

Issues For Today

Discussion Guides written by Rev. Robert E. Smith

Issues for Today Discussion Guides are ideal for leading any group of Christian youth or adults to discover how their faith impacts their everyday life. They are ideal for providing a thought-provoking discussion in Bible classes, men's or women's groups, in-home studies, youth group meetings, college-age or young adult groups, retreats and other opportunities for Christian discipleship.

These outlines are ready-to-copy, allowing group members to participate while taking very few notes. They are flexible, allowing the leaders to select illustrations and Scripture passages they feel best add to the discussion. They leave room for discussion, debate and even disagreement with the author. Best of all, they are proven, having been developed over seven years in the context of moral instruction of middle-school-aged children. Use them for one time events or as an on-going curriculum. Either way, they will assist your students in applying their Christ-centered morality to life at the turn of the millennium.

The 20 Topics

Idols For Today

Habits

Church and State

Drugs and Alcohol

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Science and Christianity

Authority, Equality and Servanthood

Loss, Grief and Death

Illness

Studying The Bible

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Marriage

Christians, Sexuality and Modern America

God's Gift Of Sexuality

The Value Of Life

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Medical Ethics

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Idols for Today

I. An idol is something or someone other than God that we trust with our lives.

II. Sometimes people worship idols which stand for:

- A) A king or other ruler, living or dead.
- B) Invisible gods who controlled one specific country, aspect of life, idea or thing.
- C) Spirits of the dead, especially heroes and ancestors.

III. People serve idols to:

- A) Keep the gods or spirits pictured by them from harming people.
- B) Get whatever favor they want from the god or spirit.
- C) Because they can completely understand an idol they make.
- D) Because they think they can control the god the idol stands for.
- E) Idols demand actions which people can accomplish. They do not ask for perfection.

IV. People still replace God with idols.

- A) They may not physically bow down to their false gods, but they still give them all they have.
- B) They expect the idol to return their service with something they need or desire.
- C) They spend most of their time thinking about, learning about and investing in their idol.
- D) A person's God is anything that demands his or her highest priorities.

V. Some idols worshipped today:

- A) Satan, voodoo, the occult, other forms of black and white magic, astrology, numerology, tarot cards, Ouija boards, crystals and other objects or activities which are supposed to have special powers, predict the future or reveal hidden knowledge.
- B) Health
- C) Money
- D) Power
- E) Freedom
- F) "Mr. or "Mrs." Right
- G) Sex
- H) Drugs
- I) Science
- J) Ecology
- K) Beauty
- L) TV, movies, entertainment
- M) Sports, sports stars

VI. God hates idols.

- A) They lead to hell. (Rom. 1:18-22, Deut. 6:10-16, 1 Kings 18:16-45)
- B) Even the best of them will fail you sooner or later.
- C) They take all that you have and give back almost nothing in return.
- D) They make you think you are their masters when you're really their slaves.
- E) They destroy your life.



Habits

I. Habits in general

- A) Actions we do without thinking.
- B) Created by God to help us deal with a complex world.
- C) Come in many forms (which side of the bed you get up on, what you order at a restaurant, how you relate to a child or a spouse).
- D) Good habits support a person's life, bring order into his or her world or give enjoyment in a way that builds up rather than destroys.
- E) Bad habits turn a person inward, bring chaos or pain into his or her life or destroy that person's life or hurt others.

II. How habits begin

- A) Some habits are passed down to us from parent to child over many generations.
- B) Some habits come from the people we live near.
- C) Some habits begin because they make our lives easier to live, are fun or make us feel better.
- D) Some habits continue because they please our friends. We do these things because we want others to like us.
- E) We may begin because we are determined to shape our lives in a new direction.
- F) We do the same thing over and over until we do the intended action without thinking about it.
- G) It is harder to begin a habit which asks us to do something, especially something we don't enjoy, than to begin a habit of not doing something.
- H) A habit is easiest to form when someone is working on it with you.

III. How habits end

- A) Habits are hard to break because we have to realize we're going to do them before we do them. By their very nature, we do not think about our habits at all.

- B) The first step in breaking a habit is to think about it. The next step is not to do it.
- C) Just as it is easier to start a habit with the help of other people, so it is also easier to break it with the help of others.
- D) Patience is needed to break a habit, especially one that gives pleasure. "If at first you don't succeed..."
- E) Sometimes one habit can be broken by replacing it with another.
- F) Sometimes a habit depends upon a certain type of situation to encourage it. Avoiding the things which go with a habit can help eliminate the habit itself.
- G) Most important of all is prayer. God can and will provide the strength you need to break a bad habit or form a new, good one.



Church and State

I. Definitions

- A) The State (also known as the Kingdom of God's Left Hand) is any earthly government. God appointed the State to
 - 1) keep peace among the people under its care.
 - 2) protect the weak and defenseless.
 - 3) see to it the poor, sick and needy are provided for.
 - 4) repay the victims of the evil actions of sinful people.
 - 5) punish those who hurt others.
 - 6) praise the outwardly good deeds of people and reward them for their kindness.
 - 7) protect its people from the evil actions of other nations and to punish evil leaders of such nations.
 - 8) keep sin under control so that people might prosper and the gospel be preached to all peoples.
- B) The Church on Earth (Kingdom of God's Right Hand) is God's spiritual government whose purpose is to bring the Gospel to all people.
 - 1) It is ruled by Christ, its King.
 - 2) It was begun by the mercy and love of God, Who sacrificed Himself to save His people.
 - 3) Its law is to love God and other people as a way to thank God for His mercy.
 - 4) It applies the victory over Satan and his forces by bringing the saving gospel to those enslaved by him.
 - 5) Its only weapons are God's Word and His Sacraments.
 - 6) Its authority is only in spiritual matters. In all other areas it yields authority to the State.
- C) Separation of Church and State
 - 1) By the separation of Church and State, we mean that the State must not tell the Church how to do its job nor force it to act sinfully nor to believe things against the will of God or His Word.
 - 2) The Church may not force the government to obey its will nor to tell it how to act in areas beyond those set down in Scripture.
 - 3) The Church does, however, have the duty to explain to the State how God feels about matters He has spoken about in the Bible.
 - 4) The government may encourage the Church in its work and make it easier for the Church to spread the Gospel.

