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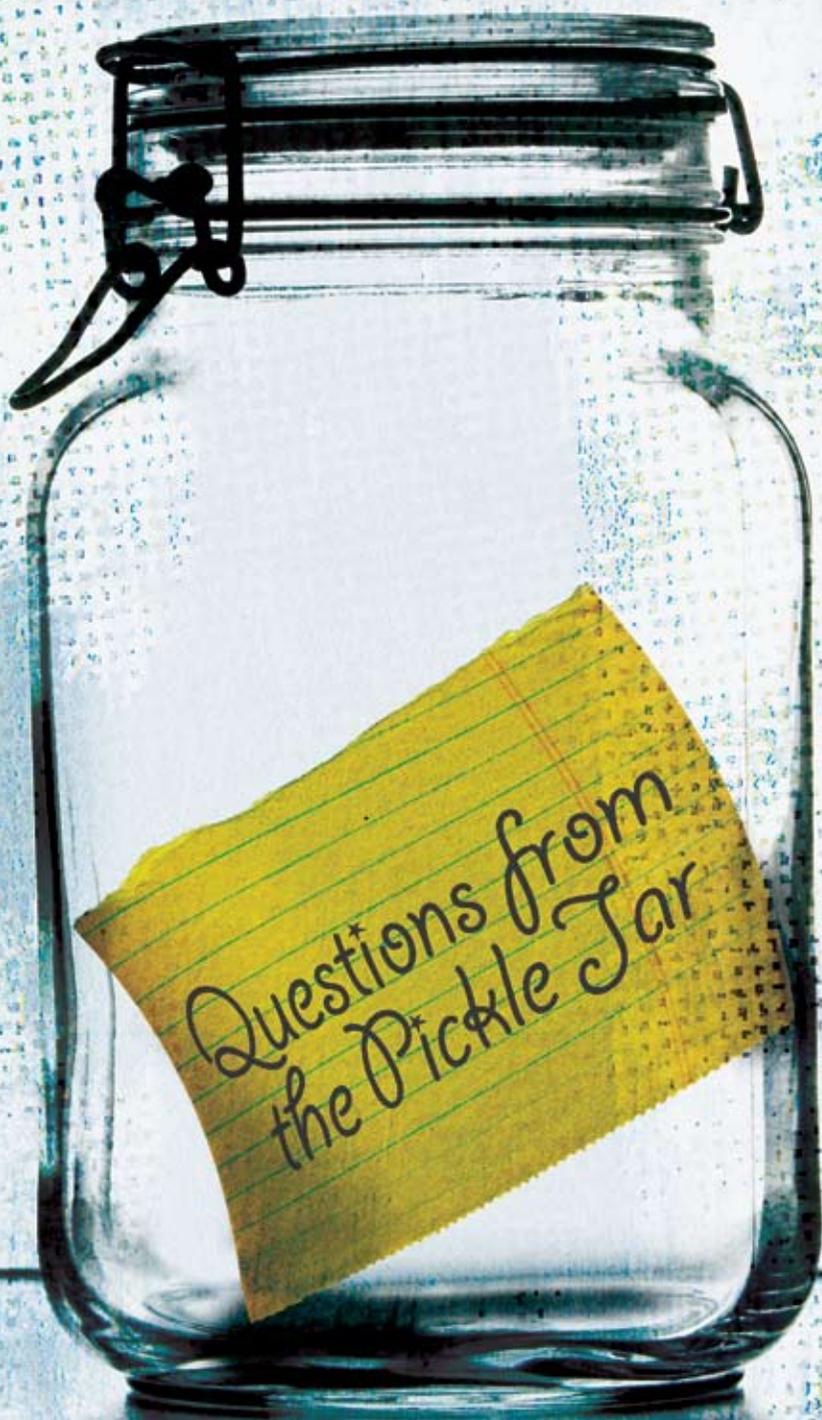
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RON DE BOER



Questions from  
the Pickle Jar

Teens and Sex

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the Pickle Jar

**Teens and Sex**

The Office of Abuse Prevention of the Christian Reformed Church  
and Faith Alive Christian Resources  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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# Preface

Have you ever camped outside an arena waiting to buy concert tickets? Or stood in a line that stretched three city blocks for the chance to score tickets for the playoffs? Maybe you and a couple hundred of your closest friends have huddled outside in the early morning frost with blankets and hot chocolate, waiting for Best Buy to release the latest electronic gadget you just had to have.

