

Q&A with
DANNAH GRESH
author of *What Are You Waiting For?*

Dannah, you're a trusted voice on issues of modesty and sexual purity, having written several best-sellers on these issues. Yet you say this is the most important book you've written. Why is this message so vital to today's young women?

Because I can't believe that I get to share this and that the whole world is not shouting it out! I believe that God has given us a very clear pathway to understanding his heart about sexuality in the ancient Hebrew language of the scriptures. It takes a little study and some time, but it's such a revelation of his plan and it answers all our questions about sex. That's why it's important.

You set out to answer the *why* question: Why does God want sex protected? And what you found blew you away! Tell us more about this ancient word that you discovered in Genesis 4:1.

I was reading through the Bible and came to "Adam lay with his wife Eve and she became pregnant and gave birth to Eve." I thought to myself, "He so was not just layin' there." So, I looked it up and found that the Hebrew word for lay was actually "yada." (As in yada, yada, yada!) Turns out this word that culture has caused us to think means "blah, blah, blah" is not so boring after all. The word means "To know, to be known, to be deeply respected." Not a mention of the physical aspects of sex, but it points to a deeper emotional and spiritual knowing. It's used over 900 times in the Old Testament and the uses convey layers and layers of truth about sex to us.

Why do so many people find sex outside of marriage so unfulfilling? How is it a distortion of *yada*?

It's a counterfeit, and those never satisfy. The scriptures use an entirely different word for sex outside of marriage: shakab. It's a euphemism for sex that's often used in conjunction with a word that means "emission." In essence, sex outside of marriage is "an exchange of body fluids." It's never enough and so we always crave more. We're looking for the genuine thing: yada. When all we get is an exchange of body fluids that had a hint of pleasure, we crave the real thing without even knowing we missed it.

How do brain chemicals factor in to God's plan for sex and marriage?

Recent research reveals so much about how the brain responds to sex. This too, answers a lot of our questions and affirms God's plan for a one man/one woman sexual partnership for life. For example, when a woman has sex the deep limbic system of her brain is washed in the chemicals of dopamine—an addiction chemical—and oxytocin—a bonding agent. These cause her to crave and feel bonded to someone she has sex with. It also explains why a woman's emotions are so rocked

when she breaks up with a guy she's had sex with, or why she wants to be more than "friends with benefits" despite trying to want to just be friends. There are bonds between people who have sex. Friends with benefits? A myth.

Chapter 8 is titled "The Lesbianism Question." Is lesbianism becoming increasingly popular, and what do young women struggling with this need to know?

They need to know that they can talk to someone. It's so important to tell someone what you're feeling and why. Most of the women I talked to who have struggled with same sex attraction weren't telling anyone. When they did, they found they weren't alone and they also found truth to heal their heart.

What's the biggest lie young women today are believing about sex?

That they can have sex without taking it too seriously. They don't realize that their body makes a promise (with brain chemicals) even if their mind does not.

Porn has become so common that it's safe to assume *most* guys have struggled with it at some point. What advice do you offer to young women who are dating a guy with a porn problem?

Well, first of all: porn is bad. You can't "know or be known" by pixels on a computer screen, so it's not anything more than a counterfeit for the real intimacy of sex. Research reveals that both men and women who are using porn often find actual sex less fulfilling than those who are not. They are also rarely satisfied with their sex lives, including porn. You want a great sex life? Press pause on the porn!

If you find a guy you are dating is struggling, talk to him about it. If he is a guy who admits his struggle and is willing to walk in transparent accountability with other men, he's probably a guy who is worth staying with. I think most guys struggle at some level. Whether it's glancing too long at the Victoria's Secret posters or downloading porn videos at work. A guy who is not acting in a long-term addictive manner and who will talk in humility about his struggle is a guy you can trust. He has to also hate the sin, but get wise counsel and guidance and ask him to do the same. But don't dump him if he's honest. Be more afraid of the guy who says he has never, ever been tempted. They may exist. I haven't met one.

Teens always want to know, "How far is too far?" How do you answer this question in *What Are You Waiting For?* Once they decide what their standard is, how do they stick to that?

I think we're asking the wrong question. Oh, I answer it. Detail by detail. What kind of kissing is OK? Are back rubs OK? I take the time in the chapter to talk it out, but I think it's the wrong question, because research tends to point to the fact that those with fewer life sex partners have better sex. So, it seems like great sex comes from a quality relationship, not quantity of partners. So, the question should probably be: "How far away can I stay from sex until I'm married."



Once they draw their line in the sand, I think it takes authentic community and accountability to live a life of purity in this day and age. I think a young woman needs other older, wiser woman asking her specific questions about how she is holding to those standards. That kind of love in authentic community gets to really celebrate on a wedding day. They feel a part of the journey to bring this bride to her wedding day.

You know the pain from sexual sin, so how would you encourage young women find healing and freedom from a guilty past?

Well, I can just tell you my experience from the perspective of a Christian. If you are hurting from too many sexual partners, a big bad break up, or just feeling used up...Tell someone. The Bible encourages us to: "Confess your sins one to another and then you will be healed." I didn't tell anyone about my sexual sin when I was fifteen. During that whole time I was unhealed. Then, I told my husband of five years. I expected him to be so angry about my secret, but he held me and loved me and for the first time in eleven years I FELT God's forgiveness. As my husband spoke his forgiveness to me, I HEARD God's forgiveness. It was like a spiritual re-birth for me to experience the perfecting love of Christ all over again.

To wrap it up, what's the motivation for young people to wait until marriage for sex? Why is having a sexual theology rooted in the Word so important?

Let me count the ways. The sex is better. (Religiously active, middle aged women who have had only one life-time sexual partner are among the most orgasmic on the planet!) The intimacy is sweeter. (There are no broken pieces of your heart to hold you back.) If you are a Christian, there is great reward in protecting the picture of Christ's love. You see, the word "yada" is used to talk of intimacy between a husband and wife, but it is also used in verses like this one: "Be still and know (yada) that I am God." All through scripture we can trace the truth that God uses a holy marriage relationship to portray his love for humanity. If we make sex less exclusive than he intended, we mar that picture of his passionate, exclusive love for us.

Where can we find more information about you and your book?

PureFreedom.org. And I just started a great new blog that's posted there. My first topic was "Bible characters didn't wait for the wedding to have sex, so why should we?"