II. All Christians must be loyal citizens of their countries.

- A) They should pay all their taxes fairly and honestly.
- B) They must obey the laws in all matters except when commanded to sin.
- C) If they are commanded to sin, they must disobey the government only in the area which is sinful. Only in this way do they obey God rather than people.
- D) In the USA and other countries where citizens have a right to vote, all eligible Christian voters hold a government office. Since God has given them this responsibility to carry out, they **must** express their opinions, urge God's will upon their nation and vote in accordance with God's will and the wisdom He has given them.
- E) Christians **may** hold other government offices, even in the armed forces and police. They are to use such office as an opportunity for service, not as a way to gain wealth or power.
- F) Christian Pastors or leaders of Pastors usually should not hold a governmental office. But the church should advise those in government concerning God's will and the needs of the people in the state's care.

III. Issues between church and state

- A) **Prayer in School:** Government may provide for it as long as they do not tell students to pray in ways contrary to God's will. In practice and under our constitution, this means the government, teachers or other leaders must not compose prayers for students to pray, but **may** provide a moment of silence in which students may pray in their own ways. In schools run by Christian churches, however, prayer is not only available but is an important part of the school day
- B) **Teaching of Evolution:** Since the theory of evolution teaches a beginning of the world without God, it is contrary to God's Word. Teachers must teach that the theory is the opinion of most scientists, but also must make room for other religious views. In Christian schools, it is necessary to teach students the details of the theory of Evolution since many people believe in it, but it must be said clearly that it is not true science that can be proven with scientific methods.
- C) **Tax Exemptions for Churches:** A government may decide not to tax churches, but God does not say it must exempt religion from taxes.
- D) **Abortion:** At this time, our government fails to meet its responsibility to protect unborn babies. Yet it does not command Christians either to have or to perform them. It is the responsibility of the Church to urge the State to end the murder of these children and to vote in ways which will encourage this. They may even protest, march and picket. Yet a Christian **may not** violate trespassing laws, with which it has no quarrel. These laws also protect churches from protesters disrupting worship services. They must obey the government in this matter.



Drugs and Alcohol

I. When does a habit become an addiction?

- A) When the habit controls a person rather than a person controlling the habit.
- B) When attempts to break the habit leaves the person physically ill.
- C) When a person fears the loss of the habit above everything else.

II. How do you know when someone is addicted?

- A) When the person's life and the lives of the person's family, friends and coworkers are hurt.
- B) When the members of the person's family complain about the person's addiction.
- C) When the person denies that anything is wrong and makes excuses for the behavior.
- D) When all the person talks about is drinking or getting high.
- E) When the person hides the addiction from family members.
- F) When the person cannot control the number of drinks or drugs taken.

III. Why is addiction a problem?

- A) Addicts will almost never seek help on their own.
- B) Addicting drugs destroy the addict's body and will eventually kill the person.
- C) Most addicting drugs alter a person's mind and result in the addict hurting other people. For example, the majority of drunk drivers are addicts. A great many unplanned crimes are committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- D) Addicts affect their families so much that the non-addicted members of the family also become "sick," doing things to survive emotionally. These may unknowingly help the addict continue to be addicted.
- E) Sons and daughters of addicts often become addicts themselves.
- F) The resulting problems cost our nation a lot of money and supplies to fix. Courts, victims of crime, loss of time at work, bad quality work, accidents are some of the hidden costs of addiction.

IV. How do people become addicts?

- A) Some people have genes which make it hard for them to deal with a certain drug or alcohol.
- B) A "friend" encourages the future addict to start drinking or using a drug. The person loves the temporary effect the drug has on him or her.

- C) Because people feel good, important, worthwhile or happy while high, they use drugs to forget a problem or things that depress them.
- D) Soon they "need" drugs to face any sort of stress or problem.
- E) The person is now an addict.

V. **How *not* to help the addict:**

- A) Pretend they don't have a problem. (The invisible elephant)
- B) Hide the problem from people outside the family, especially those who can help.
- C) Lie and cover up for the bad effects of the drugs.
- D) Make a threat to act if they do not seek help without being willing to carry out the threat.
- E) All these actions protect an addict from the consequences of addiction. Thus, it takes longer for the person to "hit bottom."

VI. **How *to* help an addict**

- A) Never use or encourage people to use drugs. Just say no. Prevention is easier than cure.
- B) When someone has a problem or complains about a friend's or relative's problem, go to a helping person to get advice.
- C) Never attack the addict. Attack the addiction.
- D) Find a group of people who've had addicted relatives and have learned how to deal with it. These groups of people are called support groups. Examples are Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon.

Twelve steps to recovery

1. Admit that you are powerless over the drug.
2. Believe that God can free you from its power.
3. Decide to turn over your will and life to God's care.
4. Make a fearless moral inventory of your life.
5. Admit to God, yourself, and another person the exact nature of your wrongs.
6. Be ready to have God remove all these defects.
7. Ask Him to remove these defects.
8. Make a list of all persons you have wronged and be willing to make amends to them all.
9. Make up these wrongs directly to these people when you can do it without hurting them or someone else.
10. Continue to take the personal moral inventory and when wrong, promptly admit it.
11. Seek to improve through prayer your relationship to God, praying for His will for you and the power to carry it out.
12. Having been renewed by these steps, carry these principles to other addicts and practice them in your whole life.



Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

I. The problem of evil is as old as the church itself.

- A) The problem: How can a good God permit evil?
- B) To say He can't help means He isn't all powerful and can lose the battle to Satan.
- C) To say He causes evil and so doesn't want to end it makes God Himself evil.

II. What is evil?

- A) Anything which hurts people.
- B) Anything which one person does to another for selfish reasons.
- C) Everything that opposes God.

III. God did not create evil.

- A) The devil created evil by disobeying God for selfish reasons.
- B) Evil entered the world because Adam and Eve sinned.
- C) God puts up with evil and its consequences so that He can save us.
- D) Jesus died on the cross to destroy the sin which causes evil, to bear all our sufferings and to win victory over evil.
- E) One day, God will destroy evil.

IV. If God is good, why does He permit evil?

- A) People choose to sin; God would destroy their freedom to choose Him if He destroyed sin without giving faith.
- B) God permits evil, because to destroy evil means to destroy evil people. Only when everyone who can be saved is saved will He act.
- C) God allows people to experience the results of their sins, so that some will turn from sin to Him.
- D) God turns the effects of evil into good for Christians.

V. Why do evil things happen to good people?

- A) God suffers more than we do when we hurt.
- B) Everyone is a sinner to some extent. Only Jesus was a truly good person.
- C) Fairness means to send everyone to hell; because He loves us, God is patient instead.
- D) Sometimes innocent people suffer from the effects of sin.
- E) Sometimes people recognize their need for Christ; that can become the positive effects of suffering.