Why would you and lots of other people go to such lengths for a concert ticket or the newest X-Box game? The answer is simple. Because that something is important to you. If you want something bad enough, you will stand in long lines, in the cold, at odd hours.

Four years ago, a small group of people decided that talking with young adults about healthy sexuality is important too. Young adults are our children, our grandchildren, our family members, our neighbors.

What motivated this small group was our concern that a healthy view of sexuality *wasn't* being talked about. Some young adults experienced child abuse, which distorts how people view their bodies and sexuality. Others told us that conversations about sex were taboo—no one seemed willing to talking about it. And lots of people turned to Hollywood or the Internet to guide their thoughts about sexuality.

So this small group huddled over coffee, tea, and early drafts of this material for hours on end. We wondered if we had thought of everything. We wondered if it would connect with you, the reader. We agonized; we prayed; we drank more coffee; we asked for more drafts.

And now we're happy this book is finally ready for your eyes and for your hearts. We wish you happy, healthy lives in service to God, your family, and your community.

—The small group

*The members of the small group are Mary VanderVennen, Lori Keen, Jack Vos, Brian DeKraker, Gerry Heyboer, and Beth Swagman. And with thanks for the countless hours and discussions on healthy teen sexuality, the small group acknowledges Shaun and Andrea Hofing, Gayla Postma, and Bill Veenstra.*



# Introduction

Charlotte was my first girlfriend. She and I were in fifth grade together, and one of the many things I remember about her was that she smelled like licorice. The first day I saw Charlotte, my heart did a drum solo. She stepped up onto the school bus in slow motion and made her way down the aisle, her hair blowing mysteriously, the way it does in a shampoo commercial, as she slowly scanned the seats. When our eyes met, she smiled, revealing a straight row of silver braces. I felt like Peter Parker when he first lays eyes on MJ in *Spiderman*. I would have climbed a wall for her that day.

I thought about her every night after that. I'd never had a girlfriend before and was freaked out that a girl could make me feel that way inside. A *girl!* For some reason, I asked Charlotte to "go with" me. That meant she would sit next to me on the bus as it rattled and bounced over the country roads to our school. One afternoon, several days into our relationship, she kissed me on the cheek before she ran off the bus as it arrived at the end of her driveway. I felt tainted and dreamy all at once. I fell asleep that night, certain we'd one day be married.

Charlotte, though, had a different idea. She broke up with me the very next day. I felt like Bart Simpson when his girlfriend rips his heart out of his cartoon chest and drop-kicks it against the wall. Sure, eventually there would be other girlfriends. But I remember none of them with the clarity of the day Charlotte flashed her silver smile and introduced me to the Land of the Opposite Sex.

Adam must have felt that same charge of electricity the first time he laid eyes on Eve. Picture it. There he was, all by his lonesome, moping around

with animals and caring for plants. Until one day he falls asleep, wakes up with a sore side and—whoa!—who’s this magnificent creature in the garden? Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he approaches Eve, smiling at this person who *kind of* looks like him but with new, enhanced features he’s never noticed in his own reflection in the pond. Needless to say, he probably got a little excited. You might not think this is a big deal but remember, fig leaves weren’t in fashion yet. What followed had to have been like the courtship between Bambi and Faline in the Disney classic you watched when you were a kid—the two of them all batty-eyed and giggly.

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Adam and Eve’s life together before their fall into sin, but I imagine they must have had a blast together in the garden. It must have been like one big all-inclusive vacation when time stood still. Between running with tigers and watering flowers, Adam and Eve probably held hands and gazed into one another’s eyes, too, slow dancing to the night-time chorus of frogs. No doubt they hugged each other during storms, laughed at each other’s jokes, and teased each other the way any young couple might. Their relationship, you’ll remember, was created by God’s hand—it was perfect in every way, the model for boyfriends and girlfriends leaning against lockers in every school hallway in North America. Adam and Eve trusted, respected, and protected each other. They were honest with each other. We don’t actually see any of this in Genesis, and the last time I checked there’s no Paradise footage on YouTube, but we do know theirs was a *perfect* relationship.

Since God told them to be fruitful and multiply, they probably spent a lot of time having sex too. Why not? They didn’t need a minister to marry them. They were created by God to be in union with one another from the get-go. Besides, they had a great big world to populate.

You know what’s cool? Adam and Eve figured out how to love each other—body, soul, and mind—and maintain a relationship without checking out *Honeymoons for Dummies* from the library or watching Dr. Phil every afternoon at four.

