



COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

WRIDING

THE NINE



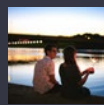
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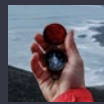
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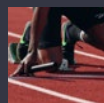
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COMPASS CHECK

Compass Check is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA) aged 12-19. Our name, *Compass Check*, describes youth pointing their spiritual compass toward God.

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire Church youth, ages 12-19, to respond to the gospel message.

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Dear Compass Checkers,

To give credit where it is due, “Compass Checkers” is the creation of our new managing editor for *Compass Check*, Kourtney Kovanis. I needed help with the editorial flow of articles, and Kourtney graciously volunteered, which is a huge blessing for me and for this magazine. Kourtney grew up in God’s Church and attended Northwest Camp for many years. She works as an editor in San Francisco, where she and her husband live. I now move to the role of editor, which means I can devote more time to working with our writers. Mitch Moss, who is our fantastic graphic designer, is also now the assignment editor. This means Mitch will be working with writers in developing new articles that are helpful to you. And yet another update: Robert Curry is our new associate editor. He will help Kourtney with the editorial flow of articles.

Please enjoy our winter issue, which features a variety of meaty articles for your reading pleasure. Let me know your suggestions for new articles, and, as always, keep turning your spiritual compass toward God.

Your camp friend,



Steve Nutzman

Editor

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Dear Readers

Five years ago I spent over two months in India for an internship through my university. I spent most of my time working for a non-profit organization, but I also wanted to meet anyone in the Church that I could while I was there. I remember planning a weekend trip and explaining to my coworkers that I would be staying with people I didn't know, but I knew it would be safe because they were in my Church. I had a difficult time convincing my hosts at the organization; they had never heard of something like that before.

But it didn't seem strange to me at all, because I grew up in God's Church, which is a family that reaches around the world. I grew up experiencing many examples

of that family trust, generosity, and community from people I had never met before.

I hope that for you all *Compass Check* can be an extension of that community. Ideally it is a place to share and support one another, even when we can't see each other in person. We can make good use of the trust that bonds us despite our limits of distance and time, reminding each other of our common goals, challenges, and hope. And we can learn from one another.

The Church has given me countless blessings, so I'm excited to give back in a small way through my role here. I look forward to widening and deepening our Church community through each issue of this magazine.

Your friend,

Kourtney Kovanis

*Kourtney,
pictured
with Monica
Masih and
Salveena
Younas
during her
time in India.*





“I’ll do anything except sex”

That was a phrase I heard growing up among some of my church peers. We all knew that the Bible strongly condemned sexual intercourse before marriage. The line was clearly drawn in the sand, and though we did our best not to cross it, some unfortunately made many excuses to get as close to it as possible.

If we were being honest with ourselves, however, we would have had to ask the question: “Who made that line?” We did, not God. We were defining what sexual immorality was, and we were defining how far we could go through our own justification rather than looking to God to define it for us. After all, we thought the Bible left a lot to be self-interpreted.

Does God actually have something to say about this? What does He think about all the actions and thoughts included in the “anything except sex” category? From hand holding to hugs, kissing or more—where does God draw the line?

Why does it matter?

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual

immorality sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Why the distinction between other sins (like lying, stealing, killing) and sexual immorality? The next verse (19) states that our bodies are the temple of God! Doing something against our own bodies would be like spray painting graffiti on our Heavenly Father’s house! It would make it dirty, losing some of its significance, and certainly would not make the owner, the One who dwells within it very happy. It’s hard to look at that and say that sexual intercourse is immoral but that God would be okay with “other” sexual interactions.

Mind before matter, thought before touch

It starts in the head. Jesus Christ removes all our make-believe lines in the sand when He says that even thinking in a sexual or immoral way about someone else is the same as following through with the act (Matthew 5:28).

