKid Camp in the summer of 2014.

Table 6. Number of participating churches by state

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Churches</i>
Alabama	5
Illinois	6
Kentucky	88
Missouri	1
Mississippi	4
Tennessee	52
Ohio	10

Table 7. Number of participating churches by affiliation

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Number of Churches</i>
Baptist	153
Christian	3
Non-denominational	10

### Sample

A population of 22 churches was identified from the total number of 166 churches which attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. From these 22 churches, a sample of Christian parents representing 28 families was purposefully selected to participate in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. These parents were chosen from a pool of parents who, during the summer of 2014, volunteered to participate in the study, or from the wider population of Christian parents who are members of a church which participated in CentriKid Camp at Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014.

Each participant met the following qualifications: (1) be associated with a church which attended CentriKid Camp at Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014, (2) be a church member (3) be the parent or guardian of at least one child who is currently between kindergarten and sixth grade, and (4) agree to participate in the study. The sample was stratified according to (1) state of current residence, (2) marital status, and (3) the parents' reported strength of association with local church.

## **Delimitations**

The proposed study was framed by the following delimitations. The research sample was drawn from families associated with churches attending CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. The research sample was limited to parents who profess to be Christian persons, and have membership in a local church which attended CentriKid Camp. The research sample was limited to parents or guardians having at least one child who is currently between kindergarten and sixth grade.

## **Limitation of Generalizations**

1. The intent of qualitative research is “not to generalize findings to individuals, sites, or places outside of those under study.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, direct generalizations of research findings was limited to the specific individuals participating in the study and the churches with which those individuals are associated.
2. As the research was conducted with parents professing to be Christian, generalizations should not be extended to adults without children.
3. The research was conducted with individuals professing to be Christian, thus, generalizations should not be extended to adults who do not hold to the principle tenants of the Christian faith.
4. As the research was conducted with Christian parents who are affiliated with a local church, generalizations will not reach to Christian parents having no church affiliation.
5. The research was conducted with Christian parents within specific geographic regions. Generalizations will, therefore, be limited to Christian parents within those particular geographic regions.

## **Instrumentation**

Data was gathered through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with research participants. The interview protocol was designed based upon the stated research questions and the literature review. The design of the interview protocol was supervised by the dissertation committee.

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<sup>7</sup>Creswell, *Research Design*, 193.

The interview protocol was validated by a panel of experts consisting of individuals with expertise in the areas of marriage, sexuality, Christian parenting, local church ministry, and qualitative research. Four individuals were enlisted to participate in the expert panel. The list of expert validators is included in appendix 5. Feedback was received from these experts. A field test was then conducted with three interviews. Following the field test, the interview protocol was adjusted to improve question flow. A copy of the final interview protocol is included in appendix 2.

A Dissertation Study Participation Form was completed by each participant prior to formal research. The purposes of this form were to confirm the willingness of each interviewee to participate in the proposed study and to verify inclusion criteria for each participant. A copy of this form is included in appendix 1.

### **Procedures**

The proposed study was conducted in the following sequence: (1) obtain access to the churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during summer 2014,<sup>8</sup> (2) invite children's ministry group leaders from attending churches to participate in the proposed study and obtain personal contact information from each volunteer,<sup>9</sup> (3) create the interview protocol, (3) validate the interview protocol through a four to five member expert panel, (4) conduct a pilot study of three interviews and adjust interview protocol as necessary, (5) from the pool of volunteers, purposefully select a minimum of 10 churches and a sample of Christian parents representing 25 to 30 families, (6) contact selected volunteers and obtain a Dissertation Participation Form from each participant, (7) conduct, transcribe, and code

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<sup>8</sup>During summer 2014, I was granted a two-minute time slot per camp cycle at the CentriKid Camp church leader meeting to announce the prospective study and invite churches to participate. Church leaders who chose to volunteer for the study provided their personal contact information to the researcher for future use.

<sup>9</sup>After being invited to participate, 52 volunteers responded by providing their personal contact information. These volunteers represent 45 family units.

25 to 30 semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, (8) complete content analysis of data, and (9) evaluate findings and draw conclusions.

### **Population Identified**

Churches which attended CentriKid Camp at Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014 were identified by me by personally attending a portion of each camp cycle. Access to the population was granted by Jeremy Echols, team leader for LifeWay Kids and coordinator of CentriKid Camp. Additional assistance in identification of the attending churches was provided by Russell Watkins, Director of Summer Camps and Conferences at Campbellsville University.

### **Interview Protocol Created**

The interview protocol was created under the supervision of the dissertation committee. The interview protocol was designed to draw out information regarding the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and how these parental perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church.

### **Interview Protocol Validated**

The interview protocol was validated by an expert panel. Experts were enlisted who demonstrate expertise in the areas of marriage, sexuality, Christian parenting, and local church ministry. A list of expert validators is included in appendix 5. The interview protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

### **Pilot Study Conducted**

A pilot study was conducted with Christian parents representing three families who are members of Campbellsville Baptist Church of Campbellsville, Kentucky. Semi-

structured, one-on-one interviews lasting approximately one hour were conducted via Skype with each participant. The interviews were recorded using Athtek Skype Recorder.

### **Sample Selected**

From the total population of 166 churches, 22 churches were purposefully selected to be included in the study. Primarily these churches were chosen based upon the number of children's ministry leaders who volunteered to participate in the study. Churches having highest numbers of volunteers were given first consideration. Secondly churches were selected based upon their geographical location. Final selection of churches was representative of the variety of states in attendance during the summer of 2014. Interview participants were then chosen from the pool of volunteers from the selected 22 churches. These volunteers will represented 28 families, and may have consisted of both married and single parents. The selected participants were parents or guardians of at least one child who is between kindergarten and sixth grade. The sample of Christian parents was stratified by (1) state of residence, (2) marital status, and (3) the parents' reported strength of association with the local church.

### **Participants Contacted and Participation Forms Obtained**

Contact was established with each participant, a signed Dissertation Participation Form was obtained (see appendix 1), and interview appointments were scheduled.

### **Research Interviews Conducted and Data Prepared**

A one-on-one interview lasting approximately one hour was conducted with each participant via Skype and was recorded using Athtek Skype Recorder. As each interview progressed, developing interpretations were checked with the interview



participants themselves.<sup>10</sup> Each interview was transcribed, and coded during<sup>11</sup> and after transcription. During transcription, the method of In Vivo<sup>12</sup> coding was employed in order to ground the analysis in the perspective of the interviewee, and to attune the researcher to the interviewee's personal worldview.<sup>13</sup> After transcription, the method of Values Coding<sup>14</sup> was employed in order to best identify and describe the elements identified in the guiding research questions.

### **Data Analysis Completed**

A primarily descriptive approach was taken to complete content analysis of the transcribed and coded data. Through this approach, the content contained within the message pool could be described in archival fashion.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the data was approached from an interpretive standpoint in order to remain in a "constant state of discovery and revision."<sup>16</sup> Emerging themes within the data were identified and descriptive analysis of identified themes was provided.

### **Findings Evaluated and Conclusions Drawn**

Once data analysis was complete, the findings were evaluated and proper conclusions related to the research questions were drawn.

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<sup>10</sup>Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 36.

<sup>11</sup>D. Ezzy, *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 67-74; Saldana, *The Coding Manual*, 36.

<sup>12</sup>Saldana, *The Coding Manual*, 61. In Vivo coding grounds the research analysis from the perspective of the interviewee. This type of coding makes use of "direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases" (6).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 61-64.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 110-15. Values coding is the "application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or world-view" (110).

<sup>15</sup>Kimberley A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 53.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 6.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. This qualitative study employed semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect data from study participants. The analysis of findings is organized into five sections. The first section describes the compilation of data. The second section describes biographical and demographic data gathered from the Dissertation Participation Form. The third section provides a synopsis of the research questions. The fourth section details the findings of the research questions. The fifth and final section offers an evaluation of the design of the research study. The Dissertation Participation Form and interview protocol are included in an appendix.

#### **Compilation Protocol**

The data for this study was gathered through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with Christian parents representing 28 families associated with churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014. Prior to the interviews, each participant completed a Dissertation Participation Form (see appendix 1). Interviews were conducted based upon a protocol I developed under the supervision of the dissertation committee. The protocol was validated by an expert panel and approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. A pilot study was conducted prior to beginning formal research. The pilot

study consisted of phone interviews with three families, each lasting approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted via Skype and were recorded using Athtek Skype Recorder. Following the pilot study, the interview protocol was adjusted as necessary to improve question flow. Twenty-eight formal interviews were then conducted. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Content analysis was performed upon the compiled data.

### **Dissertation Participation Form Data**

A Dissertation Participation Form was completed by each interviewee who participated in the research study. The form yielded the following demographic and biographical data.

The 28 interviewees resided in four states: Kentucky (11), Mississippi (1), Ohio (1), and Tennessee (15). Twenty-two churches were represented in the study: Kentucky (10), Mississippi (1), Ohio (1), and Tennessee (10). Of the 22 churches represented, 21 were affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. One church was a non-Southern Baptist Convention church.

Table 8. Participant demographic data

State	Number of Participating Families	Number of Corresponding Churches
Kentucky	11	10
Mississippi	1	1
Ohio	1	1
Tennessee	15	10

### **Biographical Data**

The age of the interviewees ranged from 35 years to 51 years old. Each interviewee represented a two-parent, married household, comprised of one mother and one father. Among the 28 family units were a total of 73 children, with the number of children per family ranging from 1 child to 6 children. Ages of the children spanned

from 9 months to 27 years. Within each family was a minimum of 1 child who was currently between kindergarten and sixth grade.

The interviewees reported length at their current church membership is displayed in table 9.

Table 9. Length of current church membership

Years in Membership at Current Church	Number of Interviewees
Less than 1 year	0
1-3 years	1
4-5 years	7
6-10 years	8
More than 10 years	12

Interviewees reported the number of hours spent at church each week, and the activities in which they were involved during those hours as displayed in tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Weekly time spent at church

Number of Hours Spent at Church Each Week	Number of Interviewees
1-2 hours	1
3-5 hours	10
5 or more hours	17

Table 11. Detailed weekly church involvement

Activity	Number of Interviewees
Sunday School	21
Bible Study other than Sunday School	18
Worship	25
Committees	1
Various Children's Ministries	8
Women's Ministry	1

## **Synopsis of Research Questions**

The analysis of research data was formulated according to the following research questions:

1. What perspectives do Christian parents hold toward marriage and sexuality?
2. What resources, if any, are Christian parents utilizing to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
3. What teaching practices, if any, do Christian parents employ to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
4. To what extent, if any, does the local church influence Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality?

### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked “What perspectives do Christian parents hold toward marriage and sexuality?” The following three interview questions were asked of interviewees to identify these perspectives: (1a) How would you describe the general representation of marriage and sexuality in the mass media? (1b) Who do you say is responsible to educate your child about marriage and sexuality? (1c) Would you say that your own life experiences have influenced your present values towards marriage and sexuality? Additional probing and follow-up questions were asked to garner more information. The research findings are presented, followed by analysis of the findings.

In describing the representation of marriage and sexuality in the mass media (question 1a), 13 interviewees (46 percent) indicated the sexuality content within mass media is “oversaturated,” and 8 interviewees (29 percent) described it as “harmful” to families and/or children. Two interviewees (7 percent) identified marriage and sexuality as “separate concepts” within the mass media, noting that marriage is no longer required prior to sexual relations. Twelve interviewees (43 percent) described a visible lack of commitment toward marriage, sexuality, or gender within the mass media. Marriage was described as “optional,” “disposable,” “whatever you want it to be,” “disrespected,” and “non-necessary.” Sexuality was described as “optional,” “unbiblical,” “non-committed,” “unrealistic,” “a choice,” “anything goes,” “out of control,” and “your own personal

business.” One interviewee described the message of mass media in the following manner: “Media is telling our girls and our boys that if it doesn’t work out then it is a disposable marriage just like everything else, and it is not a commitment and it is not a covenant and it is not a lifetime journey, which is what the Bible tells us.”

Another interviewee discussed the idea of flexibility pushed by the media:

There is no need to commit to marriage, there is no need to commit to a sexual identity or what kind of gender you are going to choose to have a relationship with or what gender you need to maintain. If you were born a female maybe you will change to male. So I would say the media’s general representation of commitment in marriage is flexible. If you don’t like the person it is okay to get a divorce. If you were gay for a part of your lifetime and now you want to choose to be hetero or vice versa that is fine too. There is no moral perimeter at all.

The lack of moral perimeter was also identified in the mass media display of family structure and dynamics. Television families were described as “unhealthy” in their display of disrespect between mother, father, and children. The lack of parental “guidance” was also noted, and children were identified as “highly disrespectful” and “the leaders of the family.” As described by one interviewee, “Parents are portrayed as big idiots. There is just an absence of the two parent, mom and dad are in charge type situation.” Another interviewee described television families: “The fathers are really stupid. The moms are kind of nutty. It is not a good representation.” This idea was affirmed by another parent who stated,

The role of the dad is so sad in the media. Dads are just ill equipped and the moms are not much better- lacking. I think our personal values are that mom and dad work together and we have authority and we are well equipped to provide for our kids. You know you just don’t see that. In media parents just seem very “doofusy” and that frustrates me. I don’t see any Christian values and it is rare you see a family go to church. We don’t see our values portrayed in television very often at all.

The overall television representation of family life was described as “unhealthy,” “disturbing,” and “glorifying of dysfunction.”

Christian parents have taken notice that unhealthy visions of family are being fed to their children at younger and younger ages. One mother described a recent recognition of such unhealthy ideas being aimed at her young children.

I was watching a show, a cartoon, with the kids the other day, and even in that one of the characters was saying “well, I really like you and we could date for a few

years and then we could move in together and then we could get married and have kids.” And I was like okay this is a show aimed at 8 year olds. Why is that being slipped in to 8 year olds?

As far as the responsibility to educate their own children about marriage and sexuality (question 1b), the interviewees responded in solidarity. One hundred percent (28) of those interviewed identified parents as primarily responsible to educate their children about marriage and sexuality. Interviewees echoed the sentiment that parents should be “the first step in that” and the “first exposure.” One father responded,

I am the one that needs to make sure my son knows what’s right about it, and I think my wife is the one who needs to make sure that my daughter knows what is right about that. So I feel all of that responsibility. I don’t hold anyone else responsible for teaching my children about this.

Parents offered a variety of reasons for providing their children with marriage and sexuality education. Some parents indicated they did not want their children “to hear it somewhere else first,” and felt that being the first line of communication with their children on these issues would cause their children to view the parents as “more of an authority.” Others simply wanted their children to have a different experience than the sheltered experience from their own childhood, and the ability to better understand their own bodies. One parent desired to educate her children so they would understand “what things they need to protect themselves from.” Another mother described the “bonding moment” that occurs between parent and child when parents provide such teaching to their children, and expressed that she would never want to be robbed of that, or to rob someone else of that.

Twelve (43 percent) of the 28 interviewees indicated that the church should also play a supporting role, assisting the family in marriage and sexuality education. One parent likened this teaching to nutrition. “I think what I give my kids should be the bulk of their nutrition and the church should be their vitamin.”

Some interviewees described marriage and sexuality education as more of a partnership between the family and the church, with parental teaching “being reinforced

through exposure within the body, within the congregation.” One parent described this partnership:

Primarily parents are responsible to educate their children. It is in the family. It should come from the example they see in the family and looking back to the Bible, what does the Bible say about marriage and what does the Bible say about sexuality. But it is also the responsibility of the church. I feel like the church and the family should work hand in hand. It shouldn't be left up totally to the church and the church should be backing up what the parents say and the parents should be backing up what the church teaches if they are teaching biblical truth.