VI. How do we face evil?

- A) Remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.
- B) Know that we share in the sufferings of Jesus.
- C) Remember that Jesus and the Holy Spirit pray to the Father for us.
- D) Realize that evil is not God's will for us.
- E) Pray about it, placing our problem in His hands.
- F) Share our burden with fellow Christians.
- G) Look for deliverance, being patient for God to work in His good time and thanking God if it comes.
- H) Find ways to live life with a burden, drawing on the strength God gives and fellow Christians provide.
- I) Ask God's help in not becoming the source for more evil, but for greater good.



Science and Christianity

I. Basic beliefs of science

- A) The world is orderly, governed by rules which people can understand.
- B) It is possible to discover these rules through careful description of the things we sense.
- C) The only things which are "real" are those which we sense with eyes, ears, touch, taste or smell. This rule includes the use of things which help us measure or see things that are normally beyond our reach.
- D) Data are to be believed only if another person checks them out and discovers the same reality.
- E) All experiments must be repeatable by others.
- F) With great effort at careful observation, it is possible to report the truth free from influence by the scientist's personal feelings and beliefs (Objectivity).
- G) Truth is only true today; tomorrow we might discover data which teaches us a deeper truth.
- H) Knowledge brings wisdom with it.
- I) Seeking knowledge is always a worthy goal; all knowledge improves human life.
- J) There is no data which we will not be able to explain by human reason sooner or later.

II. The Christian response to science

- A) Science, like all fields of knowledge and learning, are blessings from God, when used as servants of God and humanity.
- B) Christianity assumes that the world is governed by God, Who has created the rules by which it works to serve Him and do what He wants it to do.
- C) People are a part of this creation and so we will never be able to fully understand God or His work.
- D) There are things which we cannot sense or measure, yet are still real. They must be revealed by God.

- E) There are some rules which govern the world which are beyond human understanding and must be revealed by God.
- F) Thus there are things which must be believed because God **says** them, even though we can't **prove** them.
- G) Some things, like the beginning and the end of the world, happen only once. They cannot be measured by science since they were not observed and cannot be repeated.
- H) From time to time, God changes the rules (miracles). What we know about the universe will not apply at these times.
- I) No one can report completely objectively; only rarely can we come close. The background, beliefs and emotions of the scientist always effect his or her results.
- J) Truth never changes.
- K) Knowledge does not normally bring wisdom with it. True wisdom comes only from God.
- L) Knowledge is not **always** worth knowing and does not **necessarily** improve life.
- M) Some things are beyond human understanding.

III. Some things taught as science are not science, such as "evolution".

IV. For a Christian, faith is the master of science, not science the master of faith.

V. A Christian who is a scientist uses his or her knowledge for God's glory. He or she never lets science take God's place.



Authority, Equality and Servanthood

I. "Equal" does not mean "the same."

- A) God did not create all people the same. He made each person a unique, special and one-of-a-kind being. No two people in all of history are exactly the same. (Snowflake principle)
- B) God loves each of us as individuals. His love for each person is without limit.
- C) We make a mistake when we treat people exactly the same. Each person has a unique set of gifts, abilities and needs.
- D) God wants us to go beyond just being fair. We need to take the time to get to know each of the persons in our life, to find out what their special needs are and to help them use their special talents for God's glory and the good of others.
- E) Equal rights, equal pay, and other "equals" are worthy goals for our society and for Christians. Yet we must not make the mistake of treating people exactly the same way that we do other people of the same group. To do this is to reduce people to things. It is a new form of **prejudice**, which means, to make up one's mind how to treat someone or what to expect from them without getting to know them first.

II. God wants all Christians to be servants.

- A) Above all else, **God is self-giving**. He did not need to create the universe. He could have just sat around all day thinking about how wonderful He is. Yet He gave of Himself to create the universe and gives of Himself to keep it going every minute of the day and night. He made us to be **just like Him** -- creatures who serve Him and others in the same way that He serves us.
- B) When we rebelled against Him, selfishly trying to get everything for ourselves and take His place in our own lives, rather than destroy us, He gave of Himself to save us. The second person of the Trinity, God the Son, gave up all His power, riches and authority as God, left heaven, became a man, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross to pay the price our sins deserved.
- C) Now through His Holy Spirit He gives us faith, His Word, the Sacraments and many gifts and talents with which to serve Him and all people.

- D) To be a Christian, therefore, means to live in a way completely different from the rest of the world. Rather than looking out for #1, reaching for power, wealth, property, privilege and rights, we are willing to give up everything to do good for others. We reject the advice to always push our rights and to avoid meeting responsibilities. We reject the seeking of happiness and comfort for the sake of happiness and comfort. We try hard to do what's best for others first.
- E) We do not assert our rights at all costs, but look for new ways to serve God and others.
- F) Thus, instead of competing for power, position and pleasure, Christians are to compete for ways to serve.

III. Authority and obedience

- A) The world thinks of authority as the right to get one's own way. What makes authority so attractive in the world is the thought that you can push others around and use them to get whatever you want.
- B) Christians, however, see authority as another way of serving. Those in authority are responsible to God for others. God puts people in charge to care for others. They protect, guide and sacrifice for the good of those put under their authority. True authority comes from seeking the good of the one to be cared for, even to the point of the sacrifice of one's life.
- C) Christians who are placed in another's care are called to honor, respect and obey those placed over them. It is the job of an authority **to die** for his or her charge and the charge's job **to let them**. By obeying those over us, we are obeying God who gives them authority. We are to work for them **as if** we were working for God. We are to pray for them and always be loyal to them for the sake of order and unity among Christians.
- D) Throughout life, each Christian will find himself or herself responsible for many others and responsible to many others. In all places in life, God wants us to serve Him and others fully. He promises that this way of living will bring true fulfillment, peace and joy to us on earth.



Loss, Grief and Death

I. Grief is the God-given process of adjusting to loss in our life

- A) Anytime our lives change, we experience loss. It can be:
 - 1) Good changes, such as graduation, marriage, moving, or promotions.
 - 2) Bad changes, such as losing a job, disaster, breaking up relationships, and especially death.
- B) Loss changes the way we live our lives. The greater the loss, the more we must change the way we do things.
- C) Grief is the way God has given us to adjust to loss.
- D) Without grief, the strain of the loss would break a person apart mentally.
- E) Grief ranges from annoyance and slight depression to pain which can keep a person from functioning.

II. The way people grieve

- A) People deal with loss in similar ways. The phases listed below describe some of the ways people do this.
- B) Not everyone goes through each phase in order and in the same way. Like people, grief experiences are unique.