Sometimes we can trick our own minds by making up excuses of pure intent. We say to ourselves, “I’m not intending to do anything immoral” and then proceed to kiss, hug and snuggle. We develop a way of thinking

that says, if the intentions are okay, then the outcome will turn out okay too. But we are only fooling ourselves since this is not the case.

Where it all leads

When we've done it once, it becomes comfortable to do again and easier to make the next step. Constant hand holding will only lead to a natural progression of wanting to do more. Each time we take a step further, we rationalize it in our minds with the same thoughts we had before.

The problem is that God created physical touch, in all of its various forms, to chemically produce good feelings within our bodies. We may not know it, but every time we hold someone's hand, give a hug or place a kiss, we are developing a bond with that other person. Even the little things "awaken love" when it may not be the right time in our life for it (Song of Solomon 2:7).

Once we have established these bonds with someone through lust or physical touch, we will often carry them into future relationships. Actions that should be reserved as a blessing for our future husband or wife become less special, scarred or carry with it past baggage.

God doesn't do excuses

This is where excuses like "I love him" or "I'm going to marry her anyway" come into play. We often tell these to ourselves and others as we pursue a physical relationship with someone. In our minds, it justifies the actions.

But God doesn't do excuses. He doesn't say, "Don't be sexually immoral, unless you love the other person," nor does He say, "Don't awaken physical lust in your mind, or love from physical touch . . . unless you are going to marry that person someday." No, God is clear when He says that romantic physical touch leads to immoral behavior, and it should not be done except within marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-2).

"If you play with fire, you will get burned" is a popular saying, but the Bible agrees with this statement in Proverbs 6:27-28. No matter what our initial intentions are, or how we justify our actions in our head, we "shall not be innocent" of committing sin (Proverbs 6:29).

It's up to you

When seeing how God feels about immoral behavior, physical touch, lust and awakening love, we should align our actions with our Father's words. This is not the job of our girlfriend, boyfriend or fiancé—it is our job to make our thoughts and actions pure.

In 1 Corinthians 6, we read that we are to flee sexual immorality, not just abstain from it. Run in the other direction! We should be doing everything within our power to remove ourselves from situations that would encourage our emotions and passions to lead us into a physical direction with someone.

This often means sacrificing what we desire to put God first. Joseph is a great example of someone who sacrificed his job, honor and position of authority to remove himself from a tempting situation involving another woman (Genesis 39). For us, this might mean staying away from situations where we would be alone with someone we have feelings for, involving other people in our relationship or even taking a break. We may have to set up personal rules that keep us from temptations when using cell phones, computers or other communication devices.

Redrawing the line

So where is the line? If we are being honest with ourselves, it's not as far as we might pretend it to be. We need to ask ourselves if we are allowing God's Word to determine our actions, or if we are taking it upon ourselves to say how far we can go based on our desires. We should all be striving to have clean "temples" for God, so that we can look back and be pleased with our actions of the past. **CC**



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Relationships

NO SMALL MATTER



As humans, most of us crave friendship. Regardless of if we make it obvious or not, we need that companionship. It's core to how we function on a daily basis. We are social creatures, and that's a fact. Even more so, we were created to desire a connection with someone of the opposite sex. A major time in an adult's life is the day they cleave unto their lifelong mate, and that kind of relationship can only begin if both people know how to grow and foster a relationship at the most basic of levels. As in all pursuits, you have to start somewhere and grow your way to your goal.

Treat them as a sibling

As you begin on your journey of friendship, there are a few basic guidelines to keep in mind. First of all, be patient. This will be a long trek through many hills and valleys, and it won't always be easy, but it will certainly be worth it. Have faith in that fact and stay level-headed about what you do and say with the people you want to get to know on a deeper level. Patience and faith are accompanied by the obvious: Be kind, loving, and considerate. Be temperate and be keen in how you handle situations. Have wisdom and take everything to God. These are basic ideals to employ with any relationship, but you'll find they are especially effective when dealing with the opposite gender. It may seem like far too

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many rules, but there is one way to consolidate them into one idea: Treat them as a sibling. I was raised with this very concept in mind, and it has guided me very well when I have chosen to use it. Every time I lose focus of it, though, things seem to go awry.

