

Commentary: Sexual morality and steps to personal purity

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The movie *Pretty Woman* came out 31 years ago yesterday. The film's subtitle describes the plot: "She walked off the street, into his life, and stole his heart."

People magazine [reports](#) some facts you may not have known about the popular film: Burt Reynolds initially was offered the lead role Richard Gere made famous; the director's son plays a drug-dealing skateboarder in the movie; and the film was originally titled *3000*—the price of one night with Vivian, the prostitute played by Julia Roberts.

Here are some facts the article leaves out: The [homicide rate](#) among active female prostitutes is 17 times higher than that of the age-matched general female population; the average prostitute is [physically attacked](#) once a month; one study [found](#) 89 percent of women in prostitution want to escape but are trapped.

Abstinence outside of marriage

The glorification of prostitutes in popular media is just one example of our broken sexual ethic.

[Steven R. Tracy](#) is professor of theology and ethics at Phoenix Seminary, where he has taught since 1995. He also has served as a church pastor for 15 years and is the author of seven books and numerous journal articles.

His [article](#) on premarital sexual abstinence and the Bible shows clearly that God intends us to abstain from all sexual relations outside of marriage. He

counters the argument the New Testament does not actually condemn unmarried adults having consensual sex and the claim the biblical authors wrote from a pre-modern perspective which need not be accepted wholesale by Christians today.

As he demonstrates, “The overwhelming consensus of historical Christian teaching, as well as modern evangelical biblical scholarship, is that sexual relations are only appropriate in marriage.”

Five consequences of disobeying God’s word

Tracy’s article is helpful especially with regard to the consequences of disobeying the biblical ethic regarding premarital sexual relationships. Consider five examples.

One: “In terms of marital satisfaction, one of the most widespread modern myths is that couples need to live together before they get married to see if they are sexually and relationally compatible and thus to enhance future marital health and satisfaction. In reality, research shows that couples that live together before marriage have higher infidelity rates, lower marital satisfaction rates, and higher divorce rates than those who don’t live together before marriage.”

For instance, a study of 1,425 couples found those who cohabited before marriage “reported poorer marital quality and greater marital instability.” A study of more than 4,000 Swedish women reported women who cohabit before marriage have an 80 percent higher marital failure rate than those who did not cohabit with their future spouse.

Tracy adds: “This dynamic of cohabitation having a negative impact on subsequent marriage has been replicated in so many different studies that

some social scientists have labeled it ‘the cohabitation effect.’”

Two: Cohabiting couples are much more likely to abuse each other physically than are non-cohabiting dating couples or married couples. A Department of Justice report notes unmarried women are almost five times more likely to experience violence at the hands of their sexual partner than are married women.

Three: Cohabitators have been found to be almost twice as likely to be unfaithful to their partner as those who were married.

Four: Sexual abstinence before marriage is the only 100 percent effective method of birth control, guaranteeing women will not have to deal with an unplanned pregnancy. Since many researchers consider out-of-wedlock births to be the single most significant factor influencing long-term poverty in America, this is a very significant issue.

Five: Sexually transmitted diseases in the United States are among the highest in the industrialized world. In addition to their health consequences, they create a great economic burden, with direct medical costs in the United States of \$15.5 billion.

Grace is “supernatural empowerment not to sin”

The consequences of breaking God’s word are all around us today, from the public health crisis that is our [pornography epidemic](#), to the [threat](#) of rising sexually transmitted infections as the coronavirus pandemic lessens, to the [explosion](#) of child pornography on the internet.

Once again, God’s word is right. Human nature does not change, which means we still face the same issues our ancestors faced in biblical times. Divine nature does not change, which means God’s answers to our issues

are the same today as when he first revealed them. Today and every day, his word is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

If you are struggling with sexual temptation or sin, I urge you to act now. Speak with your pastor or another trusted counselor. Develop an accountability relationship with someone who will help you think and live biblically. Take all necessary steps with regard to software and technology protections for you and your family.

If this is not a “[besetting sin](#)” for you, identify those that are. Take them to the cross, claiming Jesus’ atoning sacrifice as payment for your debt. Ask for his forgiveness and cleansing grace (1 John 1:9). And claim his strength in partnership with others to “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15).

Randy Alcorn is right: “Grace doesn’t make people less holy—it makes them more holy. Grace doesn’t make people despise or neglect truth—it makes them love and follow truth. Grace isn’t a free pass to sin—it’s a supernatural empowerment not to sin. ... Grace raises the bar—but it also enables us to joyfully jump over that bar.”

What “bar” do you need to “joyfully jump over” today?

Jim Denison is the co-founder and chief vision officer of Denison Forum. He pastored churches in Texas and Georgia and now speaks and writes to empower believers to navigate cultural issues from a biblical perspective.

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