III. Phases of grief that can be expected

- A) **Shock** - numbness, a feeling of living a bad dream; being "spaced out." It allows time to prepare for absorbing the loss.
- B) **Emotion** - crying, laughing, highs and lows in rapid succession.
- C) **Depression and Loneliness**
- D) **Physical Distress** - bad colds, fevers, flus, ulcers, lack of appetite, other stress-related illnesses. A period of grief can be physically dangerous to people. The people closest to the loss need to take especially good care of themselves.
- E) **Panic** - What am I going to do now? What's to become of me? How can I live without _____ ?

- F) **Anger and Resentment**
- G) **Resisting a return to normal**
- H) **Hope**
- I) **New Life**

IV. Helping friends work through grief

- A) Be with them.
- B) Talk about the loss and encourage them to talk about it.
- C) Offer to do something specific.
- D) Help the friend to “close the book.” They should do things they enjoy that they couldn't do before the loss.
- E) Follow up a few months later. Grief lasts about 1 month for each year of a relationship.
- F) Remember to comfort them with the sure hope of the resurrection, yet let them grieve. Grieve as one with hope (I Thess. 4).
- G) Remember grief heals, but that scars will always remain.

V. Death

- A) Death is our defeated enemy.
- B) Prepare for your own death. Rely on Jesus for life and salvation. Live as if you will die tomorrow or 70 years from now.
- C) Face your own death with trust in God.
 - 1) God knows the best time for your death.
 - 2) Don't despair when He calls early.
 - 3) Don't rush Him when He calls late.
- D) Remember the unique hope of the resurrection.



Illness

I. Illness is not in God's plan.

- A) God created us to be well and to live forever.
- B) When Adam and Eve sinned, wanting to be their own gods, illness entered the world.
- C) Illness effects us in many ways. Anything which causes the body to break down is illness.
- D) We make our illnesses worse by our sinfulness, unwillingness to do healthy things, and by what we do not know.

II. Illness reminds us of death.

- A) When we do not feel well, it depresses us, because we cannot do what we want to do.
- B) Illnesses are "little deaths."
- C) When we feel very ill, we worry. We are afraid of being crippled or dying.
- D) Sometimes our fear actually makes our illness worse.
- E) One strong thing a person can do to get well is to **want** to get well.

III. God and illness

- A) God does **not** want people to be ill and often will heal people's illnesses. All but the last illness is healed by God to at least some extent.
- B) God allows illness to continue because it challenges us to trust Him.
- C) We sometimes cannot see beyond our illness. The most important thing to God is that we be saved. Illness tends to show us what is really important and causes us to turn to God.
- D) God promises to destroy illness on the Last Day.

IV. What to do when you're sick

- A) Get medical help, do what the doctor tells you to do, the way he/she tells you to do it, and when he/she tells you to do it.
- B) **Rest!** Don't play. Allow others to assume your responsibilities and to make other arrangements for your absence.

- C) Pray, asking God to heal you.
- D) Use the time you cannot sleep to read the Bible, pray, watch TV, read or any quiet activity you enjoy.
- E) If you have to stay in bed more than a week or go into the hospital overnight, ask someone to call your pastor.
- F) Thank God when you're well again.



Studying the Bible

I. The Bible is unique.

- A) It was written over a period of at least 1,000 years.
- B) It was written on three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa.
- C) It was written in three languages: in several different forms of Hebrew (Old Testament), in Greek (New Testament) and in Aramaic (portions of Ezekiel and Daniel).
- D) God used over forty different people to write it.
- E) It is the first work ever translated into another language.
- F) It is the most translated work, portions appearing in hundreds of languages.
- G) Even though it was passed down from memory and in the error-prone system of hand-copying texts, the Bible remains the most accurately transmitted ancient document known to scholarship.
- H) It is the best selling work of all time.
- I) Much of the symbolism of western civilization and literature cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of the Bible.
- J) The Bible is God's Word. As such it is:
 - 1) Inerrant (has no mistakes in it)
 - 2) Infallible (cannot make mistakes)
 - 3) Inspired (alive with the very Spirit of God, who moved its human authors to record each word)
 - 4) Profound (has wisdom simple enough for the youngest child and deep enough to challenge the wisest scholar)
 - 5) A trustworthy Counselor (has been called the Owner's Manual for the human being)
 - 6) Powerful (has power to change hearts and lives)

II. There are many ways to study the Bible.

- A) Read it cover to cover, a small section each day.
- B) Consult it topic by topic.
- C) Study individual books of the Bible.
- D) Study doctrines or topics in Bible study groups.
- E) Read books by Christian authors who explain Scripture.
- F) Use a concordance to look at the use of a word, in either English or the original languages, to see what God's Word says about it.

III. Selecting a Bible

Buying a new Bible can be confusing. There's more to it than color, leather, paperback or hardback bindings. Sometimes you wish that all you had to do was ask for the RED one. We are blessed with many versions in many styles today. Here's some advice:

- A) If the readers will read the Bible cover to cover, select a READABLE version in LARGE or GIANT PRINT.
- B) If they are on the road alot, try a Bible ON CASSETTE.
- C) If they will use it for in-depth study, select a SCHOLARLY version in a STUDY BIBLE form recommended by a pastor you respect.
- D) If they construct their own Bible studies for personal or class use, get one with a GOOD, LARGE CONCORDANCE and HIGH NUMBER of CROSS REFERENCES for each verse.
- E) If they have a computer, try a BIBLE PROGRAM.
- F) If they use it heavily, select a STURDY LEATHER or LIBRARY/HYMNAL TYPE HARDCOVER.
- G) If they're a young person, try a CHILDREN's BIBLE.
- H) Are they studying a foreign language? Try one in the language they're learning.

IV. About translations (also called versions)

- A) Remember that no two words are the same. For example, try to find another English word that means EXACTLY "excellent." Does your word cover all the shades of meaning in "excellent?" It is hard to expect a translation to be "word for word."
- B) Translators are faced with two tasks.
 - 1) Preserve the exact words of the original works as closely as possible. Such a work is hard to read or understand without a great deal of study.
 - 2) Make the text speak clearly and understandably to average speakers of the new language. Such translations make the work come alive in the new tongue.
- C) If you do not read Greek and Hebrew, do your serious study with several respected versions open to the same passage.
- D) Use several translations, picking ones that best fit your use. If reading the Bible like a novel, try an easy to understand one. Doing in-depth study, try a word-for-word translation.



Dating

I. What is a date?

An activity in which a male and a female get to know each other while having fun.

II. What do Christians do on a date?

- A) They have fun.
- B) They get to know each other.
- C) They practice being kind and considerate to other people.
- D) They learn what types of people they enjoy being with.
- E) They practice the skills needed to be a good conversationalist, friend, and possibly a good husband or wife.

