

5 Things

EVERY
PARENT

NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR

Kids and Sex

ANNE MARIE MILLER



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One Thing You Need to Know before Reading This Book

This is a book about sex.

Things may get a little awkward.

And that's the thing we're going to change.

Sex is not awkward (well, it can be . . . *in a fun way* . . . more on that later).

Sex is beautiful.

Sex isn't just a physical act—it's a spiritual one.

It's emotional.

It's relational.

Our sexuality isn't something that should be hiding in dark corners; it should be discussed honestly, joyously, openly.

And while sex is a brilliant part of our lives, it's also an intimate part of our lives.

That doesn't mean we need to keep quiet about it.

Since the day the first humans knew they were naked—and they were ashamed—we have been trying to put as many

proverbial fig leaves as possible between our sexuality and one another.

It's time to start peeling off the layers one by one.

Yes, this is a book about sex, and we explore sensitive topics like pornography, abuse, and trafficking. You might find some of the things you read disturbing or offensive. Sometimes the things you read *are* disturbing or offensive.

But sexuality is not.

I've worked very closely with my publisher, my editors, and various contributors to communicate the truth and context of the often-scary reality in which we live without being gratuitous. It is not my goal to shock you with unnecessary details, yet at the same time the subject matter at hand has often been distorted from a beautiful part of being divinely human to the unimaginable and the unpleasant. I have attempted to walk this fine line with decency and wisdom and hope you will walk along that line with me with grace and understanding.

Author's Note

Throughout history, people have approached the topic of sexuality from many vantage points—some from a place of silence and shame, and others from a place *where anything goes, whatever feels good must be good*—without thought or consequence.

In regard to sex, people from religious circles often hold the point of view that leans more in favor of silence and shame. We don't talk about sex. Sex is seen as dirty. A hush-hush attitude can be the impetus behind shame complexes in children (and adults). It can also prohibit natural sexual exploration or experimentation.

Growing up in a conservative, Southern, *and* religious culture, sex was not discussed in my home, my school, or my church. Except for our youth group's annual True Love Waits event, talking about sex was off-limits. And at the conference, all we were told was "Don't have sex."

Nobody dared ask *why*.

Keeping talk about sex under wraps definitely had an impact on my formative years (I'll share my story in a few

pages). And now, after twenty-something years, with God's providence and maybe a little bit of his humor, he has firmly planted in my heart a passion to change the conversation.

Sex is not a subject to avoid. Sex is a gift from God to us to celebrate and enjoy.

We, the church, cannot keep quiet about the subject of sex any longer. Because of the broken world in which we live, adults and children are presented with a distorted image of sexuality at each and every turn. This distorted image affects us in all areas of our lives, including our spirituality, our relationships, and our worldview.

As you work through this book, you'll inevitably see that my conservative religious background didn't scar me for life. I'm still involved in church, I work in full-time ministry, and, to set the tone of this book, I love sex!* My beliefs (having been shaped by what I understand the Bible to say and my own life experiences) construct and direct my views on sex. This does not mean I have everything figured out, nor am I suggesting that I am correct in every situation. However, my faith in God and belief in the truth of the Scriptures will be apparent as you read.

My hope in writing this book is simply to educate, encourage, and equip parents who share similar Christian beliefs by providing statistics, stories, and resources that will help them engage in gracious and life-giving conversations about sex.

With that said, please know that I am not here to convert others with differing viewpoints. I hope those who believe differently, either inside or outside the Christian faith, will

*Oversharing? Maybe. But it's a book on sex. You should probably get used to this.

read one perspective by one woman and use it as a jumping point for conversation . . . even if we disagree.

Some people may think what I research or suggest is too conservative or religious or prohibitive. Others may think it's too open and broad or that my experience and advice are not conservative enough. *I fully realize this and ask for your grace in those areas where our thoughts differ.*

This is not a book full of doom and gloom. It is not a book telling you *how* as much as it is sharing *why* this conversation is important. It's not a book about rules; it's about redeeming a much-needed conversation.

