

Desperate Housewives...Desperately Wrong

The characters on this popular TV show are no models for us. These dysfunctional women need a dose of spiritual reality!

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY in the neighborhood, but this isn't Mr. Roger's neighborhood. As the streetlights darken, the neighbors on Wisteria Lane settle into their perfect-looking houses with well-manicured lawns, but behind closed doors, life is not what it appears to be.

Ever since the suicide of neighbor Mary Alice, the residents of Wisteria Lane have come out of their dysfunctional closets. And an estimated 25 million viewers tune in weekly to watch their dramas unfold and their not-so-perfect lives unravel. It is a neighborhood of quiet desperation where delicious secrets are revealed, gossip reigns supreme, jealousy and envy chip away at relationships, and even murder takes place.

Welcome to Desperate Housewives, a television show that skyrocketed to the top of the TV ratings last year faster than any other show since ER. The show has all the elements of suburban life.

There is Susan, a divorced and single mom who looks for love in all the wrong places; and Lynette, an ex-career wife and stay-at-home mom of very active children, who struggles with wanting the best of both the career world and motherhood. Bree is an obsessive-compulsive Martha Stewart-type stay-at-home mom who finds sanity in order and perfection.

Gabrielle is a bored, materialistic, ex-model who is having an affair and constantly manipulates her husband for her economic gain. And Edie, a divorcee, is on the prowl for her next sexual conquest. This season, actress Alfre Woodard, who is African-American, brings more diversity into the neighborhood

when she buys a house on Wisteria Lane over the telephone and moves in with her son.

Yes, these are the women America loves to hate and hates to love. So why has this glorified soap opera hit such a chord among so many viewers? Could it be that American housewives relate to their struggles? Or is it that our lives too often mirror theirs?

DESPERATELY NEEDING GOD Maybe we all feel a bit desperate when it comes to managing the stress of modern living. We have stressful relationships—difficult marriages, friendship betrayals, annoying neighbors, unsympathetic bosses, rebellious teens, divorce and remarriage, to name only a few.

On top of this, our lives are full of situational stress such as job loss, relocations, health problems, war, natural disasters and more. Then add the stress of unmet expectations such as wishing to be married, wanting children or feeling like your career is going nowhere and you have a formula for desperation. It's true, we may feel overwhelmed at times, but do we really need to be desperate?

No! But unfortunately, absent in *Desperate Housewives* is the role of active and genuine faith in the lives of these people.

So let's rewrite their stories and help them manage their lives in more productive ways. Instead of soap opera solutions, they'll make better choices, use common sense and grow in the confidence that comes from knowing God.

Susan is our first subject. She is a divorced single mom who is desperate to find a man. Convinced that she is a loser, she dives into ice cream on regular occasions as she watches her once unfaithful husband continue his extramarital exploits and appear to be living the high life. Feeling replaced, rejected and failed, she doesn't realize how her lack of esteem influences her teenage daughter.

The boundaries are terrible in this mother-daughter relationship. The therapist in me wants her to pour her heart out to a trusted friend, not her daughter. The daughter is privy to her mother's sex life and, like an armchair psychologist, regularly listens to her mother's angst and offers solutions.

In our new story, Susan learns to set healthy boundaries with her teenage daughter, realizing she has been treating her as a co-parent instead of her child. She no longer uses her daughter as a sounding board when it comes to adult relationships.

Susan also decides to honor her singleness and stop sleeping with any guy who is nice to her. After a time of deep introspection and prayer, she realizes that she confuses sexuality and love, and like her mother, believes marriage is all about feeling happy for the moment.

Fresh with revelation, Susan says no to sex outside of marriage and decides to set a higher standard for both her and her daughter. The emptiness she feels, the rejection she has experienced can be healed only through an intimate relationship with God.

As she presses in to know God, she realizes that she is unconditionally loved and the bride of Christ. He esteems and cherishes her and promises to be her husband. She need look to Him only for all provision.

The desperation she feels begins to vanish. She would still like to marry, but her pursuit of a man is no longer based on insecurity and fear or the confusion of sex with love.

She needs a break from men and decides to concentrate on raising her daughter and working through the loss of her marriage. She surrenders her singleness to God.

Lynette, our mom who has left her career to raise her

children, begins to realize the transition was harder than she thought. No one talked openly and honestly about the change. All she heard was how much other moms loved their children.

Although Lynette loves her children, she also loved her work in the corporate world. Not only was she unprepared for the physical energy needed to raise kids, but the guilt of wanting to be back in the corporate game was also killing her.