Unfortunately, between moonlit strolls, Adam and Eve sinned. You’ve probably heard that story a hundred times. Their honeymoon ended as abruptly as a weekend courtship on class camping trip. They turned on each other—and they lied to God. Enter the fig leaves. Adam and Eve

covered themselves up, no longer comfortable with their nakedness. This covering up was a symbol of the effect sin had on all of life. Sin changed everything for Adam and Eve, including their sexuality. Their relationship—and every relationship after that—would never be the same. Sex, which began as a beautiful, God-created way for a man and a woman to express their love for each other, became something shameful because of sin. It became something to be hidden.

Here we are thousands of years later, and we're still keeping it hidden.

Do you talk about sex with your parents? I sure didn't. I don't know about you, but I had a hard time even saying the word *sex* when I was a teenager. In my household, sex was only acknowledged when the dog got a bit frisky or someone was naughty on a sitcom. (By *acknowledged* I mean everyone got all fidgety and our parents smacked the dog or made us turn off the TV.)

Despite our lack of formal education on the subject of sex, my brothers and I still managed to use words like *humped* and *wang* and *hooters*. How did we learn these words, and why were they always dirty? Everyone was aware of the subject of sex and had a mittful of words describing every aspect of the act, but nobody treated the topic with respect.

Guys might have accused each other of playing pocket pool, and girls might have stuffed their bras to make themselves look womanly, but no one learned the nitty-gritty about sex. For instance, I don't remember the word *masturbation* ever appearing on a spelling list. My only sex education in junior high took place when my gym teacher held up a pencil-drawn picture of a naked man and one of a naked woman and laid them on top of one another. "That's how babies are made," he said. "Now, anyone feel like badminton?"

In early high school we sat through films of teenage boys having wet dreams or girls as the victims of date rape. We knew we were supposed to take these topics seriously, but we mostly laughed at the kids in these films—their funny hairstyles and outdated clothes.

The truth is, we all desperately wanted to learn more about the inner workings of sex. Today anyone can Google this stuff and get some answers; back then, we had no idea of the difference between fact and fiction. "Does every other guy really have a larger penis than mine?" we

wondered. “Do other girls let their boyfriends inside their shirts?” Unless you had an ultra-cool mother or father who actually talked about these things, you wandered the media for sexual context or listened carefully to older kids for clues to the secret world of sex and relationships.

What about you? Do you wonder about this whole business of sex and relationships? Do you wonder if you’re not normal because you’re studying for your college SATs and you’ve never had a boyfriend? Has your view of sex been formed by *American Pie 14* or *Girls Gone Wild* clips on the Internet?

If you’re a Christian teen, you may have looked in the Bible for answers. If you read the Song of Songs, for instance, you’ll find some heavy-duty poetry about love and intimacy. Take chapter 3, verse 1: “All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him.” Pretty steamy stuff! Or how about chapter 4: “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.” Okay, up until the part about the flock of goats, this would be a great poem to write on red heart-shaped construction paper. Solomon, the author of Song of Songs, must have been one romantic guy.

You want to hear something really cool? A footnote in my Bible says that Solomon wrote the entire book of Song of Songs “to affirm the sanctity of marriage and to picture God’s love for his people.” Yeah, that’s a bit of a mouthful. I mean, who uses the word *sanctity* anymore? But it means the *purity* of marriage, the *cleanliness* of marriage, the *spotlessness* of marriage. In the 1 Corinthians, Paul has this to say about sex and love: “We must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never ‘become one’” (6:17, *The Message*).

Do you see a common theme here? Sex and intimacy are gifts from God best celebrated within the boundaries God sets for us. Does that mean you must feel guilty for having sexual thoughts that just pop into your head or for fantasizing about that hottie in math class? *Au contraire*. Anything you’re feeling, anything you’re imagining, any question you have about sex is 100 percent normal. Did I mention you shouldn’t feel guilty about your thoughts? Your mother probably had the same thoughts—OK, that went way over the line.

Whenever I taught sex education in high school, I always did the questions-in-a-jar schtick. Maybe you know it. Kids could scrawl any question they wanted answered on a scrap of paper and drop it in this pickle jar. Then I would spend two or three periods pulling out questions and unlocking the secrets to erections and ovaries.

