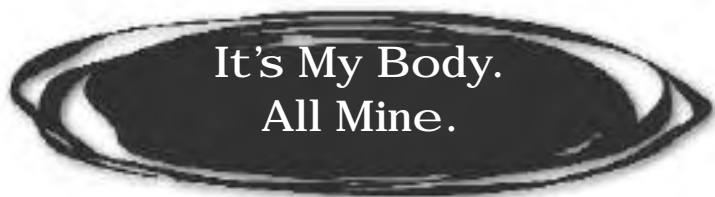


CHAPTER 7



WE SKIPPED SOMETHING.

Way back there in those early chapters, when we were figuring out who you are and what you're about, we left something out.

Your body, maybe?

. . . then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

— Genesis 2:7

As God breathes into the man whose body He's formed, so He shapes every one of us, and that means *you*.

We are creatures made of body and soul. What we do with that body matters. What we do with our bodies is a moral issue: that is, something that has the power to bring us closer to God . . . or further away.

And that means *you*. And *your body*.



SO YES, there are those moments. Moments that we have to decide, very concretely, what to do with our hands, our lips, how physically

intimate to get with someone else, in the midst of all of the fever, emotion, desire, and physical pressure. Somehow, in all of that, we have to be able to remember that God has just as much to do with what we're doing right now as He has to do with our decisions whether or not to be honest, to speak kindly, to be responsible.

It matters.

We spend a lot of time trying to convince ourselves that it doesn't, though. We think that we can separate it all out and that Jesus doesn't really care about what's going on in the back seat or at parties or with us in front of the computer.

Sorry . . . He does.

Sometimes you'll hear people say, "Well, Jesus didn't talk much about sex, you know. He talked a whole lot more about the *poor*. So why are Christians so obsessed with sex?"

Well . . .

- Look around. Watch some TV. Listen to some music. It's *Christians* who are obsessed with *sex*? Really?
- It's always interesting to ask folks who are into comparing what Jesus explicitly said about sex and about the poor . . . how much of *their* time and resources they're devoting to what Jesus talked most about. The answer might surprise you. Or not.
- There's a reason Jesus didn't go around laying down rules and being specific about sexual morality: Jesus was preaching to His fellow Jews. He preached about new things, about the Good News that was . . . new. If He didn't mention sexual morality, that was because the Jewish teaching on sexual morality didn't need anything "new" brought into it.

In other words, Genesis 1 and 2 still apply.

If I learned anything about young people in the years I've spent teaching and raising them, it's that you guys have superb, precise Hypocrisy Detectors. It's one of your favorite pastimes — to call out older people on their hypocrisy. And that's a good thing. We need it.

But here's something else to think about.

If you're walking around bearing that name of Christian, but *you* decide that Jesus has nothing to do with what you do with your body and your sexuality . . . there's a name for that.

You get one guess what it is.



NOW, THERE ARE ALL kinds of specific strategies on how to deal with these issues and lots to say about the specifics. We'll do a lot of specifics in the next chapter. But first we have to deal with the basics that are going to apply to *any* situation *anywhere*.

Quite simply: What is the attitude of a disciple of Jesus toward his or her own body?

Well, since we're "disciples" — students, that means we have a teacher. And we know who that is.

Jesus had a body. He was the Word made Flesh, remember?

How did Jesus use His body?

Obviously, this is not the space for specifics. First of all, Jesus wasn't married, and most of you will probably end up married, so those particulars don't apply. There are, simply, too many various particulars and situations to list, anyway.

You're a disciple of Jesus, so in answering that question, you look to Jesus, a man like us in all things but sin. A human being with friends and family, who shared meals, who drank, who walked and worked, touched and was touched.

Think about all you know about Jesus.



What was His body for? How did He live in and through that body?

Well, let's see. Just let your mind wander through the Gospels. What do you see, what do you remember?

Jesus used His hands . . . to heal and comfort.

His voice . . . to share the Good News of God's love and mercy.

His feet . . . to walk the earth, right to the places where people needed Him.

Finally, Jesus gave . . . His whole self to the Father for us, suffering in body, dying out of passionate, committed love. Holding nothing back, for us.

There's your starting point — to immerse yourself in that, to be committed to using the gift of your body in the same way Jesus did:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a chalice, and when he



had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (MATTHEW 26:26-28)

And do you know what? When it's Saturday night, and it's you and that other person and you're feeling passionate . . .

. . . none of that — *none of it* — stops being true.

Not even for a minute.



DO YOU BELIEVE THAT?

Really? Do you?

The truly difficult part about all of this sexuality business is that even if we have the best of intentions, the combination of where our bodies and emotions are at, physically and very naturally, along with a really permissive culture, has a certain amount of power over us.

There's pleasure in knowing others think you're hot.

There's pleasure in *feeling* hot.

There's pleasure in physical intimacy.

After all, if all of that (and more) was *unpleasant* . . . we wouldn't be here talking, would we?

It's not *temptation* unless it's pleasurable or satisfying in some way.



THAT'S WHY IT IS SO, so important to really not just know what your values are, but commit to them and live them out in small ways.

Because here's the thing, and it's really something that no one is willing to be honest about with you:



When you're hot and heavy — with others or alone, frankly — there comes a point, a tipping point, at which even the most well-intentioned person . . . *just doesn't care.*

It's physical. It's chemical. It's what your body is leading you to because, in case you didn't catch this part of the biology lesson, all of those body parts are there and work the way they do when they do for a reason: to make a baby.

