

Why Josh Harris' Lost Faith Should Make Us Reexamine Our Theology on Sex

Not long ago Josh Harris, author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, asked his publisher to pull that book from distribution. Earlier this month, he announced he was getting divorced from his wife of 21 years, Shannon. And just days ago in a lengthy Instagram post the former pastor announced, "I am not a Christian." Josh's announcements raise again questions around the church's view of sex and sexuality.

Many middle-aged and young adults raised in church grew up viewing Josh Harris and his book as a cornerstone of the "purity movement." But NO-NO-NO turning suddenly to YES once you say "I do" proved to be an inadequate and sometimes confusing message.

The church has too often addressed sex, sexuality and intimacy poorly. Does making it to the altar as a virgin mean you're a little (or a lot) holier than someone who doesn't? Are you OK as long as you don't have sexual relations with anyone other than your spouse? Are the implications of the "purity movement" the same as what God would say to someone struggling with same-sex attraction, or to the spouse whose husband or wife is using sex as a manipulative weapon?

It's not that a traditional Christian ethic that says sex is only to be enjoyed between husband and wife within marriage is wrong. But our theology around this topic needs to be deeper. And we need to do a better job of helping people young and old apply that deeper theology to the sexually charged messages culture is screaming about so incessantly.

Why is sex such a big deal?

Sex is a big deal because God cares about it. And because the enemy continues to use it to create untold destruction. And because we have all experienced sexual harm and are in need of God's transforming grace.

Genesis 1 and 2 show that God designed sex, intimacy and marriage to exist together within covenant as a three-pronged demonstration, an object lesson, of the intimacy He desires with us (Eph. 5:32).

Enter sin in Genesis 3. Shame is immediately added to the mix, and the three-fold object lesson of sex, intimacy, and marriage becomes quickly disconnected.

Only God knows how many marriages exist where there is no intimacy or perhaps no sex. Plenty of physical bodies engage in sexual activity, married or single, with no intimacy. And attempts at intimacy without covenant can't work; only within covenant is there enough safety for intimacy to have a chance.

This disconnect is also, I believe, a significant reason why too many spiritual leaders (as well as others) become trapped in sexual sin such as pornography, infidelity or sexual harassment/abuse.

But even in our messed-up state, we cannot remove or completely forget the deep need for intimacy God created within us.

Toward Sexual Integrity

If two virgins get married and remain monogamous, they will not experience certain problems. But such a deeply inadequate goal is not the root of what God is really after. And separating people into classes of "saints" and "sinners" based on intercourse only within marriage completely misses God's true redemption story, and a whole lot more.

Sexual harm not only lessens our ability to relate to other

human beings, but to God Himself. Our sexual nature is part of how we are created in His image. And to the degree we withhold that part of our being from His transformation, we will remain less than He created us to be.

A young person does not develop a healthy capacity for intimacy by primarily hearing, "Don't do it." A married couple doesn't get doused with a capacity for healthy intimacy as the bouquet is tossed after the wedding. A man or woman, single or married, doesn't become magically healed from sexual harm by praying the sinner's prayer.

Let's do better.

Let's own our own sexual stories. Let's share our stories with each other in appropriate ways. Let's invite Jesus right into the middle of our sexual stories.

And let's help others invite Jesus into the ongoing messy beautiful story of their sexuality as well. {eoa}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .