

Study Encourages Churches to Openly Discuss Marital Sex

Bragging of sexual conquests, suggestive jokes and innuendo, and sexual one-upmanship can all be a part of demonstrating one's manhood—especially for young men eager to exert their masculinity.

But how does masculinity manifest itself among young men who have pledged sexual abstinence before marriage? How do they handle sexual temptation, and what sorts of challenges crop up once they're married?

“Sexual purity and pledging abstinence are most commonly thought of as feminine, something girls and young women promise before marriage,” said Sarah Diefendorf, a sociology graduate student at the University of Washington. “But I wanted to look at this from the men's point of view.”

Studying a group of 15 young evangelical Christian men, Diefendorf learned that support groups and open discussions about sex with trusted companions were key in helping the men during their pre-marital years. But once married, they faced trouble.

Instructed by the church to keep problems “in the dark” after marriage, the men reported feeling like they couldn't discuss sex with their friends and didn't know how to comfortably broach the subject with their wives. The newly wedded men also expressed surprise that sexual temptations continued to taunt them.

Diefendorf presented her findings Aug. 17 at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco.

At the start of her study, in 2008, the men were in their late

teens and early 20s and part of a support group for young men who had pledged to remain virgins until marriage. The group was affiliated with a nondenominational evangelical megachurch in the southwestern United States that had about 14,000 attendees at Sunday services.

Over the course of a year, Diefendorf attended their meetings and conducted one-on-one interviews and focus-group meetings with the men.

The men talked about sex as both “sacred”—a gift from God meant for the marriage bed—and “beastly” if it occurs outside of marriage.

“To maintain this gift from God, they believe that they must control sex before marriage,” Diefendorf said. The support group is one way for the young men to explore their sexual urges, she said. Many of them opened up to struggles with pornography and masturbation, which some considered as “destructive” and a threat to their commitment to abstinence.

“People think that evangelical support groups are just about suppressing men’s natural urges, but really they are caring, supportive and safe space that allow men to have a remarkably open and frank discussion about sexual desire,” Diefendorf said.

Besides the support group, the men sought out accountability partners to help control their behavior. One of them, for instance, had an accountability partner who would text-message him each night, “Are you behaving?” Some of them used software to track which websites they visited and shared the results with the partner.

A few years later, in 2011 and 2012, Diefendorf followed up with the men. Fourteen of them were married, and she wanted to find out how the men’s views of sex and masculinity had changed since marriage.

During a focus-group meeting in one of their homes, it soon became clear that as taboo as sexual activity had been before marriage, it was now taboo to talk about sex, because it was seen as disrespecting their wives.

“After marriage, the church culture assumes that couples become each other’s support, regardless of the issue at hand,” Diefendorf said. “There’s little support in figuring out sexuality in married life, and these men don’t know how to talk to their wives about it.”

As one of the men put it: “For me to come home from work and say, ‘hey, did you like it last time?’ I mean that would be—that would be such a weird question for me to ask.”

The newlyweds also revealed they continue to think of sex in terms of control, and how the so-called beastly elements of sex—temptations by pornography and of extramarital affairs—do not disappear with the transition to married life.

“Before you get married, the biggest thing you struggle with, usually, is premarital sex,” one of the men told Diefendorf. “But once you are married, you can’t be tempted by that anymore, so you get attacked by completely different things. ...Essentially Satan has to find a new angle to attack on.”

They wished for more guidance from the church, and someone in the group said he’d cheer if his pastor decided to talk more about sex.

“While the whole point of these support groups is to honor sex in marriage, these men have gotten so used to thinking about sex as something negative that they bring those concerns with them to the marriage bed,” Deifendorf said. “Once they’re married, these men struggle to manage those concerns in the absence of the supportive community they once benefited from.”

She hopes that her study leads to more positive discussions of sex and how it is healthy, especially within the context of

abstinence-only sex education.

“There’s an obsession with virginity in this country,” Diefendorf said. “And we forget to have informative, successful conversations on sex.”

Doctors Gave up on Her Son, But She Prayed in a Miracle

A Texas mother and son are giving all the glory to God for the young man’s miraculous recovery.

In May, 17-year-old Cory Almanza was critically injured in a car accident that would have killed most people. His mother, Ruby Flores, remembers getting the call that every parent dreads.

“Just love your kids as much as you can, while you can, because you never know what tomorrow brings,” she said.

She even recalls realizing she might be saying goodbye to her beloved son.

“When we arrived at the hospital he wasn’t responding,” she said. “And they took me straight back to the room to see him because they didn’t know what was going to happen next.”

Almanza prayed for God to spare her son’s life. As it turned out, Cory did survive. But he was in a coma; he could not communicate at all.

“We were in the hospital for, like, a month and a half, and he was in a coma the whole time. He didn’t respond,” Flores said. “No parent wants to see their children hurt, especially in

that situation.”

Finally the doctors said there was nothing more they could do for Cory, so they sent him home, still in a coma. Flores never stopped praying for her son’s recovery.