III. Who should you date?

- A) Someone who is a Christian, who is active in going to church, youth group, etc. This person more likely will share your values.
- B) Someone you like being with.
- C) Someone who shares your interests.
- D) Someone your parents will like.
- E) Someone who is more than just attractive, popular or will give you something other than friendship.

IV. How to plan a successful date.

- A) Invite God to come along on the date.
- B) Pick an activity both you and your date enjoy.
- C) Avoid places where you might be tempted to sin.
- D) If the person says "no," ask again.
- E) Do not see "no" as a rejection of you personally.
- F) Treat your date well.
- G) Stay within your own and your parent's limits.
- H) Discuss your standards with new dates.

V. Going steady

- A) Take your time before deciding whether or not to go steady.
- B) When you do go steady, do not “lock out” your friends and family.
- C) Remember your purpose for going steady. You like your steady and want to be together and get to know each other well.
- D) Discuss your standards again.
- E) Be twice as careful about sexual temptation.
- F) Include your “steady” in all areas of your life.
- G) Watch for signs of “the end” of the relationship.

VI. Breaking up

- A) Be straight, honest and direct with your “steady.”
- B) Let go! Do not try to get the person back.
- C) Realize that breaking up is painful — like a death in the family.
- D) For awhile, avoid dating alone. Instead, go out with long time friends.
- E) Do not look for ways to “get back” at your former “steady.”
- F) Pray for God’s help to adjust.
- G) Look for lessons in your experience.

VII. Becoming a better date.

- A) Be active in spiritual things: prayer, Bible study, church.
- B) Learn to be a better listener.
- C) Practice caring for people.
- D) Become involved in church, school, community, or hobby groups.
- E) Don’t “go hunting” for girl-, boy- friends or husbands and wives. The best dates are those whom you meet while doing things you enjoy.



Engagement

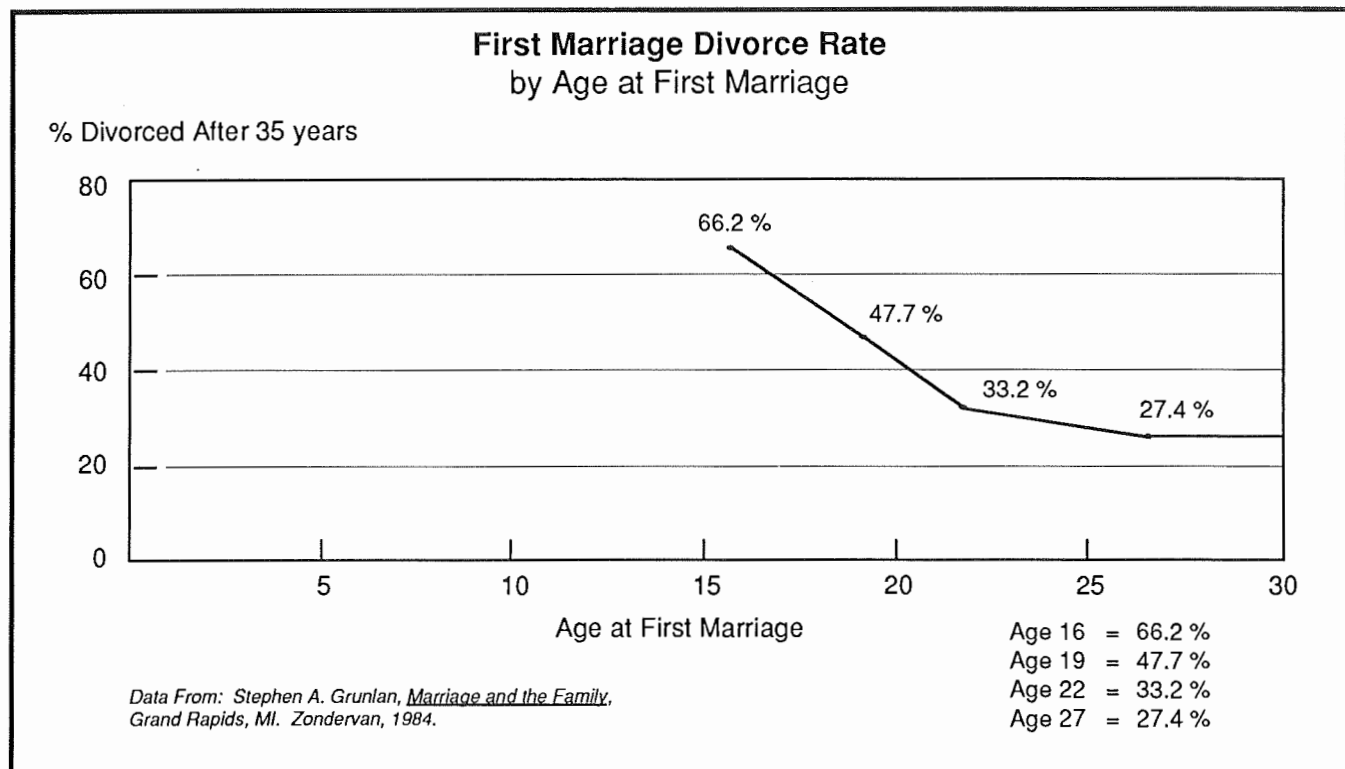
I. Engagement

- A) is the time in which a couple moves from being two single people to being a married couple.
- B) begins when a couple publicly announces that they will get married.
- C) is a busy time, full of decisions, planning and gatherings.
- D) should be quickly followed by a visit to your pastor. He will help you prepare for marriage and grow closer to each other.

II. What to look for in a future marriage partner.

Choose someone who

- A) is a Christian, active in church.
- B) has the maturity to understand this lifetime commitment.
- C) is someone like you (shares your background).
- D) is someone you like (shares your interests).



III. What to do during engagement

- A) Spend as much time together as possible.
- B) Get to know each other's family and friends.
- C) Spend a set time each day talking to each other about:
 - 1) The details of the wedding.
 - 2) How the day went and how you felt about it.
 - 3) Your dreams and plans for marriage; how many kids to have; where to live; what you like and don't like; how you do things, etc.
 - 4) Pray together.
- D) Allow yourself a little more freedom physically, but save sex for the honeymoon. Do not live together.
- E) Participate with a pastor or Christian counselor in pre-marriage counseling. Do so together with openness to learning together.

IV. Plan the wedding

A typical wedding takes at least 6 months to plan, can cost thousands of dollars and lasts only minutes.

