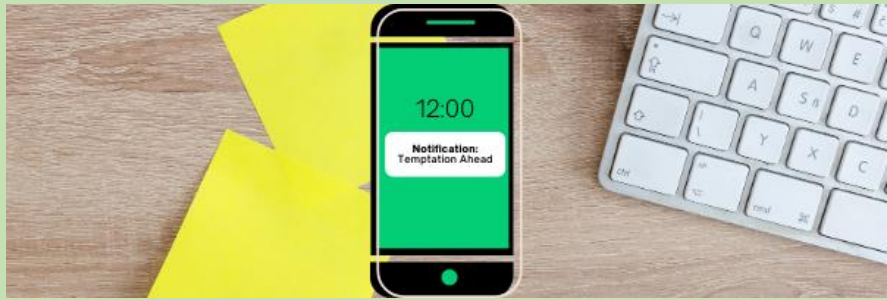




UPCOMING SERIES NOTIFICATION: TEMPTATION AHEAD



SMALL GROUP LEADER CORNER

Hey Small Group Leaders! We've got a series coming up where you will have a lot of opportunity to speak truth in students' lives to help them navigate a particularly difficult area – relationships and sex.

WHAT THIS SERIES IS NOT:

- It's not an encouragement to date.
- It's not a sex education class.

WHAT THIS SERIES IS:

- **An opportunity to open communication channels** and encourage students to seek Godly wisdom and advice in an area they may not feel comfortable to bring up on their own.
- **An opportunity for middle school students to build some Biblical foundations** in a pivotal area of life that can have huge impact on their future.
- **An opportunity to partner with parents** by not only sharing what we are talking about with them in advance, but consistently encouraging our students to have conversations with their parents on this topic at home.

IS IT TOO EARLY TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS?

- Crushes, new feelings, attractions, urges and even pressures to date are becoming more and more of our students' worlds as they grow up. **We want to have age-appropriate conversations that prepare students.**
- We intentionally have it built into the first message for the speaker to say "sex" on stage because it's a word that carries a lot of weight, and we want to break the ice from stage that church is a safe place to talk about sex.
- Did you know **the average age of exposure to porn is 8-11 years old?** 80% of this happens within the home. Our goal is to equip students to know how to respond Biblically when sexual temptations arise.

HOW WILL WE HELP YOU PREPARE TO LEAD DISCUSSIONS FOR THIS SERIES?

- We will be sharing our whole series resources with you further in advance so you can **BEGIN PRAYING AND PREPARING NOW** for leading your students through this.
- This packet includes extra resources to help you navigate different conversations your students may bring up during this lesson.

WHAT DO MY STUDENTS NEED FROM ME?

- Your students don't need you to have all the right answers. They are in a phase where an important part of owning their faith means discovering the right answer themselves. They simply need you to be a safe place to have conversations, seek answers, and guide them in the right direction.
- Your students don't need you to teach your opinion but for you to help them understand God's word.
- You don't need to have a perfect past-record in this area to lead, simply a heart that has repented towards God and is strongly seeking to take steps in the right direction. Letting students know some of your past struggles may even help them relate to you and trust your advice, but remember to keep conversations age-appropriate. Be cautious when you share, speaking generally and avoiding specifics or graphic comments. If you question if sharing would cause a student to struggle, then hold off sharing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED STUDENT RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS AND WISDOM TO ANSWER

WHEN CAN YOU HAVE SEX?

Officially, sexual immorality is used in the Bible to describe sex outside of marriage, including lust. Sex is beautifully designed to bring together a man and woman in marriage. If you aren't close to thinking about getting married, the wise thing to do is to create healthy boundaries in your life so you are staying far from sexual sin.

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR TO GO BEFORE MARRIAGE?

"How far is too far" is a BIG question that comes up a lot, but really it can be the wrong question if we are just asking "How far can I go before I sin?" It's like walking up to the edge of the cliff, putting one foot over the edge, and hoping not to fall. Not the wisest. The wiser thing to ask is, "Is this wise to do? Is this tempting me to go farther?" If it's tempting you to go farther, then STOP!

Relevant Bible verses:

- "So be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do." – Ephesians 5:15-17
- "Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?" – 1 Corinthians 6: 18-19

BUT CAN'T WE SLEEP TOGETHER IF WE ARE IN LOVE?

