

Have faith in young boys

Let's play a word-association game. I'll give you a phrase. You tell me what you think of.

The phrase is "teenaged boy."

Given the limitations of publishing, newspaper readers can't tell me what you're thinking right now. But I can. Most of us, when we think of teenaged boys, think of one word: trouble. They get into trouble. They cause trouble. Mostly, they cause trouble for teenaged girls. They are predators with raging hormones



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and young women need to be kept far, far away from those troublesome teenaged boys.

It's hard to disagree. Many teenaged boys manage to get themselves into lots and lots of trouble. But, as a group, they are hardly a lost cause.

Witness the following. *Seventeen Magazine* recently partnered with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies to conduct a survey on teenaged boys on their attitudes about relationships and sex. Neither of these entities is particularly committed to promoting chastity as a lifestyle, so I for one didn't have very high hopes for the outcome of the poll.

I was wrong.

What would you expect teen boys to say about sex and relationships? Most of us would expect them to say that they want sex, they expect sex, they seek sex and they'll take sex whenever and however they can find it.

Imagine my surprise when I saw that 66 percent of the respondents said that they could be happy in a relationship without sex. Similarly, 66 percent said they would rather have a girlfriend and no sex than have sex and no girlfriend. More than half (58 percent) would not have sex with a girl unless they really loved her and, in fact, 75 percent would rather wait to lose their virginity to someone they love than to lose their virginity as soon as possible. Given the squishy definition of "love" that hampers most teen relationships, that's far from a perfect answer, but it's also far from the stereotype of the horny teenaged boy out to "get it" any way he can. And, in news that warmed my heart, nearly half are virgins and about the same number said that it's good to wait to have sex until they were married.

There's plenty in this poll for young girls to note. Nearly three out of four say that they respect a girl

would rather have a girlfriend who is smart and funny than one who is "super hot." So for the girl who would rather be a girlfriend than a hook-up, it would appear that "smart and funny" is a better way to go.

It's no surprise that boys are affected by the sexualization of the society around them. But it's a little surprising that they're so aware of it, and that they resent it. More than three quarters (78 percent) said there is "way too much pressure" on them to have sex, and nearly as many (73 percent) said that teens and young adults take sex "way too lightly."

Here's good news for parents. Two-thirds of the guys who have talked to their parents about sex reported that they found it helpful. But the bad news is that only slightly more than half of the boys polled reported having had such conversations with their parents.

My conclusion is that there are a lot of very good guys out there, which reinforces what I found when I was giving talks to teenagers. Young men would frequently go out of their way to come up and thank me after a talk, telling me that the chastity message was helpful and meant a lot to them.

The problem is that these young men are under pressure from so many sources. There's the social pressure, which we've already discussed. Then there are the biological influences. Testosterone makes young men "ready" for sex on a biological level (which is much different from being "ready" on any other level) at a much earlier age than young women. And because the construct of the male physique makes sex much more "exterior" for men than women, young men are more emotionally capable of sexual activity without emotional entanglement. Differences in the male brain make it more difficult for young men to access and express their feelings, reinforcing the stereotype that they are "insensitive."

Don't get me wrong — I'm still in favor of stringent screening processes for the young men who want to spend time with the young women we love. But I also believe in giving credit where credit is due. God created men with certain gifts and certain challenges. He did it for a reason and those challenges can also be their strength, if purified and channeled correctly.

Parents of boys — you make a difference. You have far more influence than you probably realize. Use it. Don't cop out on them, or assume they're going to "do it anyway." They want your guidance. So guide them. Lead them straight to Christ and He'll take them the rest of the way.