First impressions

One key point to remember is that before you can be anything more than friends, you have to be friends. Before that, you need to be acquaintances, and even before that, you need to meet. Your paths need to cross, and unless you go out of your way to accomplish this, it may never happen. You two need to be friends before anything else, and that will continue to be true long after you are more than friends. Have respect in all areas of discussion and be wary of how you present yourself. First impressions are vital to a

relationship, and they will be remembered forever, so stay wise and calm.

Stay vigilant

Focusing too much on one individual can blind you to the opportunities that God may be trying to present to you. The first person you connect with will most likely not be “the one you marry,” so don’t be too fixated on the idea of “love at first sight.” That includes thinking before you act or speak! You should employ that tactic in life as a whole, but in dealing with others, you’ll find it very effective in keeping you out of uncomfortable or unfortunate situations. In conversation, avoid being too eager or passive—that can complicate the situation extremely fast. Keep the conversation focused on positive, godly aspects, and God will help guide you in what to say, when to say it and how to present yourself as a young person.

Relationships are no small matter. They shape this life, and they change how we see everything. As soon as we start accounting for others, life begins to morph into something more than just ourselves, and that is exactly how God intended it to be. Jesus is, at all times, our one true and perfect example, and we can always look to Him for advice on how to treat others. Have wisdom; be patient. Have faith and kindness and, above all, treat them as you would a sibling: with understanding, with keen advice and with love. **CC**



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ENGAGE

HOW TO PROVE FOR YOURSELF GOD'S WAY WORKS



It was a Sabbath morning, and Melissa felt tired. School, homework, and a million other time-fillers had eaten away the six preceding days. She had been craving some fun all week, and if she hadn't been studying for that algebra exam, she could have watched the last few seasons of her favorite show or hung out with friends at the pool. Wasn't the Sabbath a day of rest? Going to church seemed like a lot more work than staying home. The sermons were over an hour long, and she just couldn't find anything in common with the few teens that attended.

Melissa's mom passed in the hall. "Almost ready?" she asked. "We've got to leave for church in half an hour." "I'm not going this week," Melissa announced.

Have you ever felt like Melissa? I have at times. Whether it's the people, the messages,

getting up early, the long drive, or some other combination of factors, attending church may be the *last way* you want to spend half of your weekend. But rather than just deciding to stop attending Sabbath services because you are sick of it, wouldn't it make sense to weigh the pros and cons? Of course, as you reach adulthood, it's important to make sure your beliefs really are your own—not a mere copy of your parents'. "But," you may claim, "I've already tried it." Well not so fast. If you've just been coming because your parents provided the transportation, you haven't really given it a *fair* test.

There are many scriptures that prove we should *keep* the Sabbath, but God doesn't stop there—He actually *tells* us to attend church services. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Despite these benefits, it often seems as if those who choose *not* to follow God are getting along just fine.

Another interesting passage in Psalms refers to Asaph's search for understanding. He couldn't figure out why the wicked prospered and got away with doing as they pleased. That is, he says, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:17). For the remainder of the Psalm, Asaph shares some of the blessings he discovered in his life as a result of obeying God. So how exactly can you go about this test? I'd like to share some ideas that have worked for me.

Get involved

Everyone has a unique set of talents to share, and you are no exception—get out there and put them to use! If you're naturally outgoing, try joining the greeting committee, or if you have a knack with electronics or computers, help out with the sound system. Are you good with children? You may feel right at home helping with youth instruction or the mothers room. If you are a musician, there are numerous opportunities to help out, whether it's performing special music, accompanying hymns or joining choir. Like to cook? Many congregations have a potluck or light refreshments after services. Additionally, you can look for opportunities to be helpful at special events. But that's not all you can do to get involved!