God's healthy boundaries for sex isn't love, it's in marriage. Love may "feel" right, but there are negative consequences of having sex outside of marriage. In God's definition of love, love is patient and kind; it does not seek to please itself, nor does it delight in evil, but is always hopeful (1 Corinthians 13). True love would be patient in waiting for the proper time for sex. It would be kind to future spouses by not pre-harming marital intimacy. True love would be unselfish in placing God's desires and the needs of others above itself. It would not delight in the evil of disobedience, nor would it force another to disobey God. Love could never be a reason for premarital sex; rather, it should be one of the greatest reasons to avoid premarital sex. "But we're going to be married anyway." This is another common excuse. Along with being presumptuous, this stance will almost certainly leave one question unanswered: If one gives in to moral temptation before marriage, what's to stop him or her from giving in to moral temptation once married?

WHAT IF I'VE ALREADY GONE TOO FAR?

Good question! Certainly a person cannot reverse the past, but there are a number of steps one should take to keep from further damaging his or her intimacy with God and others.

First, acknowledge your actions as sin. For those who have accepted Christ's payment of the penalty for their sins, He asks only that they confess - agree with God that they are sinful. **Second, maintain purity from this moment forward.** Jesus told the woman caught in sexual sin to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). You cannot change what's been done, but you can keep yourself and others from any further damage by avoiding situations which might cause you to compromise your commitment to sexual purity. Paul advised Timothy to run away from temptation (2 Timothy 2:22), and Joseph is famous for running from moral danger (Genesis 39:7-12).

WHAT IF I'M DATING SOMEONE AND I KNOW THEY ARE NOT THE BEST FOR ME RIGHT NOW?

This is a tough place to be because you likely care deeply for the person. You need to break up with them ASAP. The longer you wait, the more you are wasting your time and theirs. You can be kind when you break up with them, but be clear. The purpose of dating is not to be on the mission field; the purpose of dating is not to be someone's support system. You shouldn't feel pressure to date for either of these reasons. Pray for God to guide you in breaking up with them.

PORNOGRAPHY AND MASTURBATION

IS MASTURBATION AND/OR PORNOGRAPHY A SIN?

One can not point to a verse in the Bible and read that masturbation is wrong. However, what accompanies the act of masturbation is usually something visual—whether only in the mind or by viewing pornography in pictures or video. Those things would fall under the category of immorality since giving in to immoral thoughts is sin—masturbation is enacting sex with an object (woman or man) in mind. Jesus even said that a married man commits adultery when he thinks lustfully after a woman (Matthew 5:27-28). So to masturbate—enacting sex—while thinking of a man or woman who is not your spouse is sinful because it is immoral. Sex is meant to be between a man and a woman in the context—and only in the context—of marriage. This is saying nothing about masturbation creating an emotional guilt that is hard to relieve until the act and/or habit is stopped.

I'M STRUGGLING TO STOP, HOW CAN I STOP?

If you are struggling with masturbation and/or pornography and want to stop, several things are helpful.

1. First, **acknowledge that it is sin** and that it brings emotional guilt.
2. Second, **make a decision to stop**.
3. Third, **have a plan not to do it again**. It is this third and final step that most people don't do.
Good intentions without a solid plan inevitably leads to repetition.

A good plan always includes accountability. Find a God centered adult, maybe a parent or guardian or small group leader; that you can tell in confidence who will follow up and ask you if you are victorious. A good plan also includes what action you will take when you are tempted. Maybe get up and go hang out with someone else, pray, memorize Scripture, sing praise songs. How can you lean into God to help you fight in the moment of temptation?

Be aware of when you are most susceptible to masturbating: Stress? After you are away from your boyfriend or girlfriend and begin thinking of them in a sexual way? Pornography? The books you read? Once you determine the contributing factors, tell your accountability partner. Knowing the factors and telling someone trustworthy are ways to break the cycle of repetition.

ACCOUNTABILITY SOFTWARE RESOURCES

- Ever Accountable: <https://www.everaccountable.com/>
- Accountable2you.app: <https://www.accountable2you.com/features>
- Covenant eyes (better for computer): <http://www.covenanteyes.com/>
- Net Nanny (gives deeper parental controls): <https://www.netnanny.com>
- Triple X Church (free but limited): <https://x3watch.com/>

PURSUING SEXUAL INTEGRITY

We encourage staff, leaders, and parents to use the language “sexual integrity” over “sexual purity” because the term “sexual purity” can have a lot of baggage associated with it. What if a student has crossed a line and sexually or lustfully sinned? There is grace, redemption, and power when they turn to Jesus in repentance! **Sexual integrity is about saying, “YES!” to living a faithful, abundant life as a sexual being according to how God has designed you.**

Our students need to know God's love them first and foremost. Our goal for this series is not simply behavior modification or for students to try to self-will themselves to stay virgins, but for students connect with the transformational work of Jesus in their lives and live in His design for them. **All of our obedience, all of our ability to pursue sexual integrity, is a response of God's love for us and through His power working within us.**