

THE GIFT OF SEX

**Sex is a beautiful gift from God.
But when misused, it can bring tragic consequences.**

By Graemme Marshall

Janine (a fictitious name, but the story is real) was a pretty, 17-year-old high school senior looking forward to her graduation--the last of the Millennium.

After graduation she spent a week at a beach resort--a vacation to mark the end of her years of formal education. Soon after she returned home, a shock overshadowed all her expectations. She was pregnant! She didn't intend to be. She had only had sex once.

During her vacation Janine had gone out with friends to celebrate. A friend of a friend came along and alcohol was involved. Although she had never met him before, Janine had gone with this new acquaintance to his apartment. Now her life was in turmoil. What would her parents say?

Another shock soon followed. The father of her unborn child didn't want complications to his professional career. He was older and wanted neither marriage nor an unwanted baby. He encouraged her to have an abortion.

Just weeks before she had been an innocent 17 year old with thoughts of exams, graduation, celebrations and the excitement of looking for a job. Now she had to face some tough decisions. Too fearful to tell her parents, she agreed to an abortion, ending the potential of her first child's life.

The loss

Within just one month, Janine lost many things. She lost her virginity. She lost a child. She lost the chance for God's ideal for marriage. Overnight she went from a teen about to burst into the adult world, to being robbed of precious things she will never have again.

What went wrong? With all the safe sex advertisements, how can this still happen? When "love" feels so right, why are the consequences so tragic?

Missing out?

If you choose to remain a virgin until marriage, do you feel you are missing out? For most of our world's history, sex outside marriage was not taken for granted. People were as sexually vital as today, but ordinary, healthy people waited for marriage. Most agreed that sex before marriage was wrong. If a girl or boy wanted to avoid sex before marriage, they could rely on support from family, friends and culture. Not so today.

Harder to say NO

Premarital sex has become so common it can be hard to find friends who agree with right moral teaching. It is harder to say no. That's why it is important to know why you should stand your ground. Virginity does not mean left out. It just means still waiting, still looking, still expecting the right lifetime commitment. Waiting for sex until the day you commit to one person for a lifetime of sexual fulfillment is good and it's what God expects.

A beautiful gift

There is nothing wrong with sex. Sex is a beautiful gift from God. These warm, exciting sensations did not evolve from chimps or ocean algae. These almost overpowering needs for love and companionship were put in you for a purpose. God meant you to experience them, at the proper time. Why would God create all this vibrant sexual energy and not allow you to release it?

Have you felt God doesn't want you to have fun? It isn't true. What God really wants is for you to be the attractive, healthy, wholesome, functional person you dream to be. He wants you to find the most wonderful girl or boy to date and finally marry. He wants you to explore the most exciting sexual moments that can be experienced with that one special person. He designed you to have that kind of sex life. It's why the passions, urges and emotions of sex are in your body.

The problem is that most people don't understand why God made them so sexually alive. Too many of today's movies, TV, videos and music speak an opposite, shallow message. So it is little wonder our thinking about sex is turned upside down. People assume moral guidelines keep them from full enjoyment of their senses. The opposite is true. God meant you to enjoy sex for a lifetime--with the one partner--in marriage.

The hurts and the risks

You can't replay abortion. Janine will have to live her life knowing that the child she could have had cannot be brought back in this life. Many women who have had abortions admit they would reverse the decision if they could. A baby dies. That hurt goes deep and you may never be completely healed from it.

What did Janine risk? Did she know whether her one-night partner was disease free? Does she know whether she has now contracted a virus?

AIDS is just the latest in a long line of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some are incurable, like herpes. Some are deadly, like syphilis. Once you contract herpes, you have the disease for ever. For the rest of your life you risk infecting anyone you go to bed with--including your marriage partner. Syphilis works slowly causing brain damage, insanity and death if not treated. Another STD is chlamydia, an infection you may not know you have because its symptoms are subtle. One common result for men and women is infertility. Because STDs are increasing at an alarming rate, the only thing that can absolutely protect you is abstinence.

