

**AIDS – A Study Guide**  
**Dan Fountain, M.D., MPH**

**Chapter 1**  
**AIDS – What’s Going On?**

Everywhere people are talking about AIDS as if it were some horrible thing. They say it’s all over the world. Some call it a plague; others call it a disaster. Is it really that bad? And what is this thing called AIDS?

In 1980 no one had ever heard of AIDS. Today more than forty million people in the world have it, or have died from it. Think of that: from an unknown disease in 1980 to forty million persons infected in just twenty years! How can any disease spread so far so fast? More than five million people have died of AIDS, and more than ten million children are orphans because of it. It seems incredible, yet it is happening, and hundreds of millions of persons live in fear of AIDS. It really is frightening, isn’t it?

**What is AIDS?**

AIDS is the last stage of an infection caused by a virus called HIV. It is contagious, which means it can go from one person to another. It also means you can catch it from another person. The cause of AIDS is a tiny germ or virus called HIV, or the Human Immune-deficiency Virus. The virus is too small to see even under an ordinary microscope. Only an electron microscope is powerful enough to enable us to look at it.

When you get the virus, you have HIV. After a long time, when you really become sick because of HIV, we then say you have AIDS. So we often talk about HIV/AIDS.

The virus lives inside the cells of the body. It is a clever virus, for once it comes into a person's body, it transforms itself to resemble certain cells of the body. That makes it difficult for the body to fight against it, and impossible for the body to get rid of it. However, the virus is fragile and can live only for a few short minutes outside a person's body. So it can't spread through the air, or in drinking water, or in clothing, or on ordinary objects.

### **What does the virus do to us?**

Inside our body is something we call the immune system. It is a complex system of cells and organs that protect us from many kinds of diseases including infections. An important part of the immune system is the white blood cells. These cells circulate in our blood all the time to attack and destroy any disease germs that get into the body. They are like an army that defends us from an enemy attack. Just like in the army, we have different kinds of white blood cells. One group of cells is like the infantry that actually attacks invading germs and tries to destroy them. Other kinds of white blood cells act as commanding officers, communications officers, and scouts. When a germ gets into the body and starts growing, the scouts detect it and advise the generals who then use the communication officers to coordinate the infantry attack. In most cases this works

just fine and we recover quickly from the infection.

With HIV/AIDS, however, it is different. The virus of AIDS attacks the “commanding officers” of the white blood cells that are essential for our defense against infections. As the number of these key white blood cells diminishes, the ability of the body to protect itself against infections diminishes. Eventually, few of these cells are left, and the body gets more and more infections. Finally the whole defensive army is overwhelmed and the person dies of many infections.

### **What is the disease like?**

When a person gets the HIV virus from someone else, the virus quickly gets into certain cells in the blood and organs. However, it does not make the person sick right away. When someone gets the virus, he or she feels nothing at the time and does not know that a virus has come into them.

The virus multiplies very rapidly and gets into many cells. However, the body begins to fight back by developing substances that attack the virus. We call these substances antibodies. They are like poisons that keep the virus from multiplying fast. Unfortunately, however, the antibodies cannot get rid of the virus completely. It is always there trying to multiply, and it keeps on attacking white blood cells in the body. So there is a war going on, a battle between the virus and the antibodies and white blood cells.

In the meantime, an infected person feels good

and keeps on feeling normal for five, ten, or even fifteen years. We call this the “silent period” because no one can tell by looking at him or her that they have this virus. Yet quietly, slowly, and insidiously, down inside the body the virus is growing and multiplying. The antibodies keep trying to suppress the virus, but after a few years the body gets weaker. Now the antibodies diminish, the virus multiplies faster, and the person starts becoming sick.

The virus is much like a termite, or wood borer, that gets into a tree trunk through a tiny hole that is almost impossible to see. The termite lives inside the trunk and eats away the wood on the inside. It lays eggs, has babies, and these eat more and more of the wood in the trunk. No one knows the termites are there, for the tree looks perfectly healthy. But one day, all of a sudden, this healthy looking tree falls flat on the ground and people are astonished – why should such a healthy tree fall over like that? When they come close, they see that the inside of the trunk is rotten and all eaten away. Now they know why the tree fell. It is much like that with the virus of AIDS. It eats away slowly inside the body until finally, after several years, the person begins to get sick. Unlike the tree, however, the person does not fall down (die) suddenly. Rather the sickness increases slowly, and we will talk about that in a minute.

Before we talk about the sickness of AIDS, we must talk about another serious problem. During the “silent period” while the virus is hiding inside a person, the person feels perfectly healthy. However, he or she

can give the virus to someone else. Through sex, a dirty needle, or by giving blood, a healthy-looking but infected person can give the virus of AIDS to someone else. Neither of the two persons will know it at the time, but the virus knows it and is delighted. The “silent period” is therefore the “dangerous period.” This long, silent, but dangerous period explains why the HIV virus of AIDS spread far in the world before people ever knew about it.

Now let's go back to the sickness of AIDS. After the long silent period, the antibodies diminish and the virus multiplies. The person starts getting simple infections – pimples, boils, frequent colds, a bad cough, or repeated bouts of the flu. Or it could be an attack of tuberculosis or a painful disease of the skin and nerves called shingles. Except for a blood test, there is no way at this time to know it is AIDS. This beginning stage goes on for a year or even for up to three or four years. During this time the infections become more frequent and more difficult to treat, and finally the real signs of AIDS develop.