Some parents, however, identified deficiencies in this partnership on the part of the church. One interviewee described the deficiency in this way,

One of the things that I think is deficient, throughout my whole generation and on up has been that we just don't talk about that stuff at church. So, yeah, we are talking about it as parents but then we as leaders in the church are ignoring the fact that those are relevant conversations to reinforce.

Another parent shared this frustration: “It is not even addressed in the church to be quite honest. You know as far as anything to do with a sexual moral stand. That issue is taboo.”

Regarding their own life experiences (question 1c), 100 percent (28) of interviewees indicated their own life experiences do influence present values toward marriage and sexuality. Nineteen interviewees (68 percent) indicated they were raised in Christian homes with parents who remained married and expressed a biblical commitment to one another. These interviewees expressed the desire to model their marriages and families after their own parents. One interviewee described the influence of his family on his own marriage.

My parents had a big influence. They had a marriage, and they stayed married. They didn't get divorced. And actually even my extended family, having strong male figures and having strong marriage relationships and not getting divorced. That had a big influence on me as a kid. All my aunts and uncles, none of them got divorced and it just created this idea that I got married and I was committed to my wife and that was the way it was supposed to be.

Five interviewees (18 percent) described experiencing divorce within their home of origin, or described living with parents who remained together in an unhealthy marriage. These individuals indicated they wanted something different for their own



families, and set out to create more godly relationships with their spouse and children.

One interviewee described her desire to create a healthy marriage.

My parents divorced when I was three, so that is all that I've known, my mom and dad being apart. And I just remember when my husband and I got married I thought to myself I want to have a family and I want my children to have both parents. I just really wanted to work hard at the marriage and make it succeed for the children because I went through that my whole life.

Interviewees also described the marriage and sexuality education provided in their own homes of origin. Table 12 provides participants responses regarding their initial marriage and sexuality education.

Table 12. Interviewees initial marriage education

Method	Number of Interviewees
Parent-child explicit discussion	3
Parental indirect teaching	5
Health/Sex Ed Class at school	1
Friends	3
Textual resources	4
Church	2
No information given	5

Fifteen interviewees (54 percent) identified the lack of explicit marriage and sexuality education in their home of origin as influential, noting that their parents never taught them explicitly about marriage or sexuality. As a result, these parents indicated they are intentional about teaching their own children. One parent described the “over-sheltered” atmosphere in which she was raised: “I was very sheltered growing up and I don’t want to shelter my kids as much as I was sheltered from stuff. I don’t know that I was, as a child, well equipped for grown up life.” Another interviewee who had been raised in a “godly home” expressed the same sentiment: “Growing up I was never taught by my parents about puberty and sexuality and it was just what I heard from my youth minister and my sisters and so when I became a mom I wanted to be more open about that.” Another interviewee stated, “I was raised in a great Christian home, my mom and

dad loved each other till the day my mom died and they set a very good example for us. The negative is that my parents didn't actually talk to me. I didn't have the sex talk growing up." Still another expressed her lack of education as a child.

I was raised in I guess what you would say is a normal household. My parents are still married. My grandparents were married. You know that is a huge influence because it doesn't always work out that way. I think the big thing was though, that my parents did not talk to us about that kind of stuff. I mean my mom never had "the talk" with me.

One father who had been part of a youth group as a child described his lack of parental teaching:

I did not learn about the whole sexual topic in the conventional way . . . well . . . maybe I did . . . I learned about it from friends at school and nudie magazines under friends beds and thinks like that. Which is probably how a lot of boys learn about those things, but my parents certainly never had the talk with me. With my parents, it was just kind of like I became a teenager and I knew about it and they knew I knew about it and so that was it. So we had a lot of discussions about it in my youth group and I think that is probably where my values around that were being shaped. But apparently it didn't take because then I didn't stick with the values when I went to college.

Three interviewees indicated the marriage and sexuality education in their home had been a positive and helpful experience. One interviewee stated, "My mother talked to me a lot about sexuality. She was not uncomfortable at all." Another stated, "It was pivotal to see a healthy marriage and to have a dad who said that sex was beautiful and worth the wait."

### **Values Codification**

The values coding performed upon the interview data identified certain prominent parental values. These values were expressed as parents described their perspectives on marriage and sexuality in the mass media, the marriage and sexuality education of their children, and their own life experiences. Three prominent codes emerged from the data: "parental controls," "parental teaching," and "parental responsibility."

**Parental controls.** The code of “parental controls” was deduced from portions of interviews wherein participants described how they respond to mass media. Participants described the lengths to which they go to protect their children from undue media influence. These controls ranged from restricting use of the remote control, to restricting television time, to not subscribing to cable or satellite television. Internet controls were also of great importance to interview participants. Television and internet were considered only two of many potential media influences parents must attempt to control each day. In terms of controlling media consumption, parents also expressed concern with how to maintain that control when their children were in settings outside the family home, such as the school or the home of a friend or family member. Efforts made on behalf of parents to control media in these situations included training children on what is and is not appropriate to view, teaching children how to be forthright in expressing what they are permitted to view, and parents having direct conversations with other adults regarding what their children are permitted to view.

**Parental teaching.** A second prominent code was that of “parental teaching.” Participants clearly described the importance they place on their own teaching of their children, of the opportunity to be their child’s primary educator and first exposure on these issues, and of pro-activity in educating their children. Some interviewees specified formal and explicit teaching of their children. All interviewees described teaching their children as a direct result of media or other outside exposures to which their children have been privy.

The expression of parental controls was deeply connected to the parent’s education of their children. One interviewee who described media and television as “harmful” stated that her children “don’t watch the news, don’t watch television, really” because media begins “indoctrinating at a young age. It’s everywhere. It’s in the music, the television, all the entertainment.” This participant went on to describe the threat she feels even in taking her child to the doctor’s office: “The doctor, at her checkup, educated

her on some things to do with her body change and details. And quite frankly it made me uncomfortable because I think that is my job.” Participants described the race to educate their children on marriage and sexuality before something or someone reaches them first. This battle involved balancing the child’s age and maturity, the controls parents have instituted with their children, and constant exposure to the outside world.

**Parental responsibility.** A third code was that of “parental responsibility.” The parental responsibility described by participants included not only the responsibility to educate their children, but also to protect their children from a damaging level of worldly influence. This parental protection may include restricting and screening media, screening friends, and acting as a buffer between their child and outside influences. Parents also linked this protection to the responsibility of undergirding their children with godly teaching. This theme was closely tied to the themes of parental teaching and parental controls. Participants described the biblical teaching they offer their children as foundational to successfully navigating the secular world and all of its potentially damaging influence.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked “What resources, if any, are Christian parents utilizing to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?” The following two questions were asked in order to identify the resources interviewees are using to teach their children about marriage and sexuality: (2a) What resources have helped you discern how to communicate or teach about marriage and sexuality? (2b) Do you use the Bible in your teaching, if so, how? Additional probing and follow-up questions were asked to garner more information. The research findings are presented, followed by analysis of the findings.

Interview participants reported on four categories of resources that have helped them discern how to teach their children about marriage and sexuality: human, school,

church, and textual resources. Table 13 displays the human resources accessed by parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.

Table 13. Human resources accessed by parents in teaching children

Resource Person	Number of Interviewees	%
Interviewee	28	100
Spouse	28	100
Interviewee and spouse exclusively	10	35
Grandparents	4	14
Close family members	8	28

One hundred percent of interviewees (28) indicated that other than themselves, their spouse was the most important human resource (question 2a) in educating their children about marriage and sexuality. Within some families this was described in terms of a discipleship approach: “My husband and I have been very proactive in our children’s lives starting with the changing of the body and how God is preparing our body through puberty and then all the way up to staying modest and staying pure, not only now but also into their marriage.” Ten interview participants (36 percent) stated the marriage and sexuality education for their children is presented by themselves and their spouse exclusively, involving no other family members, friends, or entities outside the family. One interviewee explained the purpose for education being restricted to the home is “so that our beliefs are brought out” because others “don’t really get our beliefs.” Others indicated this education excluded other family members such as grandparents due to not living near family members.

Four interviewees (14 percent) indicated that grandparents played an important role in educating their children on these issues through being available for conversations with children and marriage modeling. This role was described by one interviewee:

I think as far as marriage and those values, I feel like both of the kids’ sets of grandparents play vital roles in that and they spend a lot of time with them and just portraying the marriage. And we are fortunate in that both sets of grandparents are

Christians and are active in church and so my kids being able to see that not only mom and dad work this way and have these values but my grandparents do to.

One interviewee described being in close physical proximity to the grandparents as important to this process: “We live right next door to the grandparents and my kids are extremely close to them, and I homeschool so the kids are with me 24 hours a day.” Another participant described having grandparents on both sides of the family that her children are close to and spend a great deal of time with, and expressed “I would trust any of the grandparents to have conversations.” Eight interview participants (29 percent) identified other “close family members,” such as aunts and uncles, as a potential resource for helping to teach their children about marriage and sexuality.

Interviewees also addressed the use of their child’s school as an educating resource for teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. Table 14 displays participant responses regarding their child’s school.

Table 14. School trustworthiness

School Trustworthiness	Participant Response	% of Participants
Public school trustworthy	12	43
Home school-no concern	4	14
Public school non-trustworthy	2	7

Twelve interview participants (43 percent), whose children attend public school, identified their child’s school as being a “trustworthy resource.” One interviewee described her trust of her child’s public school:

I fully trust in the teachers that are there and the counselors that are there and I know that when they get up into seventh and eighth grade we do have a lady that comes and does an abstinence lesson with them from the community. And so I have no concerns as far as curriculum and things like that, of anything that she would be taught at school or coming from the adults in the building. I also feel confident in our counselors. We have a male and a female counselor and I know my daughter already loves the female counselor, I have full confidence in her skills and her abilities that if my daughter wanted to go speak with her about something I feel confident that she would direct her in the right path or give her the right advice to help her through a situation that might come up.

Two of these parents described their children's schools as having a "conservative set of faculty," and "a lot of Christian teachers." Some parents were, themselves, employed within the same school or district their child attends. One such parent stated, "I have been there for 21 years and have been able really shape the culture." Another parent employed within her child's school system explained how the scope of her employment has provided her with more comfort in trusting the school on these issues: "As an educator I already knew the curriculum and the basis for it and the topics that they are going to cover. Curriculum wise I don't have any concerns."

Three of the 12 public school parents stated they have previewed the curriculum their child's school planned to use for teaching about body growth and development. In two situations, the school earned the trust of the parents by providing information and opportunity for involvement. One interviewee described her situation.

The school was really good. The school sent us exactly the content and a link to the video they were going to be doing and they allowed us the opportunity to have our child opt out and go to study hall if we wanted, which we didn't because we didn't want her to be alienated at school for being the only one that didn't go to the talk. It was not a coed talk. Boys went to one room and girls went to another room so we got to preview everything that was going on and we got to debrief her after. So it was handled very well by the school.

One father in a similar situation described his experience:

They invited us all to come in the evening and they had a session just for the boys and just for the girls. I was appreciative of the fact that I was allowed to sit there and hear what was being said so that I could at least have a discussion about what we do and do not disagree with.

Another parent described the trustworthy sex education at her child's school:

The school has an organization that they work with that is a local organization. They sent home a flyer that we had to sign to give permission for our child to go through that. Then they gave us a link to a website that the organization uses to explain what they will be discussing with the children.

A more unique situation was described by a participant who explained her child's school provides education to the parents one time per year rather than to the children. In this way, the parent stated, "There is nothing I am trying to combat. There is nothing I am having to go back and correct." Three more of these 12 public school parents indicated

that they have not yet previewed any such curriculum but would choose to do so if and when their child's school provides such lessons.

Two interview participants (7 percent) identified their child's school as a non-trustworthy resource for educating their children about marriage and sexuality. One of these participants succinctly stated, "As a parent, I do not want the school involved in that." Another father stated,

When it comes to school, I would definitely want to know what the content is. And my wife will tell you that I am very non micro-managing when it comes to his school but if that was something he was being taught I would probably read over every single thing they would try and teach him.

Another parent expressed diligence in protecting her child from unapproved teaching from the school.

They sent a letter home telling us that they were going to provide a sex education course at the school my daughter attends. I wrote them back and told them to please notify me when and where it was going to be held because I was going to attend because I want to know what they are feeding our children. And they never wrote back and my daughter told me they never had it. I told my daughter that I wouldn't go with her to her class-that I would go in another class so she wasn't embarrassed. And I would have gone in first thing and if I didn't approve it I would have taken my child out. And I think that every parent should be aware and have that option. And I really think that it should be that they allow us to sit in a session before they even expose our children to that so that we have the choice. And you know if some parents don't care, they don't go to the session-that is their choice. But I think that they should give parents a preview of what they are going to teach.

One family expressed mistrust for their child's school because in the past the school had failed to give parents notice of planned sex education courses:

In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade they had a guest speaker come in and speak about sex and their bodies which was a whole ordeal because they did not get parents' permission. And there were some angry parents the next morning. It was a little bit heavy for ten and eleven year olds.

Another parent, who is also an educator, expressed mistrust for her child's school where she is employed:

I would not trust them with anything. When they talked with the fifth graders before, they sent them home with a very graphic brochure. I had to take the brochures away when my class came in. The little boys were passing the brochures around the class and everyone was looking at it and I finally had to take it away. It was not detailed about sex but it showed the male body parts and described an erection and all that. It was a little much for them.



Four interview participants (14 percent) homeschool their children and as a result have no concern about the marriage and sexuality education their children will receive.

Interviewees also commented on the idea of their church as a resource for marriage and sexuality education for their children. Table 15 displays the church resources that parents accessed for assistance in educating their children about marriage and sexuality.

Table 15. Church resources accessed by parents in teaching children

Type of Resource	Number of Families Using Resource
Mentor relationships for parents	10
Mentor relationships for children	4
Small group/Family group	4
Peer parents	4
Pastor/Associate Pastor	2
Student Pastor	5
Sunday school teacher	4
Other church leader	2

The most prominent area of discussion regarding the church as a resource focused on mentoring relationships. Ten interviewees (36 percent) described a mentoring relationship with an older person in their church as helpful to them in knowing how to educate their children about marriage and sexuality. One participant described mentoring relationships with various older families who “have been in leadership above or over us”:

We just really respect how their kids turned out. And some of them have kids that have made poor choices and as they have reflected on those we have been able to ask what would you do different. So some of those have been learning through what they feel like were the mistakes they made.

Four interviewees described a mentoring relationship their child has with someone in the church as being a good potential resource for their marriage and sexuality education. Four interviewees (14 percent) stated the small group or family group they engage with is a beneficial resource for them as parents in learning how to educate their

children on these issues. Additionally, 4 more interviewees (14 percent) indicated their peers within the church are a useful resource.

Interviewees also identified individuals in specific ministerial roles as a resource. Five individuals (18 percent) indicated their student pastor as a useful resource, 4 individuals (14 percent) indicated the Sunday school teacher as a resource, 2 identified church “leaders” as a useful resource, and 1 interviewee identified the pastor as a useful resource in helping parents know how to educate their children about marriage and sexuality. In thinking of the church overall as a trustworthy resource, one parent stated, “I don’t have any concerns or issues with her going to any of them [church leaders] or the advice that they would give her.” Another parent described the trust for her church:

If you can’t trust the Sunday school teachers and the youth leaders to teach and have those conversations then they won’t be effective. It is the topic that is on the minds of the youth more so than it is on the minds of the adults. The hormones are raging and if they are not addressing it then I don’t think they are doing their job. You have to have faith that they know what they are doing, but I think that goes along with choosing a church. You choose a church based upon your confidence that they are going to give biblically based solutions, tastefully delivered, and they know what to teach on and what not to.

