

Regret to Grace to Hope

A couple of years ago we conducted a little experiment in our family. I wanted to teach into the level of nit-picking and bickering that was present at that time so I stuck a piece of paper down the length of the pantry door and began writing...

I began with the words:

"McEwan Family Rules"

- Don't tease
- Don't tease till the other person gets upset
- Don't deny what you did
- Don't over-react
- Don't dob
- Don't pretend you didn't hear
- Don't quote rules at each other
- Don't nick off without finishing your jobs

Not to mention a few more like

- Don't squidgie Caitlin's tummy
- Don't stick masking tape on your lips
- Don't fry your mum's brain
- Don't forget to tell Dad when Mum burps

We made it to 174 rules before deciding to stop after about 3 days of misery. What we found was that these rules made us more miserable and kept us focussed on

the things we were doing wrong. This was in fact part of the purpose of the exercise and it was interesting to see the children whittle this mammoth list back to the two points the Bible uses to sum everything up... to love God and love your neighbour.

When we focus on rules and failure, life and the possibility of growth is squeezed out of us. This is not Life or Freedom or Purity. I believe that there is a space between black and white (wrong and right), but that space is not shades of grey, but rather; grace.

A law is an external requirement... the Spirit is both alive and also gives life. Paul was a major mover and shaker of his time and his words live on now 2000 years later.

Something he wrote was this:

*2CO 3:6b...not of the letter but of the Spirit;
for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

Grace gives freedom to grow. It understands that others are moving from a different starting point and that their journey towards the same goal may look different from the outside.

Grace doesn't deny truth but weaves together justice, mercy and humility.

MICAH 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Even when grace has been absent - we have the opportunity to grant it back.

Grace given and grace perceived both give opportunity to move forward.

If we dare to be honest about our responses we may sometimes find seeds of shame or guilt long concealed. The world has worked hard at eradicating all negative emotions as bad, but even these have a purpose for good - for if we allow it, they can take us to a place of readiness for change. Shame and guilt show us we are vulnerable - that there is something needing attention.

Of course there is also the possibility of *false* shame or guilt - no one needs to live under that pressure! Growing Families teaches a concept known as 'the prohibitive conscience' - this being the state of *perpetual possible guilt!*

Many of us have regrets and hurts in our lives. Purity is *not* yet another avenue for condemnation but the place where we can be healed and move forward. It is a place

where we reset our mistakes and regrets as motivation to make it better for the generations to follow.

I'm not talking about attending rallies or picketing Parliament house... our culture needs people who recognize the need for change and will live it from the inside out - in an authentic, simple and practical way. When change touches our hearts, we simply live in response to that.

Change-makers are people who've made mistakes. Who have faced the sorrows and perhaps consequences of their past. They are people with hearts like a mother or a father who want things to be better for their children. In different senses they are both ordinary *and* extraordinary! They are people not afraid to be different to their culture - for there can be no change if there is no difference. They are people who've combined their regrets and desires into positive force for growth and change.

So what do we see that we would want different to society's 'norms' for our children? What trends do we NOT desire for our children and why?

Marriage breakdown and divorce for one. *Not* so that we can improve a statistic but because we want to save them pain. And not just the event of the divorce ITSELF but the situations leading to and resulting from it. No one

that's lived this course found it a picnic! I want to save our children this pain with the same passion and force I'd want to save them from falling into a burning building. Maybe we can't 'save' them. But maybe we can learn some lessons from the past and equip and empower them to make better choices from a wider foundation - at the outset.

So what symptoms do I see?

Current day statistics.

- Year 10 students who have had... intercourse: 25%¹
- Year 12 students: just over 50%¹
- As many as 80% (average across yr 10 & 12) are participating in some form of sexual activity. 91% have had intercourse by 20 years of age¹
- It is estimated one quarter of ALL TEENS have an STD - many of whom will never know it as there are no visible symptoms that emerge before a number of other conditions - including a range of cancers - can emerge 2-3 decades later in life.²
- "Abortions were the second most common reason for young women aged 12 to 24 to be admitted to Australian hospitals in 1997-98." ³

¹Latrobe University; ²"Teen Sex is Killing our Kids" Dr Meg Meeker;

³The West Australian Newspaper

www.latrobe.edu.au/cleu/sexual_health.htm

It's easy to read statistics in a very cold and impersonal way but it's not so comfortable when we measure these numbers by our own families or communities.

In a family of 4 Children, present day statistics would indicate the following:

- One won't be a virgin at 15. The younger a person, the more partners in a lifetime and the more associated risk of disease. This without considering the emotional trauma, the moral or spiritual beliefs as factors.
- Two out of four by age 17.
- Three out of four will be engaged in some form of sexual activity before finishing high school
- If there are six other children in your street (and you have four), only one of the 10 will have stayed abstinent till age of 20.
- If they marry according to average age for Australians today - they'll be 30. For some that's half their lives being sexually active before committing to marriage
- One out of your four kids will have an STD before age 20
- Two or three will have an STD at some point in their life
- How many possibilities for broken hearts and lives can all this represent in just one short lifetime?

What if you consider the children gathered for assembly in your very own school... A school of 400 kids means

- 100 no longer virgins at 15

- 200 by 17
- 300 sexually active in some form at 17
- Only 40 of 400 remain abstinent till age 20
- Many less by the time they marry at age 30
- 100 with an STD before turning 20. An average of 10 more years to spread disease to several - mostly without ever knowing as some diseases present no initial symptoms.

In the US - At least 50 percent of sexually active men and women acquire an HPV infection at some point in their lives. By age 50, at least 80 percent of women will have acquired an HPV infection.

www.cdc.gov/STD/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm

HPV is the only known cause of cervical cancer

www.health-science-report.com/

There is much in the news at present about the new vaccine for HPV. I agree whole heartedly that abstinence is the best prevention, but when you consider the statistics, and measure the likelihood of your own child remaining abstinent plus the likelihood of them marrying someone else who has remained abstinent - we see the chances of even being married and disease free falling drastically.

So after all that - is change really possible?

YES.

George Barna says:

"Most people do not believe that there is any source of absolute moral truth. Even born again individuals are abandoning the notion of law based on scriptural principles. Families, who hold a major responsibility for shaping the moral values and attitudes of children, are ill-equipped to do that job in relation to a Christian worldview or on the basis of a comprehensive and coherent notion of faith-based truth. The result is that busy people, regardless of their faith affiliation, wing it when it comes to moral decisions. Religious institutions could greatly influence people in these areas, but they'd have to substantially alter their existing strategies."

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=97>

Something amazing has happened in Uganda over the last decade and a half.

In 1994, 60% of 13-16 year olds were sexually involved. By 2001, 60% had become just 5%

National statistics for HIV in Uganda dropped from 15% prevalence to 5% prevalence between

1991 to 2001. That's a drop of over two thirds!!!
This decline is unique worldwide!!!

Case study published by the U.S. Agency for International Development
(2002),
"What Happened in Uganda? Declining HIV Prevalence, Behavior Change, and
the National Response."

Did you notice the statistics of sexually involved 13-16 year olds in Uganda (60% in 1994) has a frightening resemblance to our present day statistics for the same age group?

What did Uganda do? They instituted Health programs which flew in the face of the generally accepted Public Health measures already in place. They dared to go against the grain of institutional thinking and watched the National statistics for disease and promiscuity dropping to approximately one third of their previous levels and one third of the surrounding countries.

Next week... we'll begin looking at the answers to these questions:

- What five areas are almost universal in those who wait?
- How can we implement these findings?
- What are the threats?
- Why does it matter if my children are still little?