When Lynette visited a local church searching for some peace and refuge from her confusion, she was chided for her desire to work outside the home and judged by other stay-at-home moms. Now racked with even more guilt, Lynette meets a new friend who has made a similar transition.

This woman offers her support and understanding. They discuss ways to keep their hands in the business world without forfeiting their parenting roles.

Neither woman is a major corporate “player,” so the occasional consultation on a project is enough to keep each mom happy. Lynette is able to work her schedule with her husband’s so the kids are covered during her short absences. Full-time work will come later because of parenting demands.

When Lynette shares her negative church experience with her friend, the friend apologizes for the judgment she felt. She explains that authentic Christians are motivated by love and reveals that she, too, is a Christian.

Now instead of abandoning her spiritual pursuits due to one church experience, Lynette agrees to give Christianity a second look because of her relationship with a Christian woman who lives out her faith.

Bree, our Martha Stewart mom needs to learn how to relax. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) has an organic component, and medication can help stop the intrusive thoughts and compulsions that follow. First, she musters up the courage to

see a therapist who works with anxiety problems and explains the brain chemistry involved in her OCD. She then learns that her thoughts exacerbate her symptoms.

Bree is desperate for control but doesn't have it and never will. She must surrender control to God, acknowledge her weaknesses and learn to deal with conflict in a healthier way.

She learns new problem-solving methods, ends her "friendship" with another male, grieves the untimely death of her husband and realizes that her symptoms and unrealistic expectations could have played a role in her past marital problems. Daily surrender is the key to her newfound peace.

Gabrielle gives new meaning to Madonna's material girl. She is obsessed with image and appearance. Her inner beauty is yet to be developed because she has always relied on her body to get what she wants.

Interestingly, Gabrielle admits that she has no idea what she really wants or needs and doesn't know the difference between the two. And her self-absorption is about to be challenged with the pregnancy she now carries. This is what pushes her to seek help.

She can't be so self-centered if she has a child. The energy used to manipulate her husband is exhausting, so she begins to work on developing a true identity; one based on the image of God and being esteemed for being His daughter.

Gabrielle's superficial outlook is refocused to things that are valued by God, such as kindness, helping the poor and giving to others. She realizes that the money she has is not to be hoarded but given away to those in need.

She is transformed by a new relationship with God. It's personal and not just the religion of her youth.

This leads to confession of her wrongdoings, ending her

affairs, renewing her marital covenant, forgiving others and recognizing that her interminable unhappiness comes from a deeper longing than anything materialism can buy or satisfy.

What she thought could bring happiness has only led to an insatiable appetite for more. Her newfound identity has decreased that appetite and she finds herself less shallow.

She must continue to explore a new kind of intimacy, an intimacy with God who cares less about her appearance and more about her heart. For the first time in her life, she feels valued for who she is, not how she looks.

Edie, eventually, grows bitter and tired of trying to seduce every man she sees. She's aging, and the younger competition is gaining ground. Even plastic surgery is taking a toll, and she searches desperately for authentic relationship.

Her confident veneer is a cover up for terrible insecurity and abuse as a child. She hates the fact that she is alone. Invited to a house church by a man whom she finds incredibly handsome, she is taken aback by his vulnerability and genuine relationships. He respects her and doesn't ask her for sex.

Edie's curiosity heightens the chase but he maintains his ground, saying he would like to befriend her as a person. Edie's a work in process. She is skeptical that this guy is for real and continuously tests the relationship, but he genuinely likes her for the person he sees inside, not the knockout body she flaunts. It's disarming. Her desperation begins to fade.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD Wisteria Lane becomes transformed as the neighborhood desperation dwindles. The women's lives have been re-storied. Oh, life still has its stress, but the way the women cope and manage it is different.

They no longer respond as if they live in a soap opera. The gossip is gone. The envy and strife are put to rest. The women

are filled with love; they encourage one another, are honest, open and vulnerable because a new trust has formed.

The residents seem to genuinely care about each other. A sense of community develops. When stress hits, desperation is replaced with a quiet resolve that God is in control, the storm can be ridden out and hope abounds.

The down side to this re-storying is that the lives of the women on Wisteria Lane no longer interest 25 million people. There is less drama, more maturity and better problem solving based on love and a desire to be obedient to God.

The media feels these people are now extreme because they embrace God and talk about the love of a heavenly Father. The show is canceled. People are bored with no sex, violence or dysfunction. Or are they?

Perhaps there are some who would tune in to see desperation transformed. The network executives rethink the cancellation, realizing that now they can pitch the show as reality TV. And hey, there is a big audience for that!

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