Three interviewees (11 percent) described their church as being a less useful resource in their children’s marriage and sexuality education. One interviewee stated, “My church does not talk about sex,” while another stated, “The church hasn’t played a big role in it.” Another participant stated, “Our kids aren’t taught anything about that through our church. It is not even addressed in the church to be quite honest.” Another interviewee attends a church that teaches on marriage, but not in a helpful manner:

[My church teaches] maybe a little bit about marriage, but I wouldn’t say it was from a biblical perspective. You sort of felt like you were going to a self- help program. Sort of, you should all get along and don’t argue, and maybe once in the many years that we’ve been there, there was something very watered down and very generic.

Parents also commented on textual resources they employ in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality (question 2b). Parental use of the Bible as a textual resource in teaching their children is displayed in table 16.

Table 16. Parental use of Bible in teaching children

Method of Use	Number of Families Using Resource	%
Uses Bible in teaching	26	93
Do not use Bible	2	7

Twenty six interviewees (93 percent) indicated they currently use the Bible to varying degrees in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. Two interviewees (7 percent) stated they do not currently use the Bible for this teaching but plan to do so as their children grow older.

Participants also commented on the method of their Bible use in teaching their children. The method of Bible use as described by parents is displayed in table 17.

Table 17. Method of use of Bible in teaching children

Method of Use	Number of Families Using Resource	%
Uses Bible “generally” and “specifically”	16	57
Uses Bible “generally” only	5	18
Uses Bible as reference	1	3

One interviewee described his Bible use as “more as a reference” than a content guide, explaining that he teaches “more through experiences” than through specific Scriptures. Other participants described their use of the Bible in teaching in terms of “general” teaching basic biblical principles, and “specific,” using specific passages of Scripture to teach specific biblical concepts regarding marriage and sexuality. Five interview participants (18 percent) described their use of the Bible as *only* general. One participant provided a description of her “general” teaching.

I just really talk more about general things that the Bible talks about. I haven’t, and I probably should, especially when we go through the next stage, actually sit down with her and the Bible. I have not done that yet, and pull out specific Scriptures which I think would be very helpful. At that point I would have to do some research as to the best Scriptures to use for that. At this point our conversations have been about what we believe as Christians and not directly pulling out Scripture yet, but I feel like that needs to be that next conversation that we have is to actually sit down

and look specifically at what the Lord says about those kinds of things, just to give her, to make that foundation stronger.

Another participant who uses the Bible in a “general” fashion described her teaching in the following manner.

I probably haven’t sat down and said “okay, this is where sections of the Bible seem to talk about it” but I tend to be one of those that talks, using the stories of the Bible. So we’ll talk about David. We’ll talk about Bathsheba. We’ll talk about Song of Solomon. Sometimes I’ll kind of throw something out there like, “you know that is in the Bible right?” So that is the kind of where I’ve used it.

A third participant described her use “general” of the Bible in teaching her children:

We teach the Bible just in general. We read it and we talk about it as a family in general and we will hit some of these topics like marriage. You know we start out in Genesis and we can talk about marriage. One man and one woman and things like that, what Jesus says about divorce.

Other teaching content from this group included broad ideas such as “remaining pure,” as well as more specific concepts such as “being created by God” and “marriage being created for a man and a woman.”

Sixteen of the 28 interviewees (57 percent) indicated they use the Bible both generally *and* specifically in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. This group of interviewees provided examples of their parental teaching. One interviewee described using the account of Adam and Eve (Gen 1-3) to teach broadly on creation, but using the specific examples of the creation of Adam and Eve to teach their child about different characteristics of man and woman. One participant stated,

For me personally I think I just use examples of the Bible. My parenting is more hands on, open the word, let’s go to a specific passage. And of course we have talked about Adam and Eve and the different characteristics of how God created them to be perfect and they didn’t and therefore that is the reason why we have pain in childbirth and that is the reason why the man has to work and toil and so what the effect of sin was.

Other participants described teaching their children specific concepts about marriage through the metanarrative of Scripture, such as the following interviewee: “We define marriage and put it into the perspective of what it is supposed to be. We’ve taught an overall picture of the Bible- that it looks like a marriage.” Another parent described

teaching generally about love “as defined by the Apostle Paul” while talking more specifically about appropriate sexual behaviors through the account of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife.

Five participants (18 percent) described their general and specific teaching as being applicable to the daily life within their family. Two interviewees described the applicability: “When situations arise we go to where it is in the Bible and we talk,” and “We always go back to the Bible. When we see things on television, we talk about how some people will say that is right but the Bible says it is wrong.” Another participant described teaching through daily life situations coupled with general biblical principles and specific biblical passages as “teaching a biblical worldview.”

In addition to the Bible, interviewees commented on other textual resources they have employed to teach their children about marriage and sexuality. Seven interviewees (25 percent) indicated they use no textual resources other than the Bible to teach their children about marriage and sexuality. Some participants who have used no textual resources aside from the Bible have done so from a lack of awareness of what resources are available, such as the following participant:

Personally I have only read literature that might deal with fatherhood on a more general level where one of the chapters might deal with how to discuss things like this with children. But honestly, I am not really aware of a lot of material, although I assume it’s out there.

Another parent with a similar experience stated, “I have not really found any good resources for that.”

Sixteen interviewees (57 percent) indicated they have used or currently do use other textual resources to teach their children about marriage and sexuality. These specific textual resources are listed in table 18.

Table 18. Textual resources used by parents in teaching children

Name of Resource	Number of Families Using Resource
<i>The Care and Keeping of You</i> by Valorie Schaefer and Josee Masse	8
<i>Passport to Purity</i> by Dennis and Barbara Rainey	2
<i>Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter</i> by Vicki Courtney	1
<i>Teaching Your Child about Sex</i> by Grace Ketterman	1
<i>Becoming a Young Woman of God</i> by Jen Rawson	1
<i>Bringing Up Boys</i> by James Dobson	1
<i>Bringing Up Girls</i> by James Dobson	1
<i>Every Woman's Battle</i> by Shannon Ethridge	1
<i>Passion Pursuit</i> by Linda Dillow and Juli Slattery	1
<i>Pulling Back the Shades</i> by Juli Slattery and Dannah Gresh	1
<i>The Body Book for Boys</i> by Rebecca Paley and Grace Norwich	1
<i>True Woman</i> by Mary Kassian	1
<i>Lies Women Believe</i> by Nancy DeMoss	1
<i>Lies Young Women Believe</i> by Nancy DeMoss and Dana Gresh	1
<i>FLYTE Curriculum</i> by Lifeway Christian Resources	1
<i>Growing Up God's Way for Girls</i> by Cris Richards and Liz Jones	1
<i>The Ultimate Guy's Body Book</i> by Walt Larimore and Guy Francis	1
<i>When You Were Born</i> by Emma Dodd	1

### Values Codification

The values coding performed upon this section of data illuminated three codes: importance of Bible, importance of mentoring relationships, and parental controls. The first two codes address valuable resources used in teaching children about marriage and sexuality. The third code, “parental controls,” addresses the concern of parents for their children as they become educated about marriage and sexuality.

**Importance of Bible.** Interviewees value the Bible as the most used and important teaching resource in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. Participants described using this resource in a variety of ways, ranging from a “reference,”

to “general” use to “specific” use. The participants who indicated their use of the Bible as a teaching resource described their use as a means to provide their child with biblical teaching, and a biblical worldview. Participants also described the Bible as a tool in helping their child develop a Christian belief system, and Christian values regarding marriage and sexuality.

**Importance of mentoring relationships.** A second theme which emerged from this set of data illuminates the importance of mentoring relationships. Participants identified mentoring relationships for themselves and/or their children as a fundamental element in their ongoing teaching and learning about life in general, and their teaching and learning about marriage and sexuality specifically. These mentor relationships were established with individuals who were either biologically older than the parent or child, or had more life experience than the parent or child, or both. The mentor relationships described by participants were distinctly Christian, in that interviewees were specifically seeking out Christian counsel for themselves or their child from a mentor who was also a committed follower of Christ.

**Parental controls.** A third theme that emerged from this set of data demonstrates the concern of parents for their children as their children are educated about marriage and sexuality. Parents who sought out resources to assist them in teaching their children directly described a personal screening process they administered upon the particular resource to determine its appropriateness. Even children’s books, by some parents, were considered too heavy or explicit to share with their child. Parents expressed a desire to use materials which were written from a biblical worldview and not overly explicit in description, through text or illustration, of human growth and development, body processes, and/or the act of sexual intercourse. Aside from concerns with textual resources, parents also expressed concern with control of other resources such as human, school, and church. Even trustworthy mentors, teachers, coaches, ministers, and friends

did not leave parents unconcerned regarding what topic might be addressed and the manner in which it was done.

### Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “What teaching practices, if any, do parents employ to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?” The following primary question was asked of interviewees to ascertain *how* they teach their children about marriage and sexuality: (3a) As far as teaching your kids is concerned, is there a certain way in which you have addressed the issues of marriage and sexuality? Additional probing and follow-up questions were asked to garner more information. The research findings are presented, followed by analysis of the findings.

Interviewees indicated whether or not, at the time of this study, they had begun teaching their child about marriage and sexuality. These findings are presented in the following chart.

Table 19. Marriage and sexuality education initiated

Teaching Initiated	Number of Families	%
Had initiated	22	79
Had not initiated	6	21

Twenty-two participants of the 28 (79 percent) indicated they do provide marriage and sexuality education to their child, and they do so in an “ongoing” manner. These interviewees described having multiple conversations with their children, some of them being “formal” or “sit-down” conversations, and others of them being “informal,” “casual,” or “on the go” conversations.

Of the 28 interviewees, 6 participants (21 percent) had not yet begun talking about marriage and sexuality with their child. These participants have children ranging between ages 7 and 14. One parent stated, “As far as sexuality is concerned I am not



ready to talk to my kids at 12 and 9 about those issues . . . Sexuality isn't even, they've been sheltered from that." Another interviewee who is parent to a 7-year-old boy plans, in the future, to teach on marriage and sexuality as part of a larger base of education on "biblical manhood," and expressed the desire for his child to know "that I am intentionally talking with him about this stuff because I want him to know how important it is."

Of the interviewees who had begun marriage and sexuality education, some expressed little difficulty in having a formal conversation with their child. One interviewee described a formal conversation with her daughter as a "private conversation over dinner at a park in a secluded spot." This same interviewee indicated she continues to have more casual conversations with her daughter "as opportunities come up" and has plans to have another formal conversation in a like manner in the near future in order to readdress some issues and to breach new topics.

Another interviewee described a "formal conversation" as the initial teaching time, and expressed the need to "rehash the conversation as opportunities come up." This interviewee described intentionality in trying to "frame up a casual conversation" as often as possible to keep the initial conversation open. An additional participant described a more informal method of teaching:

They've always asked questions and then we've just answered when they asked every time any possible opening has come, and there have been a ton of openings to talk about it. We just talk about it. There has never been a time when I've had to sit down and say "OK, we are going to talk about sex."

Age of the child at the initial teaching time was another element addressed by interviewees. Eighteen interviewees (64 percent) could remember specifically the age of one or more of their children at the initial teaching. These findings are presented in table 20.

One participant began teaching her child at age "4 or 5," 2 others at age 6. Five participants began teaching their children at age 8, 5 participants began at age 9. Three children received initial teaching at age 10, 3 at age 11, and 4 at age 12.

Table 20. Age of children at initial teaching time

Age of Child at Initial Teaching	Number of Interviewees
4 or 5	1
6	2
8	5
9	5
10	3
11	3
12	4

Interviewees also described their reasoning for beginning the initial marriage and sexuality education. Interviewees offered multiple reasons for beginning marriage and sexuality education at the specific time they did so. These reasons included physical development of the child, exposure to something while outside the home, questions from the child, parents' desire to be the child's first exposure to the topic, and the child's maturity level. One participant explained her reasoning for beginning marriage and sexuality education with her child shortly before the child turned 9 years old:

For me as an educator, once they hit middle school and they have a little more freedom, it goes from 20 in your class to 100 on your team. Just having the education background that I do, I knew that it is just more. She is going to start being exposed to more, and our middle school goes through eighth grade. They are in the same building with our fifth graders, and so just walking down the same hall you might hear something. So I just wanted her to know where we come from and where we stand on things like that before entering and getting into that middle school zone. And really, it is just knowing that if I don't share my beliefs as a Christian with her, she is going to learn about it and it is a matter of where I want that learning to come from. I don't want her to learn it on a field trip with a bunch of seventh grade friends. I want her to know that when that conversation comes up and when that conversation happens that she has the background knowledge that she needs. For me it was just where do I want the information to come from, realizing that it is hard enough on kids out there.

This participant continued to explain that for the purpose of her child's social and societal comfort it was important to begin teaching at a young age.

I was so sheltered as a kid, even certain things make me uncomfortable and I have been married for 17 years. I don't want her to feel the same way that I felt when I first got married or had conversations with college friends. I wanted it to come from me, from us. I think it was the realization of where I wanted that information to come from. I could overcome the discomfort of the first conversation knowing that I was doing what I needed to do for her. For her to have a good basis, and good foundation for her beliefs and to be able to know that she stands strong on those and not fall to what the media, Facebook, or Snapchat says. I wanted as much control

with them young as I could have, so that when they are out making their own decisions and I am not in control anymore, at least they know where we are coming from.

Another participant shared similar reasoning for beginning marriage and sexuality education with her child shortly before entering first grade.

Just my personal experience of growing up not knowing anything and hating how that felt. I didn't ever want them to feel that way. I didn't want to ever be part of a conversation that they didn't understand that embarrassed them because they didn't know what someone was talking about. I wanted them to know what the question was talking about and then from there, not just know what they are talking about but also know, just know the God-centered view of whatever that person was talking about. So they don't hear something and think that it is right when it is really not. So that is probably the biggest thing, was my personal experience.

Several interviewees described measures they have taken to ensure their child feels comfortable during such teaching. Various comfort measures were described by participants, such as use of a journal to minimize embarrassment. One participant described how the use of a journal allowed her to have important conversations with her child:

At one point of our conversation she said "I don't know how to ask this question," so I said "why don't you just write it down" and then from that we just continued the conversation. So I think a little bit of it was just embarrassment, but then we pushed through that and she could write it down instead of having to say it out loud. From there, it is more open now.

A second participant described her use of a journal in teaching her child, and emphasized the importance of the journal being helpful for her child in the present as well as the future.

It is easier for them to write their feelings instead of talk about them, especially to adults. So I will just ask some questions and she will journal it back to me. It gives her a chance, and it gives her something special to look back at. It's just a regular notebook and we write in it, and write her precious things and I know that she will keep it for a really long time. And when she's having a bad day and she doesn't think she's beautiful she can go back to the journal.

Other comfort measures include keeping the conversation private, and talking while engaged in another activity, such as eating. One participant described a scenario with her own child:

It's just me and her. We will go somewhere. Like we went and got some food and we went to the park the last conversation we had. A more secluded spot is something I have done and I think it goes over a little better. I think she feels more open. So just to make it as comfortable as possible for her, is just not having anybody else there and it just being the two of us. I think she would feel more open to talk about anything.

Still other participants increase their child’s comfort level by maintaining a level of continual dialogue so they aren’t afraid to ask questions, answering questions when they ask, and by maintaining a calm parental demeanor.

Interviewees also described one or more specific methods they employ when teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. The most commonly used teaching methods are displayed in table 21.

Table 21. Parental teaching methods

Practice	Number of Families Using Practice
Formal clear instruction	14
Question-answer discussion	9
Teachable moments	2
Modeling	2
Joint media consumption	1
Parent-child retreat	2

Fourteen interviewees indicated they have offered their children some type of formal, clear instruction regarding marriage and sexuality. This type of instruction varies with each participant. Some formal and clear instruction involves a hearty use of biblical teaching in daily life as described by the following participant, whose children overheard a husband-wife discussion about homosexuality:

But the kids wanted to know about that because they heard us talking and they were like “what is that about?” and we turned to the Bible. And we told them God says it should be a man and a woman and we begin that way anytime something comes up about marriage. We do use specific references with our kids. They are in Awana. They have to memorize Scripture and of course we do that with them and you know sometimes they will just read something and they will say ‘what does that mean?’ and we will discuss that. So we do reference things a lot. Like, you made a bad decision today and why was that wrong and what does God say about that. And then we have them ask for forgiveness. I mean that is just part of our daily routine as a family.

