



## Introduction

I get a lot of questions about sex.

Sex dominates our society. Turn on a radio or TV or pick up a magazine and there's a good chance the theme is sex, dating or romantic relationships. But while sex and relationships are often our most pressing and confusing concerns, sometimes it's hard to know where to voice them. It takes a lot of trust to bring these topics up.

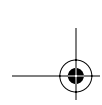
During my twenty years of spiritually mentoring college students, I've had the privilege of getting to know many young people who, somewhere along the line, came to trust me enough to bring up their most intimate concerns. Perhaps in the overwhelming university atmosphere, it's easier to talk to someone older and neutral. Whatever the reason, I have listened to hundreds of stories and have sought to impart my best advice about sex and dating.

People come to me seeking guidance and wisdom, but the paradox is they have in fact been my teachers. As people have shared their stories and revealed their heartaches, joys and deepest dreams, they've taught me much about the complicated journey of pursuing love and coming to terms with one's sexuality. I consider each story a sacred trust.

So what business does someone my age have writing a book about sex? I like to think that living on a college campus and spending the bulk of my time with university students has kept me informed. Times and trends change, but the issues are often the same. Getting upset by something on your boyfriend's MySpace profile is a new problem, but jealousy is as old as time.

God could have made sex a much more boring enterprise. He could have made us void of desire for romantic relationships. But





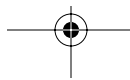
somehow in God's good wisdom, he chose to make us male and female with deep longings to connect. God thought up sex, his wonderful gift to people. God hard-wired us for relationships and built into us sexual desires, but we are imperfect people living in an imperfect world. Sometimes we need help figuring things out.

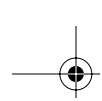
The content of this book is presented in a Q & A format. It has grown out of questions that real people have asked me over the years on the topics of sex and dating. These questions come up over and over again in coffee shops, during student appointments, seminars and e-mails. Some of these questions will be of interest to you; others won't. Feel free to skip around and read the ones that intersect with your life. There's no need to read everything in order. I know how busy life can be, so my hope is that the format will help you zero in on the areas of concern to you.

By using a Q & A format, I don't mean to suggest that these are questions with one clear, simple answer. People are too complex to have one answer suffice for all situations. I honestly wish I could sit down with you personally, over a decaf skim latte (with extra whipped cream) and hear your specific story and enter into your heart. I have had the luxury of doing things this way often, but sadly a book won't allow it. And so I have done my best to supply general answers to the questions presented. My hope is that you'll see your story in the stories of the people I have written about.

It feels a bit awkward to write on an area in which we all feel insecure and have suffered failures. Don't think that I have figured out everything, and don't assume I no longer struggle with any of the issues discussed. I do. Like you, I'm an imperfect human being trying to navigate my way through life and love.

I'm not an expert, but I've spent years listening—not only as a campus minister but also as a pastor's wife. Being with people





through different life stages from the cradle to the grave has been instructive. So has raising my four kids, all in their twenties now (two married and two single), who have confided in me as they found their way through today's dating world.

All of these rich life experiences have taught me a great deal about this area of our lives that touches us so deeply but often leaves us so confused. I'm happy that some of the knowledge people imparted to me will find its way to others. I'm forever grateful to them for their trust and vulnerability.

By the way, all the accounts in this book are real stories of real people, but I have changed names and some identifying details to protect their privacy. Some stories are composites of multiple people.

I want you to know that even in a world of short-term relationships and hookups, *lifelong love is possible*. My husband, Bill, and I are proof of that. We have been married over thirty years, and the process of interweaving our lives has been joyous, turbulent, fulfilling, and frankly, difficult at times. But through it all, we have confronted our own brokenness and deepened in our love and understanding of one another.

I write this book as a Christian. I have become convinced of God's reality and relevance in my life, and I've seen the power of Jesus transform lives and heal pain and sexual brokenness. I'm also convinced of the value and wisdom in God's written Word, the Bible, which has much to say about sexuality and relationships. But whether you're a Christian or not, whether you're sexually active or not, whether you're in a serious relationship or have never dated, I hope this book helps you move toward healthy relationships.