1. The person begins to lose weight and to feel weak.
2. A fever may come, not very high, but it comes almost every day for months on end.
3. The person may have a bad cough that lasts for months
4. Painful sores develop in the mouth,
5. Diarrhea starts and it will not go away.

Loss of weight, fever, cough, sores in the mouth, and diarrhea are the typical signs of the disease of AIDS.

All of this can go on for months, maybe even a year or two. The weakness increases, and finally death comes. The total duration of HIV/AIDS, from the entrance of the virus through the silent period until death comes at the end of the disease of AIDS, may be fifteen or even more years. It is not a pleasant situation. It means years of suffering and a slow painful death. No wonder people say it is such a horrible disease.

Questions to think about

1. In the past twenty years, what has happened in the HIV/AIDS epidemic? Can you think of anything to which you can compare the epidemic of HIV/AIDS?
2. What is HIV/AIDS? Describe it in your own words.
3. When does the virus do inside a person's body?
4. How does the person's body fight against the virus?
5. Why is the long silent period so dangerous?
6. How can you explain that to another person?
7. What is the disease of AIDS like? Describe it in your own words.
8. How long does HIV/AIDS last?

## Chapter 2

### Why is AIDS such a problem?

HIV/AIDS is a serious problem for the following reasons:

1. It is a fatal disease. We have no medicines that can kill the virus and thus cure AIDS. We do have medicines that can suppress the virus so that people infected by the virus of AIDS can live longer. But those medicines are very expensive and are difficult to take. So once you've been infected by HIV, sooner or later you will die from it.
2. When you look at a group of people, you can't tell who has the virus and who doesn't. During the ten year silent period of the infection, a person who has the virus looks and acts perfectly healthy. He or she can work, play, have sex, and live normally without ever knowing there is a virus inside. Only a blood test can detect it, but how many healthy persons ask for a blood test for AIDS?
3. This person, however, is dangerous. He or she can give the virus of AIDS to another person or persons simply by having sex with them. You need to know that you can get AIDS from someone who looks perfectly healthy.
4. We haven't yet found a vaccine for it. We keep trying and keep hoping. But the elusive virus keeps changing its shape, so it slips away from the vaccine bullets we keep shooting at it. It is a fast moving target, and we haven't yet figured out how to move with it.

### How do you get AIDS?

We call HIV/AIDS a sexually transmitted disease (STD) because it goes from one person to another through sexual relations. We now know of more than a dozen sexually transmitted diseases, and any of them can really make you sick. But most of them can be treated, and with good treatment most can be cured. AIDS is the only sexual disease that can't be cured and will kill you. That's why it is such a bad problem.

HIV/AIDS is an STD because the virus lives in the sex organs, both of a man and of a woman. It swims around in the fluids (secretions) that come from the sex organs and that are exchanged during sexual relations. The virus can go from a man to a woman, from a woman to a man, and from a man to a man during sex. Although the virus is present in other fluids like saliva and tears, it is present in such small amounts that you probably can't get it from an infected person's saliva or tears.

The virus also lives in the blood, so you can get it from an infected person's blood. Fortunately, many hospitals and blood banks can now test the blood of someone wanting to donate blood. If they find the virus, the blood of that person is never given to another person. So getting a transfusion in a good hospital is no problem.

However, shooting drugs is a major problem when drug users share needles with each other. The needle goes into the first person's vein, into the blood

stream. If his blood has the virus in it, the needle now has a bit of infected blood in it. If you use that needle and put it into your vein, you get the virus of AIDS. Shooting drugs with shared needles is literally slow suicide, suicide by AIDS. It will take you years to die of it, but you will die. You can count on it.

The same goes for a needle used to inject medicines. If the needle has already been used and not thrown away or sterilized, it can be a means of transmitting the virus of AIDS. So never let anyone inject you using a needle that is not sterile.

This is true also for needles used for tattooing or acupuncture, and even sharp instruments like razor blades or scissors. If they have touched blood that has the virus and then they stick, scratch, or cut you, you may be in trouble – bad trouble. So never use needles, razor blades, or scissors someone else has used. Even someone else's toothbrush could be dangerous. Use only your own.

A new baby can get the virus of AIDS from its mother if the mother is infected. However, not every baby born to an infected mother will get it. We now have medicines which can lower the risk of the baby getting it. Even so, some babies born to infected mothers will get AIDS no matter what we do. These babies will die within the first few years of life. More than five million babies and children have died already, and that is a great tragedy.

## **Ways you don't get AIDS**

Many other types of contact, however, will not give you the virus of AIDS. Here are ways you cannot get it:

1. Touching or even hugging a person who has the virus.
2. Eating with a person with HIV.
3. From clothes, linens, toilet seats, or other objects.
4. From food and drinking water.
5. From mosquitoes or any other insects.

However, if you care for a person who has HIV/AIDS, you must follow certain rules. Be careful not to touch with your bare hands any blood or other fluids that have come from this person. Likewise, do not touch any open sores or wounds he or she may have. If you must touch these things, first put on a pair of rubber gloves if you have them. If you don't have any gloves, use ordinary plastic grocery sacks. Put each hand in a sack and then clean up the blood or change the bandage or dress the wound. The gloves or plastic sacks are sufficient protection for you. When you are finished, throw away the gloves or sacks and wash your hands.