One of the best ways to get involved and help others is through encouragement. Talk to someone who's lonely, sympathize with their troubles and offer to pray for them, or even offer a practical way to help. Remember what the apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Perhaps you haven't discovered your hidden talents yet, but often the best way to find out is by serving others! If you don't know how to get involved, ask around—and ask your pastor or his wife.

Build a support network

Church is one of the best places to build a support network. You can meet a variety of people from different backgrounds and age groups—like older adults who can offer insight and amazing new perspectives from experience. Many teens find going to church difficult because there aren't a lot of young people near them in their age range. Try expanding your age group to include young adults, teens or pre-teens younger than you, who will look up to you as an older sister or brother.

If you attend one of the smaller church areas, try saving money to attend a summer or winter camp so

you can meet more people your own age. And remember—the Feast of Tabernacles is an excellent opportunity to meet new people! You're not the only one who faces the dual pressures of school and trying to live God's way; others have struggled with the same things. Seek these people out. Being with like-minded believers might be just the thing to perk you up. You need fellowship to grow.

Get those questions answered!

Why do we keep the annual Holy Days? How do I know what movies to watch? How do I forgive this person? When should I start dating? If you've had these questions, or just about any other Bible or Christian living question, church is the place to ask. At times do you find the sermon overly long or irrelevant to you? Here's another challenge: Make it a goal to learn at least one new thing from each sermon. Listen to the message. Write down scriptures—that way you can look them up later, and perhaps one or two of them will spark a new question to ask someone. Listen for verbal cues such as, "Secondly," or "another point," and write down any main ideas. Note-taking is a skill that comes with practice. But from personal experience, I can tell you that it has changed the way I view sermons. A few weeks ago, I looked back at some old church notebooks from when I was a young teen and was surprised to find how much I have progressed since then. I've also noticed that the sermons have been getting shorter. Coincidence?

Make a statement

That's right! Just being there shows what side you're on. Teens attend church for a variety of reasons. Some like the social aspect, some the potluck, and others just feel obligated to come. If you struggle with church attendance, ask God to refresh your perspective and to renew your desire to attend.

Melissa's struggle is one we all go through in our lives at one time or another. But it doesn't sound like she's given Church a fair try. "I'm not going this week," sounds like a lame excuse. Get involved, build a support network, and be sure to ask lots of questions—you will make a real statement! So it's your choice—are you up to the challenge? **CC**



Heidi Braun is a college student who attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation. Some of the many things she enjoys are writing, performing music, and spending time with Church friends. Appreci8books@gmail.com

FINDING GOD THROUGH *Obedience*



The teenage years—and the transition from child to adult—are a time of decision-making and taking responsibility. I remember asking myself, “What do I want my life to be like?” and “What makes sense to me?”

I analyzed my parents and how they dealt with life, and thought about what I wanted to do similarly or differently. I remember being ultra-sensitive to hypocrisy and feeling an urge to test the limits of everything. In my mind were thoughts like: “Was what teachers and other adults told me really true? What was real life like?”

Those years of transition are also a time of questioning God and challenging spiritual beliefs. It is a time (for those who grew up in the Church) of either accepting religion or discarding it.

C.S. Lewis, although he didn't have God's truth as we know it, as an adult became one of the most influential and famous Christian writers. But he went through spiritual growing pains during his teenage years as many of us do. He grew up in the Church of Ireland, but he didn't feel his childhood was especially spiritual or religious. In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, he writes: “I was taught the usual things and made to say my prayers and in due time taken to church. I naturally accepted what I was told but I cannot remember feeling much interest in it” (page 7). At 15 he became an atheist, feeling overwhelmed by emotions that seemed to pull him in opposite directions. He writes: “I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world” (ibid., page 115).