Another commonly used teaching tactic by parents is question-answer. One participant offered the following explanation of how that happens in family:

Well, I’ve never had to sit down and bring it up with them. They’ve always just asked something and then we’ve answered it when they’ve asked it. Unless it was a

completely inappropriate time to be talking about penises or something, and then I've said "we will answer that in a little bit." But we always go back to it and answer it.

Another interviewee describes the question-answer method in her home:

When he has questions we answer as much as he wants to know. It is not unusual for us to sit down and have a conversation about these issues or anything else. It is not unusual for us to have very real conversations and we try to sit down at the kitchen table and have supper together as a family. A lot of conversations happen there.

A third common teaching method involves parents making use of "teachable moments." The following example of this method was offered by one participant.

My son had a girl asking for his phone number just a couple of weeks ago and he said no and I was sitting right there. And we had to discuss that afterwards and of course he knew that he couldn't give her his phone number, but some other stuff had happened and he knew this girl and so that gave us the opportunity to discuss what kind of girl he wants and what kind of girl he should be interested in. And I had to discuss with him that there are going to be lots of gorgeous girls who are going to be interested in you but you are going to have to deal with that. You will have to be strong enough to realize that this is not the kind of woman that God has for me. We had discussed that sort of thing before but not as specifically. But because that happened that was an opportunity to actually sit down and talk about it.

The method and importance of teachable moments is described by the following participant.

I believe everything is a teachable moment for our kids. I have an 8 year old son and even he sees immodesty on TV and he'll say "Mom that is not modest." I think as a parent we can't always shield our kids from the world. They're going to be introduced to this stuff now or later and so I feel like as a parent it is my responsibility to use those things as teachable moments and to say 'what do you think the Bible says about this?' and no, the mass media does not give us any type of good example. However, I think we can use those as teachable moments and say "what do you think?"

Finally, one participant offers a description of her use of multiple teaching methods in teaching her children about marriage and sexuality.

I have found where we may be in the car and my daughter says "Mom you told me if I had a question I could ask" and I've said "sure." And so we've been in the car and she has asked questions. And my husband and I model in front of our children. We model appropriate affection in front of our children. My daughter will be like "that is so gross" and we will be like "isn't it great though that your parents love each other?" We want to show them affection, appropriate affection so that they have an example and a model to go by and we hold hands and we pray together. We talk about our love languages in front of the children. And we talk about "what do you think that your love language is? We know what Dad's and mine is." Just last night we were talking about the needs of a husband and that they have a physical need and I was asking my daughter 'why do you think that is important?' So we do all three. There's times when my daughter comes to me and has a question and I'm

like “Okay let’s talk about that” and then there are other times that God just lays it on my heart and I’ll say “We need to talk about this.”

Another area addressed by interviewees was areas of struggle in teaching their child about marriage and sexuality. The areas of parental struggle are displayed in table 22.

Table 22. Areas of parental struggle

Struggle	Number of Participants Identifying
Appropriate developmental teaching	5
Teaching about divorce	5
Teaching about having children outside of marriage	3
Various issues with media consumption	3
Having the initial “sex” conversation	2
Teaching modesty	2
Not allowing child to have “boyfriend”	2
General awkwardness in teaching	1
Not knowing “how” to teach	1
Not “over sheltering” child	1
Teaching “good decision making”	1
Teaching proper social practices	1
Controlling information child receives outside the home	1
Parent to child cross-gender conversations	1
Teaching about inappropriate self-touch	1
Teaching about proper attitude	1
Teaching child about homosexuality	1
Making time to teach	1

The most prominent area of struggle expressed by participants involved appropriate developmental teaching for their children. One participant described this struggle in the following manner.

Well I know when we first started talking to our children about it I had looked at a Christian book store and some other book stores for some books, you know just some guidelines on it -how to have that conversation. I didn’t find a whole lot. Of the things that I found they weren’t necessarily Christian based. I didn’t find a whole lot of Christian materials out there. I guess maybe having that initial conversation or what is appropriate at what age. What should you be talking to your kids about at different stages of your life? The earlier you start talking to them the easier it is to have those conversations throughout their life.

A second area of struggle identified by interviewees was the problem of explaining social issues such as divorce and having children outside of marriage. One interviewee described the ongoing struggle of explaining divorce to her child, who has had multiple encounters with the topic with individuals outside of her immediate family.

One of her very best friend's parents got divorced and that was the first encounter. Now there have been multiple. And my daughter would ask "why would they not stay married?" And so that has started her questions and that was 3 years ago. Multiple things have come up since. So this has brought lots of questions and that has been really hard. And she doesn't get it. And my husband and I have a disagreement here or there and she has said to me "Are you and Daddy getting a divorce?" And I am like "No, we are human. We don't always agree on everything." And it was nothing really bad. It was just something we didn't agree on. But that has been hard. She has asked me that 2 or 3 times about divorce and I am like 'No we are not getting divorce. The Bible says that divorce is wrong.' And that has brought about questions too. Like, "If that is wrong then why do they do it?"

Some parents also struggled to explain to their children how babies can be born to individuals who are unmarried. As one parent described, "Whenever they realize that there are people who are going to have a baby that are not married they say 'Well I thought you said. . . .' and 'How can that happen?' That has been something that we have had to deal with."

A fourth area of struggle identified by parents centered on media consumption. One interviewee described his struggle to teach his children good decision making regarding media choices:

I think the struggle has been to help them make good decisions maybe about things that they watch so that there is not, they are not watching things that influence them toward the wrong direction or anything like that. That is always a struggle. I think it is a struggle for them to actually grasp the importance of why this show is not a good show to watch or something like that.

Another participant comprehensively expressed his struggle with the same issue:

Probably the biggest struggle I find is, I have a hard time trying to teach them and instill in them, the effects of media consumption on their overall spiritual and mental well-being and their mind. That becomes such a tough thing to control. As far as what they listen to, do they even know what they are singing about? Trying to explain the harmful effects of entertainment, I struggle with that. I don't get the music they listen to. My parents probably didn't either, the whole rap culture and everything. Especially from an African American perspective, the whole view of sexuality through the culture or the subculture. That's a big, hard thing. I have to print out the lyrics and go through, 'You know what they are talking about here? This is what they are talking about. This is a negative word for a woman and what they are talking about doing. You are listening to this stuff and singing it, not

knowing what they are singing about. The problem is that I am trying to get my arms around that. I struggle on that. I guess if I described that challenge that I have, how do I balance shielding them from things that are inappropriate but then teaching them the correct things? I can instruct them both biblically and culturally on homosexuality, on gender, on traditional marriage, divorce, adultery, you know all of these things I feel pretty confident in explaining and giving a biblical view of that. And why we believe what we believe and why we do what we do. The cultural things, you know, how women are viewed and the overt sexuality that I have a hard time kind of grasping.

## **Values Codification**

Values coding performed upon this set of data identified multiple codes regarding parental teaching practices. The codes that emerged address teaching resources, methods, times, outcomes, and parental controls.

**Teaching resources.** The Bible was the most prominent resource identified as participants described their teaching practices. Described in terms of use as both “general” and “specific,” the majority of parents are either using specific biblical passages to teach their children or more general overarching biblical principles. One other resource, a human anatomy chart, was identified by two participants as being an included resource in the ongoing teaching time with their children. While this resource was not used in abundance, it was deemed by these particular parents as useful, though not to the same degree as the Bible.

**Teaching methods.** Methods valued by most interviewees included daily teaching from the Bible, dialogue, mentoring, modeling, open conversations, and teachable moments. The method employed by parents depended upon the topic of conversation in which they were engaged, the physical location, as well as the relationship with the child. Many interviewees indicated they employ multiple teaching methods on a regular basis. Parents who indicated use of multiple teaching methods perceived their children were receiving a more holistic message about biblical marriage and sexuality.

**Teaching times.** Regarding times, participants addressed the need for making time to teach their children in an ongoing manner, as well as teaching “at the appropriate



time.” For some participants, the appropriate time meant at a certain age, a specific stage of physical development, or when the child began to ask questions. For others, the appropriate time indicated a time when a private conversation could be conducted. Interviewees also valued certain teaching outcomes.

**Teaching outcomes.** Parents desired for their teaching to produce in their child a biblical worldview and/or strong Christian beliefs regarding marriage and sexuality. Many parents expressed an understanding that teaching outcomes are largely dependent upon the teaching methods and times. All interviewees expressed a desire for their children to possess the outcome of a biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality, whether or not they had begun teaching them to that end.

**Parental controls.** Parents expressed the need for and the desire to control information their children received regarding marriage and sexuality. This control was facilitated in a variety of ways. Some parents with children at the upper end of the age spectrum of this study fully restricted their children from teaching on marriage and sexuality, even within the family home. Other parents of younger children who had not yet initiated such teaching indicated a desire to wrap the teaching on marriage and sexuality within a larger scope of topics, keeping the subjects of marriage and sexuality from being singled out and possibly taken out of a biblical context.

Some parents who had begun marriage and sexuality education with their children indicated they did so as a means of controlling their child’s first exposure to the topic. These parents desired for their child’s first formal thinking on the subject to be done so in light of the parental message, rather than a possibly unapproved message from an unexpected source or at an unexpected time. Parents expressed struggle in not over-sheltering their children, controlling information their children receive outside the home, and controlling the messages they receive from other sources.

#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, “To what extent, if any, does the local church influence Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality?” The following primary questions were asked of interviewees to ascertain if and how the local church influences their perspectives and teaching: (4a) Does your church address marriage and/or sexuality in any way? (4b) Has the teaching or stance of your church regarding marriage and sexuality changed your personal teaching and/or parenting in any way? (4c) Are your church leaders properly equipped to teach or influence parents in the areas of marriage and sexuality? Additional probing and follow-up questions were asked to garner more information. The research findings are presented, followed by analysis of the findings.

Interviewees described the method or methods in which marriage and sexuality are addressed at their churches. These methods are presented in table 23.

Table 23. Methods of addressing marriage and/or sexuality in the local church

Method	Number of Interviewees Citing Particular Method
Preaching	15
Bible study or Sunday school	9
Marriage retreat	6
Youth group	7

Twenty three interviewees (82 percent) indicated their church does address marriage and sexuality (question 4a). Sixteen of these participants described the message being sent by their church on these issues as “clear.”

Five interviewees (18 percent) initially indicated their church does not address marriage and sexuality in any way. Four out of 5 of these participants went on to describe *some* mention of marriage or sexuality within their church, however diminished they perceived it to be. One participant stated, “It comes up from the pulpit and maybe some in Bible study but not a ton. There has been no preaching series on marriage that I

can ever remember.” Another stated, “The pastor might say something in passing about marriage, but never anything about sexuality.” A third participant stated he hears of marriage and sexuality “only in indirect references, we aren’t hearing anything about it in messages, nor are we having the solid foundation of study.” The fourth interviewee indicated that her church does address “maybe a little bit about marriage.” She went on to state, “But I wouldn’t say it is from a biblical perspective. You sort of feel like you are going to a self-help program.”

Regarding the influence the local church has upon their parenting or teaching (question 4b), interviewees reported that their local church has some influence to no influence. The following chart displays the influence of the local church as described by participants.

Table 24. Influence of the local church

Influence of local church	Number of Interviewees	%
No influence	17	61
Some influence	8	29
Supported or reinforced	7	25

Seventeen (61 percent) of the 28 interviewees indicated their church has not influenced their parenting or teaching in any way regarding marriage and sexuality. Two interviewees offered reasoning for the lack of influence. One participant stated, “I was already a parent and sort of well rooted in my own convictions and approach to parenting when I got here.” Another stated, “I don’t think the teaching of our church on these issues has really affected me any on what I already knew to be true.” Seven interviewees (25 percent) indicated that while their church has not influenced their parenting or teaching on these issues, they have been “supported” by their church or their church has “reinforced their teaching.”

Eight participants (29 percent) indicated their church has influenced their parenting and/or teaching in some way. One participant stated, “My church has influenced me, absolutely. I am confident that I am at a Bible believing church, and that my pastor is going to speak from the Word of God, and that he has my back as a parent.” Another stated, “Definitely. It has opened my eyes and it has brought me closer to the Bible and closer to God’s word and has aligned my parenting more with that.” A third participant indicated that her church has “escalated the conversations I am going to have with my child, knowing the pastor is going to talk about these issues at church has encouraged me to talk to my kids about it at home first.”

Regarding the ability of church leaders to influence or equip parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality (question 4c), some interviewees indicated whether or not they perceived their pastors were properly equipped to do so.

Table 25. Pastors properly equipped to influence and equip parents

Pastors properly equipped	Number of Interviewees	%
Are properly equipped	15	54
Are not properly equipped	6	21
Unsure	3	7

Fifteen interviewees (54 percent) indicated they perceive their pastors are properly equipped to influence or equip parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. Six interviewees (21 percent) perceive their church leaders as not properly equipped to influence or equip parents in teaching their children on these issues. Three interviewees (7 percent) were unsure if their church leaders were properly equipped for this task.

Participants offered multiple reasons as to why they perceived their pastor as not properly equipped to influence or equip parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality. These reasons include age, a lack of relationality, life stage younger than that of congregants, unawareness of issues, and a lack of pastoral freedom.

One participant who identified age as an issue offered the following response when asked if he felt his church leaders were properly equipped to teach and influence parents and kids in the areas of marriage and sexuality:

I am going to answer no. And the reason I am going to answer no is because our staff is pretty old. We've got a pastor who is 62. We've got a minister of music who is 64. Our education guys is like 59, and our children's minister is 58 or 59 as well. So, if they've even gone through this with their kids, and also from when they were raised, their knowledge is out of date. The youth ministers who really have a better handle on it don't have a lot of general access to the population of the church. So, no, I don't think in general our ministerial staff is equipped to do it.

Another participant discussed age and the lack of relationality between his senior pastor and the children and teens within the church:

What I am thinking about is more their approach. I think some of them have a more, they just approach it more relationally than others. I think on this particular situation you have to be relational, more so than you are with any other subject. And age. You've got a senior pastor talking to teenagers. What do you know? You don't live in my world. You don't have the girls dressing half-naked all the time in high school. What do you know? Because they don't see it. So it's really got to do with relationships. How relational they are and how they can relate to the audience.

Another interviewee addressed an issue with pastoral age from the other end of the spectrum:

Currently everybody on our staff is forty or younger, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It doesn't make us ineffective, but I think there is something to be said for experience and things and having to raise kids and raise a family and live in the culture. What I see is a disconnect, and the teaching is teaching and biblical truth is biblical truth whether it is coming out of a 22 year old or it is coming out of a 50 year old but being able to apply that. So maybe that is the challenge. I think younger pastors that lack some of the life experience are maybe a little more detached from the reality and culture and sexuality. I mean they know the truths of the Bible and what it speaks to and they can obviously apply it to the culture. But it is different than having someone under your roof that you are trying to raise and trying to shepherd through that. You can teach a lot more on what you've done that what you will do.

One interviewee of older children expressed an issue with having a pastoral staff in younger life stages than herself:

I think in the present situation and just looking at that situation they need more. And it's really just because the mix of pastoral staff that we've got right now. My senior pastor has got a third grader and below with his three kids. My associate pastor and his wife were not able to have children so they have never been parents. Our youth minister has two preschool aged kids. My children's minister has a one-year old and my worship minister is unmarried. So I've got nobody who's got kids older than mine. I don't really have anybody who is past my own stage in parenting. So I am really kind of the resource for them instead of the other way around.