Ordinary bleach kills HIV very quickly. If you wash the clothes or bed linens of a person with HIV, soak them first in a 1% solution of bleach for a half hour. Or if you must clean up blood or other fluids from that person, pour some of the bleach solution on them first.

## **Why do millions of people now have AIDS?**

We don't know when HIV first appeared in the world. We think it has been around for a long time, living in an animal like a monkey, chimpanzee, or maybe gorilla. Somehow it got into a man perhaps eighty years ago, and the virus was able to live inside his body. He then passed the virus to his wife, or someone else, and slowly it began to spread to other people through sex. It did not begin to spread rapidly, however, until around 1970. Over the next ten years it spread to people in various parts of the world, but no one knew about it because these people were still in the silent period. We did not recognize the disease until 1981, when it appeared at the same time in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean Region. We did not find the virus until 1983. By then, millions of people already had it. They lived in many countries of the world, and the virus is still spreading rapidly.

HIV/AIDS spreads far and fast because millions of people engage in sexual relations with more than one person. Those who have sex with many different people are the ones most likely to get it and to spread it.

We must remember, however, that many persons with HIV have not had sex with more than one person. Some of them got the virus through a blood transfusion, many of whom had never had sex at all. Others have had sex only with their spouse. A wife can get the virus if her husband has had sex with other women or men, got it from one of them, and brought it

back to her.

Some people say HIV/AIDS is a sin. That is not so. AIDS is a disease, a horrible disease, and persons with AIDS are sick and need help. If they got the virus through behavior we could call sinful, that is their problem, not ours. Our responsibility is to help them because God wants us to care for all who are sick, no matter what that sickness is or how they got it.

Questions to think about

1. Why does AIDS make people so afraid?
2. Why do we call HIV/AIDS a sexually transmitted disease?
3. What are the ways the virus of AIDS can go from one person to another?
4. What are five or more ways the virus of AIDS cannot spread to other persons?
5. If you are caring for a person with AIDS, what must you do to protect yourself?
6. How has the virus of AIDS spread so far and so fast?
7. Has every person with HIV/AIDS gotten it through a sinful sexual behavior? Explain your answer.

## **Chapter 3**

### **How can I keep from getting AIDS?**

This question is very important, and it seems to have a simple answer – just a few basic rules. If you follow these rules, you will not get the virus of AIDS.

1. Wait until marriage before having sexual relations, and be sure your marriage partner does not have HIV.
  2. Have sexual relations only with the person you marry, or to whom you are already married.
  3. When you are married, both of you should remain faithful to each other and never have sex with anyone else.
  4. Never shoot drugs or receive an injection with an unsterile needle or syringe.
  5. If you need a blood transfusion, get it only in a hospital where you are sure they screen blood carefully for the virus of AIDS.
1. Never use scissors, a razor blade, or other sharp object belonging to another person.

Keeping these basic rules will protect you from the virus of AIDS. However, following the rules about sexual behavior is not easy. In reality, it is tough and may even seem impossible. We all have strong desires

to have sexual relations. We were made that way, and as we are growing up the desire for sex becomes very strong. You are probably thinking, “Many of my friends are having sex and enjoying it. Why shouldn’t I follow their example?” Good question. Let’s look at it carefully.

There are two ways to think about sex and what it is for.

1. Many people believe that sex is a physical need of our bodies. It is fun to have sex. So we should have sex whenever the desire is strong, the circumstances permit it, and it doesn’t hurt anyone. We call this “casual sex.”
2. Other people believe that sex is much more than just a physical need. It is really an important and very beautiful part of our whole life. The sexual relationship is how we express a deep, intimate, and joyful love for someone of the opposite gender. It is how we share our whole self with that other person – our bodies, thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires, and spirit. People who believe like this are convinced the sexual relationship is reserved for marriage where two persons agree to share their whole lives with each other. To engage in sex casually with anyone else, just because we feel we want to do it, makes sex cheap, for there is no way to share one’s whole self with a lot of other people.

There are problems with both of these beliefs. Let’s look first at the problems that come from casual

sex.

1. There are germs of more than a dozen sexually transmitted diseases out there, including the virus of AIDS. We can never be sure who has what germ. So when we have casual sex, how can we know whether or not someone, including me, is going to get hurt?
2. In casual sex, the real beauty and meaning of sex is lost or becomes cheap. The sexual relation should be a wonderful, deeply personal way of sharing one's whole self with a person of the opposite gender. However, if you have several different sexual partners, or have sex with commercial sex workers, the sex act becomes just a physical act with no real intimate sharing of thoughts, feelings, and emotions.
3. In casual sex emotions get mixed up. There is a lack of trust between partners. When a man becomes attached to a certain woman for a short while, then moves to another woman, anger and jealousy quickly develop, along with guilt and shame. The sex act loses the beautiful sense of belonging entirely to someone else, for it is impossible to really trust a casual or short-term sexual partner.

