



Alternative lifestyles
– what's the big deal?

Being a man in
a man's world

God created sex
and it was very good

Sex & Sexuality

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Editorial

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Sexuality is a tough topic to cover, but it is one that we felt needed to be tackled. We can read of the massive changes taking place during the last century and how each generation provided a means for the next to grow bolder and more liberated. There were the Victorians and their closet attitudes to sex; the eye-opening and all-changing First and Second World War years; the arrival of easy-access drugs and the pill allowing the 60s to 'swing'; the 'rock and roll' generation of the 70s; feminism in the 80s and the shocking discovery of AIDS and its tragic consequences; the Me-generation of the nineties where anything and anyone could be bought with the appropriate funds; and then finally the naughty noughties at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As the next decade begins, a slow backlash has started, and more and more young people are now taking abstinence pledges (promising to refrain from sexual activity before marriage).

Where do you stand on the issue? Most would say no to sex before marriage, but how far is it OK to go without actually having intercourse? If your ideas differ from your partner's, how can you work out a solution that won't destroy your relationship? Where

does God really fit into the equation? Are homosexuality and lesbianism really so controversial? And what are the true consequences of unsafe sex? View the articles on pages 8 to 19.

On pages 20-21 Pastor Des Boldeau will be introducing a four-part series based on the General Conference Youth department 2010 theme of Leadership. Pastor Paul Tompkins is also writing a four-part series on the concept of Reclamation which you can read about on pages 4-5.

March/April brings ADRA-UK's Annual Appeal – see the back page for details. Maybe this year you and your youth group could think of a unique way of raising funds for the worthy work that this charity is involved in. Bath of beans, anyone? Why not post your plans and photos on the **@encounter Facebook** page – just search: **@encounter magazine**.

After reading the magazine, you will no doubt have your comments and opinions. We really would like to hear from you and publish a wide selection of responses. Please contact us at the BUC using the contact details on page 2. Looking forward to hearing from you!

• Natalie

Adventist Volunteer Service

Your prayers are requested for these volunteers, all of whom are far from home for a considerable period of time. You can keep in touch and send encouraging messages to them via **Facebook** – search: **Adventist Volunteer Services (UK & Ireland)**

outgoing

Volunteer's name	Volunteering at	Returning
Elisa Alvarez, Wales	Colegio Timon, Spain	June 2010
Abigail Dantzie, SEC	SDA Language School, Korea	Aug 2010
Richard Harrison, SEC	SDA Language School, Korea	Aug 2010
Joanna Jones, SEC	Peruvian University	July 2010
Melissa Nicholson, NEC	Maranatha Bilingual School, Honduras	June 2010
Sisa-Linda Nxumalo, SEC	SDA Language School, Korea	Dec 2010
Carissa Typaldos, Newbold Kiev English Language Centre, Ukraine		Aug 2010

incoming

Volunteer's name	Volunteering at	Returning
Kim Barrett, Australia	Stanborough School, Assistant girls' dean	July 2010
Juan Darrichón, Argentina	Stanborough School, Chaplain	July 2010
Elian Giaccharini Sr, Argentina	Stanborough School, Assistant men's dean	July 2010
Diana Ionita, Romania	Stanborough Park Church, Task force worker	Sept 2010
Reluta Paune, Romania	Stanborough School, Teaching assistant	July 2010
Theresa Pearce, Australia	St. Austell Church project, Church planter	April 2010
Audrey Reitsma, USA	Stanborough Park Church, Youth assistant	July 2010
Dragos Suci, Romania	Stanborough School, Intl group supervisor	Dec 2010

Please remember these volunteers in your prayers.

Names correct at time of printing.

Are you in the picture?

Paul Tompkins



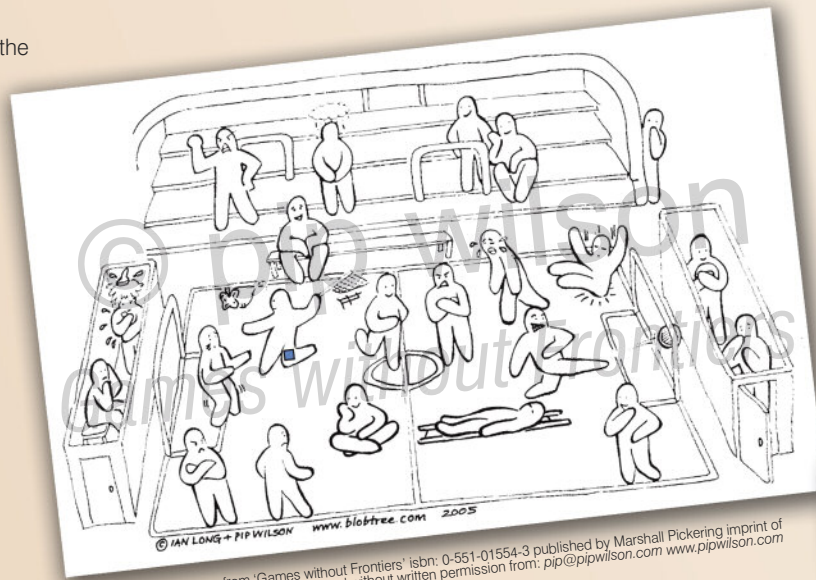
When I was young I remember newspapers used to run spot the ball competitions – a picture of a football match with the ball removed. The idea was that from the actions of the players you had to guess where the ball was. You then had to wait until the next edition to see where it actually was and if anyone had guessed correctly.

Let me show you another picture of a football field and ask: Where are you in this picture? This is a very important question as we are all there somewhere, and maybe at times we are in different places. Who do you feel like currently, the one scoring the goal, or how about the one who has fallen over – or even the one being carried off? Or maybe we don't think we're actually on the pitch at all – maybe in the changing room or the stands. How about the one with his back turned? I wonder if he or she is about to leave!

Many do just that – leave, that is. You know some and so do I – they are our family and friends and we miss them badly. In football terms, fans usually leave when their team is losing and they see no way back. (I can remember England unexpectedly winning 5-1 away some years back and there seemed to be no home fans left at the end of the match.) Usually, though, they are back for the next match with hope anew, but in church terms they leave quietly and sometimes don't return for a long time. Too long!

Sometimes, and very unfortunately, we then call them inappropriate names like backsliders. I hate that name. Rather, those who are inactive or who have taken a break from the church for a time. They may be off the pitch for the moment but they can come on again – maybe not this game but certainly before the competition is over.

Jesus addressed this issue in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15), most commonly known as the Prodigal Son. In the second picture you will see Rembrandt's last depiction of this story. (He painted it on more than one occasion.) The original hangs in the Hermitage in St Petersburg, and one day I should like to see it in the flesh. It is a very powerful picture and it is believed that Rembrandt featured himself in the picture – when he was young as the prodigal and now when older as the father.



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The question is, where are we in this picture? There are a number of options; maybe as one of the onlookers, or perhaps the returning prodigal, or even the father. (No one wants to be the elder brother but if we're honest maybe we've been there, too!)

Now let's look closer at the people in the picture. The light is on the father's face and hands and he seems lost in the moment. The same cannot be said for the brother, though, as he has a very different body language. The younger son, dishevelled as he is, is buried in the father's embrace, and this is undoubtedly meant to be the heart of the scene. The onlookers intrigue me as Rembrandt has painted them in for a purpose. They are there, they watch but they are not part of the action. Maybe they need to be, and maybe we need to be, too!

The important thing, though, is that the son returned, the father was waiting and that he met the father before he met the elder brother. Wouldn't it be a different story if he had met the elder brother first!

I have learned that no matter how long someone has been away they still can return. This sometimes happens at the unlikeliest times and in the strangest of circumstances, and I have met some who have remarkable stories to tell of God's grace. I also know that two things have always played a part – someone has been praying for them, and the Holy Spirit has been tugging on their hearts.