It's why we get aroused and excited, it's why we feel propelled and *compelled* to just *keep going* and why it's so hard to stop.

Our bodies don't *want* us to stop.

Stupid bodies.

Or maybe — smart bodies. Maybe the fact that our bodies do this is a huge clue as to what the purpose of all of this is and why we shouldn't be messing around unless we're ready and willing to go ahead and let those bodies go the whole way and make those amazing babies — brand new little people, little beloved children of God — in a family that will care and love them the way God cares and loves us: with unswerving commitment, rock-like stability and self-sacrifice.

(They call it marriage, by the way.)



That's all general, but I hope you see how powerful and true it really is. You're here on earth for a reason: to love, to know, and to serve God. The way you do this is specific to you and your talents. But in the end, that's what it comes down to, and when you're facing eternity, that's what will be asked of you:

- ☞ How did you use these gifts?
- ☞ How did you treat your body?
- ☞ How did you treat the bodies of others?

Was it all about you and your few seconds of pleasure, or was it about love — real love — that brings joy that lasts a *lot* longer than a few seconds?

Chastity

There's a name for the attitude, stance and practice we're talking about in this chapter. It's called "chastity."

We often think of chastity as just saying no to premarital sex. That's not the correct definition — because even married people are called to be chaste. All human beings are called to live in the world chastely.

So what does it mean?

Everything we've been talking about. Understanding what your body is for and living that way. Understanding what sexuality is all about and living it:

"Chastity is really a way to look at all your relationships so that they no longer become mere exchanges of commodities. It's a plan for your whole life, for your happiness, and for eventually going to heaven. I look at chastity as a way to practice what it's like to be in heaven."

— DAWN EDEN, AUTHOR OF *THE THRILL OF THE CHASTE*,
INTERVIEW IN *THE LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC*,
MARCH 7, 2007

(So . . . how can married people be unchaste? Well, married people can be tempted to use each other as objects, to use sex as a weapon in a relationship, to close off their sexuality to the possibility of making babies — that's all *definitely* unchaste.)

So this reality, which we just can't deny. It's also really, really serious. Consider the misery of people you know who've been exploited sexually, who have profound regrets about things they've done that they can't undo . . . serious, life-changing stuff here.

So how can we live this out? Everything — the culture, our own hormones and desires — seems against us. What can we do? Start here:

- ☞ Commit yourself to live your whole life, body and soul, as a disciple of Jesus. In prayer, however you can, maybe even in front of Jesus' Real Presence of *His* Body and Blood, soul and divinity — commit. Promise. And pray for help.
- ☞ Bring all of your temptations to Jesus in prayer. *All* of them.
- ☞ Go to confession. *Confess*. Let Jesus' mercy strengthen you. You can always, always, always start over. Always. Did you hear that? What did I say? *Always*.
- ☞ Receive Jesus in the Eucharist often. Let His love fill you. Join your whole self to Him. Pray: *Live in me. Love others through me*.

And maybe, just maybe . . . think about being a little bit radical here.

Be honest about the power of this culture. Be honest about the hothouse that your peer group is. And maybe . . . walk apart. Just a little. Not in a snobbish, arrogant way. But in this way:

- ☞ Dress modestly, which simply means dress in a way that doesn't scream, "Look at my breasts! Look at my rear end! Look . . . everywhere!" (Guys and girls both.)
- ☞ Have some reserve with people of the opposite sex. Don't talk about sexual matters with them.
- ☞ Think about the music you listen to and the images you let into your brain. Then rethink it.

Finally, consider this. Now this might be the point that makes you shut the book and just go elsewhere, but too bad. I really think it's worth thinking about:

☞ Re-think the whole concept of dating.

I'm not going to dictate *how* you should rethink it or what you should conclude, but think about it, anyway. Think about an alternative world in which you're not concerned about who's going out with who or if someone likes you or not, or worried about how far to go on a date or how someone talks to you after you go out . . . or any of that.

It is possible for teenagers to find love and to love. Some of you might even be the child or grandchild of men and women who did, indeed, find lasting love in their teens. It happens.

But it used to happen more frequently when the culture was a little different. When the expectation — even if it wasn't lived out perfectly all the time — was that sexual activity wasn't just recreational and came with responsibility and the majority of folks who were in high school were getting ready, not to go off to college for even more school, but to plunge right into adult life. It was a different world that your grandparents lived in. Not our world, a world in which sex means something different — and you're under incredible pressure to internalize that casual, recreational definition of sex into the way you live your life.

But even if it's possible, it's rare. And sometimes the most powerful step we can take in our lives is just to admit — remember how important *honesty* is in trying to live a virtuous life — to admit that:

☞ We are weak.

☞ Our culture and our desires are very strong.

☞ We're not superheroes. We need help.

☞ We sometimes need to take radical steps to protect ourselves. To make it *easier* to live as a disciple . . . to find happiness.

Yeah, so imagine it. Imagine what it would be like to be free from all of those obsessions and concerns, and to trust that all that really matters in life is God's love, not some seventeen-year-old guy or girl's judgment of your appearance or sexual experience, or their expectations of what you can do for *them*.

And you wonder why they call it . . . *Good News*.

We should love others truly, for their own sakes rather than our own.

— St. Thomas Aquinas,
Summa Theologica, 2-2, 184, 1