I'm not here to frighten you or encourage you to move off the grid, far away from the dangers of technology and modern Western culture (though sometimes it's tempting, isn't it?). I simply want to inform you of the things I've learned from my years of talking to kids just like yours in communities just like yours. I'm here to offer you the tools and knowledge that will best aid you in initiating and continuing the conversation about sex in your home—with as little anxiety and awkwardness as possible.

This Book Is a Starting Point

You can read this book from cover to cover or just peek at the things you feel are most relevant to you and your family at the moment. Use it as a reference guide.

During the course of writing this book, I told my publisher each chapter could stand alone as its own book. Sex is a beautiful and complex topic, as are the physical, social, and psychological effects it has on us. If you want to learn more about one of the five things I've addressed, visit

5ThingsBook.com, email me, or ask a pastor, a doctor, or a counselor. Much more information is available as you navigate these topics with your children.

Before you dip your toes in the water, here's a quick overview of what's ahead:

In the preface, you'll learn a little bit about me and why my personal history is relevant to this book. In the introduction, we'll run through a basic understanding of the theology of sex. It's important to begin this conversation with why sex is important to God. We'll look at the purpose of sex from a scriptural perspective and explore why God cares about it. We'll also talk briefly about how we, as adults, view sex, and how your own personal history is significant to this conversation as well.

In chapter 1, we'll look at the sexual development of children and when and how to initiate conversations about sex. We'll discuss the degree of detail and content appropriate for particular ages and why these conversations are necessary, even imperative, in the first place.

In chapter 2, we'll debunk the myth that your child is the exception to the rule. The fact is that parents can take every precaution available, but at some point in time, children will need to learn how to handle their sexuality and encounters with sex on their own.

In chapter 3, we'll explore what largely informs society's view of sex: mainstream media. We'll examine how we digest the media we consume and how it affects our beliefs and behavior. We'll also delve into four media staples: television, video games, movies, and music.

Of course, our media consumption doesn't end there. In chapter 4, we'll look at how the internet and new technology

is changing the way kids are educating themselves about sex. We'll also explore pornography's impact on our individual health, as well as on public health, and examine the correlation between the sex industry and sex trafficking and why it's important to offer our children the big-picture repercussions of pornography.

Finally, chapter 5 addresses some tender issues, particularly identifying and healing from sexual abuse. We'll discuss the signs of sexual abuse, explore the reasons why survivors of sexual abuse rarely speak up, and determine how we should talk to our children about such a sensitive topic.

If you're starting to feel a little overwhelmed, it's okay. I'm right there with you, which is why we'll conclude the book with the most important message of all: *there is hope*. There is hope for you, for your children, and for your family. There's even hope for the world. In the Resources for the Conversation section and on 5ThingsBook.com, you'll find practical books, websites, and other materials that will help equip you to talk to your kids about sex.

I have never been more certain about anything in my life than I am about this: it is time to be brave about communicating openly and frequently about healthy biblical sexuality. Chances are that as you read through this book and begin to talk with your children about sex, you will see, if you haven't already, how the culture of sex in our world is changing at lightning speed.

Since 2012, anytime I've given a talk about sex and almost every time I've sat down to write or edit this book, the enemy (we'll call him Satan or the devil or whatever word best describes him to you) has attacked. I know that sounds a little crazy.

Time and time again, just days before I was to share my story and resources at an event, I would end up in the emergency room with a different health scare. I got a concussion and experienced the sudden onset of the flu, pneumonia, *and* bronchitis (at the same time)—all issues affecting my ability to speak. During the course of writing this book or other material on this topic, something would inevitably interrupt me, whether it was a common cold (but just bad enough to make my brain too fuzzy to write coherently), a major issue with our home, an ill family member, a friend newly diagnosed with cancer, the death of a loved one, or even, most recently, a shooting in the store next to the café where I was writing. I was thirty minutes into writing about how parents can't always protect their children when a police officer entered the café and instructed everyone to evacuate immediately. As I left, a SWAT team stood shoulder to shoulder, their automatic rifles drawn, waiting for a gunman in the store next door. Somebody had been shot less than one hundred feet from me, and while everyone in the café was safe, I was tempted to play the worst-case scenario over and over again in my mind. *What if the shooter had chosen the café instead of the store next door?**

Later, during the editing process of this book, I became pregnant. But then I miscarried, which required an emergency surgery and more time off. And then my laptop suddenly went missing for two weeks—and I had not saved my most recent edits.