This year, the South England Conference has taken as its theme the 'Year of Reclamation' and wants to help many young people find a place of refuge in their Father's arms and as part of His church too. We want them and youth from all over the country back on God's pitch. It could be that a name is on your mind right now, and maybe God has placed it there. If so, now is the time to act.

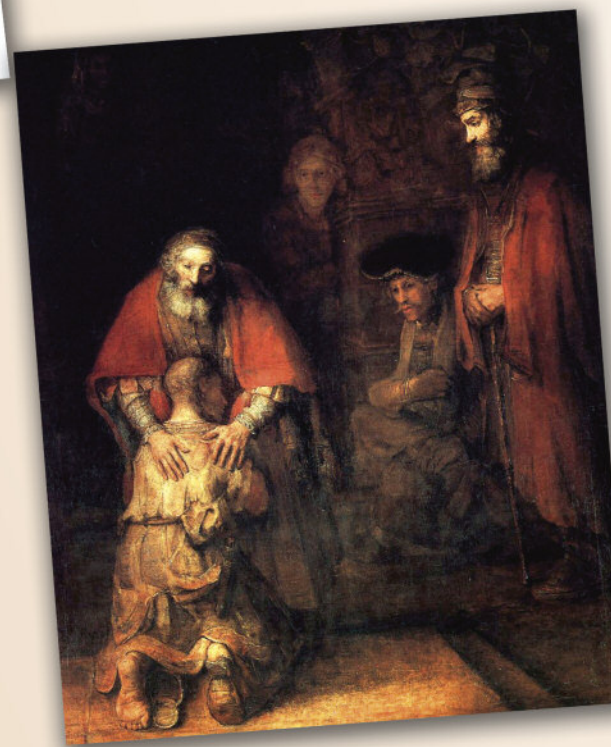
Some time ago the Review and Herald Publishing Association launched an initiative that seeks to bring youth back to God. It had the following two main emphases: **1. bringing our youth back to God** and **2. bringing our youth back to church**. With the first of these two initiatives they set aside a two-week period to pray for children, youth and family members. Couldn't we do the same for our friends during the Youth Week of Prayer (March 20-27)?

In relation to this, *Guide* magazine also launched a project called, 'Guide a Friend to Jesus'. It involved a special monthly edition of *Guide* designed to reach former attendees, along with their friends and relatives outside the Adventist Church.

I like that initiative, and **e**ncounter wishes to join the action during 2010. We want the church to be a place of refuge, and to be effective we need you to help. In the next three editions we will look at some of the challenges and some ways to address them.

Are you in the picture now? Thanks, we need you to be and so do your friends. . . .

Dr Paul Tompkins is the youth and family ministries director at the Trans-European Division. He is married with two daughters and his first grandchild is due very soon!



10TH INTERNATIONAL TED
PATHFINDER
CAMPOREE
27.7.-3.8.2010
ISO KIRJA, FINLAND



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NEC youth leadership training weekend

Youth Leadership Training was a very good, interesting and challenging event, where I was able to meet other youth and youth leaders from around the North England Conference. As a group we all built a good rapport. Over a period of two weekends we had presentations on communication, leadership, programming and planning, evangelism, mentoring, worship, counselling, post-modernism and evangelism 'outside the box'. The presentations were vibrantly presented, interactive and very informative. They increased our knowledge; our confidence levels were also boosted when we demonstrated what we had learnt to the rest of the group by presenting interactive worship sessions. This helped us understand how to keep the youth alert and interested; it was fun and it helped us in many ways.

We were taught how to be a good mentor and what makes a good mentor, but also how to separate mentoring from counselling and how to see when someone needs help and what approach we should take to help them. We learned that knowing which course of action to take all came down to observation of the person and situation.

Pastor Des Boldeau did a presentation on 'Evangelism outside the box'. He told us that we shouldn't be afraid of change because change can be good and that we should go out and help the community. This linked to Danella Taylor's presentation about 'Evangelism' and what it's all about, and how there are many different ways in which to evangelise.

These past two weekends have been amazing, informative and very reflective. Everyone who attended was able to acquire some skills which are useful to take back to work with the youth in their respective churches and the local community. We want to spread the Advent message to all the world in this generation, so we can hasten the coming of Christ and not delay it.

This event was not only for youth leaders but for people and youth who have a passion for gospel work, and don't think you are too young! Just like Jeremiah who, when God sent him with a message, said: **'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.'** (Jeremiah 1:5-8.)

Jessica is a member of the NEC Youth Team who is responsible for Hospitality and Catering liaison. She worships at Pendeford church in Wolverhampton.

- Jessica Lawrence



Eastbourne Youth Conference. 'Return' - Colin Stewart

15 - 17 January 2010



The Eastbourne Youth Conference was a great success and I would like to start this report by giving thanks to God, my team, and all the volunteers that helped make it a powerful weekend. Without God's blessing nothing significant can happen.

In an intentional way, the youth, teen and Pathfinder forces joined together to be resourced, trained and inspired for service as never before. Top speakers were in place to fire up the troops and this included keynote speaker Pr. Timothy Gillespie, the young adult pastor of Loma Linda church. He was truly an inspiration and presented his messages in a lively, sometimes comical, but always deep manner.

We were also blessed by the return of a friend and former SEC Youth director, Pr. Japhet De Oliveira. He presented a devotion and also workshops. It was a real treat to have so many youth-focused speakers in one place, and all the presenters made a positive impact on the conference. The youth were blessed to have the BUC president, Pr. Don McFarlane, make a special presentation to all serving youth leaders of the SEC.

Topics and themes were based around the idea of 'Return' – returning to our first love of the Gospel, returning to the traditional values of the youth movement, service and volunteerism. Returning to the mandate of giving a very old message to a very modern world that may have forgotten the old ways.

Here is what Pathfinder leader Enid Roderiques had to say about the weekend,

'I needed you to know that I felt that the weekend was a real blessing. I thank God for the way you allowed the Holy Spirit to lead you and your team to organise the weekend to bring total praise and glory to Him. The actual structure of the programmes was solid! I'm being blessed by every one of them.

Thank you for being an obedient servant.'

In turn we want to recognise the commitment of youth, teens and Pathfinders from all over the Conference, and even a few from the NEC, who came with a great spirit, and we know from our records that around 500 youth leaders and youth came to share in the blessings. The spirit of Eastbourne still lives on in our hearts and we are already planning next year's conference. Make sure you don't miss out!

Pr Colin Stewart is the South England Conference Youth Director and is married with two children. He Loves the Lord, and youth ministry to bits . . . along with his beloved Arsenal of course.



Standing out from the crowd

- Sharon Platt-McDonald



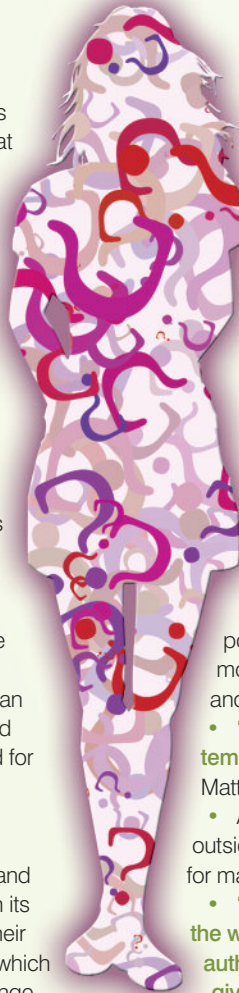
Kari is in her late teens. She has grown up in a Christian home where her parents taught her the virtues and values of being a Christian young lady. Having accepted Jesus at a young age, Kari has always been comfortable with the choices she made to follow the biblical teaching on how a Christian should behave and the lifestyle she should follow. However, recently she has begun to struggle with sexual temptation. Her Christian boyfriend has been putting pressure on her to have sex, something she believes should be kept for marriage as God's Word states. What would be your advice to Kari?

