



Prude

Misconceptions
of a Neo-Virgin

Carrie ✦ Lloyd

Praise for Carrie Lloyd

“Prude is not worthy, pious, or preachy; it’s truthful, it’s flawed, and it’s inspirational.”

Malcolm Croft

Senior Editor at Carlton Books UK, freelance author, editor

“Carrie Lloyd is Bridget Jones meets Ann Voskamp. I found her refreshing, insightful and encouraging.”

Christianity Magazine

“The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘prude’ as a puritan, prig, killjoy, moralist, or informally, a ‘Goody Two-shoes.’ Carrie Lloyd’s new book, Prude: Misconceptions of a Neo-Virgin, stands in fierce opposition to the OED’s definition. Lloyd is an earthy, funny, insightful woman embarked on a most unusual journey. Having experienced the modern world’s sexual ‘liberation,’ Lloyd makes the outlier’s decision to forgo sex before marriage. No easy path, this, as we soon discover in the pages of Prude. From incredulous girlfriends, to damp and derailed boyfriends, Lloyd finds that ‘holding out’ is fraught with uncertainty and frustration. Faith helps her prevail, but that too is subject to doubt and redefinition. Prude is not a cenobite’s memoir, but a romp through traditional church and modern bedroom, both of which are found to be leached of meaning and spiritually threadbare. Whatever you feel about faith and Christianity, meeting Carrie Lloyd in the pages of Prude will convince you of one thing: Chastity can be sexy.”

Michael Braverman

Executive Producer, A Smith Company

“Carrie is brilliant because she’s prepared to talk about the things that so many of us shy away from, or don’t know how. In this funny, frank account of her own journey (which I suspect will be sneakily read by just as many men as women), she unpacks issues which are both timelessly relevant and culturally definitive, and gives a rare and candid perspective on everything from porn to self-sabotage. Prude is a sassy, poignant, hilarious and brilliantly-written story about what happens when a regular girl living at the heart of a sex-mad society, suddenly meets the God who redefines everything.”

Martin Saunders

Contributing Editor at Christian Today

“Carrie’s book is a MUST-read for every person committed to sexual purity who has struggled with sex, self worth, shame, and judgment while on the road to freedom and...Mr. Right. Prude is fresh, real, and honest in ways no other Christian authors are speaking today. Instead of being politically correct in terms of ‘Christianese,’ Carrie says it like it is so that women can actually be set free by dialogue they relate to.”

Cynthia Garrett

Inspirational Speaker, Evangelist, Executive Producer,
and Host of The London Sessions on TBN

“Get ready to go on an journey with Carrie Lloyd in a real, raw and relevant adventure of what happens when you taste ‘free love,’ and then decide to save the gift of sex to be fully enjoyed the way it was designed!”

Tom Crandall

Youth Pastor of Awakening, Bethel Church, Redding

“Challenging the expectations placed on us by society, Prude encourages a personal journey past guilt and shame, veering towards freedom, love and light. Offering a candid and vulnerable insight into her individual journey, Carrie uses humor and her passion for Christ to guide us through bouts of darkness. With refreshing honesty and beautiful words, Prude, and Carrie, lead us towards a more intimate lifestyle with Christ, whilst inspiring us to believe that the best is yet to come.”

Victoria Gottschalk

Creator & Writer for *Oh No, Not Another Blogger*

“Prude: Misconceptions of a Neo-Virgin is revolutionary, life-changing view of dating, sex, porn and purity. Carrie Lloyd’s comprehensive book exposes complicated misconceptions of the true trials of Christian dating. It illuminates truths and principles that are seldom taught today. I have read many books on this topic. However, I found Prude to be a powerful tool for dethroning misconceptions in a candid, humorous way.”

