

A longtime youth pastor looks back on her past as a promiscuous teenager and offers a "street" strategy for engaging kids about their sexual behavior.

HOOKUP CULTURE

TEARING DOWN CULTURAL LIES WITH TRUTH AND HOPE

by Lauren Surprenant

"For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much"—Jesus, in Luke 7:47.

When I was a teenager, I was told I was going to hell every day at school—sometimes on an hourly basis. The first Scripture verse I ever heard was this little Jesus-gem from Matthew 5: "If your hand causes you to stumble, better to cut it off." I remember looking around to see if anyone else was missing body parts....

A million years ago when I was a kid, ADHD was just a random mix of letters—no one had any idea that a lot of my "bratty" behavior was rooted in my inability to focus. But if I was going to hell, I was going to make it worth the trip! If there

was a limit, I pushed it. If there was a standard for behavior, I broke it. If you said "Don't," I said "Done." I was such a wild-child that, many years later at my 25-year high school reunion, the people who knew me back in the day were beyond shocked to hear I was involved in Christian ministry. One told me: "That ministry cover is really good—what are you *really* doing with yourself?"

What I'm *really* doing with myself is partnering with God to bring redemptive beauty out of my ugly past by offering a path to rescue for teenagers who are caught up in sexual sin....

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PROMISCUITY IS A SNARE THAT TRAPS ITS VICTIMS MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY—A TRIFECTA OF DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT.

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

As it turns out, there are many paths to hell—my particular favorite was promiscuity. Few paths of sin are better at accentuating the diabolical skills of satan (as Jon Acuff says, I reserve the right to give him “the middle finger of grammar” with a lowercase s). Promiscuity is a snare that traps its victims mentally, physically, and spiritually—a trifecta of destructive impact.

The Mental Attack—First, the evil one uses the false promise of promiscuity as a primary temptation to overcome a poor self-image: “If you can get a guy to sleep with you, it proves you are not as [ugly, fat, awkward, generally undesirable] as you think you are.” I tell the kids in my ministry all the time that dating in real life is not like on TV—people do not go out for dinner and a movie and then end up in bed together. The culture is serving up a recipe for promiscuity, perpetually. And the immature adults in many of today’s single-parent homes undergird what kids see on TV by acting inappropriately in their dating life.

The Physical Attack—God created sexual intercourse and sexual foreplay as a celebration of unity between a man and woman who’ve vowed to stay together forever. But the evil one has successfully flaunted sex as just something physically fun to do—a recreational pastime with no downside. I nearly gagged the first time I heard, “We did ‘it’ because we were bored and had nothing better to do.” In extreme terms, if sex was designed as a purely physical act, why do rape victims experience depression and post-traumatic stress and suicidal thoughts?

The Spiritual Attack—In today’s relationally starved world, physical intimacy is equated with love, even though love is not a requirement for intimacy. Psycholo-

gists link promiscuity in girls to failed father-relationships. Because I never followed the mold, my failed relationship was with my mother. But the issue is not the “who” (which parent), but the “what” (a deep and mostly unmet hunger for relationship). Jesus repeatedly reminded us that God is interested in relationship, not a religious show. The enemy tactic is bait-and-switch—promise relationship through physical intimacy, then leave us with only wounds and damage to our ability to be in relationship with God and others.

A REDEPTIVE WAY FORWARD

The hookup culture is so enticing that our conventional approaches to helping kids avoid its traps are near-useless. Bluntly, those who are driven to promiscuity because of a missing parental “link” need a loving relationship, not another negative one. Those who are trying to shore up a poor self-esteem need to know God views them as treasured children. And those who are haunted by guilt need to know the depths of God’s forgiveness.

Cancel the Condemnation—For all the times I was told I was going to hell, no one ever told me I could be redeemed—not once. I was often told: “See that man on that cross? You are such a sinner he had to die for you.” But I never heard about the redemption behind the sacrifice. No matter how destructive and repugnant the behavior, it is not an impediment to God’s grace and mercy. But, nevertheless, Christians have made sexual sins “more equal” than others. So let’s address *all* sin the way Jesus addressed sexual sin with the adulterous woman in John 8: “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”