Greg always stands out in a crowd. He's the confident one, ever-popular with his peers and very good-looking. As far back as he can remember he has always had an eye for the girls. As a new believer, Greg is finding it difficult to maintain the Christian purity that he knows is expected of him from the Word of God. Following a recent evangelistic campaign, having just promised God through tears that he would no longer give in to sexual temptation, he has found himself repeatedly breaking the vow he made. He is 'serious' with his Christian girlfriend with whom he has become sexually involved and feels very guilty about it. He has shared with you his need for help. What would you say to him?

The challenge

Battling with hormones is something that both males and females have to face. For women, the monthly cycle (with its physiological changes) can have a significant effect on their emotions, sleep, eating patterns and body organs, all of which can impact sexual desire. For men, their hormonal challenge may affect their response to observing an attractive female or looking at a scantily dressed woman on screen or a magazine picture depicting a female in a seductive way. Visual stimulation, sensuous discussion or sexualised writing or music can induce arousal and feed the sexual appetite of both genders.

Learning how to deal with sexual arousal is key to building sexual



resilience and avoiding circumstances which lead to sexual temptations.

Consider the following tips:

- Remember, temptation gives you the opportunity to **do the right thing** as well as to do the wrong thing.
- Don't try to find out how far you can go, but rather determine how you can best honour God with your mind, your body and your life.

• **'God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honour.'**

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, NLT.

- Sexual purity means avoiding situations that would lead you into compromising your sexual integrity. It means saying 'no' to sexual intercourse, oral sex and even sexual touching until marriage. It means saying 'no' to a physical relationship that causes you to be 'turned on' sexually. It means refraining from looking at pornography, listening to music, watching television shows, movies or even participating in conversations that stimulate and feed sexual thoughts.
- 'Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!'** Matthew 26:41, NLT.
- Although the world sees sexual intercourse as acceptable outside of marriage, it is unacceptable because God made sex for marriage.

• **'The husband should fulfil his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfil her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.'** 1 Cor. 7:3-4, NLT.

- When you say no to sex before marriage, you are saying yes to a better future where you will be honouring God, your spouse and your body when you wait for sex within marriage.

Rebecca St James's book on sexual purity, *Rediscovering the Joy of Purity in Romance*, is a good resource to assist your journey.

Sharon is the BUC health ministries director and also the disability awareness co-ordinator. She is married and is passionate about empowering individuals to make positive, health-enhancing choices.

God created sex and it was very good!

A biblical perspective on sexuality

- Steve Currow

God created sex! In a Creation week that climaxed with the dedication of the Sabbath, God's penultimate action was to create man and woman – and in that order. God blessed this couple and commanded them to 'be fruitful and multiply' so they could populate the earth. They were to do this in a relationship exclusive of the rest of creation, where they would bond together to become one flesh, the ultimate intimacy.

At the end of this incredible day, God reviewed his creative activity and declared it not just good, but very good! All of this took place in a world where there was no evil, not even a thought of it, no clothing and no shame!

But Adam and Eve, by disobeying God, chose to discover both the knowledge and experience of good and evil. This one act of disobedience changed the world. Two specifically have implications for sex and sexuality: humanity now experienced nakedness and shame; and childbirth would be in pain – not just the birth of a child, but also the biological processes making childbearing possible.

Just like the death of Abel revealed the intense and destructive emotions and actions living in fallen humanity, the effect on the pure sexuality of Eden was also distorted. A range of perversions and abuse emerged which dehumanise the participants. Scripture also records less-than-ideal experiences, even for the so-called 'heroes of faith'. Many of these activities, including polygamy, servant substitution and extra-marital affairs, were culturally acceptable. Others, such as defiling virgins, incest and so on, were not culturally acceptable and created some huge problems, even civil war in one instance! Acceptable by the culture or not, this was not God's plan.

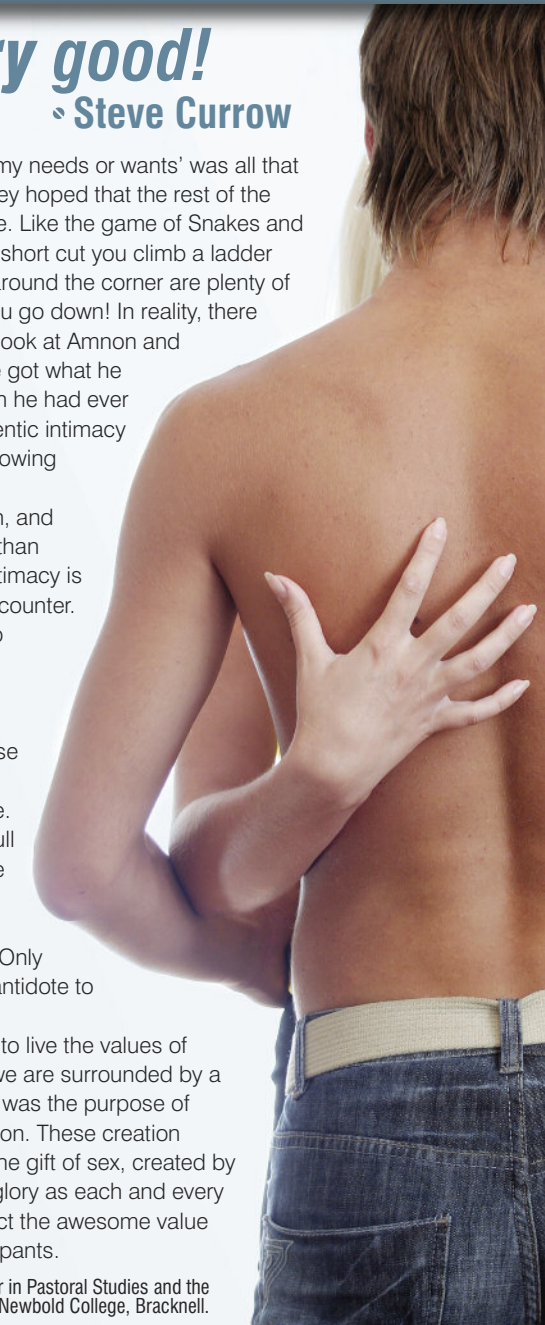
It was as if humans wanted to find selfish

shortcuts to intimacy. 'Me and my needs or wants' was all that counted. By getting physical they hoped that the rest of the relationship would fall into place. Like the game of Snakes and Ladders, every time you take a short cut you climb a ladder and appear to get ahead. But around the corner are plenty of snakes committed to seeing you go down! In reality, there is no shortcut to intimacy. Just look at Amnon and his lusting after Tamar. Once he got what he wanted, he hated her more than he had ever loved her (2 Sam. 13:15). Authentic intimacy can be experienced only by following God's ideal.

One can argue that sin is sin, and sexual sins are not more sinful than other sins. As already noted, intimacy is more than a physical sexual encounter. It involves the whole person. So although all sins are sin, the consequences may differ. Paul implores people to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), because the consequences of sexual transgressions are so pervasive. It is a sin against themselves, full of guilt and shame. It cannot be reversed. The guilt can be forgiven. Yet the memories and consequences usually remain. Only grace, inspired by God, is the antidote to shame.

As Christians, we are called to live the values of restored people, even though we are surrounded by a world of sin and depravity. This was the purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. These creation values include sexual values. The gift of sex, created by God, is one to be used for his glory as each and every sexual relationship should reflect the awesome value God has placed on both participants.

Dr Currow is the Principal Lecturer in Pastoral Studies and the Postgraduate Course Director at Newbold College, Bracknell.





Who's calling the shots?

• Pam Millington



They say in the 'old days' that there was a way to talk about this sex business. I do not remember anyone showing me! I went to a convent school in Dominica and all my teachers were nuns in habits! They just kept telling us, 'Sex is bad,' and 'Stay away from the boys!'

So what is sexuality?

Sexuality is how a person identifies him/herself in terms of their gender. The *World Book Dictionary* describes it as 'sexual character' or 'the possession of sexual powers or capability of sexual feelings'.

