

Nappies to Nuptials

Have you ever thought about the fact that you are raising husbands and wives?

When I ask a group of young mums if they expect their child to be abstinent at marriage they tend to be somewhat startled! I don't blame them - they're too busy with the business of living and managing babies and toddlers to have thought about that yet! Some are not long married themselves and can hardly imagine their little ons that far in the future! I also don't blame them for their surprise at that question because it was my reaction the first time someone asked it of me! I also recognised that I felt a number of internal conflicts at having to answer that question...

- Firstly being a Christian - I felt I *should* say yes!
- But second I'm painfully aware of the reality of statistics and what that represents on the word's terms for our children.
- I didn't want to lie and say I expected it when deep down I doubted it and
- I didn't want to deny what I believe is best and right and true either!

I think in the end I answered that I *hoped* for that.

In the years since I have come to hope and train into that outcome with a passion. I'm so grateful that person forced me to think so specifically of the future of our children.

These days though, not only do we hope and train into our children being abstinent... but we've come to understand a difference between being abstinent and pure... There's a lot more to purity than remaining a virgin!

Last time I was here I finished with the remark that marriage should represent the place of sexual freedom. I want to recognise that some that are married have a problem with that comment due to difficult experiences, disappointments, hurts and marriage breakdown. I don't want to minimise anyone's pain but I've never met a parent yet who didn't want their child's experience to be better than their own.

Wanting it better for the next generation is the foundation from which I speak. When we come to terms with the fact our own lives have perhaps not been all we once looked forward to, or that we carry scars and regrets for different reasons and then begin to be healed and released from that, we break free of the chains that bind us to silence and fear and inaction.

Many parents are fearful of setting or speaking or teaching into a standard they didn't live. They fear the

implications of being seen as a hypocrite or their own story 'granting permission' or excuses to their young ones. They fear opening channels of communication with their kids that may lead to areas they carry shame and regret about.

There is much could be said about that alone but my point here is that if we want to see young people equipped to manage their whole lives... including their sexuality... with purity and purpose we must move beyond our fears and begin to empower our children. Silence won't do it. Silence isn't silent anyway - it's the hole into which any and all other voices can fall.

If we want our children to marry someone that will love them for the whole of their person for the whole of their lives they are going to need to know that their whole person is worthy of love attention and respect, not just their physical appearance or sexual attractiveness. We see Hollywood intent on maintaining appearance and youth... but do we see models of happier lifelong or more fulfilled marriages there? The love that will last through illness and wrinkles and weight gain and stress - can't be founded in mere sexuality.

Neither is sexuality a gift to only the young and physically beautiful but a gift which can still find expression in the kind of love that endures illness and wrinkles and weight gain and stress.

I remember a local pastor here in Perth who said "a great lover is not a man who pleases many women throughout his life, but one who pleases one woman for the whole of her life".

Unless your kids are teenagers (and maybe even then) their possible marriages can seem a long way ahead... but time passes so quickly and if we want to reach a certain destination we need to start somewhere.

If you want your sons to marry free of the shadows of regret, and free of the shadows created by the disrespect of women's bodies, the preparation for that is best to begin long before his desires take him down harmful paths.

As my next example uses modesty, please be clear that modesty does not equal frumpy!

A girl at 16 who chooses modesty out of her heart intuitively knows:

- That she's worth waiting for
- That her body is intended for purity
- That she doesn't have to compete with other women/girls for attention or admiration
- That a person who shows no interest in her because of her lack of physical display is not someone she needs to know

- That she wants people to appreciate her for *her* not the amount of skin she is showing (how many models faces do you remember after turning the magazine page?)
- That she's worthy of great value regardless of comparison to others (whatever the current measure of cultural beauty)
- That she wants her friends comfortable around her rather than in competition with her
- That inspiring sexual interest in others is not a complement to her
- That inspiring sexual interest in others disrespects those who are trying to live pure

A boy at 16 who chooses purity in a free and informed way knows:

- He is worth waiting for
- That he can trust all good things to be there for him *in the right time*
- That his purpose in life is not to do with the conquest of girls
- That his masculinity has nothing to do with the amount of attention he inspires from girls
- That he is free to pursue the purpose for which he is only 16 at this time... to learn... grow... find his place in life...
- That it takes more courage and strength to be pure today than it does not to be pure.