Now let's look at the belief that the sex act should be only within marriage. The problem here is that this requires a lot of discipline and self-control. It means resisting a great deal of pressure from friends. Not everyone is having sex, but many are, and those who are accustomed to having casual sex strongly encourage their friends to join them. Standing up

against that pressure is a real challenge, but a challenge that can successfully be met if one really wants to do it.

Where do these two beliefs about sex come from? They come from something that is deep within our hearts. They grow out of how we think about ourselves and who we really are as persons.

1. As we have seen, many people think sex is just a physical need and can be enjoyed casually whenever the desire and circumstances permit it. These people believe that we are simply intelligent animals who can think and who have certain feelings, emotions, and desires. We are to live for ourselves, each person thinking primarily of his own interests and desires. They believe, "My body is my own and I can do what I want with it. Let's have fun today and not worry about what may happen later."
2. Those who think that sex is really a central part of our whole life believe much differently. They believe that human beings have been made by God and that we have a spirit as well as thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Since God has made us, we must give an accounting to God of how we use our body, mind, and spirit. We must live for others and for God even more than we live for our own pleasure.

The whole matter of sex and how we are to live and act is a very important question. It needs a lot of thought, reflection, and study. If you decide that you are simply an animal with a body and mind, you will

probably engage in casual sex. On the other hand, if you decide that God has made you with a body, mind, and spirit, you will probably keep sex for marriage. It is very important, therefore, to understand that our behavior (what we do) comes from what we believe about ourselves. What we believe comes from decisions we make either consciously or unconsciously about the world, ourselves, and God.

All of us want to live lives that are good and give us joy, peace, and satisfaction. To do so, we need to think about our basic beliefs in order to make good decisions about our lives and our behavior. Beliefs about sexuality and who we are as persons are very important questions. Unfortunately, a lot of us don't ask these questions. We don't think about who we are, where we are going, and what the world is all about. We live one day at a time, and cope as best we can with what happens.

The problem with this is that we have to make lots of decisions about our behavior. One such question is about sex. Do I engage in sex now, or do I wait? If we don't know who we are, we can't really know how to answer an important question like this. Then we are apt to make bad decisions. The unfortunate result is that the results of the bad decisions we make can affect us for the rest of our lives. In the next chapter we will look at the important question of who we really are.

#### Questions to think about

1. How do the basic rules of behavior listed above

protect us from the virus of AIDS?

2. Why is it difficult to follow them, especially the ones about sexual behavior?
3. What do you hear your friends saying about sex and about sexual behavior?
4. What do you think about that?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of:
  - having casual sex?
  - limiting sex to marriage?
6. Why is it important to think about who you really are?
7. How can this help you in deciding about your own sexual behavior?

## **Chapter 4**

### **Who Am I?**

#### **Two different beliefs**

Many people believe that everything in the world came by chance and that we also have come by chance. They believe that, by chance, we have evolved from lower forms of life. This means that you just “happened,” and so did I. But if you just “happen” to be here, your life does not mean very much. Someday your life will finish; you will go away, and that will be the end of you. Your life has no permanent meaning. Therefore you may as well do what you want and have as much fun as you can because nothing really matters. You are alive today and gone tomorrow. As someone has said, “Let us eat, drink, and be happy, because tomorrow we die.”

On the other hand are many people who believe that God made everything including us. This belief gives an entirely different way of looking at life. According to this view of life, God made you as a unique and wonderful person. Indeed God made every one of us this way. In the beginning God created a man and a woman, our first ancestors. God took physical matter – the dust of the earth - and made a human body. He made all the wonderful tissues and organs in our body out of physical materials. He made the heart, lungs, stomach, intestines, liver, skin, muscles, bones and joints. He made eyes and ears, the brain and nerves, and our abilities to touch, smell, and taste things. He put a vast

amount of information in all our different cells in a complex protein called DNA so the cells could function as they should. Yet when God had finished making this wonderful body, it was not alive. It did not become a living person until God breathed into it. We find this account in the bible in Genesis chapter 2, verse 7.

What does this mean? It means two important things.

1. God designed and made our physical body. It is a wonderful creation, complex, and good. My body does not really belong to me for I did nothing to make it. God made it and gave it to me to use for my life. Therefore I must take good care of my body in order to please God, to care for others, and to have good health and strength.
2. I am more than just a physical body that can eat, drink, breathe, go to the toilet, and have sex. I have God's breath and God's life within me. This is the invisible part of me. Although it is invisible, it is very real, and is part of every one of us. Think about it. What do you have in you that is really YOU that other people cannot see or touch?

### **Soul and spirit**

When God breathed life into the first person, what came into us? Here is what we received from God.

1. Mind. This is our thoughts, our intellect, and our reason. It is where we think and make decisions about our life. Our mind has come from God because

God also thinks.

2. Feelings and emotions like joy and peace or anger and fear have come from God. God himself has feelings..
3. God has given us the desire to be with other people, to talk with them, listen to them, and belong to them. Our ability to communicate has come from God because he is a God who communicates and wants to communicate with us.
4. He also gave us our ability to remember things that have happened to us and that we have learned. We can use what we have learned to help us live our lives and do good things.

All of these things together we call our soul. Our soul has come from God, and everything that comes from God is good. It is hard to imagine that all that is in our soul – our thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories – have come simply by chance.

