

## Teens Who Abstain

Summarized by Bob Young

The church is concerned about its youth. A recent issue of the “Christian Chronicle” addressed the question again—what can we do to help our youth develop faith and Christian lifestyles? The next issue of the same publication addressed the disconnection between many singles and religious expression. What is the solution?

Of possible help in addressing these questions and the dynamics involved are the results of a survey in late 2008. The media reported that the probability of teenage abstinence from sex was not decreased by vows of abstinence of chastity. Now we have learned that teens who abstain from sex share some characteristics, according to government-supported research at the Heritage Foundation. The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health identified eight personality and behavioral traits that were associated with both abstinence (and academic achievement).

- Future orientation, with a focus on long-term goals, unwilling to sacrifice the long-term vision for short-term desires
- Willingness to postpone current pleasures for larger future rewards, with the accompanying ability to evaluate and prioritize the best possible outcomes, including the ability to overcome desires for immediate gratification
- Perseverance, the ability to stick to a task or commitment
- A belief that current behavior can positively affect the future
- Impulse control, including ability to control emotions and desires
- Resistance to peer influence
- Respect for parental and social values
- Sense of self-worth and personal dignity

Abstinence also is associated with better physical and mental health across socioeconomic groups, according to a summary of the study in *U.S. News & World Report*. And those youth who make abstinence decisions are far more likely to attend and graduate from college than those who are sexually active.

These characteristics from the Heritage Foundation research would be a good beginning point for any church or group of church leaders interested in understanding what kind of biblically-based curriculum and principles would be helpful in healthy spiritual development among our young people.