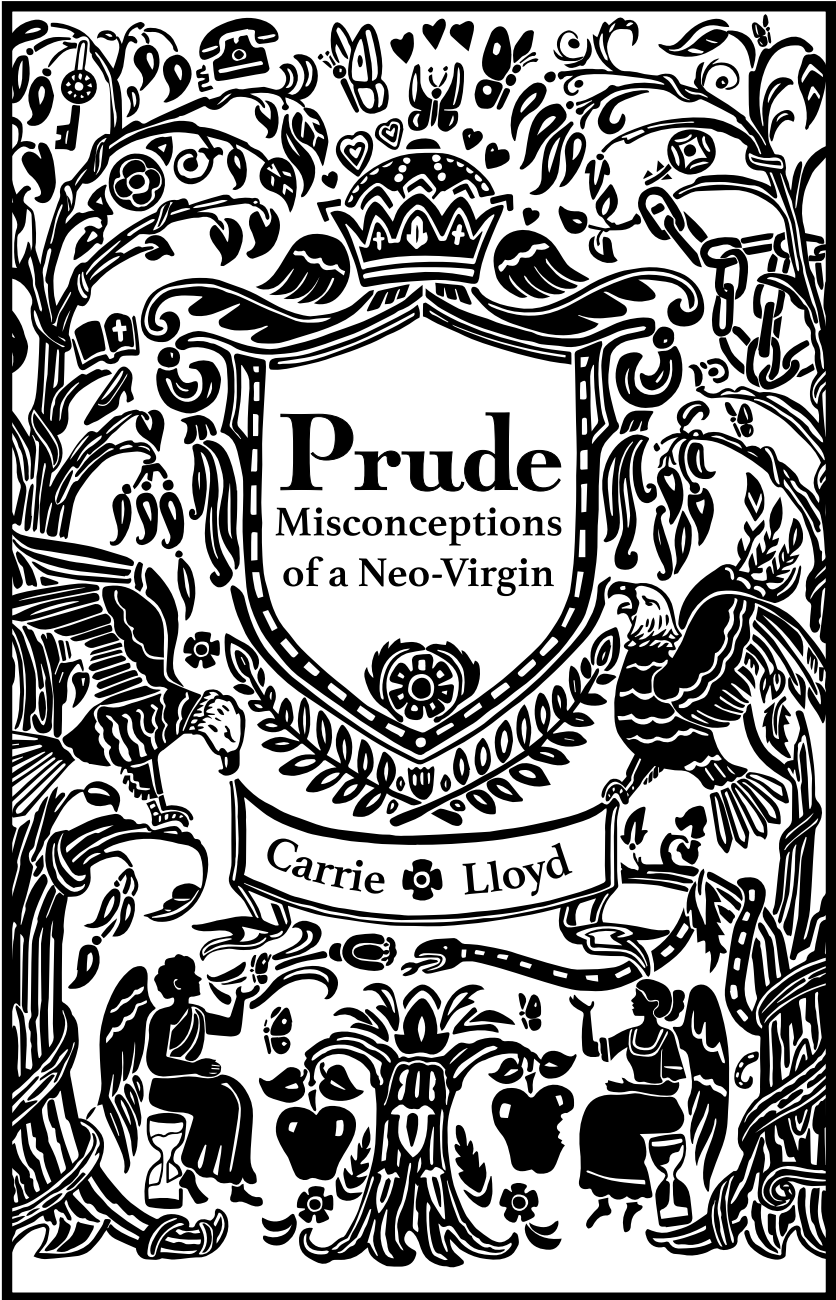
Shaneen Clarke

Founder of A Woman’s Call Charity (AWC), International Speaker & Author

“This book holds many familiar conversations, experiences, questions and fears, and explores them with great humor, refreshing honesty, and courage. Carrie opens up what is so often a private, and sometimes shameful conversation to show how ‘normal’ it is to wonder about sex, relationships and what is ‘right.’ Her passion for Christ and exploring His best for us is a constant theme throughout this engaging, challenging and fun read.”

Katharine Welby-Roberts

Writer, Blogger, Mental Health Campaigner



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Carrie ♦ Lloyd

Prude

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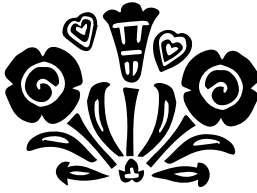
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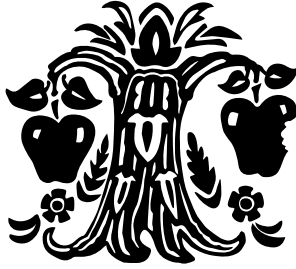
For the two who held onto hope for my arrival after waiting so long.
For the two who introduced me to love, peace and light—my parents:
Rev. May Lloyd, and the late Dr. Rev. John Antony Lloyd.



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Preface

Today people deny a belief in God more than ever before, and Christianity is too often represented by some clever clogs who directed a documentary on crazy nuts worshipping God and then setting themselves (or perhaps other people) alight moments later. The word God has been thrown around like a rolling stone for centuries. God has often been connected to maniacs, terrorists, pedophiles, racists, bigots, even scientologists. When people mention God, the response is equal to that of someone with vertigo about to plunge on a bungee rope. Perhaps, before we even go into talking about my life and the virgin years within, it's best to explain the version of God I mean before this book is thrown into the portal of hell itself.

