

LifeWay relaunches sexual purity program

January 7, 2014

NASHVILLE (ABP)—Twenty years after launching the first virginity-pledge program, LifeWay Christian Resources is retooling its famous [True Love Waits](#) sexual abstinence commitment with a video-driven Bible study on sexual purity.

The True Love Project will move beyond telling teens what not to do to everyday issues they face such as pornography, lust and social media, author and speaker Clayton King said in a promotional video. The program also will address questions such as “How far is too far?” and “What should you do if you’re not a virgin?”

The recently released eight-week study is not just another Bible study for students on the topic of sex and virginity but a “summons” for young people to view their sexuality in light of the gospel, said Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry at [LifeWay](#), the Southern Baptist Convention’s publishing house.

The central message of True Love Waits, a groundbreaking initiative that began with notes from coffee-break discussions jotted down on napkins always has been that “purity is possible because of Jesus and is for Jesus,” Trueblood said.

King, a youth evangelist and teaching pastor at NewSpring Church in Anderson, S.C., said Bible purity means “being found faithful on Judgment Day, not just refraining from sex.”

“I want people to know they are pure because Jesus purified them from sin, not because they have perfect behavior and have never had intercourse or

looked at porn," King said. "The good news is that temptation, lust, porn, sex, shame and guilt are no match for the grace Jesus offers us."

Launched in 1993, True Love Waits spawned a torrent of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, including the Silver Ring Thing, a high-tech, high-energy performance tour started in 1995 featured in hundreds of media reports worldwide.



In July 1994, more than 210,000 cards from teenagers pledging to remain sexually pure were displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. While the concept began with religious organizations, today virginity pledges also are part of many secular abstinence programs taught in public schools, many with federal funding. The first federal funding for abstinence-only programs was inserted into welfare reform during the Clinton administration but grew exponentially under President George W. Bush.

As recently as 2012 the Obama White House added [Heritage Keepers Abstinence Education](#), a program started to reduce unintended pregnancies among single 18- to 25-year-old enlistees working at Navy hospitals, to a Department of Health and Human Services list of "evidence-

based programs" shown effective for preventing teenage pregnancy.

Critics of abstinence-only sex programs point to studies that indicate pledges only work in situations where a limited number of students participate and that they delay the onset of sexual activity by an average of 18 months—far from the goal of waiting until marriage. Critics also insist teens who take virginity pledges are less likely to use condoms when they have sex, risking not only pregnancy but also sexually transmitted diseases, and less likely to seek medical testing and treatment to find out if they risk spreading a disease.

Advocates like True Love Waits co-founders Richard Ross and Jimmy Hester measure the program's success by testimonies of changed lives and the fact so many people continue to use it.

In 1987, LifeWay launched a Christian sex-education project with Hester, at the time director of student ministry, as coordinator. Ross, a team member and youth minister at a Nashville-area Baptist church, proposed the True Love Waits theme in a brainstorming session in 1992.



Richard Ross proposed the True Love Waits theme in a brainstorming session in 1992. Ross' youth group at Tulip Grove Baptist Church in Hermitage, Tenn., signed the first True Love Waits commitment cards in February 1993. The program officially was launched at the 1993 SBC annual meeting in Houston.

The next year, the True Love Waits display at the SBC annual meeting in

Orlando, Fla., featured 102,000 signed pledge cards displayed on the lawn in front of the convention center. They were displayed again on the National Mall in Washington in July 2004 at a rally attended by 25,000 youth.

Since then, an estimated 3 million students around the world have made a True Love Waits pledge. In Uganda, the program was credited with dropping the rates of HIV/AIDS, which were above 30 percent in some parts of the country, to below 7 percent.