Then came the miracle. Cory finally came out of his coma.

“We were just sitting there talking to him. We always do. And he just kept following our voices, looking at me and his sister talking.” He was just following us, and it was amazing. And I was just, ‘Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!’ That’s all I could say,” his mother recalled.

Since that time, Cory has improved dramatically. His mother said Cory can be used by God to encourage others.

“He can talk and express himself, let everybody know what he’s been through and how the Lord has blessed him,” she said. “He can be an inspiration to others that are in his situation, not to give up, but just keep fighting.”

Cory is still at home recovering. He’s not the same young man he was before the accident, but he’s getting stronger every day.

He especially wishes he could rejoin his high school football team as they prepare for the upcoming season. His mother recalled a visit from a few of his teammates.

“His friend told him two-a-days [practices] were starting,” she said. “And he said, ‘I want to go! I want to go!’ And [the friend] said ‘No you don’t; it’s hot!’”

4 Tips to W.H.I.P. Your Loved Ones Into Shape

If you're familiar with my writing and areas of interest, then you may know that I get a thrill from finding parallels between our physical and spiritual lives. Most recently, I've been pondering a few similarities I see between Christian evangelism and, for lack of a better term, fitness evangelism.

How people come to accept and follow Christ and how they come to embrace and enjoy a healthy, active lifestyle may have more in common than we think.

Merriam-Webster defines evangelism as "the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ." I would argue that what I am calling "fitness evangelism" is "the winning or revival of personal commitments to *health*."

Before I go on, I want to make it very clear that one's choice whether to accept or deny Jesus Christ as Lord is the most important decision he or she will ever make. 1 Tim. 4:8 clearly says that physical training has "some value," but "godliness has value for all things." The reason I emphasize fitness and enjoy helping others establish healthy workout and nutrition habits is because being in top physical condition:

- **Honors** and **glorifies** God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:31)
- **Enhances** and **improves** our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being (3 John 1:2; Prov. 17:22)
- **Prevents** illnesses and diseases that can cut our lives short (Prov. 23:20-21)
- **Enables** and **equips** us to handle the physical tasks of everyday life (Prov. 31:17)
- **Sets a positive example** for our children, friends and others around us (Eph. 4:15-16)

Having a physically healthy and fit body should never supersede our desire to purify our hearts and sanctify our souls as we pursue spiritual intimacy with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now, going back to “evangelism,” what isn’t so succinctly spelled out in dictionaries is the method one should employ when going about the act of evangelizing, a verb meaning “to try to convert (a group or area) to a different religion (especially Christianity).”

I do not wish this article to become a thesis opining the proper tenets of Christian evangelism—we can leave that to the preachers and theologians! However, I do think there are some general guidelines associated with spreading the Good News of Christ that can be applied to our mission to help our loved ones become healthy.

Because acronyms are fun and ever-trendy teaching tools, I’ve created “WHIP” to aid us in “evangelizing” those friends and family who need to start, perhaps for the first time in their lives, taking their physical health seriously.

W: Walk the Walk, Save the Talk

Maybe you’ve chatted a lot to your husband, best friend, grandmother, etc. about a certain type of exercise you’re really into nowadays, such as Zumba, CrossFit, Pilates or indoor cycling. Or maybe you’re seeing results from a new nutrition plan you’ve been following and love to talk about how much better you feel now that you’ve given up eating or drinking X, Y and Z. Surely my enthusiasm will rub off, and they’ll want to do what I’m doing!

I’ve thought that before ... many times.

When you read the Gospels, you will see that yes, Jesus taught and preached to throngs of people, but He also simply walked a walk that was consistent with His message. As fit and healthy

individuals, we don't have to rely solely on speaking eloquently or passionately in order to attract the interest of our audience. If we continue to abide by our convictions imparted by the Holy Spirit and informed by the Word of God, our loved ones will see and experience the fruit our lives produce and, prayerfully, be inspired to adopt such a lifestyle.

H: Have a Positive Attitude

Don't give up on those you love. It may be frustrating to continuously watch them make poor food choices while dining out or when you see nary a vegetable in their fridge and only processed junk food in their pantry, but a pessimistic attitude will only perpetuate the problem, and may in fact discourage them from considering a healthier lifestyle at all.

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11, ESV).

I: Invite Them to the Gym/Park/Trail/___fill in the blank ___with You

Have you ever invited someone to a Christian concert or special sermon series at your church? This probably didn't require you to lay out the Romans Road to salvation. All you did, I'm assuming, is say, "If you don't have plans this Saturday, I'd love for you to come hear this band with me!" Or, "My preacher is starting a series on Heaven and Hell this Sunday. It sounds like it's going to be really interesting. Want to go with me?"

Is there a 5K or a mud run coming up soon in your city? Does your gym offer free passes to first-timers? If so, invite your friend or family member to go and participate with you. If necessary, ease any concerns or fears they may be feeling by assuring them that you'll remain with them for the duration and go at their pace. For most of us, the first step toward a new routine is the toughest one to make, and having a friend

there to support them and hold their hand, literally if need be, can make all the difference.