There is more. God put within us a strong desire to know him and to know the truth that comes from him. We call this our spirit. Spirit is that part of our personality that can communicate with God, or with other spiritual powers if we so choose. Our spirit is where we think about the basic questions of life and where we make decisions about our lives. We call this our will, for it is here deep within us where we decide how we will live. Spirit is what makes us different from animals. The Bible tells us that God made the animals

but did not breathe into them. (See Genesis 2:19)

In our spirit we can come to God in prayer. We can talk with him, listen to him, and learn from him. He has given us a book about life, a book we call the Bible that was written by men who knew God in a wonderful way and who wrote down what God told them to write. When we read this book we can learn the truth of God.

No one has ever seen God because he is invisible. Yet God wanted us to see what he is like. So God became a man and lived for awhile on earth. His name was Jesus. He taught us the truth of God and he lived the life of God on earth so that we could see how God wants us to live. The man Jesus died because evil men who did not want God to rule over them put Jesus to death. However, because Jesus was God living as a man, he was stronger than death and he rose from the dead. The spirit of Jesus is now alive, and if we invite the spirit of Jesus to live in our spirit, then we can live with God and receive from him instructions about how to live plus the power to obey those instructions.

## **God knows you**

The Bible tells us more. It says that God made you as an individual, and that he knows your name. He knew your name before you were born, from the time your mother conceived you in her womb. This is a marvelous thought. God, who made everything including the sun, moon, and stars, made you personally and he knows your name. This means that you are good, that you are unique, and that you are of great value to God. God likewise knows everything you do, say, and even think about, whether it is good or bad. Nothing is hidden from God, for he sees and knows all that we do.

Since God made you and knows you, he loves you and he wants you to love him and be his friend. The amazing thing is that God, who made everything, will listen to you and even talk to you if you listen to him. So, because God knows you, you can know God.

### Questions to think about

1. When God took physical matter and made a human body, what all did he put inside this body?
2. Because God gives each of us a body, to whom does it really belong?
3. What did God put inside of us that is invisible?
4. How would you describe “soul?”

5. How would you describe “spirit?”
6. How can you know God and his truth?
7. How can you be sure that God knows you and loves you?
8. Now make a list of all you can know about yourself from what you have learned here and from the Bible.

## **Chapter 5**

### **What Has Gone Wrong?**

We have seen that god has made us in a wonderful way. Nevertheless, we have a serious problem. It is clear that something has gone terribly wrong in our world. We see many bad things around us. Wars are being fought. People are being killed. We get sick and die. We have much trouble in our families, our work, and our communities. We even have bad thoughts and feelings down inside of us. Why is this? What happened?

### **We are free to do good or evil**

God is love and he wants us to love him. If we do, we become more like him. He wants us to show our love for him by helping other people and by taking good care of the world he has given us. In other words, he wants us to be unselfish, to think of him and other people and not just of ourselves. However, God wants us to love him by our own choice. He did not make us so that we must love him, nor will he force us to love him. On the contrary, he has made us free to choose to love him or not to love him.

In the Bible we read in Genesis chapters two and three that God gave our ancestors a choice. They could do good things, the kind of things God wanted them to do. Or they could disobey God and do bad things, things that would harm and even destroy themselves, other

people, and things that God had made. God said to our original ancestors, Adam and Eve, "Obey me, or obey your own desires. Follow the order I have established, or choose disorder." At that moment they became free and capable of making moral choices. In his wisdom, which no one in this life can fully understand, God decided that the value of our freedom was greater than the evil consequences of all the bad choices we could make.

Our ancestors, in their freedom, refused to do what God wanted them to do. They chose to do what they wanted to do, to obey their own desires. They chose disorder rather than the order God had made. We say they sinned against God. In this way they brought disorder into the orderly world God had made.

The sin of our ancestors upset the good relationships God had made. Their disobedience destroyed the close relationship they had with God. It also upset relationships between people. Our ancestors became selfish, and selfishness leads to conflicts, anger, fighting and even murder. Sin also caused problems inside of their spirit as they suddenly felt fear, shame and the remorse of guilt. Their pride prevented them from acknowledging their sin and turning back to God for forgiveness and help.

### **What is sin?**

Sin means disobeying God and his plan for our lives. Sin starts, not in our actions, but in our thoughts, feelings, and desires. We think of ourselves and not of

others. We want the best for ourselves and what pleases us rather than what helps others. That is what it means to be selfish. Often we want what hurts other people. We want the good things they have and so try to take those good things from them. This makes them suffer. It also puts bad and painful feelings down inside of us, feelings like fear, hate, jealousy, and sorrow. So selfishness makes us suffer and makes other people suffer as well.

### **Why is sin such a problem?**

Everything we do has consequences. Things happen because of what we do or say. If we do good things that help other people and nature, good results come from this. But if we do selfish things that can harm others or the world, then bad things happen. If we hurt other people, they can hurt us. If we do harmful things, we can get sick and suffer from it.

When we sin we harm or destroy what God has made. We must repay that. In other words, we have a debt to God. We have destroyed so much of what God has made, however, that none of us can ever repay God what we owe him. Because of our sin, we must die.

