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## Dedication

### To Saint Joseph

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## Introduction

Jason Everet and Crystalina Padilla, both in their 20s, are dating each other and thinking of someday getting married. They also travel the country making a presentation to young people entitled, “What If We Really Love Each Other?”

Their message: “It’s possible to have freedom, peace, and romance without regret.”

They deliver this message to thousands of young people—from junior high through college—every year. Those who hear them say things like:

“They were awesome!”

“They were young, fun, and could really relate to teens.”

“They made me think about things I never would have thought of—like how important you should be to yourself.”

Because we’d heard such great things about them, we invited Jason and Crystalina to speak at our parish, St. Mary’s Catholic Church, in Cortland, New York. Nearly two hundred teens and parents turned out. Jason began the presentation by saying:

In high school, my question was always, “How far can I go with this girl?” I didn’t go all the way, but I used girls. Pornography had an influence on me. I was into all sorts of stuff. I didn’t think God had a plan for my love life.

As a young guy himself, Jason knows that marriage is often the farthest thing from teenagers’ minds when they’re with someone of the opposite sex. They’re thinking about this girl or this boy and the feelings they’re having *right now*. But, Jason said, if you keep in mind the person that you will someday meet and marry, you’ll wait for them. And in the meantime, you won’t do anything to disrespect or hurt a person who will someday be another person’s husband or wife.

To bring this point home, Jason shared the following story. After one of his high school presentations, a guy—call him Bill—came up and said he wanted to know how far he could go with his girlfriend. The conversation went like this:

Jason: What do you have in mind?

Bill: Well, like [here Bill mentioned a particular sexual activity that we'll leave unnamed for the moment].

Jason: Okay, let me ask you this: Do you want to get married someday?

Bill: Yeah, sure.

Jason: Do you think the girl you're talking about now is the person you're going to marry?

Bill: No.

Jason: Do you think there's a girl out there somewhere that you are going to marry?

Bill: Yeah.

Jason: Okay, let's suppose that right now, some guy is trying to manipulate that girl—the one you're going to marry—to do with him what you said you'd like to do with your current girlfriend. Would that bug you?

Bill: (looking uncomfortable) Nah, I wouldn't care.

Jason: Really? Try to get the picture: This is the girl you're going to kiss on the altar on your wedding day; this is the person who will someday kiss your children good-night when she puts them to bed. Wouldn't it bug you just a little that right now, this guy is pressuring your future wife to do this?

Bill: (looking down, getting flustered, and sounding unconvincing) I don't care.

Just then, another guy who was standing close enough to overhear this whole conversation blurted out in a loud voice, "It would TICK ME OFF!"

Jason's audience erupted in laughter at this, but they got his point: You don't want your husband or wife to be sexually intimate with anyone but you. That's obviously true once you're actually married, but it's also true *before* you're married, even before you meet your future spouse. You want him or her to save that special form of intimacy for you.

Jason told his audience, "That's what kept me from losing my virginity. There was this voice inside of me that said, 'Jason, that gift is for me. Please wait for me.'"

Jason then introduced Crystalina. She began:

My situation is different from Jason's. I lost my virginity when I was 15. My boyfriend and I thought we loved each other. But once we began having sex, it completely destroyed any love we had. I felt he was no longer interested in spending time with me—he was interested in spending time with my body.

You could hear a pin drop as she spoke. Crystalina continued:

When Jason and I get married, I won't be able to give him the gift of my virginity. But after my high school boyfriend and I broke up, I resolved to wait for the person I would marry. After that, every time I said "no" to a guy, I wrote a letter to my future husband telling him I had done that and that I was waiting for him. I'm going to give Jason those letters on our wedding night. He accepts the mistakes I've made in the past. He loves me for the person I have become.

Crystalina and Jason went on to talk about how they keep their commitment to purity—by practicing modesty, avoiding tempting situations, and staying close to God through the sacraments and prayer.

"It's a hard lifestyle to live out," Crystalina said. "Some of your friends will say, 'What, are you *better* than us now?' Some people will make fun of you. But when you stand on the altar, nobody will be laughing."