Understandably, the audience participants might question the likes of someone like me who says she loves Jesus. I've been an atheist as well as a Christian. I've given every minister in England I could find a run for his or her money. I've contested time and time again in apologetics classes, in religious education classes, in Quaker meetings, on film sets, in Catholic churches, in Protestant churches, in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings,

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and even in hospice wards with those who said they visited Heaven. I questioned them all. And regardless of my beliefs—my horrific religious ones as a kid, my arrogant ones as an atheist—my findings came down to what we all searched for in the beginning. Before we were taught anything about God, before we could place pen to paper, we searched for a meaning. And this was my conclusion:

God is love.

Any exegetical attempt of scripture to suggest that God is not agape love, or that He was the one who placed an AK-47 in the hands of a seven-year-old boy is, for me, misguided. The essence, the force that joins people together, that purges a mother who lost her son to the IRA of unforgiveness, and the deeper need to do what is best, what is righteous, what is kind, what is humble, what is pure, what is beautiful, what gives instead of takes—that is God.

It is not as simple as some giant Abraham Lincoln sitting on a throne in the sky. To be as complex as we are leaves room to believe in, to at least question if there are similarities between our Creator and us. That we are able to love at all, to prefer another's life or happiness above our own, points to an inner wiring that goes against the natural desire for self-preservation, and this doesn't make sense without an original source of love. For me, that source didn't just create love. That source is love. And, as far as I'm concerned, love means more than affection. Love longs for, love desires. God being love therefore amalgamates a desire to have relationship with us. It is because of this that I call God a father and there is a union between God and me.

Though God is both female and male in form, I use the word Him for relativity, but not in accuracy. The complexities and multi-dimensions of God, the many facets that travel outside of space and time, the evolutionary components that built and formed the earth, the science, the

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mathematics, the quantum physics, the design itself is all God. The one whom C.S. Lewis and Tolkien discussed at length so often in *The Eagle and Child* pub in Oxford is the God I speak of in this book. I do believe God was incarnated into human form, and that Jesus wasn't "just a nice guy." I know plenty of nice guys. I doubt we'd be talking about any of them 2,000 years later.

So whenever God is mentioned, attempt to not bolt upright with walls or prejudice against something that should be seen as life-giving. I realize many of us have had our negative encounters with Christians: Some left a bad taste in our mouths, some tried to convert rather than let us speak, some wanted our souls instead of treasuring our hearts. But open your mind for a moment and trust there is no ulterior motive, no quest to do anything other than tell a story without a hidden agenda. Resist the urge to bring any preconception from any propaganda you've viewed in the press or on any television network. It's far greater than some poor behavior carried out by Man. Anything they did was not God's fault. After all, this is a free world, and for God to be love in any real way, He must also give us free will.

Think me not an idiot for believing in something beyond what we see, and we will get along just fine. Besides, it was not always this way for me; discovering such a God—one not of religion, of law, of restrictions—was all part of the journey, one I might have done differently had I the chance to write the story again.



CHAPTER 1

Forbidden Fruit

“ Be honest, is being you awful? And what exactly is a *neo-virgin*?”
A fair question, one I get asked more times than I care to count. This is the twenty-first century after all, the age of information overload, global perspective and influence, universal exploration, technological and scientific advancement, and creative freedom. We now have an expectation to live a life full of toe-curling adventure and authentic self-expression. Does not having sex before marriage help meet that agenda? It feels like the opposite of being free, liberated, and unhindered. How could anyone possibly have fun without it?

“I don’t understand, Carrie, why would you not have sex when you’ve already done it?” This question was posed by my friend Goldilocks at a Christmas party two years ago.

“No one said this to Aileen Wuornos, did they? ‘Well, if you’ve murdered one guy you might as well keep going.’”

“What?” she asked, perturbed by my association of pre-marital sex to

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serial killing.

I revoked my statement. “It made sense to me.”

This particular discussion was instigated by an event that had occurred a few days before. I met someone, let’s call him “Montane,” at a party. He was dazzling in all natures and met most of the “wants” on the checklist of ideals:

Tall—*quite*.

Dark and handsome—*yes*.

Kind and witty—*of course*.