Satan wants me to be afraid. He wants to prevent me from talking about this topic. And he wants you to be afraid

*They caught the shooter, for what it's worth, and nobody was seriously harmed in the incident.

too. I don't blame every horrible thing that happens in life on the enemy, but there are some things I can't dismiss as coincidence.

We are in a fight. We frequently point to the media, pornography, and sex as the enemy, but these things, especially sex, are *not* the true enemy. God has given us sex as a beautiful way to express love to our spouse. The media and pornography are tools the enemy uses to break us down, enslave us, and cause us to feel shame instead of strength and hopelessness instead of hope.

Our enemy is Satan.

We are all, each one of us, in the heat of the battle. I know because I am feeling the heat. I'm just one person out of many who is sharing this message of freedom and hope, and I know others are fighting to speak up too.

Here are some things you can do to strengthen your fight:

1. **Pray.** Pray always. Pray for your family, your church leaders, and the people who are called and committed to sharing the message of God's grace and hope to those broken by addictive behaviors and to those negatively impacted by damaging images and messages about sex.
2. **Create family values.** Create and adopt a set of family values to guide you as you work through these chapters and as you engage in difficult conversations with your children. I've put together a list here, but feel free to create your own guidelines as well. The family values listed below will also be included in other chapters for your reference. It's important to note that while this book is primarily about sex, our lives are about so much

more. These values are applicable to all areas of our lives. If good values are established together as a family, each member will have a sense of ownership and responsibility and want to fulfill them.

Family Values

- We believe God created sex to be a worshipful experience between husband and wife* that brings glory to him.
- We believe that because we live in a fallen world and will constantly face distorted views of sexuality, we must learn to identify and process these views in a healthy and biblically sound manner.
- We believe in honest conversation, even if it feels uncomfortable, antiquated, or old-fashioned.
- We believe everybody is created in God's image, and no one should be abused or exploited for any reason.
- We believe we should not be ashamed of sex or sexuality—ever.
- We believe in showing grace, mercy, and love in every circumstance, even toward people whose beliefs we don't agree with or understand.
- We believe in the healing and redemptive power of the love of God, who sacrificed his Son, Jesus Christ, for our sins.
- We believe in having integrity in our thoughts, words, and actions by demonstrating God's love to everyone, including ourselves, regardless of past or present circumstances.
- We believe in asking for help when we need it.
- We believe in relying on the power of God and prayer, as well as being accountable to our family and friends when we struggle.

3. Find Freedom. Statistics indicate that more than half the people reading this book are waging a battle of their

*I understand homosexuality is a very widely debated topic in the Christian culture. If you're tempted to mentally check out and not finish this book because of my belief, I encourage you to hang in there. I go into a little more detail about this later.

own. If this is you, please get help. Tell someone. Tell just one person. Do whatever is necessary, even if it's extreme, to seek freedom. We will talk about this more in the introduction.

4. **Love your enemies.** We shouldn't get angry with the media or the pornography industry. We need to pray for the people trapped in the sex industry. A lot of them don't want to be there. Pray that God's love is so bright it will overpower the darkness they live in.

5. **Talk to your church leaders.** Conversations about sexuality, pornography, and abuse should not be limited to our families. The church is not exempt from this conversation. Speak with the person who directs your church's adult and young adult ministries about the necessity of having this kind of conversation within your church. Consider leading a prayer ministry specifically geared toward those who are trapped in a cycle of sexual abuse or sin. Engage your church in a prayerful revival. Rely on God to deliver those who are trapped and use others who aren't to help them heal.

Talking about sex, pornography, abuse, and trafficking is not an easy task. Let's acknowledge this fact early on and know that these growing pains are necessary and good. These conversations, though difficult, will positively impact your family—and quite possibly families around the world. With God's help, we've got this. We can reshape our culture with

We believe God created sex to be a worshipful experience between husband and wife that brings glory to him.

humility, surrender, and proactive communication with our children and other parents.

