

“What does the Lord require of you?”

by Amy Johnson

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The National Criminal Justice Reference Service publishes a document called “Bystander-Focused Prevention of Sexual Violence.” Among their recommendations are heightening awareness, having a sense of responsibility, being confident in one’s ability to help, building skills, and having policies that support intervention.

I believe it is important to realize that we are all bystanders in this moment in history regarding sexuality issues in our society and our world.

That means we all need to heighten our awareness of the injustices around us regarding gender, privilege, orientation, and stigma.

It means this responsibility belongs to each one of us. It means it is time to figure out how to build confidence and skills to deal with uncomfortable topics in our circles. And it means that we need to make intervention the norm -- instead of the deadly silence too many places and too many churches now condone regarding matters that have to do with sexuality.

As part of my job, I am fortunate to be able to have conversations with people who want to begin a sexuality education ministry. It is not easy work, nor work that comes without controversy. In fact, just the phrase “sexuality education ministry” is enough to send some people either fleeing quickly or raising their voices in condemnation and judgment.

As people of faith, though, we are not required to only do what is easy.

People who are willing to even think about doing this work are people who want to put their faith into action by giving accurate information to people, within their value systems. They want to create space for people to live in their bodies without shame, to connect in authentic ways, to develop and nurture intimacy, to be educated about how bodies work, and maybe enjoy a few awkward laughs along the way.

People who are willing to pick up this yoke are well aware of injustices in our society and our world around stereotypes, gender, power, and violence in relationships. They are all too aware of the ways in which sexuality is damaged and portrayed as less-than-sacred, and how this has life-changing consequences not only for our youth, but also for families, couples, and adults throughout lifetimes.

Sexuality education ministry is a ministry of doing justice, of loving kindness, and of walking humbly with our God.

You only need to look at headline news these days to see how sorely this work is needed in our world. We see leaders who are openly demeaning women, prominent athletes who are virtually excused for criminal behavior due to white male privilege, people who are gunned down because of their ethnicity and orientation, and more than half of HIV-infected people in the world left untreated even though we now have the ability to effectively manage the disease.

We need to be brave enough to talk about sexuality-related issues matter-of-factly. And we need to do so in ways that invite people into these conversations instead of shaming folks and shutting them out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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