Participants also stated they perceived their pastor to be ill-equipped for the task of influencing and equipping parents due to an unawareness of the issues at hand. One interviewee stated of her pastor, “I don’t think my pastor is [equipped]. Not that he is not concerned, but I just don’t know that he sees it as as big an issue as it is.” Another participant echoed a similar sentiment, but also added a lack of “freedom” to her reasoning:

I don’t doubt that they are equipped and could do it. I just don’t know if they, either they don’t see the need or they don’t feel the freedom to address it. Like maybe the pastor feels like he would get a million emails if he addressed it in the service. Maybe he doesn’t realize it is a need or something. And our children’s minister, I just have a feeling that he is always afraid of a congregational backlash.

Finally, interviewees identified issues they would like to see their church address in the areas of marriage and sexuality. These issues are displayed in table 26.

Table 26. Issues parents desire their church to address

Issue	Number of Interviewees	%
Parental training & discipleship	6	21
Social issues: divorce, pornography, homosexuality, promiscuous sexuality	4	14
Sin as a root issue	2	7

Six interviewees (21 percent) indicated they would like their church to provide training for parents regarding how to disciple and teach their children in the areas of marriage and sexuality. Four participants (14 percent) indicated a need for their church to address family and societal problems such as divorce, pornography, homosexuality, or promiscuous sexuality, and specifically how to teach children on these issues. Two interviewees (7 percent) indicated the need for their church to address the root issue of sin on a regular basis, as opposed to behavioral manifestations of sin.

### Values Codification

Values coding performed upon this set of data identified the codes of “parental training,” “equipping parents,” and other values involving the church such as “church as a support,” “church as an influencer,” and “partnership.” Both values expressed by

parents here address the need for parents to feel capable and ready to teach their children on these issues of marriage and sexuality. The code “parental training” was expressed in terms of what parents perceive they are in need of, while the code of “church equipping” was an indicator of what participants perceived they need their church to provide..

**Parental training.** Some interviewees expressed a need for personal training and coaching on how to best teach their child about marriage and sexuality, and how to disciple their child in general. These parents desired training from their church, their family, or a Christian mentor. While some participants were willing to seek out training on their own through textual resources or asking questions of persons they deemed knowledgeable, others had not taken such steps. Parents who classified themselves as ready to teach or capable of teaching their children still perceived they would benefit from some type of training for personal reassurance and/or to gain insight from sources outside themselves.

**Church equipping.** Interviewees expressed a need for their church to provide training to themselves and other parents within their congregations. Parents expressed value for their church as a support to and influence upon their families in building hearty Christian worldviews within their children. In some cases, parents expressed appreciation for the support and influence of their local church. In other cases, parents valued such help from their church and expressed a desire to receive it.

Additionally, parents expressed a need for training in the areas of general biblical discipleship of their children, biblical teaching marriage and sexuality, teaching their children a godly response to current social issues, teaching body development, understanding body development of opposite gender children, teaching godly social and relational behaviors to their children, among others. Interviewees expressed openness to receiving such training from their church and a desire to see their churches offer such training.

**Partnership.** Interviewees expressed value for a partnership between the home and the church in regard to teaching and influencing their children in the areas of marriage and sexuality. Some parents spoke of a desire for their teaching to be reinforced by the local church, specifically by their pastor and other church leaders within their child's circle of influence. Other parents who also serve on church staff in some capacity spoke of the desire for the teaching they offer at church to be addressed and reinforced within the family home. The central value of partnership expresses the need for the church body as a whole to act as one likeminded body, nudging the child more toward Christ-likeness in the critical areas of marriage and sexuality.

### **Evaluation of the Research Design**

This qualitative research study sought to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. This qualitative study employed semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect data from 28 study participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Content analysis was performed on the collected data.

Three strengths are identifiable in the research design. First, the design was structured around a large pool of potential interviewees. Having identified the population as "Christian parents associated with churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during the summer of 2014," the study was open to potentially hundreds of Christian parents. I was more likely, then, to succeed in achieving a sufficient number of interviews to complete the study.

A second strength of the research design was the creation of a unique instrument for the purpose of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The creation of the instrument allowed the interview questions to be tailored specifically to this research topic. The



instrument was established under the notion of providing guidance for a “semi-structured” interview. The semi-structured nature of the interview required a less wooden approach, thereby allowing more freedom to explore discussion points as they developed organically with each individual interview.

A third strength is found in multiple rounds of coding of the qualitative data. Two rounds of coding provided a micro and macro analysis of the data. The design required a first level of coding, “in vivo” coding,<sup>1</sup> to take place during the transcription of the interviews. This initial round of coding established a pool of brief but key set of quotations through which interviewees had answered interview questions. This particular type of coding offered strength to the research data by allowing the actual spoken words of interviewees to emerge. The second round of coding, “values” coding,<sup>2</sup> was performed upon the data following the transcription process. The values coding process provided a broad view of what the interview participants’ value most as a group, and allowed for the most widely identified values to emerge.

In addition to strengths, weaknesses became evident in the research design. One flaw in the design resulted in the inability to conduct two-parent interviews. Only one two-parent interview was conducted. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with one parent representing a family. This weakness is largely due to the constraints of life placed upon this particular population. It is unusual for both parents of school-aged children to be available at the same time, for the length of at least one hour, to discuss such a topic outside the presence of their children. In some cases the other parent was nearby during the interview for consultation on certain questions. For the majority of interviews,

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<sup>1</sup>Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 61. In Vivo coding grounds the research analysis from the perspective of the interviewee. This type of coding makes use of “direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases” (6).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 110-15. Values coding is the “application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or world-view” (110).

however, only one parent spoke for the couple. It is possible, therefore, to have attained less data than what could have otherwise been attained.

A second flaw in the research design involved a lapse of time of one year between the initial invitation for interviewee's study participation, and the actual interview completion. This lapse of time necessitated an extra step in communication to reengage potential interviewees. This extra step resulted in a more drawn out research process than originally planned.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

This study described the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. This qualitative study employed semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect data from study participants. This chapter will present conclusions drawn from an analysis of the research findings. Also included in this chapter will be research implications, applications, and limitations. Suggestions for future research will conclude the chapter.

#### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church.

#### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the research.

1. What perspectives do Christian parents hold toward marriage and sexuality?
2. What resources, if any, are Christian parents utilizing to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?
3. What teaching practices, if any, do Christian parents employ to teach their children about marriage and sexuality?

4. To what extent, if any, does the local church influence Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality?

### **Research Implications**

This section offers the findings and implications of this research as it relates to the four guiding research questions. The following is a summary list of research implications. These implications are organized according to the flow of research questions (RQ). Implications 1-4 are derived from RQ 1. Implications 5-10 are derived from RQ 2. Implications 11-16 are derived from RQ 3. Implications 17-20 are derived from RQ 4. The list of implications is followed by further discussion of each research implication.

1. Christian parents perceive mass media as a threat to their child's development of a biblical worldview, especially in the areas of marriage and sexuality.
2. Christian parents desire to exhibit control over their children's exposure to marriage and sexuality content, both within the family home and outside the parental purview.
3. Christian parents express a commitment to and a clear understanding of their responsibility to educate their own children regarding marriage and sexuality, but were less clear as to whether or not the church should help.
4. The life experiences of Christian parents play a direct role in the manner in which these parents educate their children about marriage and sexuality.
5. Mother and father are the most important human resources in educating children about marriage and sexuality.
6. Christian parents find mentoring relationships for themselves, to a large degree, and their children to a lesser degree, as positive and helpful in marriage and sexuality education.
7. A majority of Christian parents are not comfortable with their children receiving marriage and sexuality education in a public school setting.
8. Christian parents desire to exhibit control over the marriage and sexuality education their children receive.
9. The Bible is the most prominent resource Christian parents use to educate their children about marriage and sexuality.
10. Textual resources other than the Bible are used minimally by parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.
11. Parents desire to equip their children with a biblical worldview regarding marriage and sexuality.

12. Christian parents employ a variety of teaching practices with their children.
13. Christian parents differ widely in regard to the age and developmental stage of the child when the initial marriage and sexuality education is offered.
14. Parents struggle in knowing the right time and developmental stage to provide their children with marriage and sexuality education.
15. Parents employ comfort measures in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.
16. Parents desire to have complete awareness of *if*, *when*, and *how* their children will be taught about marriage and sexuality by individuals and entities outside the family home.
17. The church has minimal influence upon Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality.
18. Christian parents desire to be equipped by their church to teach their children about marriage and sexuality.
19. Christian parents desire a partnership with the local church in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.
20. Christian parents perceive pastoral age and life stage as issues in determining whether or not their pastors are well trained to influence and/or equip parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.

### **Research Question 1 Implications**

1. *Christian parents perceive mass media as a threat to their child's development of a biblical worldview, especially regarding the areas of marriage and sexuality.* Seventy-five percent of those interviewed identified mass media as oversaturated and/or harmful regarding marriage and sexuality content. Media outlets of television and internet were identified as the largest threat, with the potential of exposing children to large amounts of damaging content on a daily basis. This content is reflective of the current culture of non-marriage, which embraces divorce, cohabitation, and gay marriage. This content is also reflective of a culture which has been captured by sexualization and immorality, which parents deemed as harmful to their children.

2. *Christian parents desire to exhibit control over the children's exposure to marriage and sexuality content both within the family home and outside the parental purview.* The parents interviewed value control of their children's exposure to such

content, taking measures such as limiting or removing one or more forms of such media from the home. Parents also desired to be in control of the content to which their children are exposed outside the family home. Such exposure may occur within the public school system, the church, or in the home of a family member, friend, or neighbor. Parents determined they limited their child's exposure to marriage and sexuality content in these arenas by expressing clear expectations and standards to their children, maintaining an awareness of pertinent teachings within the church, communicating their parental standards to family and friends, and remaining in close contact with teachers and administrators within the school setting.

*3. Christian parents express a commitment to and a clear understanding of their responsibility to educate their own children regarding marriage and sexuality, but were less clear as to whether or not the church should help.* One hundred percent of participants expressed an understanding of their own parental responsibility to educate their children regarding marriage and sexuality. Only 48 percent of participants, however, indicated the church should play a supporting role by directly assisting the parents in marriage and sexuality education. Parents who were unsure of what role the church should play expressed uncertainty as to what content would be presented through the church and the manner in which such content would be presented. Parents also expressed disfavor for blanket teaching being offered to children who, although in the same age range, are likely at different levels of maturity. Parents expressed value for control of the marriage and sexuality education their children received, especially that provided outside the home, even when that education was coming from the church. Therefore, the education provided to children of these families may or may not be coupled with some level of education provided by the church or school. If so, this education would be heavily monitored and controlled by parents.

4. *The life experiences of Christian parents play a direct role in the manner in which these parents educate their children about marriage and sexuality.* The example of Christian homes and godly marriages experienced by interviewees was the most profound experience reported regarding life experiences, and was described by 68 percent of interview participants. Negative life experiences impacted interviewees as well, providing parents with an example of what they did not wish to replicate in their own families. Many Christian parents, especially those born in the 1970's, described a lack of marriage and sexuality education in their own homes. These parents were negatively impacted by this lack of education and determined to provide more significant marriage and sexuality education for their own children.

### **Research Question 2 Implications**

5. *Mother and father are the most important human resources in educating children about marriage and sexuality.* One-hundred percent of interviewees identified their spouse, other than themselves, as the most important resource for their children's marriage and sexuality education. Other individuals, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, may play a role in this education for some families, but only minimally as far as explicit teaching is concerned. The Christian parents interviewed expressed value for control of *who* provides marriage and sexuality education to their children. Even close family or friends who espouse similar family values were largely minimized in this regard. This minimization is due to the possibility of teaching content that may contradict what the parents want taught, or the potential manner in which such teaching could occur.

6. *Christian parents find mentoring relationships for themselves, to a large degree, and their children to a lesser degree, as positive and helpful in marriage and sexuality education.* Parents expressed value in learning from the experiences of other Christian parents. In many cases, these parents are mentored by those who are ahead of

them in life stage. However, some parents also indicated they desire to learn from others who currently share their parenting struggles. As far as mentoring children is concerned, parents expressed value, although to a lesser degree. Mentoring relationships for children were identified as a good potential resource for the child's marriage and sexuality education. However, parents still desire to control this education, and therefore would access child-adult mentoring relationships on a lesser basis.

*7. A majority of Christian parents are not comfortable with their children receiving marriage and sexuality education in a public school setting.* Some parents described lessons in body development as having been offered within the school, but differentiated between these lessons and those lessons dealing specifically with marriage and sexuality. Basic body development classes would be acceptable by some parental standards, but these parents would prefer such a course remain free of the teacher's personal values. Other parents indicated they did not desire for such teaching to be given in a manner void of personal values. Rather, they preferred personal values and moral holdings remain connected to the content. For this reason parents wished to handle the teaching themselves, even within school systems identified by as "trustworthy."

*8. Christian parents desire to exhibit control over the marriage and sexuality education their children receive.* Thirty-six percent of interviewees indicated their child's marriage and sexuality education is given by mother and father only, involving no other family members, friends, or entities outside the family home. Those parents who would involve other family members would do so from a level of deep trust, indicating they would only trust certain close family members. Overall, parents expressed a desire to keep their children free of marriage and sexuality education within the school. Even those schools deemed "trustworthy" would be closely monitored by parents who may or may not allow their child to participate in the classes.



9. *The Bible is the most prominent resource Christian parents use to educate their children about marriage and sexuality.* Interviewees indicated the Bible was used as the most prominent resource to provide their children with biblical teaching, a biblical worldview, a Christian belief system, or Christian values regarding marriage and sexuality. Ninety-three percent of parents identified the Bible as a resource they used in educating their children on these issues. Those who did not identify the Bible as a resource had yet to begin marriage and sexuality education with their children. These parents indicated they do plan to use the Bible when they begin such teaching.

10. *Textual resources other than the Bible are used minimally by parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.* Parents specifically identified 18 textual resources<sup>1</sup> they have consulted in teaching their children. Ten of these resources were used only by parents, and 8 resources were used by both parents and children together, or were given to children to read and review for themselves. In addition to the 18 textual resources, 2 participants also identified a human anatomy chart as a resource they have used in teaching their children. The minimal use of textual resources aside from the Bible may be due to the difficulties identified by parents with the use of such secular resources. These difficulties centered on resources presenting marriage and sexuality from a conflicting worldview and being overly explicit in presentation of material.

### **Research Question 3 Implications**

11. *Parents desire to equip their children with a biblical worldview regarding marriage and sexuality.* This goal was expressed by parents, both those who have begun educating their children and those who have yet to begin. Some parents go to great lengths to see this goal accomplished, spending time in thought, prayer, and ongoing marital and parent-child conversations. Parents seek out and evaluate resources to help

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<sup>1</sup>For a full list of resources identified by parents, see table 18 in chap. 4, “Textual resources used by parents in teaching children.”

this in this task, though many rely solely on the Bible. Parents describe this education in terms of its importance, indicating such education would be foundational to their child as they grow and develop physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Parents also expressed an understanding that the biblical worldview possessed by their children would have influence upon their life choices, thus, influencing their child's future family.

12. *Christian parents employ a variety of teaching practices with their children.* The most prominent teaching practice was “ongoing” education, which was described by 79 percent of interviewees. This type of education ruled out the practice of having one single discussion with children on the issues of marriage and sexuality. Instead, this teaching practice involves having multiple, ongoing conversations with children. Some of these conversations are formal and planned; others are casual and happen within the course of daily life. This type of education is in line with the model of parental discipleship of Deuteronomy 6, wherein parents are instructed to educate their children as life happens, giving them opportunity to learn at a practical level.

Additional teaching practices employed and valued by parents included mentoring, modeling, open conversations, and teachable moments. Through the use of these various teaching practices, parents expressed a desire produce in their children a biblical worldview and/or strong Christian beliefs regarding marriage and sexuality.