When I answered the questions, you'd have thought we were in a library, it was so quiet. *Everyone* wanted to know the answers to those questions. This surprised me. And it taught me that lots of teens pretend to know everything there is to know about sex. The reality is most teens don't know everything, and what they do know comes from some highly questionable sources. In fact, nobody knows all the answers about sex and relationships—not even me, even though I had lots of girlfriends.

Think of this book as a pickle jar. All of your questions about sex and relationships won't be answered, of course, and you may already know 83.7 percent of the answers to the questions on the scraps of paper I've pulled out in these pages. But I hope there will be a few things in the book that get you thinking about this awesome, scary, exciting topic of sex and relationships.

So let's talk about sex . . . the way God intends it.



## CHAPTER 1

# Who's in Your Top Ten?

Sorry about that long introduction! Once I get started you can't shut me up. The fact that you are still reading tells me one of two things: (a) your mom or dad or youth leader is making you read this; or (b) you want to learn more. I'm hoping for (b).

I'm guessing you've found a nice, safe place to read—maybe the attic, or maybe your bedroom. So make yourself comfortable. Enjoy the book. If you disagree with parts of it, you can yell at the book. It has a stiff spine. If you like what you read, hug the book. (Every time you hug a book, the author gets a warm fuzzy feeling.)

OK, here we are in your bedroom. I'll bet somewhere in your room you have pictures of your friends and family, maybe even your pit bull. Go ahead, look at them right now. If you've got a computer in your room, I'll bet you could go all Mozart on your keyboard right now and pull up a thousand pictures of your friends on your personal web pages. Am I wrong? (You'd think I've known you for years, wouldn't you?)

Let me ask you something. Why do you have so many pictures of your friends and family? Go ahead, look away from the book and try to answer the question. (Don't answer out loud—your parents will think you're hiding someone in here.) Let me hazard a guess . . . because you care about these smiling, goofy people—and they care about you too, right? You care about them so much you put your head against theirs, snapped a shot on your digital, and made a collage.

Perhaps there are a few people on your walls you *really* care about—like your best friend, a teammate, or your third cousin Lenny. And I'm guessing there might be a face you keep glancing at that makes your heart leap. Go ahead, look at that picture right now.

This book will eventually get to the heavy-duty relationships—such as the boyfriend-girlfriend tandem—and even marriage, the mother of all relationships. But for now, let’s just think about all the great relationships you’ve had and still have at this point. Think about all the different people you invite into your life. You’d probably describe each one differently, wouldn’t you? Try it. Write down all the people you have a relationship with right now, and beside each name, try to describe the relationship or at least how you feel about the person.

Here’s how my list would have started back when I had peach fuzz on my chin:

<b>My father</b>	Strict; sometimes fun; my biggest Christian role model; love being with him watching sports; someone I can’t really be honest with.
<b>My girlfriend, Karen</b>	I get all short-breathy when I’m alone with her in her basement; I care about her more than anyone. She’s funny and way smarter than me in school.
<b>My best buddy, Doug</b>	He makes me laugh; we understand each other without even talking; I’d stick up for him in a fight.
<b>My teacher, Mr. Schat</b>	I like being around him; he makes me feel important; he has lots of wisdom; I listen to his opinion of things more than anyone’s.

Go ahead, make your own list. Maybe you’ll want to limit your list to your top ten relationships—you know, the David Letterman thing. (OK, if you’re feeling really popular this week, write down as many names as you can—even the janitor at school who says “howdy” to you every morning as he wet-mops around you while you’re trying to pull your math book out of your locker.)



Either you cheated and skipped your assignment or you’re back already. Either way is cool by me. It’s *your* bedroom. If you listed the people who are important to you, you probably learned as much about yourself as you did about them. I wonder what everyone who would list *you* on their chart would write about you. Would it be the same as what you wrote about your relationship with them? Hmmmm. That’s the kind of deep stuff you share around a campfire with your youth group while everyone stares at the logs or pretends they have smoke in their eyes.

The point is, you have a ton of different kinds of relationships. And you will continue to have lots of relationships throughout your life—hopefully long after you get hitched or become an astronaut or whatever. What you want to remember is that in all your relationships, God wants you to be *honest* and *respectful* and *loving*. These concepts comprise some of the boundaries God sets for us.

You might be wondering, “How can I be loving to the guys on my football team or the girls at school?” As you know, love can look like a lot of things, but the Bible says it simply and perfectly: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And by neighbor, it doesn’t just mean old Mrs. Higgins who lives next door and owns thirteen cats. It’s the dude in your math class, the guy who makes the fries at the fast food joint where you work, the girl sitting beside you at youth group.