The honeymoon

The honeymoon for virgins is unique, incredible and can't be repeated. You get only one first time in life. There is great joy in experiencing it with the person to whom you have publicly committed the

rest of your life. But that's possible only if you wait. For the sexually experienced, the honeymoon is merely another nice vacation.

Isn't it ironic that many of the boys and girls trying to get you to bed really want to marry someone who has never had sex with anyone else? If someone says he loves you, yet seeks other partners too, how can you trust him? These types will compare your performance with everyone else they have sex with. It's humiliating to know you're on a rating list. Surveys show that people who learn to take sex lightly before marriage tend to continue to do so after marriage. It's a reason many marriages are plagued by suspicion and jealousy.

Why wait?

Those who wait show each other they take sex seriously. They demonstrate the kind of self-discipline a relationship needs. It builds trust and respect. Remember, the sexually active can never recover lost virginity to be like you!

What God says about sex

The word "puritanical," which means strict and severe, does describe some people, but God is not that way. The Bible, the guide to God's mind, is very frank about sex. A whole book (the Song of Solomon) celebrates the sensuality of erotic love. It's not pornography. It is an account of how wonderful God intended sex to be.

Sex is not a big part of the Bible. Other topics, particularly our relationship to God, are given much more time and importance. But the Bible does address sex and in the way you'd expect a designer to write about his creation. The Inventor of this great process, better than anyone else, appreciates what His invention means. He tells how it is to be properly used. And He has firm ideas about it.

Put simply: Sex is expected and blessed within marriage. Outside marriage it is an offense to the Creator. Hebrews 13:4 says: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (NIV throughout). Pure means unmixed with any other substance. It means to allow only one person into your marriage bed--your spouse. Don't adulterate the relationship with anyone else.

The Bible recognizes that sexual desire is a strong physical impulse. It presents marriage as the answer to that: "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2).

The love we are to have in marriage should be modeled after the deepest, most intimate love of the universe. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25, 28). This is a selfless sacrificial love for humanity.

Jesus did not go into a lot of detail in Scripture, but you could summarize His instruction as: Sex is for marriage. Marriage is for life. Anything that breaks that apart, whether it is adultery, casual sex or divorce, is falling short of what God intended (Matthew 15:19-20, 19:4-9). In brief: adultery and casual sex are wrong (Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17, 10:8).

What does God say about controlling sexual temptation?

Flee the situation (1 Corinthians 6:18). This refers back to Joseph in Egypt who fled from a married woman trying to seduce him (Genesis 39:12). This is good advice for today! To help avoid clouded judgment, or worse, rape, don't drink alcohol or take drugs. To ensure sex belongs in marriage, practice self-control.

If your only reasons for saying NO to premarital sex are worries about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, be warned! These are good and valid reasons, but if these are the only reasons you have, the pressure will get pretty intense if your date talks of safe sex.

Although STDs and unwanted pregnancy are serious problems, they are not the main reasons premarital sex is wrong. Many sexually active teenagers somehow avoid these problems, but that doesn't make it right. It's wrong for everyone--boy or girl, young or old--whether a person gets caught or not. Sex was designed by the Creator God to help husbands and wives stay close together--physically and emotionally. Any other use makes sex less effective in its purpose and design.

If you've had sex before marriage, what now?

Marriage is where sex rightfully belongs. Once you understand and accept what God intended, then no matter the mistakes made in the past, you can now decide to save sex for marriage.

Premarital sex is as any other sin. It's not worse in God's eyes than lying or stealing. It often has serious consequences and may hurt you more, but God will still forgive you. You need to face reality and decide not to repeat the error. Ask God to give you the strength to carry out your decision.

You can't change the facts of your past, but you can change the way they affect you and your future. Change your lifestyle. Seek friends, peers and mentors who will help you be a better person. Make new friends who will not pressure you sexually. Avoid the pitfalls of drugs, alcohol and steady dating until you meet the right person for a lifelong commitment. Make your life something to be proud of from now on!

Janine learned some hard lessons because she chose sex before marriage. Sex is a good thing, but like anything else, it must be used properly. The right time is marriage. Waiting for the joy of sex in marriage, where it belongs, is worth it!