Intense and curious—*abundantly*.

Highly influential and well known in his industry. The money itself didn’t matter so much as the influence he could have—and did have—in the world.

It had only been three months since I had been dumped without much explanation by my ex-boyfriend on Facetime whilst he was travelling on a lads’ holiday. When my non-Christian friends discovered that the ex was a thirty-something virgin, they deduced he must be gay—no man could wait that long for sex, and the large number of vest tops he owned seemed to confirm their suspicion. A trip to New York helped heal my hurt heart, and I returned to Scotland to a party nine hours north of my home in England.

Montane opened the front door and shared his condolences on hearing of my break up. “I heard he was gay?”

I looked to my friends John and Goldilocks in the background with an accusatory, *How many people have you told that my ex is gay* look. “Well, no. Not exactly—”

John interrupted in the background, giving a close inspection to some cutlery and shouting, “Do you think this spoon is bent?”

I attempted to continue explaining the real situation. “I think he just

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wasn't that into me. Apparently he didn't think he could meet my needs. Although when I asked what they actually were, he couldn't answer. The truth is that I made sure I had no needs. More the fool me."

John couldn't resist using another projected voice to tale end, "Darling, could you pass me the cushion thing, you know the poof from over there please?"

"I can assure you my virgin ex-boyfriend was straight."

John's smug grin shot across our way.

Montane showed a concerned smile.

As the night progressed, I found Montane more and more fascinating, surrounded by really interesting, quirky, expressive people. He told stories that had us gasping for breath, but he still came across as genuinely humble. Despite knowing how influential he was in the world, he wasn't afraid to listen to another opinion. He was a gentle giant, wrapped in the kind of power and gusto that made one's knees a little shaky.

We finally found ourselves alone when I bumped into him in a corridor. As he hugged me, I wished him a Happy Christmas. Then suddenly, a familiar whisper came to me, overriding my own thoughts: *Ask him about being known*. Oh God, not now. Now is not the time to get spiritual. But such was my stance that my relationship with God was stronger than my fear of looking crazy.

I held my breath and went for it. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure?"

"Do you feel known?"

Silence. His face dropped, his eyes brightening as if I just told him he'd won his net worth all over again.

"That's an incredible question."

Someone bumped into him, and we were soon parted by a crowd of people all wanting to play Jenga. They called us to join them.

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“Well, I just wondered.” I tapped my heart.

He winked.

When we sat down to play, he positioned himself across from me. Throughout the game he kept glancing at me, placing blocks of wood without really looking and repeating again, “That’s really an incredible question.”

Once the game ended, I didn’t see him for the rest of the evening, slipping off into the night without a word.

Two weeks later I received a text with a screen shot of text conversation from Montane to Goldilocks. It read: “I had a dream about your friend Carrie last night, I need her number.”

I texted Goldilocks, “Does he know that I won’t be doing anything physical with him?”

“Well, I told him that, but I also said that Jesus might just turn his head away so you can have a little flirt and tickle.”

“You’re the worst friend. Oh, dear Lord, help me.”

“Yes, perhaps praying would be good. It’s out of my hands.”

Goldilocks, although an atheist, thought she’d been helpful.

Truth was I adored this guy.

Within five minutes of receiving a text from Goldilocks, Montane was in his car, ready to drive down to England. And it wasn’t to play another board game. There was something in my question that made him curious about me.

“I’m driving up to find you.”

“But I’m nine hours away. You’d not be here until 10:00 p.m.”

“10:00 p.m. it is.”

“But you can’t stay here. I live alone and...and...well you can’t stay over.”

I began texting my friends for an emergency meeting, seeking advice

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on how to resist this guy for whom I had every urge and feeling. I had abstained from sex for four years, but this was the greatest temptation to date. I also just happened to be writing about purity for an article when I got the call.

“I really appreciated his work with—” Montane was so influential, my friends kept coming back at me with their feedback on what he was known for.

“I’m not looking for Wikipedia results; I’m looking for help here, people!”

10:00 p.m. arrived, and there he was—hundreds of miles from his mansion, three inches away from my face.

“So this was a choice,” I said. “A nice choice. But a choice.”

“I know.” In he came and poured himself some water. He scanned the room, my photos, a painting I had commissioned Francesca Lowe to paint called “Grace.” Then he took a closer look, reading the scriptural context.

I was clearly nervous. Stunned that he came all this way, frightened to consider his expectations.