### **God wants us to have a good life**

God, however, does not want us to die. He wants us to have a good life, which means living with him according to his plan. Even though our ancestors rejected God by disobeying him, he did not abandon us. From the beginning God has tried to help us come back

to him by choosing him and his plan for us rather than our own plan.

The first thing God did was to give us laws. These are rules about how we are to live and to relate to one another. We find these laws in the Bible. God tells us we are not to kill other people. We are not to steal from other people, tell them lies, or strongly desire things that belong to someone else. We also must not have sex with anyone beside the person to whom we are married. These laws can help us because *they show us how we are to live the good life God has planned for us.*

Do we always follow God's laws? No, we do not. It is because we are selfish and do not like to obey rules someone else has given us. Some of us do try to follow God's laws, but we fail. We keep on sinning by disobeying God and his laws, and because of this we must die. But God has helped us in another way.

### **Jesus paid the debt of our sin**

Because of our sins, we have an enormous debt to pay to God, so big we cannot pay it. Therefore we must die for our sin. But Jesus, who was God living as a man, had no debt to pay since he did not sin. Because he had never sinned, he died for our sins. In this way he took our debt and paid it by dying on the cross for us. Then, three days after he died, he came to life again. The power of his sinless life is greater than the power of sin and selfishness. Jesus himself then went back to heaven, but his spirit, the Spirit of God, can now live in us if we want him to. If we ask Jesus to come into our

life, the Spirit of God comes inside of us. *He can give us the power to live a good life.*

### **What is God's plan for our lives?**

This is the most important practical question we have to think about. Let's look at it this way. When God made our body, he put inside of us a soul and a spirit. In our spirit we can communicate with God or with other spiritual powers. Our soul is our thoughts, our feelings, our beliefs, and our desires. In addition, God has put strong needs and desires in our body, such as the needs to eat, to drink, to sleep, and to have sex.

God wants us to control the thoughts, feelings, desires, and needs of our soul and body. He wants us to do that so we can live unselfishly, for the good of other people. Yet these thoughts, feelings, desires and needs are very strong and selfish, and we often find we cannot control them. Rather, they are so strong that we decide to obey them and live for ourselves rather than obeying God and his laws.

On the other hand, if we do want to live the good life God has planned for us, he can help us. We can find God's help by asking Jesus to come and live within us, in our spirit. In this way, the power of Jesus who overcame sin is within us. His power can now help us live the good life of God by controlling the selfish thoughts, feelings, desires, and needs of our soul and body. He can even help us control our sexual desires and fulfill them according to his plan for us.

However, if the Spirit of God does not live in us, our own spirit is weak and cannot control the self-centered feelings, desires, and drives of our soul and body. We then live selfishly, trying to satisfy what our soul and body want. That is when problems come inside us and between us and other people. This is when we do unhealthy acts that lead to diseases like HIV/AIDS. One big problem in our lives is how to control the desires and drives for sexual relations. We will look at that in the next chapter.

Questions to think about

1. What choice did God give to our first ancestors?
2. Why do you suppose God gave them that choice?
3. What does "sin" mean?
4. Why is selfishness so bad for us and for others?
5. What are the many consequences of sin?
6. What did God do to overcome the power of sin?
7. How can God help us now with the problem of sin?
8. Have you asked Jesus to come into your spirit so he can help you live a good life?

## **Chapter 6**

### **Making Decisions about Sex**

We have already seen that there are two ways to think about sex. Some people believe that sex is simply a physical act that we can indulge in whenever we want the pleasure that the sex act brings and whenever the circumstances permit. Other people believe that sex involves the whole person and should occur only within marriage. What we want to do now is to look at God's plan for our sexuality.

#### **God's plan for our sexual behavior**

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God made a man and a woman. He gave certain feelings and qualities to the man and different feelings and qualities to the woman. He did this so that, when a man and a woman get married, they satisfy each other and make each other complete. This gives both of them joy and happiness. When they come together in a sexual union, they share together their bodies, feelings, and spirits. It is a good plan because it is God's plan for us and it protects our health.

God's plan is that marriage take place between one man and one woman and that it last for life. A man cannot share himself completely with more than one woman, nor can a woman share herself completely with more than one man. The sexual union between husband and wife gives joy to them both because it is between two people who share their whole lives together. They

trust one another and build up their confidence and understanding of each other. They truly know each other when they remain faithful to one another because they know they belong to each other.

A stable and happy marriage is the ideal place for children to grow up. From their parents they can learn values of trust, integrity and faithfulness that can help them grow into mature adults.

### **Why is our sexual desire so strong?**

God put within us a strong desire to have sexual relations. He did this for several reasons. First of all, it is to assure that men and women will come together to have children. Secondly, this strong desire enables us to have the marvelous joy and security of sexual union within marriage. Thirdly, although the strong sexual desire is difficult for the spirit of a person to control, God does want each person to control it and not fulfill it until marriage. The strong sexual desire, then, is a way to test the spirit of a person and to encourage that person to ask for help from God. Our strong desire to have sex is good because God has given it to us. It gives us much joy when we fulfill this desire within marriage according to God's plan, and God himself can help us do that. However, this strong desire can lead us to do acts that are harmful to ourselves and to others if we do not control it with the help of God's spirit within us.