Sometimes in this stage it's easy to want to test God. It's tempting to think, “Are the boundaries of His law really for my own good?” and, “If I break His commandments, will what He warns really come true?” Some seem to want to test God through their own disobedience, daring God to show Himself, to call down fire or send them a sign.

Malachi 3:13-15 addresses this issue: “‘You have said terrible things about me,’ says the LORD. ‘But you say, “What do you mean? What have we said against you?” You have said, “What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying His commands or by trying to show the LORD that we are sorry for our sins? From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm”’” (New Living Translation throughout).

The people God speaks about in these verses are questioning whether it is worthwhile for them to obey God. They have doubts about whether God will follow through on what He says, or if His laws just limit them for no good reason.

In times of doubt or transition or growth, however, there is another possible way to respond. Instead of testing God to prove He exists, test Him through obedience. Malachi 3:10 says, “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the LORD, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!’”

In my first year after college, when I was far from my family and working retail while trying to gain experience through an unpaid internship, I realized I hadn't been tithing consistently. I was renting a room from a Church member and struggling to make everything work, not wanting to ask my family for more help. Despite the strained circumstances, I decided to set up my tithe payments and make sure I was doing that every month instead of putting it off. That same evening (before I had even sent any tithes, but after deciding I would), the lady I was staying with comes over and gives me an envelope, saying she put it in the wrong pile a while ago but it's actually for me. Inside was a big check, the security deposit from my old apartment that I'd been waiting probably six months for and hadn't received until then. God always has blessings waiting in the wings to reward obedience.

I don't think His promise is limited to tithing either. I've heard stories about keeping the Sabbath, overcoming addiction, and just stepping out in faith in order to be a good example to others. Ecclesiastes 12:1 is a reminder that youth is a time of exploration, but that following God will never do you wrong. When feeling far from God or in that shaky time of transition, make your parents' religion your own. Trust God and obey. He wants a relationship with you, and He wants to bless you. Through obedience, faith grows, and wisdom develops as blessings rain down. **CC**



Kourtney Kovanis attends the Oakland, California, congregation and is the managing editor of *Compass Check* magazine. She sings in the choir and enjoys the sunshine after growing up in Oregon. She works as an editor in San Francisco.

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It was a bitterly cold spring day in Wisconsin when I arrived at our track meet. We had to dress in cold weather uniforms due to the weather, with mesh body suits and short pants. I added two layers of sweat jackets and pants, as well as a stocking cap and gloves, but I would have to eventually wear just the short pants and body suit for my race. Because of the cold temperatures, I was not looking forward to that.

The last event of the track meet came—the 4x 400 relay. In order to stay warm longer, I waited, fully clothed, on the track behind the lead runner. When she was halfway around the track, I would quickly take off my sweat suits and have just enough time to be ready for the baton exchange.

Get ready . . .

When I saw my teammate hit the halfway mark, I slipped off both of my jackets and my sweat pants. I tossed them to the side of the track, then caught the eye of the next runner on my team to signal that I was ready. She responded with a horrified face. What was wrong? Oh, my hat! I whipped the hat off my head and threw it to the side; I was ready now. But no! My teammate was running towards me, still looking shocked. What could be wrong now? When Beth was finally close enough, she said, “Gayle, you took off your short pants!”

I was horrified. How embarrassing! I would never live this down. I would be the talk of the school. How could I ever face my teammates again? I quickly found my short pants, pulled them on, and ran my leg of the race.

We returned to the locker room. No one said anything. I thought that everyone had seen me with my short pants off, but obviously they were preoccupied watching the other runners. I kept waiting for someone

to make a snide or sarcastic comment about my mistake, but they never did. I learned that day that even my most uncomfortable and embarrassing mistakes will usually go unnoticed by other people. I learned that when you fumble or blunder, you should always keep moving forward, not stop to worry about what others think. Just change and move on!

Get set . . .