Remember Solomon, the king who asked God for wisdom when he got his one wish? He sure had a lot of good things to say about our relationships. In Proverbs 13:20, he says “Walk with the wise and become wise; for a companion of fools suffers harm.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve hung around with some real boneheads in my time—guys I thought were funny and courageous because they “didn’t take nothin’ from nobody.” They were rude to teachers, didn’t respect girls, and mouthed off at their parents. In short, they ignored the relationship boundaries God sets for all of us. I realize now it felt really safe to hang around with guys like that—I didn’t have to do anything except sit around and cut people up. Maybe you’ve had similar relationships.

Here’s another assignment. Go down your list again and put a little “w” beside the name of each person you think is wise. Do the same with an “f” if there are any fools on that list—people you hang with who aren’t wholesome, don’t respect other kids, don’t love God, make poor decisions that seem kind of fun but you know are wrong. (Don’t worry, I won’t make you show them.) Would you be labeled a fool on anyone else’s list? Time to stare into the campfire again! See you in a bit.



OK, next question. You might want to go get a bowl of ice cream before this one. In all those pictures on your wall or on your personal web page, is there anyone of the opposite sex who you’re thinking you

might want to get kinda serious with, maybe even spend the rest of your days with, share the toothpaste with, fight over the remote with, snuggle with when thunder rolls and rain beats against your bedroom window? Don't be shy. There *is* someone, isn't there? Yes or no, write your answer right here: \_\_\_\_\_.

If you said no, skip the next three paragraphs. You're safe for now—but you might want to stick a piece of uncooked spaghetti in this spot for future reference when the person who will one day grin all goofy-like with you at the front of the church comes stumbling into your life.

If you said yes . . . wow, you're thinking about marriage already. Maybe you already know *when* you and your "friend" are going to get married. My then girlfriend and now wife, Karen, and I knew in high school when we were getting married, but we didn't tell anyone. It was one of those little secret treasure chests only she and I had the key to. We talked about it at our favorite abandoned parking lot. Later, when we got engaged, we didn't get married for another two-and-a-half years. (Man, it was hard getting through that long engagement and not having sex!)

The Bible has a lot to say about married people. Genesis says God created man and woman to be together, to be joined in a lifelong union. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (2:24). Yeah . . . except I didn't really leave my mother and father after I got married. I was still in college and we actually had to move in with my parents for two months before we got a place of our own. Can you say "awkward"?

Even Jesus talked about marriage. He told those Pharisees who were always stalking him, "The Creator originally made man and woman for each other . . ." (remember Adam's hubba hubba reaction when Eve showed up at Eden?). "Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart" (Matthew 19:4-6, *The Message*). His art? I probably wouldn't call myself a work of art, but my marriage is, that's for sure. In fact, marriage is like this big painting on a canvas where the artist is constantly working away. The work is never done; it's continuously evolving and changing. Sorry, I didn't mean to get all Rembrandt on you there, but you catch my meaning, right? You don't stand in front of the minister, go for an all-inclusive

honeymoon somewhere, and everything is hunky-dory until your fiftieth anniversary. Marriage takes work. Just ask my wife.

If you're a "no" person, congratulations. Here is your "Normal" bumper sticker. For those special people like *moi* who already knew the babe in senior English would one day share a wedding photo frame with me, you have to know, we are *not* normal. Some high school relationships do end up in marriage, but most of them don't make it to the sexennial—just so you know, that means *sixth*—anniversary.

If marriage isn't even on your Doppler radar, I salute you. You are living your life with all the goofballs on your bedroom collage and personal web page. You text your buds every day and LOL with an entire table full of people in your school cafeteria without a worry in the world about what your boyfriend or girlfriend is thinking. That's called being a teen.

But you need to know that out there somewhere you probably have a soulmate who is looking for you. Your eyes will meet, and fireworks will go off sooner or later. You will know who this is by the sudden deep breathing you will find your lungs doing. Eventually, I'm going to be talking about marriage and sex (do *not* put the book down!), but you don't have to be doing either of the two to be reading about it. When the fireworks go off, you will have read the part about sex and marriage and you will be ready. You might even tell your future life partner you have read the book on sex and marriage and are ready for your first date. My advice: don't mention the book. Just go bowling or something.