In our culture, sexual expression is seen as an important element of becoming an adult. In making sexual choices today, as young people, you must consider not only issues of identity, personal growth and relationships but also the growing danger of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

I'm sure you can appreciate that many adults find it very difficult to speak to youth, including their own children, about sexuality. They are embarrassed, shy and sometimes not sure what they themselves feel about masturbation, teen sex, gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Given that, they are reluctant to discuss it with young people!

Human sexuality encompasses a broad range of behaviours and processes, including female sexual identity and sexual behaviour, the physiological, psychological, social, cultural, political and spiritual or religious aspects of sex. Various aspects and dimensions of female sexuality, as part of human sexuality, have also been addressed by principles of ethics, morality and theology.

Sexuality varies across the cultures and regions of the world and has continuously changed throughout history, and this applies equally to female sexuality. Aspects of female sexuality include issues pertaining to biological sex, body image, self-esteem, personality, values and attitudes, gender roles, relationships and communication.

Self-esteem – how valuable, lovable, worthwhile and able you feel you are – is very important to sexual health. Self-esteem is based on life experiences and personal relationships and can change over time. Good self-esteem is one of the most important gifts that a child can receive as he/she is growing up.

There is a relatively new female desire to look and feel like a doll, to be immaculately turned out and rewarded on the strength of looks alone. The media seems to view pole dancing, porn and promiscuity as acceptable – empowering even! And young girls are overwhelmed by a narrow image of femininity from Bratz dolls to Girls Aloud.

Many young girls' ambition is to become a glamour model. To me, this reflects deeper problems in society – of education and a lack of social mobility. If your only other option is signing on for £80 a fortnight, it's little wonder that a lucrative deal in a men's magazine may look tempting!

In our Church, there are many well-educated young women, blessed with far more choices, who still subscribe to this narrow vision of femininity and see exhibitionism as the ultimate in empowerment. We are emerging from years of inequality as women, so to dress up in skimpy skirts with low cleavage tops and visible thongs to battle for the male gaze is making a mockery of what our mothers fought for. Words such as liberation, choice and empowerment are being used to justify or gloss over bad behaviour.

Call me a prude, but I will never see such choices as a victory for women.

Young people, it is time that we reclaim sexuality education as ours; to teach our positive cultural values about sexuality, to deal with the pain of negative experiences, so we do not pass them on to our children.

You also need to love your bodies and treat them as 'temples', to have the courage to make good decisions about sexuality and to live sexually healthy lives.

Pam Millington is PM leader, Pathfinder leader and asst. youth leader at Ashford church. In her weekday role as a Housing Operations Manager she uses every opportunity to work with young people on the estates of Stanhope in Ashford and Pollard's Hill in Norbury.



Being a man in a man's world

• Eddie Hypolite



In an ever-changing society that is constantly shifting its definition of what constitutes masculinity, can we still say, like Soul Brother Number One, 'This is a man's world'? Read the lyrics to that soul classic and you'll see that a man's world and his masculinity are easily defined by the things he builds, the heights he reaches, the obstacles he overcomes and, lastly and most importantly, by the love of a woman, without which life remains meaningless. What an Alpha-male description of man and masculinity! Actually, I should stop there, because it sounds good to me and probably most men who'll be reading this right now, maybe even the women.

In describing masculinity, the Bible celebrates male creativity and ingenuity, just like Soul Brother Number One.

However, the Bible is more concerned with the soul of a man, rather than his *testostic* (I made that word up) exploits. So to whom else can we turn but Solomon? I mean, if anyone is going to give us retrospective wisdom on what inevitably is godly masculinity, it has to be Solomon. In Proverbs Chapter 4:22-27, Solomon opens by stating that the wisdom that makes a man who he should be is transformative wisdom, the kind that adds to his personal wellbeing (vs 21 & 22). He proceeds (vs 23-27) to the core of a man, namely his heart, and outlines five simple and profound lessons concerning

godly/Christian masculinity.

Protect your heart (mind, emotions, spirit).

Central to a man's sense of who he is, is the notion that he is able to control his emotional wellbeing. An unprotected male heart is a very dangerous place.

Watch your mouth. A heart that has no protection produces a mouth that is reckless and a 'Trouble Man'. A man's worth and value is determined when he opens his mouth, regardless of what his appearance might be.

Focus your attention. Single-minded determination brings about a greater strength of being in a man. Solomon saw masculinity in terms of being a focused man, not one given to the changing opinions of people or situations.

Define your life journey. The saying: 'If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there' is all too commonplace in men who don't define their life journey. The building of an overarching ethic and value system into the fabric of male identity is central to Solomon's idea of masculinity.

Live without compromise. My dad once told me to 'stand my ground and fight my battles like a man'. Living without apology for the decisions you make or the life of faith you live is part of being a man. Being true to the direction you have mapped out by prayer, faith and hard work is a part of Solomon's definition of masculinity.

In an ever-changing masculine climate that blows hot and cold as to what constitutes masculine prowess and significance, a word from the wise to the wise can be sufficient to win the day.

Having said that, I still love the now immortal words of Soul Brother Number One.

Eddie Hypolite works as an associate youth director at the South England Conference with responsibility for teens and chaplaincy. He is married to Yvonne and has a daughter, Rhea.



'Let's talk about sex, baby!'[☆]

This is a true story: It was the weekend before Lizzie and Will's¹ wedding. They were both staying with Lizzie's parents, who were away, so they had the house to themselves. As things began to get more intimate they decided, 'We're getting married in a week, anyway – why wait?' So they headed upstairs. Some time later, and both still naked, Will carried Lizzie back down the stairs. Suddenly, all the lights went on. 'Surprise!' And there stood all their family and friends, throwing them a last minute pre-wedding party. Will was so shocked he dropped Lizzie, who fell down the rest of the stairs and broke her leg. A week later, the wedding went ahead, although the bride walked down the aisle in a cast, the honeymoon had to be postponed and Will and Lizzie were seriously thinking about

changing their identities and leaving the country. And that's why you shouldn't have sex before marriage.

On a more serious note, we live in a society where sex is so common that it is practically meaningless. Sex is used to sell cars and toothpaste and, thanks to tabloids and the internet, is freely accessible. Yet we as Christians view sex somewhat differently, or at least we're supposed to. So how do we practise what we profess to believe? Here are some points to consider.

Know what you believe

Christians have a principle of sexual purity. We believe that sex was created by God to be enjoyed within a marriage relationship. The Bible is very clear that sex outside of marriage or with more than one partner (adultery or fornication) is sinful and not part of God's plan. In the New Testament, Jesus says even lustful intent can lead to sin. God does not want us to abstain from sex to limit our lives.

Rather,

through the experiences recounted in the Bible, he demonstrates the damage sexual impurity can do.²

Decide how far you are prepared to go

Before you even get into a relationship, you should consider how you are going to practise the principle of sexual purity. Decide for yourself how far is too far. People differ on this, based on their age, culture and gender. Some people decide not to kiss until marriage; others feel this is an unnecessary restriction. Some people can go on holiday together; others can't be in a room alone. Either way, set reasonable limits for yourself that you know you will be able to maintain.

There's nothing wrong with being single

If you're not already in a relationship, don't worry. Whatever age you are, it is easy to feel pressured into being with someone. After all, God created us to be social. However, don't let being single spoil your fun. Have lots of friends, enjoy the freedom. The truth is, if you're not happy being single, you're not going to be happy in a relationship. If you're happy with who you are, someone else is going to be happy being with you.

Avoid relationships with people who have different values

Relationships are difficult, so don't put yourself under extra pressure by getting involved with someone who does not value the principles and practices that you do. You don't have to agree on everything, just the important things. God wants your relationship to be amazing and the best sexual experience you can have is with someone you trust, someone you are completely comfortable with. So sharing values, such as sexual purity and following God's will, serves to deepen and enhance your relationship.

