

Help Teenagers Strive for Moral Purity



Thanks to pop singers, purity rings have become a hot trend. Many young people are publicly announcing their intentions to abstain from sex until marriage. For some kids, these rings mean even more. About his purity ring, Syracuse University freshman Stephen Chang says, "It also means that I won't drink, smoke, or date until I know I'm ready to date for marriage. It's a symbol of me saying that I want to live a life that's more pleasing to God."

Maintaining a pure, God-pleasing lifestyle in our sinful world is tough. Kids are tempted to enjoy immediate pleasure rather than wait for long-term rewards. As parents, you play a vital role in your teenagers' moral decision-making. Not only do kids look to you as examples, but they want you to listen and be available to talk. Surveys show that kids crave moral information from their parents. Research also shows that kids whose parents had talked with them about tough topics were more likely to turn to their parents first in difficult situations.

Kids crave control over their lives, and the quest for purity is one area they can control. It's also an area where kids can assert their individuality, think for themselves, and not follow the crowd. So encourage your teenagers to make a commitment to a morally pure lifestyle. Even if you don't give them a purity ring, you can let them know that Jesus, who died to make them pure, expects sexual integrity from his children. Just as importantly, when we mess up, Jesus offers forgiveness and the chance to renew our commitment to live for him.

The book *Guy Talk, Girl Talk*, a small-group resource from SimplyYouthMinistry.com, offers these three reasons why purity is more than not having sex:

- 1. It's about purity of your heart.** Every commitment begins in the heart. Purity is about resisting the world's way of doing things. The challenge is to make a commitment that guards your heart, mind, and body from anything that would contaminate you with the sin of the world.
- 2. It's about purity of your mind.** Our thoughts and what we put in our minds can be just as damaging as what we do with our bodies. Think about the magazines you read, the movies you watch, and the songs you listen to. What messages are they sending? Purity isn't about avoiding "the world" but about making daily decisions that maintain the purity of your mind and prevent it from being contaminated.
- 3. It's about purity of your motives.** When your heart and mind are pure, the results are actions motivated by purity. Wrong motives are about fulfilling only your own selfish desires, such as instant gratification or approval from others.

Pulse

Contrary to what's seen in the media, not all teenagers engage in premarital sex. Consider these stats from a variety of online sources:

- More than half (52%) of high school students have never had sexual intercourse.
- 87% of teenagers don't think it's embarrassing for kids to say they're virgins.
- Of teenagers who have had sexual intercourse, 63% say they wish they had waited.
- 82% of teenagers desire to have one marriage partner for life.
- When the Barna Group asked 1,000 U.S. parents about the most important outcomes of raising their kids, the top answer (39%) was "getting a good education." Only 4% answered "helping to establish appropriate moral values."



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Use these discussion starters to help kids open up about purity and sex:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word "purity"? What are some ways, besides sexual abstinence, that people can stay pure?
2. How much control do you have over your own purity?
3. What are the biggest temptations that can thwart a pure lifestyle? What are some ways to resist them?
4. How do you think God views sex? How does your view compare to God's?
5. What are the pros and cons of making a public commitment to purity? Do you want to take that step? Why or why not?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will give your teenagers the desire and self-control to be morally pure in all aspects of their lives.
2. Your teenagers will make a commitment to stay sexually pure until marriage.
3. God will help you truly listen to your teenagers and give you opportunities to connect with them about important topics.
4. God will strengthen you to be an example of purity for your family and for everyone you encounter.

Verse of the month

"Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts." (2 Timothy 2:22)

God offers great advice for fleeing impure temptations: Run! But he also provides Christlike alternatives that offer more joy, as well as eternal rewards. A great way to avoid facing temptations in the first place is to hang out with other people striving for purity. When you're surrounded by Christians who provide support and accountability, it's easier to keep your commitment to stay pure.

What's Up With Kids

On SimplyYouthMinistry.com, youth and family expert Jim Burns tells of an insightful premarital counseling session with two former members of his youth group:

I was intrigued and pleased that they had waited to have sexual intercourse...and asked how they had chosen sexual integrity when most of their generation had not. Their answer was insightful. Both of them mentioned three issues. First, *their parents had talked openly and freely* about sex education. Second, when they were in youth group, they had *taken a sexual purity pledge* very seriously. Third, they added that they did have a strong sex drive and it hadn't been easy to wait, but they both had made a decision to practice the *spiritual discipline of sexual abstinence*.