13. *Christian parents differ widely in regards to the age and developmental stage of the child when the initial marriage and sexuality education is offered.* Parents who had begun teaching their children about marriage and sexuality indicated the initial teaching was offered to their children as early as four years old and as late as 12 years. Those parents who had yet to begin this teaching had children as young as 7 years and as old as 14 years. Even within their own homes, parents of multiple children indicated they began teaching their own children at different ages. This variance is based on the parental assessment of the child's individual development and maturity level, as well as

the level of exposure to outside influences and/or older siblings. Parents with multiple children indicated they educated each successive child earlier than the one before. Experts hold positions similar to the interviewees on this matter with their range of recommended age at initial education beginning at birth and spanning through adolescence and into adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

14. *Parents struggle in knowing the right time and developmental stage to provide their children with marriage and sexuality education.* Many participants described a struggle in determining the right time to teach their children and what content should be presented to them at that time. Most parents expressed a desire to be proactive in this regard, providing their children with their first exposure to marriage and sexuality teaching. Parents must weigh out several factors in this struggle such as the child's age, maturity and physical development level, exposure to media, mode of education, and experiences with family and friends, among others. Participants expressed concern with exposing their children to too much too soon, as well as not teaching them enough.

15. *Parents employ comfort measures in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.* Parents expressed concern over their child's discomfort level while receiving marriage and sexuality education. To ease discomfort, parents employed various measures to help their children feel more at ease. The use of a conversation journal was one simple yet innovative measure used to ease the discomfort level. This journal allowed parent and child to continue discussing sensitive matters by writing back and forth to one another, asking and answering questions in a conversational style through written entries alone. Other comfort measures included utilizing private conversations within secluded places such as a park or restaurant. Still other comfort

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<sup>2</sup>For a full list of expert recommendations, see table 2 in chap. 2, "When to begin teaching marriage and sexuality."

measures included ongoing conversations, multi-tasking conversations, answering questions when asked, and maintaining a calm parental demeanor.

16. *Parents desire to have complete awareness of if, when and how their children will be taught about marriage and sexuality by individuals and entities outside the family home.* Even for schools considered “trustworthy” parents indicated they desire to know if, when, and how their children will be taught about marriage and sexuality. Parents desired full disclosure from the school regarding the scheduled date for teaching, curriculum, teaching practices, and age-gender makeup of the classroom during the teaching time.

Parents also indicated the desire to know if, when, and how the church will address such issues with their children. Though, parents described a greater level of trust with the church than that of the school. As a result, they generally expressed less concern over any potential content offered by the church than that which could be offered by the school.

#### **Research Question 4 Implications**

17. *The church has minimal influence upon Christian parents concerning their perspectives and teaching practices regarding marriage and sexuality.* In discussing the influence of the local church, participants noted distinctions between *influence*, *support*, and *reinforcement*. Eighty-two percent indicated their church addresses marriage and sexuality in some manner, and identified the message sent by their church on these issues as “clear.” However, 61 percent of interviewees indicated their church has not influenced their parenting or teaching in any way regarding marriage and sexuality. This lack of influence may be due to the content being taught by churches. Some parents indicated their churches rarely offer content that addresses the real lives of families or the practicalities of raising children in a sexualized society. This suggests the teaching being offered by churches may be too general to be of help, or too outdated in its response to

the current state of culture. Twenty-five percent of interviewees indicated that while their church has not influenced their parenting or teaching on these issues, they have been *supported* by their church or their teaching has been *reinforced* by their church. Eighteen percent of interviewees stated their church does not address marriage and sexuality in any significant fashion, therefore having no influence.

18. *Christian parents desire to be equipped by their church to teach their children about marriage and sexuality.* Interviewees indicated a desire for the church to address a host of issues surrounding marriage and sexuality. Parents communicated a desire for their church to provide training on how to disciple their children in relation to these topics. Parents also indicated a desire for their church to address family and societal problems related to marriage and sexuality such as divorce, homosexuality, promiscuous sexuality, and pornography. As deduced from the interviews, what participants' value most in this area is parental training and equipping. Parents desire to be practically equipped to talk to their children about these issues, and to be adequately equipped to teach them from a biblical perspective.

19. *Christian parents desire a partnership with the local church in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.* Parents not only want to be equipped by their church to better teach and disciple their own children, they also desire to forge a partnership between the family and the church in these matters. Parents desire for their churches to teach the Bible in ways that will help them build stronger Christian families. They desire for their church to present this biblical content with some level of applicability to their own lives. Parents also indicated a need for the church to support biblical teaching that occurs within their family home. Churches need to address issues which are pertinent to growing children, teens, young adults, and families—issues with which parents are often struggling. Such a partnership would provide reinforcement of parental teaching, thereby raising the confidence level of parents. This partnership would

also provide children with another biblically-sound message, signaling the importance and truth of the biblical message, thus reinforcing the teaching of the parents.

20. *Christian parents perceive pastoral age and life stage as issues in determining whether or not their pastors are well trained to influence and/or equip parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.* As expressed by several interviewees, pastoral staff who are far beyond the life stage of the young family may seem unable to relate or speak to their parishioners concerning the current culture of marriage and sexuality. Likewise, pastoral staff who are too young in age or life stage will be equally unable to speak into the lives of parents and families. This issue has created a “Goldilocks and the three bears” scenario wherein church members are looking for pastoral staff who are “just right.”

Church members would prefer their pastoral staff to be young and hip enough to understand the cultural trends and pressures with which families deal. They would also like the pastoral staff to be aged and wise enough to offer sound biblical teaching and life experience to speak into these issues. The implication of pastoral age and life stage becomes even more complicated when one considers the relative nature by which parishioners make such judgments. There is likely to be little agreement among large groups of parishioners as to who would be young and hip enough or aged and wise enough to meet the perceived needs of one congregation. Nonetheless, age and life stage of pastoral staff are issues of importance to parents seeking help from the local church.

### **Research Applications**

The purpose of this research was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents’ perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. This research is applicable to both Christian parents and to the local

church. Practical applications have been drawn from the research implications. These applications involve proactive solutions, and both offensive and defensive strategies to assist parents and the local church in their teaching of marriage and sexuality according to God's design. Following is a discussion of these applications.

*Parents should take a significant amount of time to discover, examine, and assess the amount and type of media consumed by their children.* By parents' own descriptions, their children are bombarded with various types of media messages that are contrary to biblical teaching, oversaturated with sexual content, and harmful to children and the family. These media messages may frequently reach children completely unchecked by parents. Parents, therefore, must take a realistic look at the consumption of media by each of their children individually and their family as a whole. Such an assessment should include both the routine and obvious exposures as well as those that are less routine. Routine exposures would consist of media consumed within the home, such as television, movies, music, gaming, and internet. Less routine examples may include media consumed while traveling or in situations where extended periods of waiting exist such as the doctor's office or family sporting events.

Parents must factor into their assessment the amount of consumption and types of media consumed in other venues, such as the public school, the church, and the homes of other friends and family. In addition to accurately determining the amount of media consumed, parents must also determine the types of media consumed and the overarching and underlying messages sent by each media form. The impact of these media messages should be considered from the child's point of view, a less mature, less developed and experienced view, than that of the older, experienced, and developed parent.

*Media control is, and will be, an issue with which Christian parents must increasingly engage.* The amount and types of media consumed by their children are matters with which interviewees expressed significant concern. Interview participants

expressed that as a society, a threshold has been crossed. Parents may no longer safely allow their children to consume various forms of media apart from parental knowledge and/or supervision. Christian parents must, therefore, establish safeguards within the home to minimize harmful media influence.

Parents may choose to establish perimeters regarding the television programs their children watch or internet sites with which they interact. Parents should make clear the time of day their children may watch television or access the internet. Christian parents must also consider the use of internet filters on any device which is accessible to children to prevent unintentional exposures to harmful content.

Many parents have chosen to establish family boundaries to control what media may be accessed and consumed within the home. Parents must go further by helping children to establish their own personal boundaries to guide them when outside the family home. Parents must also help children by making clear their expectations regarding what is acceptable media consumption when parents are not present.

*Parents must embrace the responsibility of teaching their children about marriage and sexuality from a biblical worldview, bringing their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).* By participants own description, mass media presents a picture of the individual and the family that is distinctly different than the biblical ideal. Parents described a visible lack of marital commitment within television families, an anti-biblical understanding of marriage, and a blatant disrespect between husband, wife, and children. From a defensive standpoint, parents must go to great lengths to counter these non-biblical and unhealthy messages. Parental teaching should not stop there, however. Parental teaching must also occur from an offensive position by consistently teaching God's plan for marriage and sexuality according to the Scriptures, regardless of what is popular with mass media.

This teaching may be done in conjunction with or in addition to the discipleship parents are already providing their children. All teaching opportunities cannot be



planned by parents, as spur of the moment questions and conversations occur within the rhythm of daily life. Some teaching, however, should be intentional, planned, and prepared by parents. Through careful thought and minimal planning, parents can ensure these necessary teaching opportunities occur and are given in a manner for maximum impact and comfort for the child.

Parents may consider multiple methods to provide this teaching. Planned conversations, different types of venues, even new communication techniques have served parents well in teaching their children. Creative measures may also be taken in order to lighten the conversation or to reduce the intensity of discomfort for parent and child. Drawing questions from a jar, creating a special parent-child date night, or attending a weekend event together can provide parents with creative opportunities to teach their children. Those who are proactive can enjoy the privilege of providing the child's first significant education on these issues, helping their child to establish the foundation for a healthy, biblical worldview and building a bridge to long-term communication with their child. Their children can enjoy the benefit of strong biblical ideals regarding marriage and sexuality, leaving them less likely to be swayed by worldly influences, and more likely to grow into spiritually healthy adults.

*The deep connectedness of marriage and sexuality must be taught by parents to their children and by pastors to their churches.* This teaching is needed to combat the trend Christian parents described within mass media wherein marriage and sexuality are presented as separate concepts. Parents described an assertion by mass media that marriage is no longer a precursor to sexual intercourse, and that one's sexual interactions with others is one way to define oneself. Additionally, parents described the agenda of mass media to normalize the idea of ongoing self-transformation, whether that includes gender, sexual preference, or relationship status.

Christian parents, and the local church, therefore, must begin to teach marriage and sexuality as deeply connected concepts that are inseparable according to God's design.

Strong biblical and theological teaching in this area will serve Christian parents and their children by helping them to analyze current societal trends through a biblical worldview. The connectedness of sexuality to God's good design affirms that God intended to create women to be women and men to be men, according to the gender which he designed them to hold. Additionally, the connectedness of sexuality to God's good design affirms marriage as the heterosexual union of man and woman who are then able to follow God's instructions to bear fruit and multiply. Further, the inseparable connectedness of marriage to sexuality according to God's design makes clear God's intention for the sexual union of man and woman. Parents who choose to educate their children according to the deep connectedness of marriage and sexuality give their children a foundation which will be less open to influence by secular and unbiblical teachings on these issues.

*Local churches must actively and consistently equip parents, teaching them how to disciple and teach their children in the areas of marriage and sexuality.* Christian parents are tasked with the responsibility of discipling their children. One hundred percent of interviewees expressed this understanding. Parents know their children are faced with daily secular views regarding marriage and sexuality. Yet, by their own admission, these parents struggle in knowing what to teach, how much to teach, or when to teach. Parents expressed a struggle in finding time to teach their children, and knowing how to teach in a way that will not cause their children discomfort. The local church must seize the opportunity to provide parents with simple and practical instruction in knowing how to disciple their children, what to teach their children, and when it is most appropriate to do so.

Parents do not desire for the church to take their primary place in this role. Instead, they desire for the church to come along side of them and equip them in being better teachers and disciplers of their own children. This type of help could be designed for churches of any size and financial means to make available. Teaching parents how to talk to children about such issues, providing them with discussion starters, and offering

resources and information to read are simple, yet highly practical, ways to raise parents to a new level of discipleship in their homes. Churches may choose to create small groups for parents for this specific purpose. Mentoring relationships may be established. Conferences can be attended. Hour-long parent chat sessions can be arranged. Encouragement and edification of the parents and families within the church body need not come at great financial expense. Churches may encourage and edify these parents by placing well thought out opportunities for teaching and learning to occur.

Churches that offer assistance to parents in this way will create stronger, healthier families as well as generations of Christian youth with a strong biblical worldview. Parents and children will become equipped to recognize how and where biblical directives have been distorted by the world and how to counter and respond to these distortions with biblical truth.

*Local churches must continually teach and preach about biblical marriage and biblical sexuality to help Christian parents and their children overcome fear and confusion.* From a practical standpoint, local churches are filled with families who are faced daily with secular and anti-biblical views of marriage and sexuality. Some Christian parents live in fear of talking with their children about these issues. There is fear of exposing their child to too much or not saying the right thing. There is fear of what their child has already been exposed to and not knowing the answer to their child's questions. There is the fear of awkwardness. These fears prevent some Christian parents from having critical conversations with their children. Children are confused about what the Bible instructs and what society displays. Children do not understand why same gender couples are frequently on television in displays of affection, nor do they fully understand what would cause a man to change his body to appear as a woman. Children are confused about why adults discuss these issues in hushed tones and behind closed doors.

Churches can help the family by preaching and teaching about biblical marriage and biblical sexuality. Parents who are well versed in biblical theology on these issues

are in better positions to teach their children according to the Scriptures, and in ways that their children will understand. Families as a whole can only benefit from receiving consistent, biblically astute teaching on these issues. Churches must move to support families with strong biblical teaching on real issues that modern families deal with on a daily basis.

### **Pragmatic Applications for the Local Church**

The following pragmatic applications are intended to direct the local church in how to best serve families as they strive to raise godly children in an increasingly secular culture.

**Activate the church-parent relationship.** The local church has the opportunity to be of invaluable assistance to parents by activating the church-parent relationship. This desire and intent for this relationship should be clearly communicated from church leaders and then developed through intentional relationship building.

The church-parent relationship requires a team mentality and is beneficial to both parents and the local church. For parents, this relationship will provide needed assurance to those who fear they are in the child-rearing struggle alone. It can provide support and direction to those who view themselves as incapable of providing the theological grounding for their children on the issues of marriage and sexuality. Even for parents who deem themselves competent in this arena, ongoing support offered by the local church would provide the support needed at times of uncertainty or weakness.

For the local church, a partnership with parents provides inroads to speak the gospel into families on an ongoing basis. Parents and children who hear the gospel in the church and within their homes in the course of daily living will develop more gospel-centered and less segmented lives. Church leaders who activate the church-parent relationship afford themselves the blessed opportunity to become a staple in the family

home, providing support, direction, love, and biblical truth over years of living life together.

**Create venues for parent-child dialogue.** The local church should be proactive in creating simple venues for parents and children to engage in discussion and teaching regarding marriage and sexuality. Such venues may take the form of discussion starter packets which would direct parents in how to begin and carry out discussions within their own homes. Other opportunities could be facilitated by church leaders more directly, such as gender specific small group discussions with parents and children, or family table discussion wherein parents and child share a meal at a private table while being led in facilitated discussion. Creative venues can provide immediate guidance to parents, helping them to overcome obstacles and giving them the support they need to successfully begin this important teaching to their children.

**Increase cultural competency among church leaders.** Though church leaders are unlikely to consider themselves “behind the times,” some parents indicated advanced pastoral age and/or cultural disconnection as limiting factors for church leaders’ ability to understand the struggles their families face regarding marriage and sexuality. These parents, therefore, do not view their church as an entity which can provide guidance and direction for their families. It is crucial that church leaders become culturally fluent with the struggles of children, teens, and families. This may be accomplished by spending time in the family home, the public school, and by learning from those who do spend great amounts of time in these arenas. Church leaders may also increase their cultural competency by familiarizing themselves with popular literature and media consumed by the parents and children in their congregations. Increased cultural competency among church leaders demonstrates to parents an increased ability to understand and speak into their real struggles.

