

# Of Sandbags and Swords

A caller after the program last week made the important point that we need to help kids make better choices regarding the internet.

There are two Issues I want to bring out of this...

## **1. The internet as a social issue**

We need to think in terms of parenting but also of the wider social implications.

*"That which is common... becomes that which is expected which is then considered normal and eventually considered healthy" - Gary Ezzo.*

We have an obligation to stand against the watering down of social standards - like sandbags against flood waters. This is in fact still a parenting issue, as all our kids will live and move in their community, rubbing shoulders with those who have and who have not learned and benefited from discernment. Our kids will probably all have contact in their lives with those whose lives are impacted by the worst of the worst internet content. If (though legislation for ISP's to provide filtering at their level) all we did was remove the worst of the worst we would still impact the community for good.

Percentage of 16-17-year-olds who've had exposure to Internet pornography:

- boys, 84%
- girls, 60%

Just under a quarter of boys and 7% of girls 'accidentally' encounter sex sites every week.

Percentage of 16- to 17-year-olds who have watched X-rated videos:

- boys, 73%
- girls, 11 %

*About 4-5% of boys identify as frequent (weekly) users of pornography.*

*Source: Michael Carr-Gregg, commenting in the Australian, 29/12/03, p.11, on a report by Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, Youth and pornography in Australia: Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects, The Australia Institute, Canberra, 2003.*

Observations of a decade in an STD Clinic - Audrey Werner *"In 1991 the average age of children commencing having sex was 16. By 1999 children as young as 10 were sexually active. In 1991 we carried out routing aids testing on adult men. By 1999 we were testing 10 year old boys. In the 1990's US pornography laws were loosened... in 1995 the pornography industry boomed and in 1996 we witnessed a dramatic increase in date rape".*

## 2. The internet as an issue of parenting

This comment from this caller is absolutely correct. Even if everything defined as pornography was removed from the internet there would still be a need for discernment and for parental involvement

Learning and living discernment requires more than protection... more than just keeping negative forces at bay. At this point I want to broaden the discussion from internet issues to parenting for purity.

There are four areas I see as high priority. These are...

- a) Protection
- b) Preparation
- c) Provision and
- d) Empowerment.

Before I visit each of those areas I want to say that *each one of them* is to be applied to the *whole person*.

Our heart, soul, mind and strength.

- Strength being our physical capacity,
- Mind being the intellect,
- Soul is to do with emotional capacity,
- The heart - being the place of deep knowing, the moral capacity.

There are areas of heart understanding that are inborn. No one has to be taught a sunset is beautiful. That

kindness makes you happy. That murder or theft is wrong. Other areas of the heart understanding are to be taught and developed.

For too long the topic of purity has been left in the physical arena alone. Impurity does not begin in the body... that is just the final symptom. Impurity and purity both begin in the heart - in desire.

*James 1:14-15 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

The emotions and the mind are both gateways to the heart. If we're going to be serious about purity we need to see that and how we are to apply Protection, Preparation, Provision and Empowerment across the Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength.

I do see it as helpful though to be aware of some basics here. We are to both guard our own hearts, and do the job of guarding over our children's hearts (until they are ready by degrees for ownership themselves).

## **The Four Priority Areas:**

1. Provision is the simplest to discuss so we'll take that first.

Quite simply, provision is to be a constant - in accordance with their needs as appropriate to the stage of life. And the supply of our love as appropriate to their stage of life.

Love Languages rate a mention here... How many of life's shipwrecks are simply wrong answers to right questions? Wrong answers to right love needs?

2. Protection is a huge area... this is just a few thought prompters

Protection should be a given in many areas... if it's not, it is neglect which is a form of abuse. Health, safety, shelter etc are unquestionable. As my topic is purity my comments are confined to that which will promote or hinder specifically in that goal.

Parenting for purity involves much more than protection, but it does still involve protection. Protection is a pretty emotive word. We can tip the balance from protection to pride as soon as we consider another family EITHER overprotective or underprotective. My purpose here is to recognize it as a necessary element. One that we all do - just in differing degrees - in our families.

To some the very word protection is equated with over-protection. We all tend to asses one another on the basis

that our own position is the correct one. We can consider someone who protects their children from more influences than ourselves as "over the top" or equally be scandalized by less filtering.

We need to:

- a) Consider our own field of responsibility
- b) Remember another family's differing starting point
- c) Stay teachable in case there is more to be learned perhaps in either
  - i) Recognizing an over-reliance on protection or
  - ii) Recognizing more about any possible dangers associated with media such as
    - \*The manipulation of feelings... revenge, justification of untruth etc
    - \*The cultivation of a mindset of opposing moral views and values. (Very little modern media is supportive of Christian values)
    - \*Early sexualization... not just explicit media but also innuendo and implied activity.

*RSVP America - EXPLICIT IMAGERY AND LANGUAGE IS HARMFUL*

*Neurochemical science affirms that all imagery is real to the human brain whether the setting is scientific, educational or pornographic. All sexually explicit media have the effect of obscenity and alter the development of young brains physiologically and neurochemically.*

Something about sexual imagery seats itself differently in the mind to all other imagery. Violence comes close but sexual things are really in a class of its own. Combine this with violence and you have something truly explosive.

One place where we may have legitimate cause for concern over someone else's standard is where the care of our own children intersects with the care of other adults. As far as family friendships go, sit down and discuss allowable movies etc. If you don't know this person well enough to have that discussion, do you know them well enough to trust them with the care of your child? If this occurs in a school setting, be proactive in finding out if and what your school's viewing policies and guidelines are. Go in gentleness and respect with reason and confidence.