Each year at the beginning of track season, I informed my coaches that I could not run in meets on Friday night and Saturday, but I could run on all other nights. They were disappointed that I would not be available for the big meets yet happy to have me run on the meets that I could. Later in the track season there was one invitational—a track meet with 10 teams on a Friday night—that I could run in because with the time change. My races would be over before sunset.

This was the first time I would have the opportunity to run at a major track meet. I was very excited! I participated in my events, and then shortly before sundown, I returned to the bus to wait for the final events to finish up. I did not want to show that I was participating in the track meet on the Sabbath. While I waited alone on the bus, I had time to reflect. I was not participating or doing my own pleasure on the Sabbath, yet I didn't feel like I was honoring God either. My thoughts went to my family, who were together having a nice Sabbath dinner. I realized that I would rather be there with them, rejoicing in the beginning of the Sabbath, than sitting on the bus alone, trying *not* to do my own pleasure. I don't



Ready, Set,

GO

Life-Changing Realizations I Gained From Running

remember whether I won any of my races that day, but I did learn that the pleasures of this world do not stack up to the rewards of obeying God.

The day before another track meet, my coach announced that he was going to change things up from the normal schedule. He was going to put some people in races that they normally did not run to see how they performed. I had been running the 400 meter dash for two and a half years, and that was *my* race. I ran it in every track meet, but this time, coach wanted me to run the 800. What? I was not a long distance runner. I hadn't trained for that race. I was sure I couldn't do that. But I had no choice in the matter; the schedule was set.

I had no idea how to pace myself for this race, so I decided to keep pace with Nancy, who normally ran the 800. The starter fired the gun, and we were off. I fell in behind Nancy. It seemed like a comfortable pace, until I got to the 200 meter mark. Suddenly it felt too slow! I decided to pick up the pace, and I passed Nancy. I finished the race in first place, about 20 seconds faster than Nancy.

I was shocked and surprised. I could hardly believe my success! The coach had been trying to get me to run that race for the whole year, and I'd refused to try it. I learned a valuable lesson that day: Never be afraid to try something new just because you haven't done it before. You might find that instead of being mediocre at something you already know how to do, you could be great at something you haven't yet tried. You might even discover something that you enjoy doing *more* than what you're doing now!

Learn

Though these lessons were learned years ago, I still run today. I am still learning lessons while running. I find that my morning run is a great time to commune with God. There are no interruptions—no Facebook, no Netflix, no texts or phone calls, no e-mails or family members asking me to do things, and no to-do list staring me in the face. I am alone with God. I can pray; I can meditate; I can thank God for the beautiful sunrise and the tweeting of birds. I find that running helps me to think clearly. I have solved many problems while running. The lack of pressures and stresses causes clear answers to come into my mind. I find that running is also a great time to “write” articles. While running, the creative side of my brain functions more easily.

Maybe running isn't for you, but whatever you enjoy doing, you can always use it to learn lessons that will help you to be a better person. Take time to reflect on what you are doing, and consider what you can learn from the things that you face in your daily life. David often meditated on his circumstances. In Psalm 32:8 he expressed what God had taught him: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.” God is always guiding us, and He can help us to learn lessons from our most basic daily activities. **CC**



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The Unadvertised
Side Effects
of Pornography

by David Cobb



PHY
LEAVE ALONE

Active Ingredient
Lust.....

Purpose
Short-term pleasure

Uses • temporarily heightens sexual urges without providing lasting benefits

Warnings
Pornography will cause severe problems. These include:

- unrealistic sexual expectations
- relationship instability/unhappiness
- difficulty expressing yourself
- difficulty relating to others
- anxiety and/or depression

Side effects: The temptation to consume pornography is unavoidable and strong. Don't give in. An unending need and -

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Modern culture is filled with pornography—it's everywhere. Sexually explicit images and videos are easy to find on the Internet and in many other places. But that's only part of the problem. Images and videos that reveal just a bit less, often referred to as "soft porn," are literally everywhere. Sexual themes and imagery are very commonly used in movies, television, Internet and magazines. It's inescapable.