“God saved me a year ago,” he stated quietly.

Oh no. I could have resisted so much easier if he had told me he doesn’t believe in God.

We went on to talk for hours about how God saved him, about his past relationships, his friends, his family, and how when I fall in love with him I can move into his place in the middle of nowhere, the one that no one knows about. He brings up *Fraud*, a collection of essays by David Rackoff. I pick mine up from my coffee table. Every part of me was melting. I wondered what our wedding would be like. And then I charged myself not to be *that* type—you know, the deranged woman who writes her vows after one conversation.

His spontaneous eagerness was a refreshing touch compared to the

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fearful men I had dated before in the Church. We talked sex, and how wonderful it was, how I didn't do it anymore, holding out for my hero.

"Oh, so you really are waiting until marriage?" He seemed shocked.

Internally I wondered just how clear Goldilocks had been about Jesus and my reformed virginity.

"Did you think it was a coy remark, part of a cute branding strategy?"

He smiled, refreshed to have a "no" girl around him. He made another cup of tea, while I couldn't stop watching him.

2:00 a.m. and I had hit my limit, too tempted to have him around without an action I knew I'd regret. I shoved him out of the house in the nicest way possible and found him a hotel. No one in his life had probably carted him into a Holiday Inn, but here he was, waltzing into a room he had no intention of staying in alone. He looked at me with his deep, Labrador puppy eyes and with such exclusivity that I felt like he'd only ever looked at me like that in his life. I had to remind myself, *He does this all the time.*

3:00 a.m.—7:00 a.m., he slept.

I didn't. Mainly because I knew within a minute I could drive to his location.

This could be the start of a whirlwind romance. Then it wouldn't be a mistake. It would be love. Love is never a mistake. And love covers a multitude of sins—that's most probably biblical. And the Song of Solomon is a whole book of exuberant passion. Driving down from Scotland. I mean that's something.

Go. To. Sleep. Carrie. I stayed put under my duvet until sunrise. The sound of my phone startled me out of my half-conscious state. He was going home, which was a good thing for me, but I told him to wait for me to come over first. When I knocked on the door, he answered barely clothed, which didn't help my desire to pretend he was my husband for the morning.

"All I wanted was to fall in love with you and live with you at the

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place that no one knows about. Perhaps it's some location where you kill girls and keep their corpses upright whilst you watch television, but I'm going to go with my original assumption and believe it's the palace of dreams. Probably with a more exclusive playroom than Christian Grey, the difference between you and him being that you mentioned commitment last night."

He kept watching me ramble, smiling at my consternation.

"In short, I wasn't rejecting you because I said *no* to sex. I'm probably the only woman in your life to have ever declined it."

He smiled and grabbed me, pulling me into the room and shutting the door.

I snuggled into him and held onto him for as long as I could.

He wrapped his arms around me. "You seem happy," he whispered. "And I respect your values."

I had hope. Would he stay? Would he stay and build rapport, and then build a relationship, and then would sex be an ecstatic crescendo on our wedding night?

"But I'm going to need to have sex with my girlfriend."

Oh. The truth sunk into my red-hot, coursing blood like an injection of methanol.

"But I do respect your values. Should you ever change your mind though..."

I was conflicted. This couldn't really be unconditional love if he had this specific condition. And if this wasn't really love, then...this wasn't really what I wanted either.

In the middle of his display of comfort, a leaf blower started making a racket in the courtyard. Within a second, he burst into a comedy act, as the leaf-blower grew louder, sounding like it was about to come through the French doors.

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“THEY’RE HERE!” Montane flung himself across the room, spreading himself against the doors. “The Christians are here to snatch you away! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE, CARRIE!”

I broke into a thousand hysterics. He picked me up the way I imagined he would when we crossed the threshold of the murder palace, and then he sat me on the bed.

“She can’t hear you. I taped it all up down there four years ago.” I held onto him for a little longer, pulled his chin up so his eyes could meet mine, kissed his cheek, and said, “I want to be a friend to you, a woman who doesn’t want anything from you. Just friendship. Just conversation. Society killed the art of talking so long ago, and yet, it’s where my heart ignited last night. You’re fascinating. A true gent. I did all of this not to restrict you, but to honor you.”

As I left the hotel, my tears felt like waterfalls. I walked away from a man I had only dreamt could exist, but couldn’t really have. I returned to my empty flat, the scent of his cologne still lingering.

Goldilocks texted an hour after his departure: “Did he get in touch?”