In ancient times a city wall was for the protection of that city. In our culture our purity boundaries have fallen under assault. We need to rebuild them.

Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls while the city was under attack. They built with tools in their hands and swords at their sides. We need to do the same for our families.

We are to watch at the wall (build and defend) and be watchful within. Solomon wrote of a vineyard being

ruined by little foxes. Small and cunning critters able to make it through the gaps in the perimeter. It's so easy to become complacent either as an individual, a parent or a leader but we must be on watch for the little foxes too. These may take the form of attitudes, wrong or absent teaching, pride etc.

So, what do children need to be protected from?

I have plenty of ideas... what about you?

Have you ever sat down and thought about your goals in the area of purity?

What children need to be protected from are the things that are going to hinder rather than help them.

Our protection is to:

- a) Give way to *their* ownership for self protection
- b) Not be considered an end in itself - it is part of developing a functioning active ability of discernment.

i.e. If we don't protect from anything how will they know self protection matters? If we never speak about the things they are being protected from how will they know? It's not just the absence of the problem but the presence of governing values that matter.

Protection is not just in the physical realms but also of the emotions, mind and heart.

Strategies for self protection taught and modeled while children are young (such as "bouncing the eyes").

How much does that romantic fiction or movie help a daughter to be content as a single?

How much does that movie packed with innuendo and immodesty help a son master his emerging feelings? Many of the movies around today are samplings of soft porn packaged for acceptance with beautiful or humorous or action packed story lines! My negative take on these films doesn't diminish their positive messages - in fact that serves to illustrate the point of clever marketing.

Our society surrounds us with images of things we are not meant to ever see outside of the marriage relationship!

If we want our children to understand *that* they need to guard their hearts, minds, emotions and bodies - it starts with us.

As our protection gives way to self protection, remember long periods of trial, error and transition will

occur. Will we be there to coach and encourage along the way?

Guidance in the area of emotion is so important... emotions are untested until we find ourselves in the midst of a situation. When young ones ask "Don't you trust me?" a good answer is (hopefully) "yes, I trust you, but your emotions haven't been tested in this area yet".

I've just finished facilitating the Lisa Bevere course "Kissed the Girls and made them Cry" with a group of predominantly Christian women. There were a couple of common comments on the feedback form I supplied. The commonest was how different the ladies felt their years before marriage would have been had they the knowledge from this course. Another common remark was to do with recognizing how much protection they needed and lacked in their growing up years.

### **3. Preparation**

Each of these areas is closely linked and carries much overlap.

The question to think about here is "What do children need to be prepared for?" If the answer is 'sex', then go ahead and give them all the details you want.

If the answer is purity - which one day will most likely include the physical relationship of marriage - then there is a great deal more that they need than plumbing and technical information.

On that basis I suggest the areas a child needs preparation for are:

a) Preparation for Puberty - changes and developments to their heart, emotions, minds *and* body

One example of preparing a child for changes *to their emotions* is from a chat I had recently with our 11 year old son. I introduced the word 'seduction' saying that it has many levels of meaning but what I wanted him to understand is that seduction is a form of enticement... an invitation to our desire... that has its first effect in the heart or the ego.

I wanted him to know that as girls begin to pay attention to him there is a form of seduction that so easily takes place - where the ego is flattered into response. It's not *real* feeling - for love is about the good of the other. When we respond in ego it's all about self. When we expose the thinking that contributes to perceived emotions we help form better responses.

This is given to our boys in a very long letter during their grade 7 year. (Contact me if you'd like a copy of it in booklet form for \$5 or as part of the package I've

written and called "Passage of Blessing" - a whole series of events to promote encouragement and purity in the lives of our teens - \$18.00).

b) Preparation for Purity - which will at least in part be as a single person but also for the probability of life as a married partner. Purity is no less a factor in marriage than in single life.

Purity is not the death of Eros - God invented each kind of love. Purity gives freedom to Eros to operate without the external influences of entertainment, past relationships etc. Purity can be restored when lost, but as far as our children go, how much better to grow them up in these things than have them need the healing so many of our generations have needed by their 30's and 40's?

The next question that arises is "WHEN does a child need preparation in each of these areas?"!

I suggest that a child needs to know before they NEED to know, but that the majority of what they need to know is different to what the mainstream world is saying they need!!!

**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. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)

A child's physical changes are landmarks, as are the other capacities of their being.

There is a story and an agenda behind the hurry the world forces on us for sexual information to the very young.

Parents - listen to your gut. If your gut tells you something is too soon or too much it may well be. Speaking these matters to children should be natural and easy. If it's not, we need to investigate WHY. The answers to that WHY will not always be the same.

We must base what we tell our kids on their age and stage and need to know. Not someone else's and not your own... parenting the child *you were* will not necessarily bring about the result you are hoping for in your child. A parent who rushes information because their parents told them nothing is not a student of their child. This also is not an information problem as much as it is a relationship problem. We must identify the motivations, issues and answers on their own terms and in the context of our own children.

**4. Empowerment** is very much a combination of each of the other areas... plus more besides! We need to aim for

functioning empowerment in appropriate circumstances around the age of 12,13 14. The ages where they hit high school, their physical freedoms and responsibilities enlarge and they are operating in the wider world. This will include strategies, boundaries, values, practice, love and encouragement in the failures, active dialogue, functioning warning signals, conviction, and still more love.