

# appraising god's property appraising god's property keesa schreane

There were no curfews set for me in high school. My parents didn't bother. My friends usually had parents like mine who told them, "You know better than to come back in this house at all times of night." But people with less strict homes were generally so afraid of my six-foot-one, 250-pound daddy that they never fixed their mouths to suggest a post-midnight rendezvous.

My first year of college delivered me from my southern, old-fashioned Baptist upbringing right into the land of temptation. And, oh, did temptation look ripe for the picking! Sometimes it was a sexy six-foot-plus, caramel coated, muscled mass of iron. Other times, temptation emerged while I listened to my girlfriends recount their steamy weekend experiences, wondering what it would be like to get a little "groove" of my own. Scariest of all, I found temptation withering in my head, tainting the thoughts that I tried to keep innocent.

At the time, I saw sexuality as pure evil, whether it materialized

in my thoughts, the way I moved or the looks I saw in my male companions' eyes. After a beautiful night of dinner, conversation and occasional hand-holding, I dreaded the moment when young men poised themselves for the infamous good-night kiss. My firm-but-polite *no* resounded in the still darkness of my doorway, sending them scrambling for their egos. I was lucky to be left with a light peck on the forehead and a "Well, I'll call you tomorrow, Keesa," before they fled the premises in shock and embarrassment.

In high school, I belonged to a youth group that traveled around Tennessee promoting abstinence and the use of contraception. Group members, who ranged from abstinents to teen parents, were required to understand and discuss condoms, birth control pills and diaphragms. This early knowledge of such a taboo subject gave me a tinge of maturity I would have otherwise lacked. Although I had the giggling, timid reactions during my first lessons, I later grew to understand the need for sex education. If I was going to be a virgin, at least I could be an enlightened one.

My role as abstinent teen had plenty of challenges. Inmates in the various detention centers we visited thought they had the tools to crank my engine. I would deliver my panel speech on why I didn't have sex. Then the lewd, crude comments began: "Can I get with you?" or "What's wrong, nobody wants you or something?"

Frankly, I didn't understand the preoccupation with sex and why it was so difficult to resist. At the time, I wanted to pursue a career as a journalist and actress. I had no intentions of giving this up for one night of ecstasy. Waiting for the development of my career, and the development of a husband, seemed to be a wise choice for me.

My church, and the warm support of its members, encouraged this resolve. Growing up as the youth secretary, usher, choir member and all-around good girl rooted me in the religious reasons to hold onto my virginity for dear life. I got constant reassurance from the

church folk. From the well-intentioned deaconess who delivered the "Don't let the boys fool you" tirade to my pastor's stern "Are you sticking to your church teachings?" lecture, I was more than a little bit scared to stray. Once I left the security of those church walls, I ventured on my own to study God's rules and why they are what they are. I came to a deeper spiritual understanding of my abstinence at a time when I seemed to be the last lone soldier.

In my undergraduate career, I was thrust into a land where booty calls were "in" and waiting until the third date to hold hands was "out." And all four years, I was definitely out.

I experimented with the dating game, but the rules were too confusing: Meet a guy, become attached at the hip, fall in love, try to make him love you back. And somehow, the same disastrous results followed. A mysterious phenomenon would occur, leaving my girlfriends red-eyed and teary or swept into a tempestuous rage, cursing the day they ever laid eyes on their former loves.

I quickly concluded that having a serious relationship during college was not tops on my agenda. Instead, I dated a few select men who met my strict standards. For several months, I enjoyed the company of a young, respectable businessman who thought my innocence was cute. His handsome looks, three-piece suits, sensuous fragrances and shiny Lexus always elicited stares and looks of admiration from my dormmates. After a few weeks of holding his hand in shows and restaurants, I allowed the cheek kissing on the doorstep. I let him know upfront that the horizontal touchy-feely stuff was not my cup of tea. After a few failed attempts to change my mind, he finally gave up.

Then, I found friendship with a sweet undergrad who didn't expect sex, seemingly for the same reasons I didn't. I felt completely at ease with his cheek kissing and light embraces after dates. I saw no need to settle down with one man. I was flying high! Among my

peers, I was an anomaly—a sexually inactive fox of sorts—because I gathered a whole harem of admirers who wanted to be around me even though I wasn't giving it up.

Then, it happened. After dating what I took to be the most sophisticated, funny, intelligent man in the universe, I thought, *maybe it's time for a real relationship . . . a real (and, of course) sex-free relationship*. Why not? As a graduate student, I was immersing myself in my profession and developing into a healthy, emotionally stable woman. He was an MBA candidate with a burgeoning career. He complimented me, cooked for me and adored me.

After several weeks of dating, he finally cut to the chase and asked for an exclusive relationship. Along with my request for time to consider his proposition, I blithely delivered my “no sex” spiel. Here are highlights from the remainder of our conversation:

He: Can we make love, sweetheart?

She: No!

He: Why not, sweetheart?

She: Because I want to wait.

He: How long, sweetheart?

She: Until I'm married.

He: Later, baby!

I was hot! I was hurt! How dare he ditch me because I wouldn't share myself in that way? Why would he reject my mind, heart and spirit because I wouldn't share my body? It took a few conversations with God and my parents to show me that he obviously wasn't worth my time.

It took courage, but I had to admit to the painful reality that this man wasn't the only one out there who felt this way. I have come across many people who have ridiculed, denounced or misunderstood my reasons for abstinence. These reactions led me to ask myself some hard-hitting questions. Are sexually active people

ignorant to the fact that I can be a sexy siren without having sex? Yes! My girlfriends are always confident that they can cast spells on men with erotic gestures and suggestive looks. But when they see me dating a classy *GQ* type or stepping into a formal event with the hottest date in the room, I'm always questioned on how I managed it.

I can feel attractive in my body—and project this—without having to allow men to act on their attraction. Have I set the feminist movement back a couple centuries with my loyalty to virginity? I do think of myself as a modern woman. I disagree with the notion that I'm enslaving myself by abstaining. Just the contrary—it's empowering for me. The feminist movement has stressed the importance of women “owning” their bodies—and I am nothing if not in control of what happens to and within my body.

Should I feel relief knowing that I debunk and add humor to the myth of black women as sexually insatiable creatures who live only to fulfill those desires? It gives me great pleasure to know that I have a *choice* in my sexual behavior. I wear the gifts of my beauty and intelligence with pride.

These questions are burdensome, but because my choice of abstinence is based on a higher authority, the answers are a source of strength. My faith in God keeps me steady. My relationship with God is spiritual, but my body reflects the strength our relationship gives me.

I am a structured person because I have goals I plan to reach. Treating my body as sacred is the foundation for that. Physical health is important to me. No matter what the temperature or weather condition, I usually spend my mornings in the company of other dedicated walkers and joggers. Friends believe that I border on obsession with my habit of drinking two glasses of water with each meal. I believe that what I put on the inside shows up on the outside. Mentally, I challenge myself to read one book a month, no matter what

my school workload is like. I find that reading and attending arts performances and lectures add a dimension of culture to my life. Emotionally, I use my personal time to reaffirm my self-love and to clear away negativity.

God lives within me, which makes my body a special place. I think of it as a temple. When I share my temple with someone, I must be a complete person—the person God wants me to be. Then I'll be able to share myself with my partner, body and soul.