The wedding was a joyous occasion and since I knew both sets of parents, I made it a point to thank them for the incredible start they gave this young couple on their road to sexual integrity. The parents laughed and said it wasn't always easy. In fact it was downright uncomfortable at times. I know you would agree with me that the results were well worth it. This couple proved what authorities have known for years: Sex is better in marriage. Sex is better with couples who have a spiritual connection, and sex isn't better if you cohabit.

Give your kids a biblical foundation and challenge them to live by this Purity Code: "In honor of God, my family, and my future spouse, I will commit my life to sexual purity." This involves honoring God with your body, renewing your mind for good, turning your eyes from worthless things, and guarding your heart above all else.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Lady GaGa, born Joanne Germanotta, is a singer-songwriter in the electronic genre. She worked her way to the top by playing New York City clubs, and last October her debut album released atop Billboard's Electronic Albums Chart. The single "Just Dance" hit number one in the U.S. Lady GaGa recently toured with New Kids on the Block and is now on the road with Pussycat Dolls.

Albums: *The Fame* (2008)

What Parents Should Know: Lady GaGa's musical style is pop and electro-pop, rock and disco. Her album addresses fame, glamorizes partying and alcohol, and uses some foul language. Lady GaGa's musical acts are eccentric and full of self-designed scant clothing.

What Lady GaGa Says: "I've just been growing. I think everybody grows.... I'm constantly changing. I am constantly pushing the envelope to be more and more creative and different and original to create this beautiful, graphic, important imagery."

Discussion Questions: Is being different a good or bad thing, and why? In what ways are you growing and changing? Do you like to "push the envelope"? What are some God-pleasing ways that young people can stand out from the crowd?

Christian Artist

Background: Stephanie Smith's debut album is driven by her compelling redemption story. At age 14, she met her father, who called her the wrong name, wounding her deeply. During the next few years, Smith did lots of soul-searching. After going on mission trips, she won a vocal contest and was signed to TobyMac's Gotee Records. Smith's music expresses the healing power of forgiveness.

Albums: *Not Afraid* (2008)

What Parents Should Know: In the vulnerable piano ballad "First Words," Smith opens up about the encounter with her father. The catchy breakup song "Not Afraid" reminds listeners what relationships are all about. "Beauty" deals with having inner peace.

What Smith Says: "I ended up going to Guatemala on a mission trip. If anyone is struggling with pride or self-righteousness, you need to go haul cinder blocks up a mountain. The hard work will cure you!"

Discussion Questions: Read Proverbs 11:2. How would you define pride and self-righteousness? Do you struggle with either of these traits? If so, explain. What experiences humble you? What are some ways to ensure that you're characterized more by humility than by pride?

FILMWATCH

Movie: *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (releases Feb. 13)

Genre: Comedy

Rating: PG (for some mild language and thematic elements)

Synopsis: Despite mounting debt, New Yorker Rebecca Bloomwood (Isla Fisher) lives out her passion for shopping every day. She dreams of working for a favorite fashion magazine but instead writes a financial-advice column. Rebecca goes through extreme, funny adventures to hide her inexperience and reach her ultimate dream job.

Discussion Questions: How important to you is financial success? Would you be happy working in a career that pays little money? Why or why not? What's your dream job? What steps are you taking right now to achieve it? While trying to reach an important goal, would you be willing to compromise your integrity? to go into massive debt? to sacrifice friends or relationships? Explain.



February 2009

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|----|----|--|----|----|---|
| Donut Sunday Group 4 Living Stones 11:00 Mass HS Super Bowl Party 4:30 pm | | | Mission Trip Meeting 7 pm Living Stones 6-7 pm | | | |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| Confirmation Small Group Meetings | | | MS 7:00-8:15 MS Open Gym 6:15 pm Youth Group 7:00-8:30 pm Living Stones 6-7 pm | | | |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| | | | MS 7:00-8:15 MS Open Gym 6:15 pm Safe and Sacred Places 7:00-8:30 pm Living Stones 6-7 pm | | | |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| Living Stones 11:00 Mass | | | ASH WED. MS 7:00-8:15 MS Open Gym 6:15 pm | | | MS = Middle School HS = High School Conf = Confirmation |

Last, but not least . . . OR . . . “Thinking inside the box!” 😊

“Creating Safe and Sacred Places”

In response to the archdiocesan *Protection of Children and Youth Initiative*, teens and their parents are invited to the “Not a Word” presentation by the Homeward Bound Theatre’s Teen-to-Teen Outreach group. The skit deals with a young teen’s experience of sexual abuse, and is followed by an interactive discussion. Although all Confirmation students and a parent are required to attend, any high school teens with a parent are invited and could probably benefit from the evening. Meet in the church on **Wednesday, February 18** from 7:00 to 8:30 pm.