**Reclaim marriage and sexuality as an essential part of the Christian worldview.** The secular world has attempted to commandeer marriage and sexuality, twisting each into an unrecognizable shadow of what God created. Church leaders must be intentional about reclaiming marriage and sexuality for God's purposes. Words associated with marriage, and with sexuality, must be spoken boldly in the church. Teaching on these topics should be embraced, and biblical study on these topics should be publically encouraged. Church leaders must not project embarrassment and timidity dealing with issues surrounding marriage and sexuality. Rather, taking into account the whole counsel of God, church leaders must recognize marriage and sexuality as essential parts of the Christian worldview and lead parents to incorporate these teachings into the training of their children.

### **Research Limitations**

The research required a precedent-setting study to be undertaken. The fresh ground upon which this research was built necessitated the use of qualitative methods. Certain limitations were related to the research method chosen, and to the undertaking of ground-breaking research. These limitations follow.

This research was conducted upon Christian parents who at the time had at least one child in the range of kindergarten to sixth grade. The research was limited to that same demographic and may not apply to parents having no child within this range.

This research provided a time stamped snapshot of Christian parents' perspectives, resources, teaching practices, and local church influence regarding marriage and sexuality. It was recognized that this research represented only the present time and did not represent the changing or shifting perspectives or teaching practices of study participants for the future.

This research was centered on Christian families in the context of twenty-first century American society. The research may not apply to Christian families within other cultures.

This research was limited to evangelical churches, and therefore may not apply to non-evangelical churches.

### **Further Research**

Further research is needed in many areas related to marriage, sexuality, and Christian parental instruction. Such research may help Christian parents to understand how they may successfully raise godly children in a sexualized culture, and may help churches know how to assist in the building of godly families. Research is needed to assist pastors and ministers in the local church to understand how to best teach a practical and biblical theology of marriage and sexuality. Pastors and teachers in the local church must be able to teach in a manner that is applicable to their parishioners, especially regarding the issues of marriage and sexuality. Pastors and teachers, therefore, should be studied to determine if they are, in fact, in touch with the struggles of modern Christian families. Assessment of pastors and teachers in the local church could determine if they are aware of family needs on this front, if they hold a biblically-sound theology of marriage and sexuality, if they teach and preach on these issues regularly, and what other methods they employ to undergird families with applicable, biblical help.

Additional research should be considered for the purpose of determining what role parental discipleship plays in the developing sexual health and future marital ideals of growing children. A comparison study could be conducted with Christian parents and their young adult children, comparing the reported teaching and discipleship offered by the parent to the reported worldview held by the young adult child. Inferences could then be drawn between the parental teaching and the child's developing worldview regarding marriage and sexuality.

Research should be conducted regarding the amount and type of media consumed by children in Christian homes. This research could help to determine the role such media plays in the child's developing worldview. This research could also suggest areas for parental improvement regarding media boundaries within the home, parental

training of the child regarding personal media standards, and the reach media consumed by the child has into their life as a young adult.

Additionally, the literature base is in need of research that incorporates the perspectives of Christian parents regarding the targeted teaching of marriage and sexuality to their children. Many parents expressed the need for textual resources that are both practical in nature and based on a biblical worldview. Christian parents desire to learn from conservative and sensible Christian experts how to improve their parenting and teaching in the areas of marriage and sexuality.

This particular study was aimed at Christian parents. A comparison study could be conducted upon non-Christian parents, Christian ministers, or other sub-groups of society in order to gauge the changing cultural sub systems within the church and in other small societal sects. Information gained from any of these suggested studies would benefit the local church, those working in ministry, and Christian parents seeking to provide practical and biblical teaching to their children.

This study was conducted qualitatively. Further research should be considered from a mixed methods or quantitative approach. Such research could identify specific issues and needs of Christian parents which otherwise may not be discovered.



## APPENDIX 1

### STUDY PARTICIPATION FORM

#### **Instructions:<sup>1</sup>**

##### Section 1:

Read the “Agreement to Participate” statement and confirm your willingness to participate in this study by checking the appropriate box and entering the requested information.

##### Section 2:

Provide responses to each of the prompts and questions by entering your information in the appropriate area. Please enter a response for every question, even if “not applicable” is most appropriate.

#### **Section 1: Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explore, among Christian parents, the perspectives, resources, teaching practices, and influence of the local church regarding marriage and sexuality. This research is being conducted by Jennifer Rose Garrison for purposes of dissertation research. In this research you will complete the form below and participate in a personal interview by telephone.

Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. In the case of use of direct quotations, names of participants will be changed. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this form and the subsequent personal interview, and by checking the appropriate box below and entering the requested information, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Printed Name:

Signature:

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<sup>1</sup>This form is based upon the Dissertation Participation Form of John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

Preferred Name:

E-mail:

Phone:

Date:

### Section 2-A: Church Information

1. Church denomination: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Church name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Church city and state: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Length of time (in months OR years) a church member:  
 less than 1 year  
 1-3 years  
 4-5 years  
 6-10 years  
 more than 10 years  
 if more than 10 years, please specify number of years \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of hours you spend at church per week:  
 less than 1 hour  
 1 to 2 hours  
 3 to 5 hours  
 5 or more hours
6. How is your weekly church time spent? Please check all that apply.  
 In Sunday school  
 In worship services  
 In Bible study other than Sunday school  
 Other (please explain "other")
7. Do you serve in an educational capacity in your church? If yes, please indicate area of service. Check all that apply:  
 Children  
 Youth  
 Adult  
 Worship leader  
 Church staff  
 Professional minister  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2-b: Personal information**

8. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_

11. If married, have you ever experienced divorce? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Age(s) of children: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### **RQ 1: Questions regarding parental perspectives toward marriage and sexuality.**

**PRIMARY QUESTION 1:** How would you describe the general representation of marriage and sexuality in the mass media? (E.g.: television, radio, internet, news, movies, etc.)

*Probing Question:* Do you find it to be oversaturated, harmful? Do you find it to be helpful or educational in any way?

*Probing Question:* How would you describe the media's representation of your personal marriage and sexuality values? (E.g.: accurate, under-represented, non-existent, equally represented) (I.e.: Do you see your own personal values regarding marriage and sexuality represented in the media? To what degree?)

**PRIMARY QUESTION 2:** Who do you say is responsible to educate your child about marriage and sexuality? (E.g.: one parent, both parents, parents and others- teacher, minister, church, etc.)

*Probing Question:* In the case that there are others who are responsible to help educate your child about marriage and sexuality, do you feel the need to overview the content these others use? (Further probes, if necessary: Are you offered access to the content? Must you ask to review content?)

**PRIMARY QUESTION 3:** Would you say that your own life experiences have influenced your present values towards marriage and sexuality?

#### **RQ 2: Questions regarding resources used by parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality.**

**PRIMARY QUESTION 4:** What resources have helped you discern how to communicate/teach about marriage and sexuality?

*Probing Question:* Do you consider your child's school a useful resource (Further probes, if necessary: Do you consider the school a trustworthy resource? Your church? Media?)

*Probing Question:* Are there other resources you make use of? (E.g.: other parents or personal friends, your child's friends, your pastor or other ministerial staff)

**PRIMARY QUESTION 5:** Do you use the Bible in your teaching? How do you use the Bible in your teaching? (E.g.: General references to the Bible (the Bible says), discussions about specific Bible passages (Gen. 1:26 says...))

*Probing Question:* Do you use other biblically based resources in your teaching?

**Potential Follow-up Question:** Do you use secular resources in your teaching? If so, how do you use these resources?

*Probing Question:* Have you found any particular difficulty in using these materials? (E.g.: worldview differences, opposing viewpoints, etc.)

### **RQ 3: Questions regarding teaching practices of Christian parents.**

**PRIMARY QUESTION 6: As far as teaching your kids is concerned, is there a certain way in which you have addressed the issues of marriage and sexuality? (E.g.: instruction, dialogue, modeling, teachable moments?)**

*Probing Question:* Do you/have you ever set aside specific time for this teaching? If so is this a one-time event, ongoing conversation?

*Probing Question:* At what age did you begin teaching your child about these issues? What factors helped you determine when to begin? (E.g.: physical development of the child, questions from the child, unexpected exposure to content, etc.)

**Potential Follow-up Question:** As you have walked with your child, has there been any one particular area regarding marriage and sexuality that you have struggled to teach them about or to help them understand?

*Probing Question:* Is there anything specific that could help you in this struggle? (E.g.: additional time or resources such as books, DVD's, websites, advice from other parents, direction from pastor, etc.)

### **RQ 4: Questions regarding the influence of the local church.**

**PRIMARY QUESTION 7: Does your church address marriage and/or sexuality in any way? (E.g.: preaching, Bible studies, seminars, marriage retreat, divorce care, etc.) If yes, are these efforts directed at specific audiences/age groups? (E.g.: married adults, single adults, teens, children, general congregation, etc.)**

*Probing Question:* If yes, (to primary question 6) how would you describe the message(s) sent by your church regarding marriage and sexuality? (E.g.: subtle, clear, loving, unkind, out of touch, relevant, applicable, etc.) How is that message received by you, your congregation, your community?

*Probing Question:* If no (to primary question 6) what would you like to see your church address, specifically, about these issues?

**PRIMARY QUESTION 8: Has the teaching/stance of your church regarding marriage and sexuality changed your personal teaching and/or parenting in any way? Please describe. (E.g.: personal thinking, worldview, parenting practices, rules/traditions in the home, etc.)**

## APPENDIX 3

### PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

#### Kentucky (n=88)

- |    |   |    |   |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | Alton Baptist, Lawrenceburg               | 32 | First Baptist, Brandenburg                |
| 2  | Ballardsville Baptist, Ballardsville      | 33 | First Baptist, East Bernstadt             |
| 3  | Bardstown Baptist, Bardstown              | 34 | First Baptist, Fulton, KY                 |
| 4  | Beacon Hill Baptist, Somerset             | 35 | First Baptist, Hazard                     |
| 5  | Beaver Dam Baptist, Beaver Dam            | 36 | First Baptist, Henderson                  |
| 6  | Buck Creek Baptist, Calhoun               | 37 | First Baptist, Highland Park              |
| 7  | Buck Grove Baptist, Ekron                 | 38 | First Baptist, Hodgenville                |
| 8  | Burlington Baptist, Burlington            | 39 | First Baptist, LaCenter                   |
| 9  | Cadiz Baptist, Cadiz                      | 40 | First Baptist, Lawrenceburg               |
| 10 | Calvary Baptist, Danville                 | 41 | First Baptist, Madisonville               |
| 11 | Calvary Baptist, Glasgow                  | 42 | First Baptist, Middletown                 |
| 12 | Calvary Baptist, Lexington                | 43 | First Baptist, Monticello                 |
| 13 | Campbellsville Baptist,<br>Campbellsville | 44 | First Baptist, Mt. Washington             |
| 14 | Cave Spring Baptist, Horse Cave           | 45 | First Baptist, Owenton                    |
| 15 | Cedar Grove Baptist, Olaton               | 46 | First Baptist, Russell                    |
| 16 | Cedar Grove Baptist, Stamping<br>Ground   | 47 | First Baptist, Shelbyville                |
| 17 | Centerpoint, Lexington                    | 48 | First Baptist, Somerset                   |
| 18 | Coral Hills Baptist, Glasgow              | 49 | First Christian Church, Somerset          |
| 19 | Cornerstone Baptist, Lexington            | 50 | First Christian Church, Versailles        |
| 20 | Crestwood Baptist, Frankfort              | 51 | Gano Baptist, Georgetown                  |
| 21 | Crossland Community, Bowling<br>Green     | 52 | Gardenside Baptist, Lexington             |
| 22 | Crosspointe Baptist, Owensboro            | 53 | Grace Community Baptist,<br>Louisville    |
| 23 | Crossroads Baptist, Elizabethtown         | 54 | Heritage Baptist, Lexington               |
| 24 | Cynthiana Baptist, Cynthiana              | 55 | Highland Hills Baptist, Ft. Thomas        |
| 25 | East Frankfort Baptist, Frankfort         | 56 | Hillsdale Baptist, Louisville             |
| 26 | East Hartford Baptist, Hartford           | 57 | Hillvue Heights Baptist, Bowling<br>Green |
| 27 | Elkton Baptist, Elkton                    | 58 | Hope Community, Frankfort                 |
| 28 | Erlanger Baptist, Erlanger                | 59 | Immanuel Baptist, Glasgow                 |
| 29 | Fairview Baptist, Ashland                 | 60 | Immanuel Baptist, Lexington               |
| 30 | Finchville Baptist, Finchville            | 61 | Kings Baptist, Taylorsville               |
| 31 | First Baptist, Mt. Sterling               | 62 | Leesburg Christian, Cynthiana             |

- |    |                                       |    |  |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|--|
| 63 | Living Hope Baptist, Bowling Green    | 77 | Porter Memorial Baptist, Lexington     |
| 64 | Lowell Avenue Baptist, Campbellsville | 78 | Red House Baptist, Richmond            |
| 65 | Memorial Baptist, Frankfort           | 79 | Rose Hill Missionary Baptist, Ashland  |
| 66 | Mentor Baptist, Mentor                | 80 | Salvisa Baptist, Salvisa               |
| 67 | Mill Creek Baptist, Bardstown         | 81 | Second Baptist, Hopkinsville           |
| 68 | Mt. Pisgah Baptist, Bremen            | 82 | Southern Heights Baptist, Russellville |
| 69 | Mt. Zion Baptist, Kuttawa             | 83 | Springfield Baptist, Springfield       |
| 70 | Mt. Zion Baptist, West Paducah        | 84 | Union Baptist, Union                   |
| 71 | New Work Fellowship, Hopkinsville     | 85 | Walnut Memorial Baptist, Owensboro     |
| 72 | Oakland Baptist, Oakland              | 86 | West Hickman Baptist Church, Hickman   |
| 73 | Olive Branch Baptist, Hanson          | 87 | Westside Baptist, Murray               |
| 74 | Parkland Baptist, Louisville          | 88 | Woodland Baptist, Louisville           |
| 75 | Pinckard Baptist, Versailles          |    |  |
| 76 | Pleasant Valley Community, Owensboro  |    |  |

**Tennessee (n = 52)**

- |    |                                    |    |                                    |
|----|------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|
| 1  | Arlington Baptist, Knoxville       | 24 | First Baptist, Portland            |
| 2  | Beech Grove Baptist, Louisville    | 25 | First Baptist, Selmer              |
| 3  | Bethel Baptist, Greenbriar         | 26 | First Baptist, Tullahoma           |
| 4  | Bluegrass Baptist, Hendersonville  | 27 | Flewellyn Baptist, Springfield     |
| 5  | Brook Hollow Baptist, Nashville    | 28 | Forest Hills Baptist, Nashville    |
| 6  | Calvary Baptist, Murfreesboro      | 29 | Germantown Baptist, Germantown     |
| 7  | Chilhowee Hills Baptist, Knoxville | 30 | Harpeth Heights Baptist, Nashville |
| 8  | Clearview Baptist, Franklin        | 31 | Harvest Fields Baptist, Pegram     |
| 9  | Clearview Baptist, Murfreesboro    | 32 | Haywood Hills Baptist, Nashville   |
| 10 | East Maryville Baptist, Maryville  | 33 | Hermitage Hills Baptist, Hermitage |
| 11 | Everett Hills Baptist, Maryville   | 34 | Hilldale Baptist, Clarksville      |
| 12 | First Baptist, Union City          | 35 | Inglewood Baptist, Nashville       |
| 13 | First Baptist, Carthage            | 36 | Journey Church, Lebanon            |
| 14 | First Baptist, Cookeville          | 37 | Mt. Carmel Baptist, Cross Plains   |
| 15 | First Baptist, Fairview            | 38 | Mt. Lebanon Baptist, Maryville     |
| 16 | First Baptist, Hixon               | 39 | New Hope Baptist, Hermitage        |
| 17 | First Baptist, Lenoir City         | 40 | Parkway Baptist, Smyrna            |
| 18 | First Baptist, Lexington           | 41 | Pleasant Heights Baptist, Columbia |
| 19 | First Baptist, Livingston          | 42 | Poplar Corner Baptist, Brownsville |
| 20 | First Baptist, Maryville           |    |                                    |
| 21 | First Baptist, Medina              |    |                                    |
| 22 | First Baptist, Nashville           |    |                                    |
| 23 | First Baptist, Paris               |    |                                    |