“Did he get in touch?! Babe, he SHOWED UP!”

“WHAT?!?!?! You see, this is the difference between heterosexual men and homosexual men disguised as heterosexual men. They actually do something about wanting you. Did you...?”

“No, of course I didn’t.”

“Not even if Jesus turned away?”

“Remind me to explain Jesus to you one day so that this all might make sense.”

Late night tears of not having the man I wanted in my life aside, I found a gorgeous joy in entertaining my friends with my abstinence adventures. Did I decide to stop having sex just for the pure comedic value? A topic of conversation? A man-tester to see who would still hang

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around after I didn't give in? Or was it to acquaint myself with the ability to manage freedom for the sake of not hurting others? There was a method to my sexless madness.

To fulfill our innate desires, whatever they were, we acted out, we strived, we consumed. Life was about the latest Apple product, Cirque du Soleil tickets, Instagrammed pictures at the Ice Hotel in Norway, swimming with Dotty the Dolphin, having 2.4 children with an additional one adopted on a Zimbabwean mission trip. We celebrated our Employee of the Month award at our local Soho House club, parading our membership card like it was security access for the UN. Consumption created our identity. We strove for status. We acted liberally, ensuring we were not so backward to support groups such as the radical extremists, but not too forward to welcome polyamory into our living room. Yet we never outwardly denied any form of "fetishy" activity either since it made us seem prudish.

No one wanted to be prudish.

To be such would confirm some rigidity of the self, creating some uncomfortable tension about being liberal or "free."

Everyone wanted to be free.

I chewed the forbidden fruit, but it didn't give back as much as it took. I decided to hang up my Agent Provocateur negligees, the contraceptive pill, and my need to perform for requited love. To my friends, this barbarity of returning back to purity at the age of thirty-one must have been catalyzed by fear, heartbreak, or a need to make penance, a flagellant-inspired shame.

"Perhaps it was that nun at St. Bueno's that time she went on an eight-day silent retreat?" they speculated.

My reasons had nothing to do with shame, a one-way ticket to hell, a hint of damnation, mortification of the flesh, or a German nun called Sister

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Renate. It had a lot to do with a little life experience and a tangible desire to build my house on an emotionally mature rock, not a hotbed of quicksand.

What was the point of “saving myself” once more? An excellent question, and one not easily answered. What was the point of having sex (or not having sex) at all? It was a desire within, a pull toward connection, relationship, love. The world needed love. We needed love. The contradiction was that we had sex in the hope for love, while trying to believe that sex and love are two different things.

Virgins have never had a reputation of being fun, nor being very “grown up.” They *did* have the reputation of attracting hostility, harassment, or just plain unkindness. Name-calling and jokes made even well into adulthood. In the same vein as mothers who tell childless women, “You don’t know anything about life until you have children,” so too had those who refused coital connections been belittled for their decision by those who chose to have sex.

Society’s opinion of sexual purity certainly hasn’t been helped by depictions of virgins in movies and on television. Watching virgin bride shows only resulted in me throwing my ESV Bible at the TV screen; you know, the ones with virgins who had been so pure in their romantic journey that they still hadn’t had sex two years *after* marriage.

The idiots.

Camera crews followed a poor husband, taking a cold shower in case he should experience “naughty bedroom thoughts,” while his wife would calm herself by eating a raw sweet potato. And so, others often categorized me as being part of the Sweet Potato Brigade—an association with which I had no intention of partnering.

On top of everything else, the word *chastity* has become distasteful to modern ears. The Millennial generation no longer wants to know about the bitter cup of abstinence. We have heard it for decades. We know the

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statistics. We know that HPV can cause cervical cancer, that syphilis is coming back with a vengeance, that an attachment hormone called “oxytocin” becomes active in the system after sexual interaction, distorting emotional rationale in choosing the perfect mate to wed.

We’ve heard the cautionary nightmares handed to us by our parents, teachers, mentors, and, let’s not forget, Saint Oprah. We watched the rise in teenage pregnancy in the last two decades. We met the love-children of those liberated Woodstock hippies. Well, those who hadn’t fell prey to an illegal abortion by some dodgy Harley Street doctor. A sixties wild-child herself, one columnist wrote an article reflecting the era that was often heralded as the period of sexual liberation (though I’d argue it was being introduced much earlier than this):

After a decade of sleeping around pretty indiscriminately, girls of the sixties eventually became fairly jaded about sex. It took me years to discover that continual sex with different partners is, with very few exceptions, joyless, uncomfortable and humiliating, and it’s only now I’m older that I’ve discovered that one of the ingredients of a good sex life is, at the very least, a grain of affection between the two partners involved.