### **Why is sexual union outside marriage harmful?**

Sexual union before marriage is called fornication. After marriage, having sexual relations

with someone else beside one's husband or wife is called adultery. Both fornication and adultery are contrary to God's plan for us because they are harmful to the body, to the soul, and to the spirit. Sex does indeed give pleasure, so many people tell us that we can have sexual relations whenever we so desire. But God says otherwise, because the sex act outside of marriage is dangerous, and the pleasure it gives is only a passing pleasure. Here are important reasons why this is so.

**It is harmful to the body.**

The germs of more than a dozen diseases are transmitted from one person to another by the sexual act. Having sex outside marriage, with more than one partner, brings the risk of getting one or more of these diseases. Any of these diseases can cause much pain and keep a person from having children. The most serious of these diseases is HIV/AIDS, for it is very painful and it leads to early death. There is no cure for it.

Here is an unpleasant fact you must understand clearly. The bacteria and viruses of diseases like gonorrhea, genital sores (herpes), chlamydia, and other sexually transmitted diseases live in the membranes and glands of the sex organs. They may make a person sick, although not always. Nevertheless the germs are there and they stay there for a long time. They can be given to another person during the sex act and get into the sex organs of that person. It is impossible for a person to know how many different disease germs he or she may have in the sexual canal, or how many different germs the sexual partner may have. During the sex act, a

person comes into contact with, and may get, any or all of the disease germs the other person has in his or her sex organ. These germs have come from previous sexual partners. So having sex with different partners creates in the sexual organs something we could call a "germ soup." A rather disgusting thought, isn't it? Yet it is reality. What is frightening is knowing that, when you have casual sex, you may actually come into contact with that "germ soup." From that "soup" you can get one or more sexually transmitted diseases. This may even kill you if the virus of AIDS is in that "soup."

This is especially true for persons who engage in sexual relations for money. They will have in their sexual canal the disease germs of several different diseases. These germs come from the many men or women with whom they have had sex. When a man comes to a woman sexual worker to have sex, he may receive disease germs from her that have come from several other men. A man who has sex with another man may receive germs he has gotten from other men or women.

A man who has sex with different women can get disease germs from each of these women. These germs stay in his own sex organ. If he is married, he can then give the germs he has gotten from other women to his own wife. So he is harming not only himself. He is also harming his wife. Millions of women who have never committed adultery or fornication have died of AIDS given to them by their husbands who have had sex with other partners. If the man is unmarried, he will continue to have these germs in his sex organs for a

long time. He will then bring them to his future wife.

### **Do condoms protect us?**

Condoms have been around for a long time. They were originally developed to prevent conception. They do indeed diminish the rate of conception, but they do not prevent it altogether. According to studies, about 10% of couples who use condoms regularly and correctly to prevent conception will conceive within the course of a year. In other words, condoms have failed to prevent pregnancy in one out of ten couples.

We had hoped that condoms would reduce the danger of getting sexually transmitted diseases. Here again the regular use of condoms does diminish the risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease, but it does not eliminate the risk altogether.

There has been much talk about the effectiveness of condoms in diminishing the risk of getting HIV. Numerous studies have been done about this. Scientific studies about the protective power of condoms, however, are difficult to do because so much depends on what people report about their own behavior. It is difficult to determine how accurate these personal reports may be.

According to the best studies, using condoms regularly and correctly reduces the risk of getting HIV to about one third of the risk of those who do not use them at all. Let's describe it this way. Suppose one hundred men engage in frequent casual sexual relations. Fifty of

these men use condoms correctly during every sexual encounter. The other fifty men never use them. Some of the fifty non-users will eventually get HIV. For every three of them who get HIV, one of the regular users will also get HIV.

Considering the fatal nature of becoming infected with HIV, the long and expensive illness that lies ahead, and the danger being infected poses to one's spouse or to other sexual partners, one cannot rely on condoms as an adequate means of protection against HIV. This needs careful consideration when making decisions about sexual behavior.

### **Sex outside marriage is harmful to the soul**

In addition to likely harm to the physical body, sex outside marriage can also be harmful to the soul. One purpose of the sexual union is to create trust between two persons who love each other. When a person engages in sexual unions with different partners, he cannot develop such a trust. Casual sex is usually done in secret. A man will rarely tell his spouse, or current sexual partner, about the other persons with whom he has had sex. With a married man, sex outside marriage destroys the trust that should be present between him and his wife.

Casual sex quickly becomes a habit, the habit of responding to physical sexual desires. The habit of casual sex becomes strong and is very difficult to break even after a person gets married. The temptation to continue extra-marital sex will still to be strong. If a

husband or wife keeps on engaging in casual sex outside of marriage, this can lead to the breakup of the marriage and divorce, with all of its unhappiness to both partners and especially to their children.

Fornication and adultery lead to other bad feelings like jealousy, bitterness, anger, and sorrow. These feelings bring conflicts, quarrels, broken relationships, and much sorrow.

### **Sex outside marriage is harmful to the spirit**

God forbids us to engage in a sexual union outside of marriage. When we do, we disobey God; we sin against him. This harms our relationship with God and can even separate us from God. In this case, we no longer have God's Spirit working in our spirit to help us control our lives. This is bad for our own spirit and can cause guilt, depression, and much sorrow.