When they finished their talk, the audience gave them a standing ovation.

We wish every young person in the country could hear Jason and Crystalina.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, we hope you'll find help in making the right sexual decisions from the pages of this book. Like Jason and Crystalina, we spend a lot of time talking to young people about this issue. We've listened to their stories. A lot of their stories are in this book.

We've also included a chapter on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by Dr. William Boudreau. As a family doctor, he knows about STDs from treating teens who are upset to find out that they've contracted an STD from premarital sexual activity.

We hope that you'll open your heart and mind to what we have to share with you. And we pray that you'll discover—like Jason and Crystalina—how much happier you'll be, regardless of past mistakes, if from this point forward you save God's beautiful gift of sexual intimacy (in all its forms) for the committed love relationship of marriage.

We hope you know how much God loves you. He wants your happiness even more than you do. He has a plan for your life. Trust him. Open yourself to him. Don't get discouraged if you mess up; we all do. Jesus is waiting, with open, merciful arms, to forgive you; just ask. And ask the Blessed Mother—who loves you with a mother's tender love—to help you in every area of your life. Whatever your problem, whatever your need, go to Mary. She will comfort you, guide you, and intercede for you with her Son.

God bless and keep you.

With love,

Tom and Judy Lickona  
Cortland, New York  
August 2002







**Part 1**

Distinguishing  
Between Myth  
and Fact



I was 15 the first time. I had heard so much about it. You know, the girls whisper on the street, in the locker room and everything, and the boys make dirty jokes. It was supposed to be something wonderful, and it wasn't. I just felt, "Well, it's over. Big deal." . . . A lot of guys think that if you're going to have a girlfriend, then sex goes along with that. I don't think that way anymore.

a 17-year-old girl

I don't want a girl who will tease me. I'm saving myself for my wife, and I hope she waits, too.<sup>1</sup>

a 17-year-old boy

**A**s a young person, you are in a crucial period of your life. You're laying the foundation for your future. The decisions you make during these years will affect your life for years to come. Sex is one of the things you'll have to make a decision about. Right now you most likely belong to one of the following four groups:

- You have never been sexually intimate with another person, and you do not intend to do so until you get married.
- You have never been sexually intimate, but you're not sure what you think about sexual intimacy before marriage.
- You have been sexually intimate, and you don't see anything wrong with it.
- You have been sexually intimate, but you now consider it a mistake, and plan to save all future sexual intimacy for the person you marry.

No matter which group you belong to, it can seem difficult to make the right decision about sex. How do you decide? Some people say, "Trust your own feelings." Other

people just say, “Don’t,” period. Parents and teachers might tell you one thing, friends something else.

We hope that what we say in this book will be relevant to you, regardless of which of these groups you’re in. If you have not already been sexually intimate with someone, it is very likely that you will have a chance to do so in the near future. You’ll find yourself with a person who will let you know that he or she will permit you to have that experience. You’re going to have to decide between now and then what you are going to do when that moment comes. If you have already been sexually intimate, you have the freedom to decide whether to continue or to choose a different path.

In this section we’d like to distinguish between some myths and facts commonly associated with the issue of young people and sex. We will examine three questions that you may have heard others ask about sex, or you may have asked yourself.

Chapter 1, “Isn’t Everybody Doing It?” provides you with up-to-date statistical information about what it means to be sexually active and the number of teens who fall into that category. In Chapter 2, “Why Are Some People My Age Choosing to be Sexually Intimate?” you will be presented with a list of thirteen reasons that may—in one combination or another—influence your decision about whether to engage in or refrain from sexual intimacy. Some of these reasons—for example, sexual attraction, parental permissiveness, and loneliness—are not anyone’s fault, rather they just *are*, and it’s important to be aware of them. Finally, many teens and unmarried young adults associate sexual activity with “how it feels.” According to that logic, “If it feels right, do it.” Chapter 3 looks at the difference between making decisions based solely on feelings and making decisions with our minds.

We hope that by introducing these facts—some of which may be new to you—and by pointing out myths, you will be able to make a much more informed decision about sex, one that will protect your heart, your health, and your future happiness.