- A) Start planning as early as possible.
- B) Budget for it. Remember:
 - 1) Pay organists: \$50-100 is appropriate.
 - 2) Donate to church or pay janitor \$50-150.
 - 3) You don't pay pastors - they are paid by your church. You may give them a gift, typically \$50-150 in cash or in value is most appreciated, especially if the pastor also provided counseling. Remember, a non-religious counseling professional costs at least \$50/hr.
- C) Expect something to go wrong!
- D) Relax. Weddings are meant to be enjoyed, not endured.
- E) Plan a reception that is affordable for you and your families and that demonstrates your values as a couple.

V. The honeymoon

- A) Don't try to do too much. Just relax and enjoy each other.
- B) Enjoy romance during times when you're well rested.
- C) Go home rested.



Marriage

I. Marriage is:

- A) God's idea - Genesis 1 and 2
- B) Two people becoming one - Genesis 1, Ephesians 5
- C) A reflection of God's nature:
 - 1) $1 + 1 = 1$

II. How to be a good spouse.

- A) Be a Good Listener.
- B) Solve your problems together.
 - 1) Each person explains her/his view of the situation.
 - 2) List everything, even crazy or silly, that will help solve the problem.
 - 3) List what you've tried.
 - 4) Agree on what to try next.
 - 5) Make an appointment with each other to see how it's working.
- C) Deal with sin.
 - 1) Be the first to apologize.
 - 2) Forgive and let go.
 - 3) When this is difficult, get help from a friend, a pastor or a counselor.
- D) Find ways to praise and to serve your partner.
 - 1) Be quick to praise your partner when he or she does something well, pleases you, or goes out of his or her way to do something nice for you.
 - 2) Say "I love you" often - at least once a day - both in words and in your actions.
 - 3) Give gifts when they're not expected, especially of your time and in helping with the routines of daily life.
 - 4) Look for ways to help your spouse.

- E) Dream together and plan together.
 - 1) Life surprises us. It is easier to face each new challenge if you've talked about it ahead of time.
 - 2) Talk about "The Next Few Years" often.
 - 3) From time to time, talk about the far future, especially getting old together and your respective dreams and worries about retirement years.

- F) Work at your marriage.
 - 1) A good, happy marriage does not just happen; both partners must work at it every day.
 - 2) Seek ways to grow together by reading and discussing the same articles about Christian marriage or spending time together at a weekend marriage retreat.
 - 3) If you are having difficulties that aren't being addressed or solved, consider getting professional counseling through your church, mental health center or from a Christian counselor. Doing so is a sign of your strength to work for a solution, not a weakness.



Christians, Sexuality and Modern America

I. Our society worships sex.

- A) Like Greece and Rome, America worships Venus, the Goddess of love.
- B) Everything is allowed between two willing partners.
- C) We are told something is wrong if we are not sexually active.
- D) Society urges us to have sex with anyone who we like a lot, is an attractive person, or is someone with whom we'd like a commitment.
- E) Sex in any form or in any place is considered exciting, noble and loving.
- F) Many things are sold by sex . (Note how cars and cosmetics are advertised).
- G) Sex is the subject of almost every movie, program and talk show.

II. In an environment like this, it is sometimes difficult to follow God's will in sexual matters.

- A) We feel pressured to tolerate destructive misuse of God's good gift of sex.
- B) We are tempted to stray from God's plan of one man and one woman united in marriage, fully committed to each other - body, mind and spirit.

III. Issues

A) Teenage Pregnancy

- 1) Sometimes teenagers have sex before marriage and become pregnant.
- 2) It is always best - although hard - to talk about it with a parent.
- 3) There's no easy solution to being pregnant and single.
- 4) Abortion simply makes the first sin worse by adding a murder.
- 5) Raising your own child is very difficult, but a solution to consider.
- 6) Perhaps the hardest consideration is to put the child up for adoption.

B) Sex Education

- 1) Schools have tried to solve the teen-age pregnancy and AIDS problems by teaching children the facts about sex.
- 2) Yet they are bound by law only to teach "the plumbing."
- 3) It is important that teens have the wisdom to use sexual knowledge.
- 4) It is important for teens to talk to parents or pastors about their questions concerning sex, both about the information itself and about how to best use it.

C) Sex in movies, on TV and in books

- 1) Most sex on TV is unreal.
- 2) No one ever seems to get sick, pregnant or have bad sex.
- 3) Sex looks easy without practice, communication or consequences.
- 4) Sex is never considered wrong as long as both people want it.
- 5) Homosexuality is normal.
- 6) Don't be fooled. None of this is real.

D) Pornography

- 1) For people to satisfy their lusts, greedy people have published magazines with pictures of men, women, children or animals having sex in every possible way.
- 2) The problem with all of this is it feeds the selfish side of us with the idea that people are just playthings for us to use any way we want and throw away when we're done.
- 3) Pornography effects us bit by bit, tarnishing our view of sex, our spouses and others.

E) Sexual Harassment

- 1) Sexual harassment is any set of unwanted sexual comments, jokes, touches, suggestions, etc. which makes a person, especially a woman, feel very uncomfortable, unsafe or afraid.
- 2) Never continue to make sexual comments, even jokes, if the person you're saying them to seems uncomfortable or asks you to stop.
- 3) It's smart never to make sexual comments about body parts or sex itself, to anyone you do not know very well.
- 4) Never touch a person's private body parts if you are not married to that person. This is especially true if you are someone's boss or have some other position of power over them.
- 5) If you feel harassed, say "no" very abruptly and loudly and if it continues, report the person to a superior immediately.
- 6) If you see someone sexually harassed, step in and warn the harasser.
- 7) Go with the victim to his or her boss if necessary

F) Rape

- 1) Rape is any sex with another person without their freely given consent.
- 2) Most of the time it is a crime of violence.
- 3) It is a crime punishable with many years of prison.
- 4) If you are faced with rape, follow your instincts. It is not wrong to give in - it may save your life. If you are raped, immediately call the police. Most departments are aware of how much this crime hurts women and will get you help. Report it immediately.

G) Lust

- 1) Jesus said that even thinking of having sex with someone you're not married to is a sin. It's a sin because it changes the way we think about a person and goes a long way towards how we treat them.
- 2) Thinking someone is beautiful is not lust. Thinking about what to do about it is. Avoid lust by cutting off the thought when it starts, avoiding sexually stimulating books and videos and finding good things to fill your time.



God's Gift of Sexuality

I. God created us as men and women (Genesis 1)

- A) God created sex and said it was very good.
- B) This gift makes two people physically one.
- C) It helps us understand God's nature as three persons in one being. Marriage lets two individuals experience physical oneness.