Let's redeem the conversation.

Peace in the name of Christ,
Anne Marie Miller¹

Contributors

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WHOLE Women Weekend. Crystal holds a BS in psychology from Liberty University and four certifications, including one in professional life coaching. In her book *Dirty Girls Come Clean*, she shares her story of freedom from pornography use, which she hopes will bring other women out of oppression as well. Her work has been featured by the *New York Times*, *ABC News*, *CNN*, *Christianity Today*, *700 Club*, and more.

Preface

My Story

Please allow me to introduce myself before we go much further. My name is Anne Marie Miller, which I'm guessing you saw on the cover. I'm in my midthirties and have been married to my husband, Tim, a youth pastor, since 2013. I grew up in the church—the daughter of a Southern Baptist minister—with a passion for learning the Bible. I was the honors student, the athlete, the girl who got along with everyone—from the weird kids to the popular crowd. It was a good life. I was raised in a good home.

In 1996, I was sixteen, and the internet was new. After my family moved from a sheltered, conservative life in west Texas (think *Friday Night Lights*) to the diverse culture of Dallas, I found myself lonely, curious, and confused.

Because of my volatile life circumstances at the time—I was struggling with my new environment and dealing with

the stress of my dad's depression—I reached out to a local youth pastor. I needed help and went to what was familiar. I asked him for assistance in launching a Bible study, and he offered some materials for leading a prayer rally at my high school. A few weeks later our relationship changed, and for the next six months—most of my junior year of high school—he sexually abused me.

Sex was one of those things my family and my church kept in the dark. There was no talk about “the birds and the bees” for me. The combination of teenage hormones, the variety of new words I heard at school and on the radio, and the sexual nature of my abuse left me feeling lost and confused. I couldn't ask my parents about it. I thought they'd ground me for life. Plus, pastors were (wrongly) godlike in my view, so I felt like I couldn't tell anyone about what that youth pastor was doing to me. I didn't want to get him in trouble even though I knew what was happening to me was illegal. I felt like I must have done something to “deserve” the abuse. And I couldn't talk to my friends. Most of them were sexually active, and I was embarrassed about my lack of knowledge and experience. I didn't know what certain words meant and was too afraid to ask.

Instead, I turned to the internet for education, and what began as an innocent pursuit of knowledge quickly escalated into a coping mechanism. Soon that coping mechanism—looking at online pornography—became a compulsive behavior.¹ When I looked at pornography, I experienced feelings of love and safety—at least for a brief moment. But after those brief moments of relief disappeared, I felt ashamed and confused. Pornography provided me both an emotional and a sexual escape. It was medication.

I carried this secret and the heavy shame that accompanied it for years. I knew guys looked at porn—that was culturally common and even somewhat socially acceptable. But a girl? A preacher’s kid? Surely there was something wrong with me, something dark and perverted. Why else would the youth pastor take advantage of me? Why else would I seek out the images and videos I did? Why else would they make me feel better?

My Rock-Bottom Moment

As soon as I graduated high school, I found a successful job at one of the first dot-com companies. I took home a great paycheck, enjoyed all the luxuries it afforded, and was close to my friends and family. The year before, shortly after my nineteenth birthday, my longtime boyfriend had proposed to me, and I had said yes. I was engaged. But despite all that, my online habits were affecting my off-line life.

I’d reconnected with a male friend from high school through the internet. We chatted online at night and eventually met in person again. It had been two years since I’d seen him. I promised myself it was an innocent friendship and denied how my heart raced when I was with him. We began to see each other more and more—until one day, we were caught.

My fiancé knew I had a time-consuming job and was gracious about it. He worked at a law firm, and we had planned for me to cut back on my hours once we were married. He and I were supposed to go on a date one night, but I called him from work to cancel, telling him my colleagues were going out after work and I needed to be there. He understood. What I didn’t say was that “people from work” meant my

old high school friend, a lie I justified by having him meet me at my office, so *technically*, he was a person from work. I assuaged my guilt in technicalities.

