

## The Masterpiece

There was once a brilliant artist who spent his whole life creating paintings of great value. People came from everywhere to admire and bid for his priceless work. He had three sons, whom he loved dearly, and it came time for the young men to leave home.

Caring so much for the future happiness and growth of his young sons gathered them together and as a farewell gift presented each of them with a copy of his most treasured, even priceless painting, "his Masterpiece". The gift came with only one very serious instruction from the father: the Masterpiece was only to be enjoyed with one other person in the whole world- their future wife. As they left he told each one to protect, cherish and guard the painting, so that when they experience it with their wife they will have all the joy and fulfillment it could bring. To use it in any other way would greatly cheapen its value. Each promised the father to follow his directions.

Years wore on, and each of the three sons began to have different attitudes towards their painting and their father's words. The first son began to resent the conditions. He thought: if the painting is so beautiful, then I should share it with other people. My father's instructions were old-fashioned. He developed a close relationship with a young woman and as it deepened, he showed her the painting. She was blown away by its beauty, but he never told her it was a gift from his father and took credit for it himself. Soon, even though he vowed it would never happen; he tired of his female companion and began to show the Masterpiece to many other women; and eventually it became something not special at all, actually very common. The joy of the intimate sharing began to fade away. He realized the women he was now sharing it with were not as special as the first ones.

Much time passed, and a layer of dust and dirt slowly began to cover the Masterpiece, dulling its original beauty. Because it was not protected, the elements of life caused the painting to crack and decay. One day the father paid a surprise visit to his son and was horrified at what had happened. He was heartbroken and sternly said to his son "you have not protected and guarded the masterpiece the way I asked you to, and now you will never know the fullest measure of joy and fulfillment it could have brought you. If only you would have obeyed me and guarded it diligently.

The second son thought that since the painting was to be so exclusively shared, there must be something bad or shameful about it. So he hid it away, never spoke about it and was embarrassed about it. Years later, he did marry a special woman and on his wedding night, remembering his father's wish, escorted his wife to the dark closet where he had hid it. But instead of sharing it with her in joy, he opened the door to let her see it alone and then quickly slammed the door shut. He never mentioned that it was a treasured gift from his father and it was rarely revisited. His father visited and was saddened to see that it remained hidden in a closet. He said "it was supposed to make your love for each other even stronger, not to be treated as something shameful and dirty. Just like with your older brother, my heart is broken by your dishonoring of my gift.

The third son accepted the gift and was awed by its beauty and knew it was something he needed to guard and cherish until the day he married his future bride, so he hung it in a special room and locked the door and hung the key around his neck for safe-keeping. Over the years he was tempted to show others because he did not find his bride as quickly as he thought he would; but he refused to weaken. Finally he met the princess of his life and on their wedding night shared the painting with her. When the father came to visit his heart swelled with joy because his request had been honored and his Masterpiece was delighted in and enjoyed. His third son had treasured his gift, and even though it had been difficult to guard it. And so then the son spent his lifetime reveling in the joy and fulfillment of its beauty.

***Guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life" Proverbs 4:23***