

Why Did We Listen to R. Kelly, Anyway?

Singer and songwriter R. Kelly has been an American music sensation since the early 1990s. He's sold 30 million albums, and he's worth \$150 million. But now, millions of his fans are suddenly purging his music from their playlists and asking radio stations to "mute R. Kelly."

The reason: Allegations have been piling up for years about this man, suggesting that he sexually abused minor girls and held women against their will as sex slaves. But in early January, after the Lifetime network aired a bombshell documentary series, "Surviving R. Kelly," a national emergency erupted.

People are now demanding that Kelly be held accountable. Spotify, the music streaming service, has stopped promoting his songs on their platform. Apple Music and Pandora then took the same action. Kelly, meanwhile, glibly fought back—denying the allegations and announcing: "Only God can mute me."

My question: Why did we wait until now to hit the mute button?

It's bad enough that a majority of Kelly's music was essentially hard-core pornography in an audible form. Some of his most famous songs include "Bump n' Grind" and "Your Body's Callin'"—and most of his lyrics could not be printed here. His music is what my friends used to call "smut." It's nasty.

But today, apparently, it's okay to listen to nasty music until we find out that the man behind the microphone had relationships with 15-year-old girls and allegedly controlled small harems of women using threats, emotional torture and physical violence.

The saddest part to me is that Christians—including young

Christian guys—listened to R. Kelly’s music because they “liked the beat.” They didn’t realize that if you allow a polluted sewer to flow through your soul, the sleazy sludge will affect the way you think and act. Kelly’s music (and a lot of other popular music today) is a big reason why so many American men have a degrading view of women.

When I mentor young guys, I remind them that Jesus is very much concerned about the way they treat females. Christ’s values were invented a long time before the #MeToo movement. Here are five rules I live by:

1. **Train yourself to look at a woman’s heart, not her figure.** In our culture, women often are objectified, as if their entire identity were about their breasts or other body parts. That’s stupid. A woman has God-given dignity: She has intellect, a unique personality, a sense of humor, talents, compassion and so many other special qualities. Learn to focus on those aspects and stop defining women by physical attributes. And if your music objectifies women, get a new playlist.
2. **Don’t blame a woman for your sexual weakness.** I hear guys complaining that girls at church show too much cleavage or wear their pants too tight. Yes, that is a problem we can discuss at another time. But if a guy can’t control his libido when Delilah bats her eyelashes, how can he stand for holiness when Potiphar’s wife gets aggressive? Men, your responsibility is to show integrity and keep your pants zipped and your hands to yourself no matter how much temptation is thrown at you. Quit blaming women for your lust problem.
3. **Don’t use your words to stir up sexual passion.** We joke about silly Christian pickup lines (“Last night I was reading the book of Numbers, and I realized I didn’t have yours!”), but it’s no laughing matter if you are inappropriately using your words to stir up sexual desire in a woman. If you are filling your mind with

songs full of graphic sexual innuendo, those same words will eventually come out of your mouth.

4. **Respect sexual boundaries.** Every guy should read the story of Sarah in Genesis 12. Abraham lied about his wife's identity to Pharaoh, so the leader of Egypt decided to make a move on Sarah. Then God "afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues" (v. 17), all because Pharaoh thought he could romance a woman whom God had especially set apart as a "princess" (see Gen. 17:15). She was off-limits—and God was about to "mute" Pharaoh! Consider yourself warned if you even think of crossing a boundary with one of God's daughters. That means hands-off. It also means no sexting, flirting, groping, seducing or date-raping.
5. **Honor your marriage vows.** When I got engaged to my wife, my mother gave me my grandfather's wedding band that he wore when he married my grandmother in the 1920s. I keep this antique ring prominently on my finger at all times. I want women to see it, and I talk about my wife in conversations to remind everybody that I am "taken." Any Christian man who flirts with women while hiding his marital status is picking a fight with God—and is in danger of a head-on collision with moral failure.

Stop letting R. Kelly define how men should treat women. Mute the filthy music. Let's show the world that men can treat women with dignity.