• Joanna & Andrew Evers



Avoid situations of temptation

It is easy when you are caught up in a romantic moment, when hormones are rushing through your bloodstream, when you're tired or lonely, to get carried away. If you have both decided that you want to maintain a loving and respectful relationship, tell each other when you feel tempted and remove yourself from the situation. Also, be careful how you dress, act, talk or flirt as this can sometimes have an effect you are not fully aware of. Don't allow your judgement to become clouded with alcohol or drugs.

Have support from friends and family

You are not in this by yourselves and you are only human. You will make mistakes, you will be under pressure. Tell those who are close to you and who care about you what you are going through. If you don't have support, find some. Talk to people who are experienced, who are in happy marriages, who you look up to spiritually.

Don't let sex obligate you

People make mistakes. You may have already gone too far and compromised your sexual purity. This doesn't mean you have to get married, or continue in a wrong relationship. It doesn't mean you will never have a good relationship. You will need to deal with your situation and its consequences, but remember that God can rescue every situation when you give Him control.

So is it really worth waiting for?

Absolutely! Not only are you free from emotional baggage, guilt and painful experiences, but what you have is made more meaningful and intimate because you waited. Saving sex for marriage means you can focus on other (more important) aspects of your relationship and it allows you to grow and develop together, sexually. It also means you won't be walking down the aisle in a cast!

[☆] If you're young enough to be reading this article, you're probably not old enough to remember this song.

¹All names changed to protect identity.
²See Abraham, David or Samson for a few examples.

Joanna & Andrew Evers are happily married and living in Watford. They found waiting to be worth it and are excited to be welcoming an addition to their family in the next few months.



Alternative lifestyles – what’s the big deal?

GC Youth Ministries. Article first published in Accent magazine, Spring 2009.

This is a serious issue that Christian youth need to be aware of and informed about.

Real life, part one

Heather sat alone in her room, stereo on full-blast, trying to drown out the conflicting thoughts tumbling around in her brain. Her parents were always on her case about something. Now her mother was saying Heather should get out more, have more of a social life, date some guys, have a boyfriend. Heather knew her mum was worried she wasn’t ‘normal.’

What’s normal? Heather wondered. All she knew was that ever since she had been old enough to learn about sex and think about dating, she’d never been attracted to guys. For a long time she’d told herself she just wasn’t ready for all that. Now, at 17, she was starting to admit she felt strongly attracted to other girls. But she knew that had to be wrong. Everyone said it was wrong!

She thought she was so good at keeping her secret, but some kids at school had her figured out. ‘Get out of my way, you weirdo dyke,’ a girl had said to her just the other day, shoving Heather against the locker as she pushed past. The cruel comments cut Heather to the heart. She felt so alone. Her parents, her friends, her pastor – none of them would understand. Everyone would tell her something was wrong with her.

What was the point in even praying? She’d heard TV preachers say that God hated homosexuals – and that seemed to be what she was.

Maybe it would be better if she wasn’t here at all. Maybe, Heather thought, maybe I should just end it all.

What’s the problem?

For you, homosexuality may be a joke, an issue you debate in class, or the lifestyle of some distant acquaintance or relative you don’t know very well. For thousands of teenagers like Heather, it’s their day-to-day reality. They need to figure out how to deal with their feelings and their sexual orientation in a world where both society and the Church send conflicting messages about what they should be and do.

On some controversial issues, it’s easy to pull out a ‘fact sheet’ and say, ‘These are the statistics. This is what is happening.’ That’s not so easy when we talk about homosexuality.

- No-one can accurately say how many people in society are homosexual, partly because the term is difficult to define. When we say ‘homosexual’ (or ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’), do we mean people who are attracted to the same sex? People who are having sexual relationships with people of the same sex? What about people who seem to be attracted to both sexes (‘bisexuals’)?

- Another reason it’s hard to know for sure how many people are gay or lesbian is that many homosexual people aren’t willing to admit their sexual orientation. They’re afraid of the kind of treatment they’ll receive if others know, so they keep it secret, sometimes dating and even marrying members of the opposite sex to

try to ‘cover up’ their sexual identity.

- Statistics suggest that anywhere from two to ten percent of the total population may be homosexual – but again, those numbers are very broad and the term ‘homosexual’ is defined in many different ways, depending on who’s doing the study. What we do know is that in every society, since the beginning of human history, there has always been a small minority of people who were sexually attracted to people of their own gender rather than to the opposite sex. Generally, more men tend to be homosexual than women, but again, it’s hard to be sure.

- **One statistic we can be pretty sure of is that gay young people are two to three times as likely to commit suicide as heterosexual youth.**¹ Heather’s story is not unique. Many young people who feel attracted to people of the same sex are so torn by confusion, guilt and self-hatred that they would rather die than face life.

- Another thing we can’t answer for certain is: ‘What causes people to be homosexual?’ Some research suggests that people with a homosexual orientation are different from heterosexuals even from birth – that they may have genetic differences that cause them to be attracted to people of the same sex. Most homosexuals do not feel that they ‘chose’ their sexual orientation or that something happened to ‘make’ them gay.

What you need to know

This is a serious issue that Christian youth need to be aware of and informed about. While you may not be attracted to people

of the same sex yourself, you will certainly meet people in your life who are homosexual, and you need to know how to treat them in a way that is consistent with what the Bible teaches.

In some ways, twenty-first-century society is more open and accepting of homosexuality than at almost anytime in the past. Yet, for many heterosexual or ‘straight’ people, homosexuality is still frightening and threatening, to the point where a person can be beaten to death for his sexual orientation. It’s a confusing, difficult issue in our society today, especially for young Christians. On the one hand, the Bible clearly outlines God’s original plan for sex and marriage: one man and one woman, for life. On the other hand, the Bible just as clearly teaches love and acceptance towards everyone – even those who are different from us.

How should we respond to the challenging issue of homosexuality?

What the Bible says

The Bible outlines God’s plan for human relationships: **‘A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.’** (Genesis 2:24, NIV) One man and one woman for life – that was the ideal God instituted at Creation.

But we’re no longer living in the Garden of Eden – we’re living in a world of sin, where attitudes, practices and even people’s inborn desires differ greatly from what God originally designed. Do the Bible’s standards still apply in today’s society?

They certainly applied in the time of Jesus – a world in many ways as sinful and

confusing as our own, and a world where homosexuality and sexual immorality were common. See what Jesus had to say about it in [Matthew 19:4-6](#).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we believe that God’s standards do still apply, and that the only sexual relationship acceptable to God is a lifelong commitment between man and woman. That rules out homosexual marriage, just as it rules out casual sex between unmarried people of any gender or heterosexual couples living together outside of marriage.

The Bible makes it clear that homosexuality is not part of God’s plan for human sexuality. (See [1 Corinthians 6:9, 10](#).) Speaking of the pagan societies of his day, see what the apostle Paul writes in [Romans 1:24-31](#).

Some things should be clear from these texts. Homosexuality is one of the sinful acts of which God disapproves. It is not part of his plan for human happiness. (Some Christian homosexual groups teach that these verses refer only to promiscuous and immoral acts between homosexuals and that a committed marriage between homosexuals is just as pleasing to God as a heterosexual marriage. However, there are no examples in the Bible to support this interpretation.)

Something else the Bible makes clear, though, is that homosexual activity is a sin just like any other – no better, no worse. Many Christians treat homosexuality as if it were the very worst sin, something unspeakably disgusting and degrading. In fact, in these two passages, the apostle Paul puts homosexual sex in the same category with ‘straight’ sex outside of

marriage, as well as other sins like greed, drunkenness, slander (gossip), deceit (lying), and even disobeying your parents! Remember that in God’s eyes, a person involved in a homosexual relationship is no worse a sinner than someone who lies and disobeys his or her parents.

One more thing is clear from God’s Word: as Christians, we are called to love everyone and treat everyone with respect, no matter what their actions are. (See [Matthew 5:43-45](#).)