“A grain of affection,” you say? I like her honesty. This was stated often by my parents’ generation. The sixties lovers never gained anything out of it other than experimentation. When they found themselves at maturity, most of them would not have repeated it again. After all, the sixties revolution created free lust, not love. All lust had done was devalue the power of sex.

But why was sex so forbidden before marriage in faith circles? Why exactly did religious text tell us to hold out? It was a question that ran

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from before the time I even knew what sex was to the years I chose to have sexual relationships in my twenties.

Here we are, aware of our sexual desires, aware of the realness of all that they are, yet unable to manage our desires in the greatest freedom culture to date. It's not that we shouldn't feel sexual, but we could manage it a whole lot better by understanding ourselves. This tale we all told each other, that sex and love could be separated, wasn't the human design I had learned first-hand or by dragging another girlfriend out from the gutter, crying because some guy didn't call. That wasn't *natural*. To detach the body from emotional feeling was as insane as saying, "Taking a swim in the ocean won't necessarily get you wet."

Just because current culture told me that I "should," didn't mean I needed to fall for the delusions the world around me told itself. Trends rarely cared for the sanctity of commitment, never mind marriage; they definitely didn't give a bride's garter for anyone's heart, really. Cultures changed constantly, but the body, the design and architecture invented many moons ago, always stayed the same.

The pull to want to be known, to be respected, honored, laughed with (and not at) required, in my experience, foundations, building blocks, and a collaboration of virtues that were built within the individual and then leaked into the relationship. Sex was a congratulatory reward for all you had fought for, not an entrée meal.

The real aim, the most natural desire for all of us is to love and be loved in return. Having sex didn't guarantee that for me or for my friends, especially when men had often checked out of the relationship quicker than checking into a random hotel room, leaving no forwarding address. The ambitious hope that we can have a wild night of passion and it not mean anything perhaps suits some men, but for most of us women, we want that grain of affection, and affection looks like more than a nine-hour

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drive. It looks like staying around, even if we just want to talk.

Call me an extremist, but I'm all about the commitment, accountability. For all the ball-and-chain stigma it's collected over the centuries, marriage is still the highest symbol of commitment to date.

Still, even some of my closest friends don't understand me. "But...but what *do* you do? What do you actually do if you can't have sex?"

"Crochet." My smile would always be met with utter disdain, as if they had been waiting for the final scene in the *Harry Potter* series and it all turned out to be a dream.

"Conversation. That moment when you say something and then they reply. That sort of thing. We'll hang with friends, eat s'mores around the fire. Discuss politics. Watch some awful movie about giant whales. Go clubbing and share the love of Christ to cokehead ravers. Two people can find plenty of things to do instead of dancing the horizontal tango."

When in conversation with my atheist, agnostic, humanist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Muslim, Buddhist, Lutheran, Satanist (oh, all right, I don't have any Satanist friends), I find that we all want the same thing: to find a connection, to find kindness, to be a team, to create a purpose that means more than watching *Seinfeld* reruns and playing Rugby on the weekend, and to know beyond a doubt that I don't need to worry if he'll come home stinking of Chanel No. 5. I want sacrifice on the man's part instead of sacrificing myself all the time. I want a joy that finds me laughing at 2:00 a.m. on a park bench because we got locked out. I dream of the ability to be long-suffering when the times are tough, knowing the rough must be taken with the smooth.

I want trust before intimacy, peace before fear.

It's why I laugh when people tell me the Bible is out of date. I find it post-modern. In time, future generations may learn just how much we've hurt each other with sexual leniency. Will they see that the heart isn't as

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easily mended as we perhaps originally hoped?

Look at the beginning of the human story. Two people were given a choice: Take a bite from the Tree of Knowledge, or trust God and take a bite from the Tree of Life. Although sex made us all *feel* more knowledgeable, be it about ourselves or about someone else, it didn't necessarily bring us life. And ironically, the more I went on my journey, I found not biting the forbidden fruit more life-giving. In short, when nourishing from the Tree of Life, I became more knowledgeable about life itself.

So if I'm being honest, is being me truly awful?

As you delve into these stories, from virginity to my testing twenties, perhaps it's best for you to decide.