- |    |  |    |   |
|----|--|----|---|
| 43 | Sand Ridge Baptist, Lexington              | 48 | Three Oaks Chapel Baptist,<br>Dyersburg |
| 44 | Springfield Baptist, Springfield           | 49 | Trace Creek, New Johnsonville           |
| 45 | St.Paul Community Church,<br>Nashville     | 50 | Victory Baptist, Mt. Juliet             |
| 46 | Stevens Street Baptist, Cookeville         | 51 | Wallace Memorial Baptist,<br>Knoxville  |
| 47 | The Fellowship at Two Rivers,<br>Nashville | 52 | Woodmont Baptist, Nashville             |

**Alabama (n = 5)**

- |   |                                |   |                                     |
|---|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Bethlehem Baptist, Hazel Green | 4 | Sherwood Baptist, Huntsville        |
| 2 | Coosada Baptist, Coosada       | 5 | Winchester Road Baptist, Huntsville |
| 3 | First Baptist, Hazel Green     |   |                                     |

**Illinois (n = 6)**

- |   |                               |   |                                      |
|---|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Bethel Baptist, Vandalia      | 4 | First Baptist, Murphysboro           |
| 2 | Calvary Baptist, Monticello   | 5 | Heartland Baptist, Alton             |
| 3 | Cornerstone Community, Marion | 6 | Lincoln Avenue Baptist, Jacksonville |

**Missouri (n = 1)**

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Lynwood Baptist, Cape Girardeau |
|---|---------------------------------|

**Ohio (n = 10)**

- |   |   |    |                                |
|---|---|----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Community Church of Portage Lakes,<br>Akron | 6  | Hill Station Baptist, Goshen   |
| 2 | Fellowship Baptist, Mainville               | 7  | Lifepoint Church, Lewis Center |
| 3 | First Baptist, Fairborn                     | 8  | Mt. Carmel Baptist, Cincinnati |
| 4 | First Baptist, Mason                        | 9  | Northside Baptist, Lebanon     |
| 5 | First Baptist, Mt. Orab                     | 10 | Urbancrest Baptist, Lebanon    |

**Mississippi (n = 4)**

- |   |                           |   |                              |
|---|---------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | First Baptist, Booneville | 3 | Gaston Baptist, Booneville   |
| 2 | First Baptist, Corninth   | 4 | Pine Grove Baptist, Picayune |



APPENDIX 4  
MARRIAGE THESES

Theses (*theeseez*, pl. n. of thesis)—A statement, proposition, or premise resulting from examination of a topic.

1. Marriage is instituted by God as the most basic and fundamental relationship between a man and a woman (Gen 2:18).
  - 1.1. Marriage did not arise out of the mind or need of man (i.e. Adam was not lonely in a deficient sense, Gen 2:18-20).
  - 1.2. Man’s solitary existence is the only thing declared “not good” (Gen. 2:18) in an otherwise “good” world (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:9, 12, 17).
  - 1.3. The male-female marriage relationship is more basic than same-sex friendship relationships and male-female non-marital relationships.
  - 1.4. As the innovator of marriage, God alone has the right to set the parameters for the institution.
  
2. Marriage involves forming a one-flesh union through a process of leaving and cleaving (Gen 2:24).
  - 2.1. Gen. 2:24 is the most important verse in the Bible regarding marriage, oftentimes referred to as God’s law of marriage.
  - 2.2. This verse is quoted four times in the New Testament, and was cited by both Jesus and Paul in their teachings on marriage (cf. Matt 19:5; Mark 10:8; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31).<sup>1</sup>
  - 2.3. Since woman was made from man, they were already one flesh. Therefore, sexual intercourse is not only a *union* but also a *reunion*.
  - 2.4. Gen. 2:24 contains, in seminal form, many of the foundational marital norms that are expanded throughout Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup>David W. Jones, “The Asperity of Sexual Sin: Exploring the Sexual-Spiritual Nexus,” *Faith & Mission* 22, no. 1 (2004): 6–7.

Table A1. Genesis 2:24

<i>God's Expectation</i>	<i>Man's Sin</i>	<i>Evident in Genesis 2:24</i>
Monogamy	Polygamy	"Therefore a <b>man [singular]</b> shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his <b>wife [singular]</b> , and they shall become one flesh."
Fidelity	Adultery	"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and <b>hold fast</b> to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."
Durability	Divorce	"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and <b>hold fast</b> to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."
Fertility	Unfruitfulness	"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and <b>they shall become one flesh.</b> "
Complementarity	Egalitarianism	"Therefore a <b>man [marriage leader]</b> shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his <b>wife [suitable helper]</b> , and they shall become one flesh."
Heterosexuality	Homosexuality	"Therefore a <b>man [masculine]</b> shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his <b>wife [feminine]</b> , and they shall become one flesh."

3. Marriage is a temporal institution, yet it points to an eternal relationship (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35; Rom 7:2-3; Eph 5:22-23, 1 Cor 7:39).
  - 3.1. Scripture clearly indicates that while marriage is life-long, it is not eternal (cf. Matt 22:30; Luke 20:35; Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:39).
  - 3.2. The husband-wife relationship is frequently used by God to depict the eternal relationship that he desires with his people.
    - 3.2.1. Husband-wife/God-Israel passages (Song of Sol; Isa 49:18; 50:1, 54:4-8; Jer 2:2, 32; 3:14, 31:32; Ezek 16:1-14; Hos 1:1-3:5).
    - 3.2.2. Husband-wife/Christ-church passages (Matt 9:15; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29; Rom 7:1-4; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33; Rev 19:7; 21:2; 22:17).
    - 3.2.3 Sexual sin/spiritual sin passages (Isa 1:21; Jer 3:1-10; 5:7; 23:14; Ezek 16:15-43; 23:1-49; Hos 4:13-14; 7:4; Nah 3:4; Matt 12:39; 16:4; Mark 8:38; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:22; 17:1-19:2).
  - 3.3. God is very jealous of his analogies, even specifically directing the Old Testament priests (those symbolically closest to him) on whom they could marry (cf. Lev 21:7, 13-14); therefore, believers must be specifically vigilant concerning what they believe and practice concerning marriage.

4. Marriage ought to be entered into by individuals who are of the same spiritual condition (Exod 34:16; Deut 7:1-4; 1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14).
  - 4.1. Mixed spiritual marriages, not inter-racial marriages, were prohibited under Old Testament law (cf. Exod 34:16; Deut 7:1-4; 1 Kgs 11:1-8).
  - 4.2. Mixed spiritual marriages are still legitimate marriages (cf. 1 Cor 7:12-13; 1 Pet 3:1-2)
  - 4.3. The principle of separating the spiritual and unspiritual is present all throughout Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-13; Jas 4:4; 1 John 2:15).
  - 4.4. This is the only regulation in Scripture relating to potential marriage partners, as Paul noted that, aside from marrying “in the Lord,” believers are free to marry whomever they wish (1 Cor 7:39).
  - 4.5. A major reason for this directive is the spiritual impact that an unbelieving spouse inevitably will have upon a believer (cf. Deut 7:4; 1 Kgs 11:2, 4, 9; Neh 13:25-27), however this instruction is also concerned with the God/believer analogy, for to be in a marriage relationship with an unbeliever distorts this analogy.
  
5. Marriage was designed to be life-long and monogamous (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9).
  - 5.1. Even after the fall of mankind, no provision for ending marriage was given.
  - 5.2. In view of God’s design of marriage (Gen 2:24), and Jesus’ comments on the institution (Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9), any allowance for divorce must be viewed as an accommodation for sin (cf. Matt 19:8, Mark 10:5).
  - 5.3. Because of its presence in several Old Testament books, polygamy is oftentimes brought up in discussions of marriage and family. Note the following;
    - 5.3.1. Polygamy is the first explicit marital perversion mentioned in Scripture (cf. Gen 4:19).
    - 5.3.2. In contemporary polygamous cultures polygamy is viewed as having multiple bilateral marriages; thus testifying to the integrity of God’s design of the institution of marriage.
    - 5.3.3. There is no polygamous individual in Scripture who enjoyed a happy marriage life.
      - 5.3.3.1. In his grace and longsuffering God tolerated the sin of polygamy, as he does most sins, in hopes of repentance (cf. Exod 21:10-11; Lev 18:18; Deut 17:17; 21:15-17)
      - 5.3.3.2. Named individuals who practiced polygamy in Scripture include: Abraham, Esau, Jacob, Gideon, Elkanah, David, Solomon, Ahab, Jehoichin, Ashhur, Rehoboam, Abijah, Jehoram, Belshazzar, and Joash.
        - 5.3.3.2.1. Here are only fifteen in number, and limited to five books in the Old Testament—that is, Genesis, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles.
        - 5.3.3.2.2. There are no examples of polyandry (i.e. a woman having more than one husband) in the Bible.
  
6. There are at least seven basic purposes of marriage, including;
  - 6.1. Companionship (cf. Gen 2:18).
    - 6.1.1. In light of the fact that companionship is available in a non-marital context, this cannot be the only or main purpose of marriage.

- 6.2. Procreation (cf. Gen 1:28; 2:24; 9:1; 7).
  - 6.2.1. Reveals God's joy.
    - 6.2.1.1. Bruce Ware, "I believe that this is one of the reasons why God has made the sexual experience in human life to be as pleasurable and wondrous as it is. Image-of-God procreation is designed to reveal the pleasure God has in creating people in his own image, and the joy of bringing yet more of these humans into existence."<sup>2</sup>
- 6.3. Production of godly offspring (cf. Mal. 2:15; 1 Cor. 7:14).
- 6.4. Sexual fulfillment (cf. 1 Cor. 7:3-4).
- 6.5. Avoidance of sexual sin (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2, 5, 9).
- 6.6. Depiction of the inter-Trinitarian relationship (cf. Gen 1:26-27).<sup>3</sup>
  - 6.6.1. Compared to the rest of creation;
    - 6.6.1.1. When creating the animals there is no mention of gender or plurality within the Godhead.
    - 6.6.1.2. When creating man gender is explicitly mentioned as well as plurality within the Godhead.
    - 6.6.1.3. All of creation is made in order to *reflect* God's character to the world, mankind is made in order to *manifest* God's character to the world.
  - 6.6.2. In marriage mankind discovers the reality of composite unity.
    - 6.6.2.1. Experienced in one-fleshness, which is physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.
    - 6.6.2.2. Experienced in the embrace and manifestation of gender roles.
- 6.7. Depiction of the relationship between God and his people (cf. Eph 5:22-33).<sup>4</sup>
  - 6.7.1. God as husband (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14).
    - 6.7.1.1. Self-sacrificial love manifest in headship (Hos 3:1; Rom 5:8; Eph 5:25-28).
    - 6.7.1.2. Righteous jealousy (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; Isa. 48:11).
  - 6.7.2. Church as bride (2 Cor 11:2, Rev 18:23; 19:7; 21:2; 9).
    - 6.7.2.1. Self-sacrificial love manifest in submission (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18).

The Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*  
 "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and in the face of the congregation, to join together this man and this woman, in Holy Matrimony; which is an honorable state, instituted by God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church."

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 58.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 454-56; Geoffrey Bromily *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1-4.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. David J. Engelsma, *Marriage, The Mystery of Christ and the Church: The Covenant Bond in Scripture and History* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free, 1998), 20; J. Carl Laney, *The Divorce Myth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1981), 122-23; H. Wayne House, ed., *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 75.

7. To require or to forbid the institution of marriage is sinful (1 Cor 7:6-9; 1 Tim 4:1-3).
  - 7.1. Marriage is the usual state of mankind (Gen 2:24; Ps 68:6).
  - 7.2. Singleness is a spiritual gift, and like all spiritual gifts, it is given for the purposed of increased ministry (Matt 19:11-12; 1 Cor 7:7; cf. Jer 16:1-4).
    - 7.2.1. Lack of marriage is described as a curse in Scripture (cf. Ps 78:63).
    - 7.2.2. Singleness may be a spiritual gift reserved only for men.
  - 7.3. Forbidding marriage can be accomplished either by decree, as would be the case in a formal theological heresy or a corrupt government policy, or by cultural practices that discourage marriage (i.e., acceptance of pre-marital sex, cohabitation, etc.), as is the case in contemporary society.
  
8. Under normal circumstances, marriage is to be fruitful; however, marriage is legitimate without children (Gen 1:28; 2:24; 9:1, 7).

## APPENDIX 5

### EXPERT VALIDATORS

1. Dr. Scott Wigginton, Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Counseling, Campbellsville University, Counseling Pastor and Director of Lighthouse Counseling Center, Campbellsville Baptist Church, Campbellsville, KY.
2. Dr. John Babler, Associate Professor of Counseling and Director of the Walsh Counseling Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX.
3. Mark DeVries, Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, TN, Founder and President of Youth Ministry Architects, Nashville, TN.
4. Lee Ann Vincent, current Minister of Member Connection, former Minister of Children and Families, Parkway Baptist Church, Bardstown, KY.

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## ABSTRACT

### MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND CHRISTIAN PARENTAL INSTRUCTION: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016  
Chair: Dr. Hal K. Pettegrew

The purpose of this study was to describe the perspectives among Christian parents toward marriage and sexuality, to describe the resources and practices utilized by these parents in teaching their children about marriage and sexuality, and to describe to what extent, if any, these parents' perspectives and teaching practices are influenced by the local church. 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Christian parents having at least one child in the range of kindergarten to sixth grade.

Chapter 1 offers a detailed description of the research problem and the purpose of the research. Though traditional forms of marriage and sexuality have long been building blocks of society, current American culture now presents many alternative choices to both marriage and sexuality.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the precedent literature concerning marriage, sexuality, and Christian parental instruction, as well as key cultural trends related to marriage and sexuality, and a review of twelve parental help texts addressing both issues.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology of this study. The qualitative research design consisted of the following steps. First, access was obtained to churches who attended CentriKid Camp on the campus of Campbellsville University during summer 2014. Second, children's ministry group leaders from attending churches were

invited to participate in the study. Personal contact information was gathered from each volunteer. Third, an interview protocol was created, validated through an expert panel, and approved by the Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Fourth, a pilot study was conducted. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Fifth, 28 interviewees were purposefully selected based upon the highest number of volunteers from participating churches. Sixth, a Dissertation Participation Form was gathered from each participant. Seventh, 28 interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded. Types of coding applied to the research included In Vivo and values coding. Eighth, content analysis was completed on the gathered data. Finally, findings were evaluated and conclusions were drawn.

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the research findings. These findings describe the values expressed by Christian parents in regard to the research questions.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions drawn from the research.

**KEYWORDS:** Bible, biblical discipleship, biblical teaching, biblical worldview, Christian parenting, church discipleship, church equipping, church influence, cohabitation, comfort measures, culture, discipleship, divorce, gender confusion, homosexuality, life experience, life stage, marriage, marriage education, mass media, mentoring, parental controls, parental instruction, parental responsibility, parental struggle, parental teaching, parental training, parenting, parents, pastor, perspectives, pornography, public school, sexual ethics, sexual morality, sexuality, sexuality education, teaching methods, teaching practices, teaching resources, textual resources, values.

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