Even if we consider someone else to be ‘unrighteous’ or even our ‘enemy’, our duty is clear – to love them and treat them well, just as God himself does. Any act of ‘gay bashing’, hatred, or cruelty to someone because of their sexual orientation is just as displeasing to God as mistreating someone because of the colour of their skin.

What the Church says

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s official statement on homosexuality states that ‘sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. . . . The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden. . . . Seventh-day Adventists endeavour to follow the instruction and example of Jesus. He affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating his love for sinners from his clear teaching about sinful practices.’²



What the world says

Switch on the television and you'll see Gay Pride Week parades, gay and lesbian couples on TV sitcoms, and homosexuals visiting schools to make children more aware of 'alternative lifestyles'. Yet, at the same time you'll see news reports of young gay men being beaten and even murdered because of their sexual orientation, and conservative Christians protesting that homosexuals shouldn't be allowed the same legal rights as others in society.

Many gay-rights groups are encouraging society as a whole to accept and approve of homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. Efforts to do this include educating children through books and school curriculum programmes which teach that homosexuality is normal and homosexuals should not be discriminated against. In many countries, gay-rights groups are also working towards getting same-sex marriages recognised so that homosexual couples will receive the same rights and benefits under the law as do heterosexual couples.

In response to this, many conservative Christians are speaking out against 'gay rights' and insisting that homosexuals should not receive any special rights or protection, because they are not living in accordance with God's plan for marriage. Many Christian groups have become quite vocal about this, and some have been accused of encouraging hatred and even violence against homosexuals.

As a heterosexual Christian, what should your role in this debate be? You may decide that it's simply none of your business, and that your only biblical calling is to show Christian love and acceptance

to any gay people you do encounter. If you feel inclined to become more actively involved in society's debate over the gay-rights issue, here are some questions you might want to ask yourself:

- Do I believe it's my duty as a Christian to change the way non-Christians in society act?
- Should our governments have laws that support Christian beliefs and values?
- If homosexual couples deserve fewer legal rights because they're not obeying God's law, should those rights also be taken away from straight couples who are living together without being married?
- Is it appropriate for schoolchildren to learn to be tolerant and accepting of everyone, regardless of their differences?
- Is it appropriate for schoolchildren to learn that lifestyles other than God's biblical plan for marriage are acceptable?

What can I do?

As the discussion above clearly shows, this is a tough issue even for straight youth to deal with and decide about. One thing is clear: there is no room in the Christian's life for hatred against any group of people, or for treating people badly because of their lifestyle. 'Gay-bashing' is totally unacceptable to the follower of Jesus. We are called to treat everyone with love and respect.

It's my problem!

Perhaps you are reading this article because the issue of homosexuality is of personal concern to you. You may feel attracted to people of the same sex and wonder if this makes you gay or lesbian. Or you may have a close friend or family

member who is gay and wonder how you can help this person.

Here are a few key ideas for you to think about:

- **Feeling attracted to people of the same sex does not necessarily mean you are a homosexual.** Adolescence is a confusing and complex time, when young people are awakening to their sexual identity.

It is not unusual for teenagers to experience some feelings of attraction to people of the same sex, such as a 'crush' on a same-sex friend or teacher, dreams about being attracted to someone of the same sex, or curiosity about what it would be like to have sex with someone of the same sex. These occasional feelings and questions do not mean that you have a homosexual orientation.

Young people who have been victims of sexual abuse are likely to have particularly confused and conflicting feelings about their growing sexuality and should see a professional counsellor to help them deal with these issues.

While the fact that you are sometimes attracted to or curious about people of the same sex does not mean you are gay or lesbian, if you consistently feel attracted only to people of the same sex and have little or no interest in the opposite sex, then some of the points below may be of interest to you.

- Can homosexuals change their orientation?

Some Christian ministries, such as Exodus International, teach that homosexuals can change their orientation through the grace of God, just as Christians can overcome any other sin

through God's power. Many people have shared glowing testimonies of their experience as 'former homosexuals'.¹³

Others, however, have had very disappointing experiences with 'change ministries' and have returned to being practising homosexuals. Most psychologists and doctors believe it is not possible truly to change a person's sexual orientation. People can, of course, change their behaviour, but most experts think that a person's basic orientation will always stay the same.

- Is my orientation a sin? Sin is what you do, not who you are. While the Bible condemns homosexual activity, it does not say that it is wrong to be attracted to someone. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus condemns lust between a man and a woman, but this does not mean it is a sin to be attracted to someone else – only to entertain lustful sexual fantasies about that person. If you are strongly and consistently attracted to people of the same sex, your homosexual orientation is a part of who you are. What you do about it is a choice you make.

- Isn't God being unfair to gay people? If homosexual orientation is something you can't help, why should God say that it's sinful to act on your attractions? This may seem harsh, but in this sinful world, we human beings are born with all kinds of tendencies to do things that are not part of God's plan. Heterosexual people are born with strong sexual urges, too, which cannot be fulfilled unless that person is in a committed marriage relationship. Children born to alcoholic and drug-addicted parents may have an inborn tendency to become addicts themselves. We are all

born with natural desires that could lead us to sin, but our desires don't have to lead to sin if we choose to follow God's plan.

- Singleness is a positive choice. Our society is so focused on romantic love and relationships that we sometimes forget that being single is a positive, healthy lifestyle – no matter what a person's sexual orientation is. Choosing to live as a single person and not engaging in sex (this is called 'celibacy') is not repressed or twisted. This is how Jesus lived. See how the apostle Paul lived, and what he wrote to the church in Corinth. (1 Corinthians 7:1, 8, 32-35.)

For a Christian with a homosexual orientation, celibacy can be a powerful and positive choice.

- Help is available. If you are struggling with the possibility that you may be homosexual, please find someone to talk to – someone who will help, not judge or condemn. Ask a pastor, teacher or other mature Christian you trust to help you find a Christian counsellor who will have experience in dealing with this issue and will be able to help you make choices.

- God loves you. God created you; God loves you exactly as you are. God loves you as his child no matter who you are or what you have done. Do not allow anyone to tell you that you are not valuable to God; you are **'the apple of his eye'**. (Deuteronomy 32:10.)

Real life, part two

Heather's eyes fell on a bookmark lying on her desk. 'Smile, God Loves You,' it read. Heather almost laughed. Everything was so simple back when she was little. Smile, God loves you – that was all she

needed to know, back then.

Suddenly, a thought struck her: It's still true. No matter what else had changed, no matter what conflicting feelings she was having, God still loved her. Heather was suddenly as certain of that as she had been when she was five years old, singing 'Jesus Loves Me' in Sabbath School.

She went to the window and opened it, looking out at the beautiful sunset.

'I don't know why I have these feelings, Lord,' she prayed aloud. 'Is this the way you created me? There's so much I don't understand, so much I don't know. But I do believe you love me, and I'm sorry I thought my life wasn't worth living. You must have a plan for me.'

As she continued to look out at the sunset, Heather knew she needed to do more than just brood about the feelings she was having. She needed some information. Was she really a lesbian? What did that mean? What did God expect from her? She was sure that she could find some more information and maybe someone to talk to. A counsellor or someone. As long as she was sure God loved her, she could keep going.

Unfortunately space was so limited in this edition that we were unable to print all the Bible verses. But they are available in a Bible near you. Or to read them online, please try: www.biblegateway.com

¹ Homosexuality: Common Questions and Statements Addressed. Online: <http://hcqsa.virtualave.net/youth.html>

² 'Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality.' Statements, Guidelines and Other Documents: A Compilation. General Conference 2000.

³ For more information about Exodus International, see www.exodusintl.org



STIs – the bare facts

Sex. A popular pastime and a necessity for furthering the human race. But who knows the risks? Despite school programmes and national advertising campaigns promoting sexual health, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are on the increase. In 2008, 399,738 new episodes of STIs were diagnosed in sexual health clinics across the UK, compared with 261,608 diagnoses in 1999 (Source – HPA Centre for Infections). That's a lot of people wandering around with diseases that can easily be passed on through any form of sexual contact. Let's have a look at some of the STIs currently making the rounds near you.