## One

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# Isn't Everybody Doing It?

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**A** teenage girl described the situation at her high school. Writing under the pseudonym “Shorty,” she shared the following story about sex among her peers:

My friend is only 15, and she’s already had sex with a guy she wasn’t even dating yet. My other friend did exactly the same thing, except she was only 14.

Another one of my friends thinks she’s so cool that she tells people about the sexual things she does with guys. What is *wrong* with everyone?

Now I have a boyfriend, and my friends keep saying to me, “Oh, you’re gonna have sex soon, huh?” Usually I give them the “Are you crazy?” look. I don’t know why they act like this, and they’re constantly bragging about it! I’m not jealous or anything, but it gets annoying when that’s the only thing they talk about.<sup>1</sup>

When you hear talk like Shorty heard, it seems to lend support to what some people say about sex: “Everybody’s doing it.”

The truth, however, is otherwise: Everybody is *not* doing it.

According to several polls and studies, a great many junior high and high school students are not having sex.

For example, most young teenagers have not had sexual intercourse: 8 in 10 girls and 7 in 10 boys are still virgins at

age 15.<sup>2</sup> Another survey indicates that over half (51.6%) of all students in grades 9 to 12 say they have not yet had sex.<sup>3</sup> The Alan Guttmacher Institute also reports that increased abstinence among teenage girls has accounted for approximately one-quarter of the drop in the U.S. teen pregnancy rate between 1995 and 1998.

It's also important to know that in some earlier surveys of sexual behavior, a person who had sexual intercourse just once in the past was misleadingly described as "sexually active" and lumped in the same category with other people who may have had intercourse many times. According to one analysis, 20% of "sexually experienced" teenagers aged 15 to 17 have had intercourse only once.<sup>4</sup> Many of these teens stop having sex after their first sexual encounter.

What are some factors affecting whether a person decides to be sexually active or remain a virgin?

Sexual activity rates are lower for young people who are high achievers. For example, 73% of teenagers chosen for a recent edition of *Who's Who Among American High School Students* said they have never had sexual intercourse.

Religion is another influential factor. In a 1998 report, the primary reason teenage girls who have never had intercourse gave for abstaining was that having sex would go against their religious or moral values.<sup>5</sup> Other studies have found that for both males and females, those who take their religious faith seriously are less likely to be involved in sexual activity.

Environment also plays a role. Adolescent sexual activity rates tend to be much higher in poor urban areas. Also, sexual activity is higher among youth from single-parent homes.

In 1993 the Salt Lake City Institute for Research and Evaluation published a research report titled "Predicting and Changing Teenage Sexual Activity Rates."<sup>6</sup> It identified several important factors that predict which teenagers are likely to become sexually involved.

One factor identified by the study was the young person's sexual values. If teens agreed with statements such as, "There are lots of advantages to saving sex for marriage," and disagreed with statements such as, "It's natural to have sex with someone you like," then they were much less likely to get sexually involved.

Another important factor is friends. The above study found that teens were more likely to practice abstinence if they had at least one friend who was committed to abstinence. Drinking and drugs also played a big role. Teens who never drank were the least likely to have had sex. For teens who got drunk just once, however, the probability of sexual involvement increased considerably. Those surveyed who had gotten drunk within the past week were highly likely to be sexually active. Sexual activity and drug use followed a similar pattern.

Most popularly reported statistics on teenage sex don't give these kinds of detailed breakdowns relating sexual activity to other beliefs and behaviors. As a result, a false impression is created that all groups of young people are equally sexually active.



### If You're Waiting, You're Not Alone

What all these statistics tell us is that if you're a virgin, you're not alone. In fact, you have plenty of company—including lots of young people who are clear about their values, take their faith seriously, have set goals for themselves, and are working hard to achieve them.

These findings also tell us that if you're not a virgin, you can stop sexual activity and find plenty of people who support that choice. We'll say more later in the book about making a new commitment to chastity—often called "secondary virginity" or "emotional virginity." But we want to emphasize here that you can make the decision to start leading a chaste life right now. You can't regain your physical virginity, but you *can* regain your chastity.