Every person has been made in God's image. Every person has God's image within himself or herself. This includes persons who engage in sex for money, who take drugs, or who do other things that are contrary to God's will. When I see a young woman and desire to have sex with her, I must remember that she is someone who has God's image in her. I cannot make her an object of my own selfish desires and use her as a means to my own satisfaction and pleasure. If I do, I am not only sinning against her, but I am sinning against the God who made her and me. The time will come when I will have to respond to God's questions to me about this.

## **Sexual behavior and morality**

Some people believe that sexual behavior is not a moral issue. They think that it is a private concern, especially for men. If a man wants to engage in sex, that is his concern and not the concern of others or of society.

This belief, however, is contrary to all that we have said above. Casual sex is a means of transmitting dangerous diseases to other persons. It can also disturb the feelings and emotions of others. Therefore, it is not just a private concern. It involves the body, feelings, emotions, spirits, and therefore the whole life of other persons. Because of this, it is clear that sexual behavior is a moral issue, one that concerns not only individual persons but all of society.

### **What about homosexuality?**

Opinions vary widely on this question. However, the Bible does state that homosexuality is not God's plan for human life and is therefore sinful.

Many people believe that a person's sexual orientation comes from their genetic makeup. A person is born that way. However, there is no solid scientific evidence for this belief. In fact, it is extremely difficult to explain any behavior or personality orientation on the basis of genetic makeup. Furthermore, as human beings we are responsible for who we are and for what we do. This is true regardless of what genes we have

inherited from our parents.

Male homosexual behavior is risky. The spread of sexually transmitted diseases is far more frequent when men have sex with men. This is because the sexual act between men is more traumatic and increases the exchange of blood and sexual fluids. The percentage of men engaging in homosexual activity who get HIV/AIDS is much higher than among those who are heterosexual. Boys should therefore avoid all sexual contact with other boys or with men, for this can lead to behavior that is dangerous and difficult to change.

### **How can we control our strong sexual desire?**

Here are ways we can control the strong physical desire to have sex outside marriage.

1. We need knowledge. We need to know how God has made us as men and women, what his plan for our lives is, and how God can help us follow this plan. We need to know the many diseases spread by casual sex and the real dangers to body, soul, and spirit of fornication and adultery.
2. Having God's Word in our memory can help us live according to God's plan. We should memorize passages that can help us to be strong in our spirit and that give us God's rules for our life..
3. We need to make a firm decision in our mind that we will do only those things that are good and are pleasing to God. We need to make this decision in

prayer, before God, and then ask him to help us keep it. Such a decision is a promise to God that we will obey his plan.

2. We must avoid going to places where the temptation to have sex outside of marriage is great. This includes bars, discos, certain kinds of parties, or being with certain friends.
3. We also must avoid things that bring this temptation to us, like pornographic pictures, bad videos, internet websites, and books and magazines that describe sex in a bad way.
4. We should choose friends who are also trying to follow God's plan. They can help us do what is right and avoid what is wrong. We also can help them.
5. Having a morally strong mature friend as a mentor to whom we can be accountable is very helpful. This can be a parent, a teacher, a religious leader, or any other wise person. It is good to spend time regularly with this person, discussing thoughts, feelings, temptations, and behavior, and allowing the mentor to reinforce the principles of God's plan for life.

### **Will God help us if we do wrong?**

Yes indeed he will, for God is a God of love. He will always forgive us for our sin and wrong doing if we ask him. This can then restore our relationship with

him.

However, we need to remember something very important. When consequences come because we have done wrong, God may not be able to take these away even when he forgives us. If we have gotten a disease such as HIV/AIDS, for which there is no cure, God does not take that away from us. Or if our marriage has been destroyed because of bad things we have done, God may not be able to help us remake that marriage. So it is far better to follow God's good plan for life from the very beginning. Then we avoid many of these difficult problems.

### **In conclusion**

The real choice about sex is between

1. having immediate pleasure with the risk of serious consequences coming sooner or later, or
2. delaying that pleasure until it can be fulfilled within the secure environment of a stable marriage.

Moses, the man who led God's people out of their slavery in Egypt, said to them, "I have set before you the way of life and death, the way of blessing and of suffering. Choose life so that you and your children may live. For the Lord God is your life."

How can you choose life? You can choose life by asking Jesus Christ to come and live within your spirit. He is life because he overcame the power of sin

and death, and he is now alive. He can help you to make good decisions, to overcome temptations to do what is harmful, and to follow the path of life. This is the path of peace, health, and joy now that can help you have a strong marriage and a happy family. It means living with God now because his spirit lives within you. And it means living with God forever. So choose life!

Questions to think about

1. What is God's plan for our sexual behavior? Why is this a good plan?
2. Why is casual sex, before or after marriage, harmful to our body?
3. What is the real truth about condoms?
4. How does casual sex harm our feelings and emotions?
5. How does casual sex harm our relationship with God?
6. Why is sex an important moral issue?
7. What are the problems with homosexuality?
8. How can we be strong and control our sexual desires?
9. How can you choose life?

Dan Fountain, M.D., MPH, Director  
Global Health Training Program  
King College, 1350 King College Road  
Bristol, TN 37620-2699  
Phone (423) 652-4708 or 4157  
FAX 423-652-4788  
E-mail: [DEFountain@King.edu](mailto:DEFountain@King.edu)  
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