

5

conversations
you **must** have with
your
daughter



THE BIBLE STUDY

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TRUE LOVE WAITS OVERVIEW

www.truelovewaits.com

This update on how God is using True Love Waits can help moms in their conversations with their daughters about sexual purity and marriage.

True Love Waits® is one of several approaches to challenging teenagers and college students to make a commitment to sexual abstinence until marriage.

Created by LifeWay Christian Resources, True Love Waits (TLW) is designed to encourage moral purity by adhering to biblical principles. This youth-based international campaign utilizes positive peer pressure by encouraging those who make a commitment to refrain from pre-marital sex to challenge their peers to do the same.

The first True Love Waits national celebration took place in July 1994, when more than 210,000 covenant cards were displayed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. More than a decade later, an estimated 2.5 to 3 million youth have signed commitment cards at LifeWay events, pledging sexual purity until their wedding day. Commitment estimates are believed to be three to four times higher based on TLW activities in churches, student groups, and cooperating ministries.

More than 100 organizations have adopted the use of True Love Waits to promote sexual abstinence, in large part because they have seen how well the campaign works and the potential it has to reverse negative trends in communities.

In 2004, the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., released a study indicating that abstinence programs such as True Love Waits dramatically reduce the rate of out-of-wedlock births. The study, which tracked the effects of virginity pledges six years later, found that young women who take a virginity pledge are at least 40% less likely to have a child out of wedlock and 12 times more likely to be virgins when they marry, compared to young women who do not make such a pledge.

The Heritage Foundation findings were consistent with a 2001 study by The American Journal of Sociology that reported teenagers who pledge to remain sexually abstinent until marriage are 34% less likely to have sex than those who do not pledge.

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Researchers conducting the study noted the delay effect is “substantial and almost impossible to erase.” The pledge works, the study suggests, because it creates an “identity movement” or “moral community” that provides peer support for the teen.

More recently, a June 11, 2008, article in *USA Today* titled, “Teen survey shows virginity pledges can work” noted, “Virginity pledges do deter some teens from having sex, according to a study by the RAND Corp. that surveyed teen virgins over three years to see whether they stayed that way. Of 1,517 adolescents ages 12 to 17 in 2001 when the research began, teenagers who vowed to remain virgins until they were married were less likely to be sexually active than others who didn’t make a pledge.”

These and other studies challenge the generally negative assessment of abstinence programs reached by some researchers. While studies about teens’ sexual behavior sometimes have contradictory findings and conclusions, the true measure of success is changed lives.

True Love Waits often receives correspondence such as this letter from Caroline in Colorado Springs:

“I was part of the [Washington] D.C. ‘94 event, and first made a commitment to abstinence until marriage. ... Although it was not easy ... I can say it was definitely worth the wait and we have no baggage in our marriage because of past partners or troubling diseases.

“Ironically, my cousin Emily was in Athens, Greece, this past summer (2004) ... [She] was part of the True Love Waits event, and signed her own card as well. ... So from one of your first events to your most recent event, you are touching lives and encouraging teens. I know at least five to six in my youth group who are now married and were virgins when they married and signed that pledge!”

Despite the progress made, much work remains to be done. The United States still has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births in the industrialized world, resulting in severe economic and social costs, not to mention the personal pain early sexual activity places upon teenagers and their families.

True Love Waits has made a profound impact in other parts of the world as well as in the United States. For example, in Uganda, True Love Waits has been a catalyst for bringing people together around the abstinence message in schools, youth groups, communities, and other places. In the years that followed, Uganda’s HIV/AIDS prevalence rate,

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which in parts of the country was above 30%, dropped to the current rate of 6.7%. Some leaders there say that this turnaround has literally saved a generation.

True Love Waits is expanding its reach in countries such as Africa, where honoring a commitment to remain abstinent until marriage is literally a matter of life and death. In February 2009, a LifeWay team spent two weeks in the Philippines to work with the True Love Waits movement there and evaluate possible ways to expand in that country as well.

Hundreds of thousands of commitment cards from youth throughout the world have been displayed at several events, including the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

Revolutionary Purity, a study that challenges young people to a life of personal and “revolutionary” purity that includes influencing peers in other countries, is one tool True Love Waits is using to enhance the international scope of the abstinence movement.

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