Chlamydia

Pretty name, huh? Not a pretty thing, though, when it takes up residence in your genital tract. This is a bacterial infection that, like most STIs, can be passed on through oral, vaginal or anal sex. It is the commonest STI in the UK and is particularly common in the 15-24 age group. Symptoms of the infection can include discharge from the genitals, burning during urination and abdominal pain, but Chlamydia infection usually has no symptoms. That means you might not realise it's there, and so it spreads easily. And as you might have heard, it can cause damage to the fallopian tubes which can lead to infertility in women. It is easily treated with one dose of antibiotics, and you can even test yourself for it by taking a swab or urine sample. If you have concerns and would like to get tested, see www.chlamydia-screening.nhs.uk

Gonorrhoea

This is another bacterial infection. Symptoms can include a thick yellow discharge from the penis or vagina, abdominal pain or pain when passing water. It is tested for by taking a swab from the urethra or cervix, and is treated with a simple course of antibiotics.

Herpes

This is a viral infection which is spread by skin-to-skin contact, and causes blistering over the skin surface. Ever had a cold sore? Well that's caused by the herpes virus, too, a slightly different strain from the one which usually causes genital herpes. Just imagine cold sores all over your genitals! Not a pretty sight, and they can be excruciatingly

painful. And it's a virus that stays in your body forever. Some people might only have one episode of blistering, but others get symptoms which recur frequently over many years. It is often when people are stressed or run down that the virus breaks out again. And it is most infectious just before the soreness and blisters appear, which means you could pass it on or pick it up from someone without realising. Each breakout can be treated with tablets which ease the pain and shorten the duration of symptoms, but there is no cure for herpes. Once you've got it there's no giving it back, you can only pass it on.



Genital warts

These are caused by a virus, the human papilloma virus (HPV). This can cause fleshy warts to develop on the genitals or around the anus, which sometimes go away on their own, but often need to be frozen off or treated with creams. Like herpes, this virus stays in your body, so the warts can come back at any time. And some strains of the HPV virus are known to be a cause of cervical cancer, so infection with HPV can significantly increase your risk of developing this disease.

Syphilis

This is one of the oldest diseases known to man and it is currently enjoying a revival. The first symptom of this bacterial infection is an ulcer, which is usually painless so you may not notice it. The second stage of the illness occurs 2-10 weeks later, and can cause a widespread rash over the body, consisting of red patches, typically on the palms and soles of the feet. Then things get interesting. At this point the infection goes underground, and the third stage of the illness may not occur till decades later. This stage, known as tertiary syphilis, can cause heart problems, problems with co-ordination and walking and even blindness, among other consequences. Syphilis infection is detected with a blood test, and is treated with a simple course of penicillin injections. And the sooner it is diagnosed and treated, the lower the risk of passing it on and developing the long-term consequences.

HIV

This is the big one. It is caused by a virus which attacks cells in the blood which fight infection. This means that once it takes hold it stops your immune system from functioning and leaves you open to other infections and even at higher risk of developing some types of cancer. It is passed on through blood, semen and vaginal secretions, and can be passed from mother to child during child

• Dr J. Turner MBBS, BSc, MRCP



birth. Infection with other STIs can also increase the risk of passing on or being infected by HIV. When the virus first starts attacking the body, symptoms such as a sore throat, swollen glands, fever and a rash can occur. Then the body fights the virus off for anywhere from months to years, until the amount of virus in the body overwhelms the immune system and other infections develop. When HIV first came to light in the 1980s it was universally fatal. Now however, many drugs have been discovered which fight the virus and keep people healthy for many years. It is now expected that with effective treatment, people with HIV infection will have a normal life expectancy. And whereas this treatment used to involve dozens of tablets in a strict regime, it can now be treated with as little as one pill a day. But there is still no cure, so your best bet is prevention by using condoms for all sexual contact.

These are a few of the main STIs, but by no means is it an exhaustive list. Here are my top recommendations to protect yourself from STIs, in order of effectiveness:

Abstain. Unpopular choice but the only guaranteed way of staying disease free.

Always use a condom for any form of sexual contact including oral sex.

If you intend to become sexually active with a new partner, both go and **get checked** out at a clinic **before** you have sex.

Have regular sexual health check-ups, especially if you've had unprotected sex or have any of the symptoms described above.

You can get confidential advice, testing and treatment from your local sexual health clinic for these and other infections which may be sexually transmitted. For further information on STIs, sexual health and contraception, including where to find clinics in your area, see www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexualhealthtopics/Pages/Sexual-health-hub.aspx www.hpa.org.uk/HPA/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/1200660066094

Dr Turner spent 4 months last year working in a busy city centre sexual health clinic. She plans to specialise in Sexual Health and HIV after completing her training in General Medicine. She has also set herself the challenge of attempting to climb Mount Kilimanjaro this summer.

Leadership – a transformational youth ministry model

Des Boldeau



Have you ever been in a group situation where someone stood up and began speaking and as they began, you became transfixed by the sheer passion of their personality and what they said? They communicated a clear vision of the group's goals, a marked passion for the work and an ability to make the rest of the group feel recharged and energised? You sat and were spell-bound and found yourself wishing that you could be like this person. This person just might be what is called a transformational leader (TL).

What is transformational leadership?

James MacGregor Burns in 1978 first introduced the concepts of transformational leadership in his descriptive research on political leaders. He made the point that transformational leadership is a process in which 'leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation'.

Bernard M. Bass in 1985 noted that the extent to which a leader is transformational is measured, first, in terms of his influence on the followers. The followers of such a leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect towards the leader and they will do and give over and above any expectation.

The basic assumption of transformational leadership is that people will follow a person who informs and inspires them. Such persons will have a vision, charisma, great passion, energy, enthusiasm and they communicate well in order to achieve the vision. Such a person will care about those whom they are leading and not just hold an office because the church has asked them to.

• Relationship with the Lord

Transformational leadership must begin with a knowledge of and a dynamic relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is the foundational platform from which any effective and meaningful ministry is based. It is God who should be informing our vision, our direction and our goals.

• Create a vision

TLs will then develop a vision. All youth leaders must know where he or she believes God wants him to take the youth. This is not about a Sabbath afternoon entertainment or adult-sitting programme, neither is it about a series of activities designed to occupy a time slot. This vision may be developed by the leader, by the youth team or may emerge from a series of discussions with young people. Corporate ownership of this vision is crucial if this ministry is to be effective and successful.

• Selling the vision

It is important that the leader buys into this vision himself – hook, line and sinker. The TL selling their vision amounts actually to selling themselves with all their God-given gifts and passion for the benefit of realising the vision. This stage is where

the leader seeks to convince with enthusiasm and passion the followers that his/her vision is worthy of following. The young people should feel inspired to believe that this vision is attainable

and so begin to buy into the journey towards the goal. Therefore, such a leader must live intentionally with trust, integrity and transparency for the benefit of the realisation of the vision and committing people to that vision.



• Pressing towards the goal

The TL should have some idea of the direction in which they desire the youth to go. This may be the result of his/her preferred way or the synergy from the team or the youth themselves. The TL is never fazed by suggestions from the group, because getting to the goal and making the vision a reality is the object and it is not about 'bigging-up' the leader.

• Lead by example

Any leader who is worth their salt will model the things they proclaim. The principles that served as the basis for the vision must become evident in the lifestyle of the leader if they are to become a reality for the followers. The leader should be seen to be leading, walking around, chatting, laughing and engaging with the youth. A TL cannot be a behind-the-scenes person.

The transformational approach to leadership is people-focused, and the TL will from time to time evaluate the value of the approach and how successful the strategy is in rallying the troops towards taking ownership of and making the vision a reality.