- That it takes more courage and strength to be pure today than ever before.

Living these choices is not without difficulty or struggle... but that's another topic!

There is immense value in thinking on these things when our children are still very small - those that do have the advantage of time.

Recent studies from the Barna Institute show that a persons moral foundations are usually pretty much in place by the age of 9 and that what they believe rarely changes after age 13. This lends great urgency to the first decade of parenting and shows that waiting to establish attitudes about marriage till the teen years is very risky. During a parents waiting years, the world will have had plenty to say about what it presents as 'normal, expected or healthy' and this will have formed the moral base by default.

www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=153

This fits perfectly with the Jewish tradition of bar-mitzvah - where according to moral law a young man is considered part of the adult community.

Proverbs 31 is an acrostic poem taught by the mother of a king to her very young son. The poem teaches the boy the character of a virtuous wife! Why teach this at such

a young age? In part, because children have a great capacity for memorization and recall... just look at the way they memorise movie lines!

This boy was most likely King Solomon of ancient times and his mother was Bathsheba. She's a woman who made some mistakes and was used by the most powerful man of her day. It tickles my sense of irony that one of the most famous portions of King Solomon's writings comes to us from a woman mostly who has been held in pretty low esteem.

There is a character based version of this poem as an English acrostic available for purchase from Purity Paradigm. You'll find the original version in Proverbs 31!

This tells me that Bathsheba grew from her experiences and that our mistakes do not exclude us from being vital to our children's preparation for life.

There's another 'word picture' of another King who was rebuilding a city wall while under attack. The workers built the wall whilst wearing their weapons on their sides. This is a picture of parenting for purity also. We are to build and protect simultaneously.

Parenting for purity won't be a perfect achievement. We're foolish if we think it can be. But our efforts as parents need to increase with the times, just as the

temperature of a refrigerator needs to be altered in order to cope as the heat of summer increases.

Just like those builder/warriors - we can expect to come under fire - but even those attacks can make us stronger and more determined if we learn from them. I read a quote from CS Lewis where he said "the only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection". As soon as we *stop trying* on the basis of not being able to achieve perfection - we've lost the battle.

The standard - like a banner or a flag - has got to be held high in order to be visible. To be a point that people can aspire to and work towards.

I believe it's a mistake to section off our sexuality as something separate to the whole person. It is a powerful force but out of balance if not viewed as both feeding into and being fed from all areas of our whole self - heart, soul, mind and strength. Or you could look at that as being the areas of morality, emotions, intellect and body.

Sexuality is a part of the whole of the life process. For sometime now it has been taught with massive emphasis and copious amounts of information then wrapped with external rules. When we see sexuality infused with the beauty of true relationship-based morality we are free.

As parents we are to provide for our children's needs through protection, preparation, empowerment and across all of these areas in a progressive fashion increasing their wisdom and allowing them to retain the innocence of childhood due them. The method must match the message.

There is great urgency to instil character and values when children are young. We see this as we teach respect, honour, honesty, obedience etc while small - establishing right behaviour even when they are too young to understand why, but then moving them through to those moral reasons why so they can transition from obedience to responsibility. The crisis in marriages today is to do with character, beliefs and values.

Do you want your children to have great marriages? Begin now to teach them how to *be* and to *recognise* people of great character. Relationships with siblings and friends both provide a great training ground. Talk about real people your children know and admire and ask your children their reasons why... they are kind, caring, they take time to notice etc etc etc

I don't believe any family needs to be fearful or bound by statistics when there is passion and vision and planning (based on a foundation of truth) to be used as the fuel towards a different future. No matter the stage of parenting or lack of perfect circumstances.

Summary points:

- Consider your heart's desires for your children's marriages
- Seek healing and freedom from your own past
- Grow in knowledge and confidence in your role as teacher to your children
- If purity and character are priorities for you, measure everything by those standards (Begin as you mean to go)
- Teach about sexuality as a part of the whole person not with unbalanced or disconnected emphasis
- Focus more on character than sexual information or rules
- The method must match the message
- Know your kids' future can be great, be informed and involved in helping them plot their course
- Don't wait to get started