II. When a married couple has sex, it is the highest gift one person can give another.

- A) It takes a strong friendship and makes it closer than any other friendship possible.
- B) It meets our need for love and security.
- C) It allows two people to reflect who God really is — a being who is always giving to others.
- D) It lets a couple share in God's work of creation.
- E) It is a way to give yourself completely to another.

III. Because it is such a good gift, God wants to protect us by telling us how to use it well.

IV. Sex outside of marriage is wrong.

- A) It destroys the trust necessary to make a marriage work.
- B) You can give the gift of your virginity just once.
- C) It confuses your view of what sex is for.
- D) It confuses your view of who you are.
- E) It leads to making sex into a god.
- F) It leads to other sins being committed, such as, lying, cheating and murder. Example: David and Bathsheba.
- G) It spreads dangerous diseases. AIDS is not the only one.
- H) It leads to women becoming pregnant outside of marriage.
- I) It invades the marriage bed. You keep a piece of each sexual partner in your heart and it comes with you when you make love to others.
- J) It sometimes leads to complete loss of control over one's sex life.

V. How do you save sex for marriage?

- A) Respect the body God has given you.
 - 1) Around 12-14 years old, your body prepares you to have sex and give birth to children.
 - 2) Your body begins to produce drugs known as hormones to do this.
 - 3) They are very powerful — when you're not used to them, they make you think you'll **die** without having sex.
 - 4) You shouldn't confuse these feelings for love anymore than you confuse a laughing drunk for someone who is happy.
- B) When you are tempted to have sex before marriage — run!
- C) Take a moment to think about what sorts of touching you will allow a date to do. Never allow him or her to do something that will tempt you to go to bed with the date.
- D) Write down your beliefs and rules to keep you from being tempted.
- E) Talk about your standards with people you want to date before you date.
- F) Plan each date — tell your parents the details.
- G) Date only active Christians.
- H) On a date:
 - 1) Act as if Jesus was sitting next to you.
 - 2) Be sure both you and your date understand that **no means no**. Respect for others and yourself means stopping any time you are asked.
 - 3) Do not arouse each other physically to the point that you will have to sin to satisfy your desires.
 - 4) Think about your date as someone's future husband or wife. How do you want others treating your future spouse?



The Value of Life

I. God is the source of our life.

- A) God created every person in His Own image.
- B) He works in each person's life from its beginning at conception to its end in death.
- C) He makes us grow and keeps us alive.
- D) He is with us always.

II. Each person is God's masterpiece. (Ephesians 2:9)

- A) Each of us is unique. No two people are exactly the same - not even "identical twins."
- B) We possess just the right set of gifts, talents, background and physical make up to be a blessing to those around us.
- C) We were born into just the right family, at just the right moment, in just the right place to be of the greatest blessing to those around us.
- D) We are God's gift to the world -- literally!
- E) God has made us in His image. In Jesus, we are created to do good works, to be God-centered and others-serving.

III. God is a protector of the weak, defenseless and unloved of the world.

- A) He calls Himself the God of the orphan, the widow, the stranger and the weak.
- B) He judges our love and devotion to *Him* by how we treat *them*.
- C) He delights in choosing the weak, ordinary and common people of the world as instruments to do His greatest deeds.

IV. God reserves the right to determine when each life will end.

- A) He reminds us often that He sets the boundaries of life.

- B) No one is born without His act of creation and no one dies without His permission.
- C) His power is necessary for life to continue and thrive.
- D) Only His mercy keeps all life from ceasing.

V. Human life is sacred. God calls us to

- A) respect it.
- B) strengthen it.
- C) protect the weak and the defenseless.
- D) work hard to increase its quality and length.
- E) witness to His love and mercy so that others might share His eternal, abundant life.



Suicide

I. Suicide is to kill oneself.

II. To some people, suicide is seen as an easy way out of depression and hopelessness.

- A) Sometimes people feel alone and not important to anyone.
- B) They have problems that seem so big that they cannot solve them.
- C) They feel worthless and suffer great emotional pain.
- D) Most of the time, these individuals go unnoticed until it's too late.
- E) They are not taken seriously when they say they are going to kill themselves.
- F) Some individuals are influenced by rock bands whose music urges them to end their pain and find peace in killing themselves.
- G) Some of these individuals try to take their own lives to gain peace.

III. Most often, suicide attempts are a cry for help.

IV. Yet suicide solves nothing. God hates suicide because:

- A) It is selfish.
- B) It robs a person of a chance to live.
- C) It hurts deeply the people who love the person who commits suicide.
- D) It encourages others to kill themselves.
- E) It tries to take from God the timing of the person's death.
- F) It costs society a great deal in time, money and resources.
- G) It may put the person before the throne of God before he or she is ready.

V. When friends or acquaintances talk about committing suicide:

- A) Take them seriously.

- B) Get them talking about themselves, their lives and their reasons for being so depressed.
- C) Above all, LISTEN!
- D) Remind them that you care about them deeply.
- E) Tell them how much God loves them and how much they are worth to *Him*.
- F) Help them to see that no problem is so big that it cannot be solved or lived with, since God is always at their side.
- G) Get them to speak to a helping person (a pastor, teacher, Christian doctor or nurse, guidance counselor)
- H) Continue being a friend to them.



Abortion

I. Abortion is the taking of the life of an unborn child.

II. Abortion is murder in most cases- a horror!

- A) It kills innocent, powerless children.
- B) The people God calls to guard and protect life - parents, doctors and other helping professionals - become destroyers of life.
- C) It dehumanizes children, making them into an "accident," "just a few cells," "the product of conception," "a growth," or "a fetal mass."
- D) It reduces the value of all human life.
- E) It robs infertile couples of the chance to raise a family.
- F) It often does real, serious damage to the mother's body and brings heavy guilt and grief over the loss of a child.
- G) Some doctors may get rich killing unborn children.

III. "Pro-choice" people say abortion is permissible .

- A) "A mother has a right to do as she wants with her body. "
 - 1) This is very self-centered at best.
 - 2) Laws can control such actions, since drug addiction, suicide and prostitution are illegal in our country.
- B) "Poor, young or single women ought not to raise a child, especially alone."
 - 1) Having the baby will ruin the mother's life.
 - 2) The child will live a miserable life, which is not worth living.
 - 3) It assumes that we can decide for someone else what makes a life worth living.
 - 4) Interestingly, the Virgin Mary qualified as a poor, single, young and unwed mother-to-be.
- C) "A woman ought not be forced to give birth to a child conceived by rape."
 - 1) Rape is indeed an awful crime and becoming pregnant in this way is a nightmare.