The rampant use of sex in media and easily available porn make life very difficult. Young men and women who are learning to embrace God's way of life must strive to resist their harmful effects! God created sex to be a blessing when used rightly. But wrong use of sex makes it a curse, filling life with negative consequences.

How can we maintain a healthy and balanced view of sex with so much pornography around us? We can't eliminate porn from the culture around us, but we can definitely *choose our response* to those influences. Jesus said that to fight against the dark and sinful aspects of their culture, Christians must put effort into living their lives in the light (John 12:35). This means filling your life with actions that are true and right.

A clear understanding of how consuming pornography differs from the right use of sexuality is the most powerful aid to resisting its dark temptations. It is possible to choose a better path, filled with light.

Consider three common myths about pornography, versus the truth of right sexuality:

Myth #1: Pornography is harmless and fun

Much of society doesn't see pornography as a serious problem. Like many other forms of sin, it's often passed off as "just something that people do." Some go further in passive

acceptance, treating it like childhood mischief that should just be overlooked. Sadly, many openly accept it, believing it's an acceptable way to "have a little fun."

In reality, porn is wrong at its very core. This means that there are no right or acceptable ways to use it and only negative outcomes if you do. The list of harmful effects includes:

- Unrealistic sexual expectations
- Relationship instability/unhappiness
- Difficulty expressing yourself
- Difficulty relating to others
- Anxiety and/or depression
- Sexually transmitted diseases (if you act on what you see)

Ironically, both participants and consumers of pornography are at high risk for these undesirable effects and many others. Despite being made to seem glamorous and highly desirable, working in the "sex industry" or consuming its products has very painful results.

Truth #1: Within a proper marriage, sex is both harmless and fun

It is God's design that a man and woman should "become one flesh," both physically and spiritually, within a loving marriage (Genesis 2:21-25). He didn't create sex as an unfulfilling duty meant only for procreation. Rather it's also an intensely enjoyable way to forge a unique and lasting bond between husband and wife. Within the safe boundaries of a committed, loving marriage, sex is only a blessing and "He [God] adds no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22).

Myth #2: Pornography shows what sex is like

It's natural as a young person to want to learn about sex and what it will be like. Viewing porn is the last place you'll find accurate answers! In reality, most pornography is a carefully scripted production that is staged, rehearsed and edited. As a result, like many other forms of media, it is filled with acting, exaggeration and partial reality.

Very bluntly, the average person's experience with sex is likely to be very different from what pornography portrays. Those differences between what you see in pornography and

what actually happens in normal life cause real problems. Instead of preparing you to enjoy sex rightly, it robs you of the true joy of sex that God intended.

In porn, sex is purely physical, and the participants are portrayed far more as objects that serve your desires than as people who should be loved. Here's a reality check—people don't like to be treated as things! Your future husband or wife won't stand for the kinds of behavior that pornography promotes, and they shouldn't.

Truth #2: The Bible's wisdom—not porn—prepares you for a fulfilling sex life

This may surprise you, since society is obsessed with a negative focus on what the Bible says *not* to do with regard to sex. However, sex is ultimately an exchange of actions and emotions *within a relationship*. God's Word specializes in relationship success, especially where outgoing love and concern for others is concerned.

Sexual fulfillment depends far more on the individuals expressing love and concern for one another than on any physical aspect of the act itself. If you want to learn how to enjoy sex, learn how to have a happy marriage. When a husband and wife's actions toward one another are based on godly character, physical blessings of intimacy will follow naturally.

In addition, be aware that when the time comes within marriage, there are many truly informative sexual education resources available. These can provide very direct and helpful information, without any of pornography's undesirable side effects.

