

Teens, Sex, and Parenting

By Paul D. Norcross

God bless you and greetings to you in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ. I recently had occasion to counsel with a lady about issues with her teenage daughter. The following letter seemed to have some worthwhile elements that I thought you might find useful, or at least thought-provoking. So I wanted to submit them to you for your blessing. May the Lord help us all raise our children for His glory! If you have any insight or comments, please feel free to tell me. This is an exploratory thought process. Often newsletters start this way, and it's fun seeing where the Lord leads!

With much love in Him,

--Paul and Rita Norcross

It occurred to me this morning as I was praying for your family that when it comes to sex, that:

Girls have 3 speeds forward (friendship, flirtation, promiscuity) and they would do well to develop only one reverse (no!) instead of opting for slow forward, or gradual downshifts.

In the flesh, boys have only one speed, and it is always forward with no reverse. Friendship is a way to get to sex, flirtation is a way to get to sex, and fornication is the actual goal, after which a teen boy earns snickering bragging rights (which quickly circulate all over the school). Boys invented first base, second base, third base, and home plate, and every boy knows what each one means. They never run the bases backwards. It's part of their programming. You never hear a boy back off and decide to just be friends (even though they might agree in principle), but girls think reversing something they have allowed to go too far is as easy as shifting a gear on a car to a different speed, or stepping on the brake. Teen boys don't work that way, and teen girls don't often understand this.

Girls who are governed by their flesh can quickly learn how to manipulate boys in order to maintain their comfort level of relational self-acceptance. Without the wonderful self-control/self-esteem from Biblical wisdom, they may be tempted to do what it takes to maintain or acquire a comfortable level of self-esteem. But that level (or lack thereof) is ultimately determined by Dad. In other words, girls will select the gear that fits their self-image, and the largest contributor to that self-image is her father. The less Bible focus, and the less Dad is involved in a healthy fatherly role, the more a daughter's self-esteem suffers.

Strong self-identities are the product of good fathering. No wonder that God is Biblically characterized as a Father, and not very often as a mother. In the attempt to overcome the vacuum left by an absent or faltering father, identification/esteem-generating careers and worldly aspirations may become the surrogate. But though boys often benefit positively from such identifiers, girls find only temporary identification/self-image enhancement from those same identifiers, and only then because of an ever changing popular culture. There is a different chemistry working when it comes to self-image building. In the attempt to fill the gap, it is not surprising that the societal values which increasingly favor career identification fail as effective substitutes for proper fathering in later life.

When it comes to sex, self-image, identity, and relationships, boys are a whole lot easier to predict. Biologically, boys are more sexually focused, more easily aroused, and event-based rather than relationship-based. For example, using the context of friendship, friendship means two different things -- there's the boy version and the girl version. For boys (still talking in a worldly sense), friendship with a girl is more often the first step toward sex, not an end in itself. Boys do not generally hinge their self-esteem on their relationships with girls. Instead, boys tend to regulate their self-esteem through accomplishments.

If the pattern of accomplishment in the home setting is sufficiently meritorious and self image-fulfilling (which God designed to occur primarily from regular doses of Dad approval, and Mom encouragement), boys tend not to fall into having to gain it artificially (such as through peer approval, gang membership, or an admiring member of the opposite sex). In fact, for a boy to gain his self-esteem through a girlfriend tends to be entirely secondary to achieving it through personal accomplishment. In contrast, for a girl, the source of self esteem building is primarily through relationship. When Dad fails to do his job in this area, another relationship is sought to provide this function. Enter the teenage boy to supply what Dad withheld, all for want of self-approval and esteem.

If a young man has insufficiently developed self-identity from insufficient parenting, they too will seek to fulfill the self-image building need. But being a male, he will

not seek it in the relationship, but in the conquest, i.e. the accomplishment of having a relationship. Boys seek to perform what will get them approval, in order to meet their need for self-esteem/identity building. Thus what boys seek out of a relationship is entirely different than what girls seek to obtain, despite the fact that both may have the same need for identity! Self-esteem building is thus an essential piece of healthy emotional growth, but each gender requires different means to achieve it, and resorts to different methods to substitute when it is not being achieved. Dads make such a difference, and their effective parenting normalizes a Godly process which otherwise can quickly become chaotic and damaging to the teen.

Understanding these differences doesn't make girls or boys bad. Good Biblical instruction greatly helps in setting healthy sexual boundaries, and proper motivations of the heart. But because God designed boys to require appreciation/respect in their journey toward self-esteem and because they gain it through accomplishment (which easily translates to the "accomplishment" of sexual conquest in their relationships with girls), their approach toward sex is radically different than it is for teenage girls. God designed girls to gain their self-image from relationships, for which sex can become a part (often peer pressure makes it into a seemingly necessary part), while boys wind up viewing sex as accomplishing an objective, for which the relationship is a necessary part. Both views address the need for developing self-image. But both are unique to each gender. Curiously, Dads who abdicate their role in building self-esteem in both their sons and daughters create the perfect void for worldly substitutes. When self-image construction fails at home, it moves out to the teen marketplace. Young adult sexual/emotional/social dysfunction is a frequent result. Sadly, it follows into adulthood, and left untended, causes predictable damage to future relationships.

Boys eventually get to be men, and those with healthy Godly self-images learn to temper their sexual attitudes. God designed marriage and the wisdom of age and Godliness to help tame these attitudes. Good healthy sex in marriage is a lingering part of men staying sexually tamed (fulfilled). Girls learn to temper their Godly relationship/self-image needs in marriage, wherein their need for self-esteem is meant to become fully and completely satisfied by their mate. The capacity for their husband to do this for them is built first by their father. For boys, the combination of Mom's encouragement, and Dad's approval are the mechanisms for healthy male self-image building. For girls, these mechanisms are the seed for growing healthy future relationships.

Healthy self-images need maintenance even after they are constructed in youth. Long after adulthood, if even a good self-image suffers from spousal neglect for

long enough, these formerly well constructed self-image issues are undermined, and can become divisive to the marriage.

So, it is amazing to see how God designed Mom and Dad to build their children into balanced, Godly adults through the Word of God and what they sow into self-esteem construction. Both boys and girls need it, but their means to achieve it is clearly different. One can also see how splintered families and homosexual partnerships can't help but have significant negative consequences on the emotional maturation of children.

But what does one do when all the wrong things seem to be happening, or a single parent is doing the best they can and still having a hard time?

Prayer and release. It's sort of like catch and release in fishing. We pray for parental wisdom to find a way where there is no way (I Corinthians 10:13), and we release ourselves and our children to God. We pray into gaining wisdom for our particular situation, and we learn to hear and obey His strategy for gaining the particular victory needed. Doing things the way He tells us will always work, no matter how bad things have become, or appear to be going. The way out of a every wilderness is the way of hearing His voice and obeying what the Lord has to say on the subject.

I hope this all helps you! You raised deep issues, and they have profound implications -- it's so wonderful to think them through and see how practical the Lord is in dealing with them.

You and your family are precious and special!

Much love in Him,

Paul Norcross