

YOU.

Hope and Redemption

While they often appear stoic and independent, many teenagers today carry hidden emotional wounds that weigh down their hearts. Despite the fact that the media portrays teen sex as being without regrets, a survey of one thousand sexually active teens across America revealed that two-thirds of them wish they had waited longer to have sex (seventy-seven percent of girls and sixty percent of boys).

If your teen has made poor decisions when it comes to his or her sexuality, do not blame yourself. After all, who is the best parent in the universe? It is the heavenly Father. Now, look at how messed up most of his kids are here on earth! It is not because he is a defective dad. It is because his children have the gift of free will, and they do not always use it wisely.

Because the gift of sexuality is so often misused, many young people struggle with:

- Self-hatred
- Memories of abuse
- Sexual addictions
- Guilt
- Insecurity

No matter what may be weighing on a person's heart, God is able to bring healing and restoration. In our fourth session, "Hope and Redemption in Christ," we introduce the students to the boundless mercy of God.

We discuss with your teens the fact that when they return to God, he not only forgives their sins, he offers them a new heart. He did not come to simply redeem their souls and then leave them with a bunch of coping mechanisms to battle sexual temptation. Thankfully, he came to redeem every part of them, including their bodies and their desires.

Christ came to offer everyone victory and freedom. Sadly, instead of claiming this victory, we often complain that purity is too difficult. By doing this, we empty the Cross of its power and meaning. We reduce redemption to some quaint religious idea that sounds good but has no real power to change us. By doing so, we fail to experience its life-changing effects.

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Becoming a New Creation

So what about our students? What do they need to do? First, he or she must realize that purity is a gift from God and that God will give it to those who ask for it. The ideal place to seek the gift of purity is in reconciliation with God. Jesus promised us that he would be with us until the end, and one of the ways he is present to us right now is in His ever-present, ever-forgiving nature.

Everyone tends to avoid confessing their sins to each other. Some act if it is irrelevant, thinking, "Well, I can just go straight to God when I need forgiveness." But in having this mentality, many people miss out on the extraordinary graces waiting for them in confessing their sins to another. In the words of St. Augustine: "I would be hiding you from myself, not myself from you."

Jesus teaches us to forgive each other because he knew we would all need it (see John 20:21-23). To cast this gift aside would be like a child who cannot swim throwing off a life preserver. Just as a stubborn child overestimates his independence, so, too, do many people exercise a spiritual independence from their communities. What is needed is humility.

Through confession, we are made new. However, Jesus did not come to earth simply to redeem our souls. Perhaps one of the most ignored teachings of Christianity is that Christ also came to redeem our bodies. When we die, our bodies and souls will be separated, but only for a time. At the resurrection of the dead, those who are saved will receive glorified bodies. It is commonly accepted that the life of the human person continues in a spiritual fashion after death. But how can we believe that this body, so clearly mortal, could rise to everlasting life?.

Earlier in this program, we pointed out that our bodies reveal our call to make a gift of ourselves in love, the spousal meaning of the body. However, the giving of our bodies to another person in marriage is only part of God's plan. Just as our bodies point us to an earthly union with a spouse, they also point us to the eternal union with God in heaven. This is why the Bible states that heaven is the consummation of the marriage between Christ and the Church.

We close this session with a reminder to your student that while we wait for the full redemption of our bodies in heaven, we are in a constant battle between sin and obedience. But the battle is ours to win. In Christ, we hold the "hope of every day," which helps us to live in freedom and to defeat "evil with good" (Romans 12:21). No matter what things feel like between you and your student, be assured that there is hope for a better tomorrow.

YOU.

Questions for Your Student

1. How do you feel before asking forgiveness?
2. How do you feel after asking forgiveness?
3. Will you forgive me for _____? (Fill in the blank with some offense you have committed, large or small, toward your child. If you cannot think of anything, your teen would probably be happy to fill in the blank.)
4. In what area of your life do you find it hardest to stay hopeful? Have you prayed about this?
5. Do you have any suggestions for how our family could better show love to each other when one of us fails?

Family Application

1. If you want your children to learn to ask for forgiveness when they fail you, ask your children to forgive you when you fail them. If you think your student is not paying attention to you, you will be astonished at how attentive they become when you ask for their forgiveness.
2. Many people were raised in families where they received more criticism than praise. They believed that the way to achieve acceptance as a son or daughter was to perform flawlessly in sports or academics. Unfortunately, these same people often believe they must be perfect for God to love them. When you offer your teens unconditional love, you will help them to see that God loves them, independent of their virtues or vices. They will learn that they do not need to earn God's love, or yours.
3. Many teens who have made sexual mistakes want their parents to know. However, they often hide the truth out of fear or shame. To help create a safe environment for them to open up to you, take an interest in every part of their lives. Reassure them that they can tell you anything. If you talk to your teens about everything (soccer, tests, and friends) it will be a lot easier to talk to them about anything.
4. If you discover your teen has been sexually active, your emotions might range from disappointment or deep sorrow to complete rage. However, at no other time in his or her life does your teen need to experience your unconditional love more than now. When Christ encountered the woman caught in adultery, it was his profound mercy that allowed her to accept his challenge to go and sin no more (see John 8). If a teen feels rejected or condemned, he or she might be tempted to fall further into an unhealthy lifestyle in order to find consolation and acceptance.