We went to see a movie. When my fiancé called my old Nokia cell phone during the movie, I thought I'd pressed the end button but unknowingly hit the talk button instead. He overheard the movie and the bits of conversation my "friend" and I were having.

Later that night, my fiancé confronted me. I confessed—yes, I'd been spending time with another man. Yes, we had a romantic relationship. When my fiancé asked if I loved this other man, I didn't know how to answer. All I knew was that I felt *really* good around him. So I said yes. Yes, I loved him.

My fiancé and I sat in my living room. I gave him back our engagement ring. We cried. He kept asking, "Why? Why? Why?" And I kept saying, "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." He left in tears. I never saw him again.*

That night, I stared at myself in the mirror. In some ways, it was like staring at a stranger. I remember touching my cheeks, wondering if the person in the reflection was me. All I knew was that something was wrong with my mind.

I knew lying was wrong. I knew cheating was wrong. I knew my selfishness was wrong. I knew the way I was living my life was wrong. I wondered where the good preacher's kid went. I looked in the mirror and said out loud, "You weren't raised to be a porn-watching, materialistic, two-timing slut."

*Based on his present circumstances, there is a relatively good chance my ex-fiancé will read this book. If you do read this, please know how sorry I am for the way I mistreated you. I'm so glad you have found happiness with your wife and family.

The word *slut* slithered out of my mouth like a hiss. I was disgusted with myself for saying it, but at the same time, I also had an epiphany. *Wait. The “real me” never would have said the word slut. Why did I say it?*

I closed my eyes. I saw the word *slut* painted in a million different colors and fonts. It was like I was looking at a computer screen through the lens of my mind’s eye.

In that moment I realized the connection: my porn habit was somehow part of the demise of my relationship. Pornography—the words, the messages, and even the actions—had infiltrated my mind and my life.

That was the night I walked over to my computer, a purple and beige Compaq Presario, unplugged the tower, marched it down the concrete stairs of my apartment building and across the parking lot, and placed it next to an overflowing dumpster. That was the night, disgusted and frustrated by my lack of control and online pornography bingeing, I threw away my computer. I’d hit rock bottom.

Two years later, at the age of twenty-one, I finally opened up to a friend, *only* because she confessed her struggle with pornography use to me first. We began a path toward healing and for the last fifteen years, though it’s not been a perfect journey, I can say with great confidence that God has set me free from the desire to look at pornography and from the shame I carried for so long.

Speaking Up about Freedom

Over the last decade, I’ve had the opportunity to share my story in a variety of venues with hundreds of thousands of teens, college students, men, and women. Sharing my story

is always a little awkward, but it's a gift I've embraced over time.* It honestly doesn't even feel like it's my story anymore.

Instead, it's a story God has redeemed for good. I am no longer the woman at the well, ashamed of her past. Instead, I am the woman at the well *after* Jesus meets her—the woman who, despite the shame and embarrassment and awkwardness and fear, can't wait to tell others what he did for me.

After Jesus met this Samaritan woman, she couldn't contain her joy.

The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

John 4:28–30 NLT

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, I can't wait to share that there's hope and freedom down the road. And beyond that, there's joy!

I was twenty-seven years old when I left my full-time job at a church to become a full-time author and speaker. I worried people wouldn't listen to me because I was so young. Many of the audiences I spoke to were comprised of parents and people in their midforties. Although I always felt a little timid speaking to these listeners, I drew strength from the truth that I was called by God to share my story of redemption with them. Over time I came to understand that many men and women, no matter their age, related to my experiences. We shared a common history: sexual abuse, struggles with pornography, codependency, feelings of worthlessness, and

*I call it the spiritual gift of awkwardness.

issues with body image. Although hearing people's stories was painful, seeing God heal and transform others—and continue to heal me—was rewarding.