P: Pray Persistently

This one goes along with “H” in that it’s imperative that we stay the course of our loved ones’ path to health, most of all spiritually. Sometimes it is challenging to, as they say, “let go and let God,” because as prideful human beings we oftentimes would rather arrogantly go to the ends of the Earth to fulfill our desires than humbly go to our knees in prayer to seek God’s will and ask Him to intervene.

Keep the people you’re rooting for and hoping to positively influence at the top of your prayer list. Ask the Lord to convict them and direct them toward a firm decision to eat healthier foods, stop eating excessively and/or emotionally, and exercise on a regular basis. He knows what is best for them and how to lead them out of their complacency, apathy, stubbornness, what have you, and has lovingly placed you in their lives to intercede for them during your quiet moments of prayer.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16, ESV).

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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For the original article, visit [www.dianataylor.com](#).

Peaceful Pope Francis Offers Strong Words About Stopping Radical Islam

Pope Francis said on Monday the international community would be justified in stopping Islamist militants in Iraq but that it should not be up to a single nation to decide how to intervene in the conflict.

The leader of the world's 1.2 billion **Roman Catholics** made his comments in an hour-long conversation with reporters aboard a plane returning from a trip to South Korea that ranged from international diplomacy to his health and future travel plans.

During the media encounter that has become a tradition at the end of his foreign journeys, Francis, 77, also said he planned to visit the United States next year and that he was ready to go to China "tomorrow" if the communist government allowed him.

He said he realized he had to slow down and be more "prudent" with his health and that he has learned how to handle the superstar status he has gained since taking office last year by thinking of his errors and his own imminent mortality.

Francis was asked if he approved of U.S. strikes against **Islamist State** insurgents who have recently forced Christians and other minorities to flee their homes in Iraq.

"In these cases, where there is an unjust aggression, I can only say that it is legitimate to stop the unjust aggressor," he said.

Proclaiming a caliphate straddling Iraq and Syria, the militants have swept across northern Iraq, pushing back Kurdish regional forces and driving tens of thousands of Christians and members of the Yazidi religious minority from their homes.

The pope was careful not to give the impression that he was giving an automatic green light for military strikes, but he did not rule them out. He said the situation was grave and the international community had to respond together.

“I underscore the verb ‘to stop’. I am not saying ‘bomb’ or ‘make war’, but stop him (the aggressor). The means by which he can be stopped must be evaluated. Stopping the unjust aggressor is legitimate,” he said.

“One single nation cannot judge how he is to be stopped, how an unjust aggressor is to be stopped,” he said. He said the United Nations was the proper forum to consider whether there was unjust aggression and how to stop it.

Willing to Go to Iraq

The pope disclosed that he had considered going to Iraq after his return from Korea, but decided against a visit for the time being. “At this moment, it would not be the best thing to do, but I am willing to do it,” he said.

He has sent a senior cardinal to Iraq to visit refugees and distribute Vatican charity funds and sent a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon about the need to stop the bloodshed.

Francis said he wanted to go Philadelphia in September 2015 for a meeting of Catholic families and hinted that the trip might well include a visit to the White House and Congress in Washington D.C. and the United Nations in New York.

That trip, which would be his first to the United States,

could also be expanded to include Mexico, he said, but no decision had been taken.

During his five-day visit to South Korea, Francis sent several signals to China, which does not allow Catholics to recognize the pope's authority, saying the communist government there should not fear Christians because they did not want to "come as conquerors" but be integral parts of local cultures.

On the plane, he said the Vatican was always open to dialog with Beijing, calling the country "noble and wise", but said that the Church needed to carry out its mission in freedom.

Poking fun at himself several times, Francis said that his custom of not taking vacations outside the Vatican was one of his "neuroses." He said he had slowed down for the summer by reading more, sleeping more and listening to music.

"Now I have to be more prudent, you are right," he told a reporter, who reminded him that he had been forced to cancel several events at the last minute in the past few months because of minor ailments or illnesses.

Francis said he did not let fame go to his head by thinking of his "sins and mistakes" and remembering that "this will last a short time, two or three years, and then we go to the house of the father" (God).

The pope, who stood for the entire, hour-long conversation, then made a chopping gesture with his hand and a whistling sound as if to say death comes sooner or later for everyone.

Editing by Crispian Balmer

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WATCH: Boy Miraculously Fights Off 400-Pound Alligator

A 9-year old boy is making news headlines across the country for wrestling a 9-foot long, 400-pound alligator—and winning.

“It really amazed me what happened. At first I thought someone was just playing with me, and I didn’t know what happened,” James Barney Jr. said in a press conference.

“I reached down to go grab it, and I felt its jaw, I felt its teeth, and I didn’t know what to do, so I immediately reacted and hit it a couple times. So then it was letting go a little, and then finally I had enough strength left to pry its jaw open a little.”

Watch the boy share his amazing story below.