When you have questions about sex now, ask your parents—it may surprise you how much they know! They can help cut through the confusing and incorrect information so prevalent in society. Much more, they would love to help you understand how to apply God's design in your life now, to prepare for the blessings that He intends in the future.

Myth #3: Pornography satisfies sexual desire

In reality, pornography doesn't satisfy anything—physically or emotionally. In fact, it only

leaves you *more unfulfilled*, in deeper and more dangerous ways. The belief that porn can provide the same outcomes that we were designed to desire from sex itself is ridiculous.

Pornographic material is the “gateway drug” of sexuality. Consuming a little often leads to consuming more and more, even to the point of addiction. Such material does not provide a “substitute” or “alternative” as some claim. Rather, it makes the consumer *more* likely to engage in sex—with even more negative consequences added on.

Truth #3: Wrongly used sex never satisfies

Society likes to pretend that in humans, sex is a purely physical need. Like the need for food or for sleep, or the animal instinct to procreate—you just fill the need however you want to fill it, the reasoning goes. This simply isn't true. Human history is filled with the negative physical and emotional consequences of this philosophy. Don't be fooled. Sex only satisfies when it is rightly used.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about sexual issues. His advice was very simple: “No one should take advantage of and *defraud* his brother in this matter . . .” (1 Thessalonians 4:6, emphasis added). This statement perfectly sums up the problem with pornography. It's an enormous, tragic fraud that hurts everyone who participates.

The temptation to consume pornography is unavoidable and strong.

Don't give in.

As young men and women whom God is calling, you *can* resist and rise above the temptation with His help. God created sex to bless your life with true physical and emotional fulfillment.

It's worth the wait. Choose not to settle for an unsatisfying and harmful fraud. **CC**



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NOT JUST
Your Parents'
RELIGION



You're at school, and that really cool kid invites you to a Friday night party. Now you are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, you really want to be able to hang out with this kid because he or she is interested in the same things you are, because they are popular and even maybe because it's someone you really like. But you know that a Friday night party is not a place that God wants you to be. Going to a party is not how you keep the Sabbath holy.

You have a couple of options you could use here, and you may be stressed out by how to respond to such a situation. You might be tempted to tell this incredibly cool kid that, "Oh, my parents don't let me go to parties on Friday nights," and let the blame rest on them. Yes, this is a direction that you *could* go.

I definitely used that wrong thinking a time or two as a teen. It would leave you looking more smooth and increase your chances of getting in with that crowd at school you've been eyeing.

But there is a much better way to deal with this situation that requires a bit more courage, and it involves owning what you believe. It involves making God your own God and not just something your parents believe in.

This is about making your relationship with God yours. God doesn't want you to keep the Sabbath, go to the Feast of Tabernacles every year and obey the Commandments just because it's something your parents require you to do.

God wants you to love Him because He is your God, too. Jesus Christ gave Himself as a sacrifice not only for your parents, but for you. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Think about that for a moment. God gave His only Son, whom He loved tremendously, as a sacrifice for you, so that you could have a chance to choose life!

Notice what Exodus 6:7 states: "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. Then

you shall know that I am the LORD your God." God is reaching out to you to be your personal, intimate God, as well as those brethren at services and your parents.

You're precious to God and important to Him, and He has incredible plans for you: "For I know the thoughts I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

Just think of how amazing it is that you have a God who created you, has wonderful plans for you specifically, and wants to hear your prayers and for you to seek Him with your whole heart. This is about a deep, personal connection with your own Creator who loves you very much.

So let's get back to that situation you might be facing sometime. How do you answer an invitation to a get-together on the Sabbath with courage? Tell them that you can't come Friday night because it's your Sabbath. This opens things up, so if they have questions they can learn something. But most importantly, with that simple statement you're claiming what you believe, and you're being a light by being different from those in the world.

Jesus stated: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14).

Our goal is to be a light, to seek God, and to be a part of His eternal family in the Kingdom of God. **CC**



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COMPASS CHECK

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