In my early thirties, I returned to school to study the science behind addiction and the sociology behind family dynamics. My goal was to bring a technical understanding of sexuality into the realm of religion and faith, where I saw it was deeply lacking. During this time, more student ministries and universities began to ask me to speak. Now my fear was that I was too old. What twelve-year-old boy wants to hear someone his mom's age talk about sex? *Awkward!* Yet I sensed a calling to share with students how God has freed me from the shame and actions of my past. I yearned to assure them that they aren't alone (because everyone always truly thinks they are alone). One college dean referred to me as "the grenade we're tossing into our student body to get the conversation of sex started." He and other administrators had realized that sweeping these topics under the rug caused their students to feel trapped, obsessed, and ashamed. I will continue to share my testimony in this capacity as long as there is a student in front of me who needs to hear it. When I finish speaking at these events, I'm always surprised to see how many students line up to talk with me afterward. They want and need to share their stories, their desire to be free from their struggles with pornography, their battles with shame, and their pain from abuse—struggles, battles, and pain no one knew about.²

An Unexpected Shift

The core of my ministry completely changed in the summer of 2013 when I entered a world few souls in my profession

dare to venture into: junior high church summer camps. From Canada to Illinois, my husband Tim and I spent weeks with junior high students, equal parts terrified of their emerging hormones and enamored with their not-quite-teenagers-yet innocence.

The last night of the last camp was pivotal for me. In fact, it prompted the idea for this book.

The camp directors (who were youth pastors at the church sponsoring the camp) asked me to share my story with the junior high girls, most of whom were ten to thirteen years old. I had shared a little each day, but the last night culminated in hours of open one-on-one confession and counseling in the back of the auditorium. As the girls tearfully shared their stories with me, I was forced to mask my shock and horror regarding what they confessed. At the same time, I noticed three things in common with almost all the stories and confessions I heard that night:

- They learned about sex from Google (usually around the age of eight or nine years old) and had seen pornography.
- If they'd been sexually abused, molested, or violated in any way, they didn't tell anyone about it (until me).
- They believed they would get in trouble if they told their parents either of the above statements because their parents were good Christian parents and their families went to church.

When I mentioned what I'd learned to the youth pastor at the night's end, I'll never forget what he said: "The thing is that most parents think their kid is the exception."

At the end of the evening, I collapsed onto the bed in our camp room. Tim comforted me as I wrestled with what to

do with all the information I'd heard over the summer. The next day I penned a blog post titled "Three Things Parents Don't Know about Their Kids and Sex." Within seventy-two hours, the post went viral, with more than 1.5 million people reading and sharing it across social media channels. What I'd learned at church camp clearly connected with many parents who wanted to protect their children but didn't know where to begin.

Now more than ever I am aware of just *how little* parents know about what's happening with their children and sex. Please don't hear this as an insult to you, your heart, your intention, or your love for your kids. *It's not*. And because I haven't experienced years of parenting (yet), I feel terribly inadequate telling you this.

But I can't *not* tell you. A mentor and close friend recently reminded me that the two people who talked about marriage the most in the Bible were Jesus and Paul, neither of whom was married. God's call is God's call, and I am confident in my call to speak out on this topic. Those closest to me affirm this.

After seeing the innocence in the eyes of ten-year-old girls who've carried secrets *nobody*, let alone children, should carry, and after hearing some of the most horrific accounts from students I've heard in recent years, I cannot go one more day without pleading with you to talk with your children.

Would you prefer your son learn what a fetish is from you or from searching Google Images? How would you feel if your daughter came home from a slumber party singing the lyrics to an inappropriate song? That happened to a friend of mine. She overheard her eight-year-old daughter singing the lyrics to "All about That Bass," a song that refers to a

young woman's curvy hips as something guys like "to hold at night." When my friend asked her daughter where she heard it, her daughter replied, "We watched the video on Taylor's iPad." Of course, in conducting proper research for this book, I also watched the video, which includes a model wrapped in plastic wrap, sexy poses and dancing, along with a couple of ten-year-old girls dancing to the song in the video. Another friend of mine learned her daughter first saw porn in the church bathroom via an image on a fifth-grader's phone.

Do the right thing, the hard thing, and talk to your children about sex for their sake and the sake of your family. If we don't have these conversations now, I am terrified the enemy will continue to steal hope and joy from our youngest generation, paralyzing their ability to advance the kingdom of God as they mature. We can't let this happen anymore. It's going to be hard, but you don't have to do it alone. This book (along with your church, your community, your doctors, your counselors, and your friends) can guide you through the process.