- 2) Yet killing the child conceived in this way will not make it right, only add a new evil to the first.
- 3) God is capable of bringing good even out of this evil.
- D) "Often a mother's life is endangered by a pregnancy."
 - 1) Sometimes this is an acceptable risk. Only a mother and her doctor can decide this.
 - 2) Yet when one or both the mother and child will surely die by the birth of the child, one life should be given to save the other. An abortion is permissible in this case.
- E) "The child will be born handicapped."
 - 1) No one has the right to decide if another's life is worth living.
 - 2) Handicapped people make contributions to humanity.
 - 3) God uses all people to show His power and love.

IV. Changing the views of abortionists

- A) While we must never perform abortions or recommend them, even if legally required to, we must obey the laws in our country that do not require this.
- B) Trespassing laws are not against God's will and protect us as well as abortionists. We must obey them.
- C) Do not destroy property or take lives in the defense of the unborn.
- D) Political action, protests and speaking out are both legal and necessary in this struggle.

V. When a pregnant woman needs help, especially to support her decision not to abort a child, God wants us to support her in every possible way.

- A) Emotional support.
- B) Information on child care and medical matters.



Euthanasia

I. Euthanasia is mercy killing.

- A) Sometimes people contract illnesses which promise long, painful suffering.
 - 1) Some illnesses, like Alzheimer's disease, will not kill, but destroy the mind or severely cripple the body.
 - 2) Other illnesses promise to send the patient to the hospital again and again each time life is threatened.
 - 3) Still others promise slow, painful death over a few months.
- B) Since great suffering is hard to endure or watch, people often wish that death would end it quickly.
- C) On rare occasions, loved ones have ended the lives of suffering patients.
- D) This is called Euthanasia, which is Greek for "good death."

II. Euthanasia is wrong .

- A) God's will is for us to protect life, not take it. (Fifth commandment: "You shall not kill.")
- B) God alone has the right to give or take life.
- C) While suffering is a great evil, God can bring much good out of it. (Rom. 5, 8).
- D) Often, faith is strengthened in suffering (I Pet. 1:1-9). Sometimes it is the individual's faith, yet other times it is the power of the suffering person's witness that brings observers closer to God.
- E) Motives are often mixed with selfishness. We don't want the exhaustion, pain and financial drain of long-term care. Or, we might use the inheritance for needed expenses.
- F) Euthanasia may lead to a cheapening of human life. Killing is easier the second time around.

III. It is not killing to allow God to take someone home.

- A) When a long illness progresses, it is sometimes beyond the power of medicine to save the patient.

- B) Under such circumstances, it is alright to make the dying patient comfortable, but not to intervene if another treatable illness threatens death (i.e., heart attacks).
- C) Depending on the diagnosis, one should usually not cut off nutrition and water. It is never alright to use drugs to kill a person.
- D) To summarize: We may never kill a suffering patient, but neither are we required to save their life with artificial means.

IV. Hospitals are now required by law to ask if you have an "advanced directive" (living will) or wish to make one.

- A) Advanced directives allow you to state how you want to be treated when incapable of making your own decisions.
- B) As long as you do not direct someone to kill you (assisted suicide), you may issue advance directives.
- C) Living wills give you an opportunity to witness to your faith, say encouraging things to your loved ones and make their decisions easier.
- D) Always leave copies with people who will need the document: family, doctors, clergy.



Issues in Medical Ethics

I. Introduction

- A) Medical science has made incredible strides during the twentieth century. A baby born in 1901 could expect to live from forty to fifty years. A child born in 1991 can anticipate a life to age 80 or 90.
- B) Many diseases which used to kill people early in life have been conquered. While this is a great blessing, it has left many people to suffer from the frailties of old age and the long lasting diseases it brings. Tuberculosis, typhoid, small pox, and the like have been replaced by cancer, heart disease and stroke.
- C) The costs of long life have many complicated moral questions. Most have few "right" or "wrong" answers.
- D) Christians need to understand how to make such decisions more than what to do in certain situations.

II. Christians make life and death decisions based on the command "Thou shalt not kill" and its positive counter-part, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

- A) A Christian does not take the life of another human being.
- B) A Christian always works to defend, save and improve the life of another human being, meeting their every bodily need.
- C) Compassion and mercy are the guiding emotions in all such situations.
- D) An understanding that all people are in the hands of a compassionate God, Who hates suffering and death, is basic.
- E) God's will for a specific person's length of life is a mystery. His will for their final destiny is not.

III. Issues

A) Birth Control

- 1) God commands the human race to be fruitful and multiply.
- 2) His will is that married couples raise a family.
- 3) As with other areas of life He places under our management (stewardship), He gives us the means to plan the arrival of children.
- 4) Christians may use means of birth control for this end, providing such means act to prevent pregnancy, not end it.
- 5) Should birth control fail, a Christian couple welcomes the new child as a surprise, not as a mistake.

B) Genetic counseling

- 1) Modern technology has made it possible to look at the genetic codes of parents and unborn children. We even know what some of these genes do. In the case of some genetic diseases, we can identify who will get them.
- 2) We may take advantage of such means to prepare for children who will have special needs or to decide whether or not to have children at all. We may not use it as a way to decide whether or not to kill a child not likely to have much "quality of life."
- 3) We may also use such knowledge to "correct" defective genes, but not to produce "designer babies."

C) Overcoming Infertility

- 1) Medicine has made great progress in its efforts to overcome infertility.
- 2) Many of its solutions are time consuming, expensive and often fail.
- 3) The inability to have children does not mean a couple cannot have a family. Adoption is a God-blessed institution which places a child in need of parents in the hands of loving, caring people.
- 4) As with any other tool of science, we may use infertility techniques when they do not involve adultery or the taking of a life.
- 5) Use caution with donor artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood and the like, which have the potential of destroying families.

D) Living Wills

- 1) U.S. law requires that all institutions who provide extended medical care must ask incoming patients if they have any "advance directives," or a "living will."
- 2) A living will is a legally binding statement that expresses your wishes to your relatives and doctors concerning your treatment, should you become incapable of making your own decisions.
- 3) You are not required to have a living will.
- 4) You may have one that states you do not wish to have aggressive medical treatment, should it be certain that you will soon die.
- 5) While you may ask others not to save you under these circumstances, you may not ask others to kill you.

E) Organ Transplant

- 1) Medical science can often save people's lives by transplanting organs from one person to another.
- 2) Since our souls leave our bodies at death and since God promises to restore our bodies on the last day, there is nothing wrong with allowing the use of one's organs after death to save another's life.
- 3) If you want to do this, leave instructions in your wallet or purse and express your wish to your closest relatives.