So why not take time to inform yourself and allow God to place a vision upon your heart for the saving of our youth and putting them to service for his Kingdom?

This is one of a four-part series to appear in e during the coming year.

Pr Boldeau is the youth director at the British Union. He is married and has three children and one grand-daughter.

• Shae Samantha Eccleston

• Friday 12 March 2010

Dear diary

Things are finally good. My job is good . . . My life is good. . . . I am even in a relationship that is really good.

Eva, my next door neighbour, came over yesterday and we chatted over drinks. I have never really spoken to her before, but she found one of my letters in the hallway last week and made sure that I got it. With all the fraudulent activity going on nowadays, I thought it was a really nice thing for her to do, so I invited her over.

Oh, dear. I don't know why I am telling you about the letter again. I wrote and told you last week. He he, I am losing it!

So, back to today. I feel really good. I don't think anything could spoil my frame of mind .

03:25

It's gone 3am and I am sitting in a hospital waiting room. Took me 45 minutes to get here. I broke several speed limits, but I actually made the journey in record time.

I just can't believe that Mum is in here. She hates hospitals! I don't think she has ever been sick a day in her life! She is the rock of this family. Just wish I knew what was going on.

04:15

Just spent the last 20 minutes calming Naomi, my little sister, down. I am still trying to get my head around the fact that my mother, my rock, my life, has cancer.

Mum and Dad thought it best not to tell us. I am too numb even to be angry about that right now. Naomi is angry enough for both of us. Though I can't help thinking, 'What if something had happened?'

I need to think straight. Not what if? . . . It HAS happened!

What would I do without . . . ? I can't even say it.

04:47

The doctor (and Dad) just told Naomi and me that the cancer has probably spread to her surrounding organs, and that, coupled with her diabetes, has made her very weak which might be why she collapsed.

Forget Dad not telling us. . . . How could he have gone through this alone?

Naomi has stormed out of the waiting area.

05:24

The on-call oncologist has arrived. He has pulled some strings to get tests performed before the weekend.

Naomi came back after her 'tantrum' and has gone to call a friend. Dad is reading to Mum.

07:00

Mum's tests are complete for now. It's just a case of waiting for the preliminary results. The nursing staff are monitoring her blood pressure half-hourly and she is receiving medication intravenously.

I am just about to go into her room, but I keep thinking that I have left the iron on at home. Why is my mind playing tricks on me at a time like this? I need to focus!

I have to be strong for the person who has always been strong for me.

07:31

Back in the waiting area. . . . When I finally worked up the courage to see Mum, she looked like an older version of the person I know. She looked frail and almost drained but in her eyes I could still see hope.

What on earth did she have to hope for? She was at death's door.

I could see the Bible on the side. Dad had been reading to her from the Bible. How could they focus on that at this time? . . . *sigh*

I sat and held her hand for a while. No words, just love.

The doctors came in to perform more tests, so I had to leave just as I was building up the courage to ask her about it.

I think perhaps it was for the best. I could tell she felt my pain and just wanted to make it OK for me and Naomi again.

08:34

I feel so guilty!

I have just woken up! How could I sleep at a time like this? I dreamt that I was the one lying in the bed, the one who had death knocking. Mum was at my side as always. All she said was, 'Things are as they have to be.'

← ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY

← MAIN ENTRANCE

I need to go back to see my mother!
NOW!

08:38

I am sitting by Mum's bed. Her virtual words are ringing in my ears as if I had heard them for real. Things are as they have to be.

It is actually what she would be saying to comfort me if she was awake. She has always suffered pain in a sensible way.

She would be telling me to be dependent on God and not to let my emotions cloud His will for the situation. Dad would be listening and nodding, the Bible ready in his hands. . . .

I am smiling now. Looking at Mum's frail face does somehow give me hope. The years she has taught her girls about God's will have not been in vain.

I am going to stay here until I know how she will be, although, somehow, I think I already know.

09:30

I guess this has been a good test for me. I am sitting and thinking about all of the people who don't get the opportunity to say goodbye to loved ones. Or perhaps those who don't get the chance to make things right between them and God before their time comes.

Whether my Mum survives this or not, I have been given an opportunity to renew my love for her and show her that I understand what she wants for my life.

I think about all of the people I have loved who have died over the last few years and how common death seems to be in my life. I have to seriously consider that God really may come sooner than I thought and that my losses may actually be signs or lessons.

I am thinking about the way I often take Mum for granted in the same way that I take God for granted. But I know that if it was God lying on the bed in room 104, I probably would not feel the same way as I do for Mum, even after all He has done for me with my job, my sister's pregnancy, my life. I feel ashamed.

I know that this is a chance to get right with God and to help Naomi to do the same.

That's what Mum wants.

Where's Naomi? I want to ask her if she remembers the prayer we used to say when we were little:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild

Look upon this little child

If I die before I wake

I pray the Lord my soul to take.

The focus is always on what we are losing but not where our hearts are. I guess that even though I am now an adult, this situation with Mum has made me realise that this needs to become my prayer again. I can make this prayer a reality if I give God control. . . . Everyone can.

I'm smiling again The doctors and nurses must think I am a lunatic!

I need to put my pen down now.

My family need me.

Speak tomorrow, dear diary,

Sharon x

Letters from a troubled soul is a fictional piece written with the intention of allowing us to identify with the human in us all. Everyone knows how to take things for granted and how to attribute our success to our own steam, rather than acknowledging the real power: God.

Throughout time, Sharon's letters will hold and reveal secrets that we all share. The joys, the pain, the triumphs and the shame. Sharon is not the only person struggling with everyday situations. The devil doesn't just focus on the huge – his expertise is in the small things that can easily pass under the radar.

Follow **Letters from a troubled soul** to see how Sharon deals with the things that make troubled souls of us all.

The Annual Appeal is coming up again. Your church will collect money for the humanitarian work of the Church. Sweet.

You give one pound. What will it do? Well, it can actually provide six pounds of aid to people in need. Pretty cool.

So you talk to your mates and ask six of them to give you a pound for ADRA. That's six pounds, right? Well, it could actually be worth £36 to ADRA! Now talk some more and get ten of them to give to ADRA – now your little effort is worth £60. Even more cool.

Soon it will be that time of the year when ADRA will ask for help. You know: door-knocking, 'pubbing'* , FunRun and so on. Why?

The Church established the Adventist Development and Relief Agency to demonstrate that as a people of hope, we care for people in need. ADRA is present in more countries than any other denominational sponsored aid agency – over 120 around the world. While small in the UK, ADRA is a household name in many countries in the developing world. Here in the UK we raise the funds needed to do our work around the world. But we need your help!

What you give can be multiplied

The European Commission and DFID (Department for International Development) are willing to partner with ADRA-UK on projects. Sometimes they will provide up to 90% of the funding, sometimes 75%. We need to raise the rest. That's why we need your help!

In Ghana £5 will buy a 40kg bag of rice seed that will provide an ample harvest for a small farmer – food to eat and surplus to sell.

In Burkina Faso £50 will help recover one acre of degraded land to use for planting food or grazing.

In Thailand £60 will provide outreach and counselling support for four Burmese women living with HIV/AIDS in shelters and safe houses.

In Somalia £1,600 will provide a school with solar power, enabling students taking night classes to have electric light and to run computer classes.

ADRA-UK assists when disasters like the earthquake in Haiti strike. This is what it costs to provide help immediately:

£10 – Hygiene kit to help one family after a disaster

£10 – Provide a family with the tools to cook food

£3 – Help to give ten people access to basic medical supplies after a disaster

£2 – Provide an emergency meal for a family

£5 – Provide a simple waterproof tarp for cover after an emergency

Together we can continue to help people in need. You and ADRA can bring solutions. Please help with the Annual Appeal this year. To find out how, visit www.adrauk.org or contact info@adra.org.uk

* the Adventist way of asking punters to give money to ADRA

ADRA aid
in Haiti




ADRA
United Kingdom