

Don't Be a Spiritual Pimp

In episode 15 of my new series, *Questions With God*, I ask the question, "How much freedom should we allow in a person's journey?" There is a fine line between wanting the best for someone and slipping into fear and control when that person is apparently making big mistakes in their decision making. This becomes even more of an issue when the person in question is someone for whom we care deeply. Often our best intentions to try to talk sense into someone is actually far more destructive than we realize, and many times isn't as loving as we may think it is.

Jesus is our perfect example of love, and He never tries to step in and control us. Fear leads to control, but perfect love casts out all fear, and if God has proven anything, it's that He has no interest in controlling us or our behavior. He has put a high premium on human freedom—including the freedom to choose Him or reject Him and the love He is offering. He does this because He knows love is never true unless it is freely chosen. And if there is anything God wants, it's our true love. Coerced love or love rooted in fear is not love at all.

Over the years, I have had many opportunities to see these principles in play, both personally and in what I have filmed. One of the most profound moments for me occurred when, while filming *Holy Ghost Reborn* in Brazil, I met Nic and Rachel Billman, who are doing incredible things there with prostitutes and street people. The condition of the hearts of women who are professional prostitutes is not something most Christians have seen or are even prepared for. Christianity has gotten so simple to many of us because it has been reduced in large part to a decision or church services or social gatherings. But in this topsy-turvy world of prostitution and sex trafficking, things get complicated quickly. For instance, most of these prostitutes have said the "sinner's prayer"

countless times because some church or well-meaning Christian came in and gave them food or clothes or showed them some kindness, but always with the desire for them to “say this prayer” at the end of the night. To these women, it was still prostitution, just without the sex. This was spiritual prostitution, and if that’s what it took to eat, they would say whatever prayer you wanted them to say.

So Nic and Rachel realized quickly their initial goal with these women was not to get them “saved” by saying a prayer but that they needed to do something more fundamental first. They needed to simply show these women they were far more valuable than as a sexual object. They had a Father who loved them and expected nothing from them in return for that love. It is a long, hard road, and Nic and Rachel are doing an amazing job, but for the women who are loved without strings attached long enough for the scales to fall from their eyes, the transformation is astounding. Many of them move straight into working with the Billmans to help get more of their friends and sisters to see the Father’s love for them.

I used to think that these circumstances were somehow unique simply because the people in question were suffering from such immense trauma. But I’m beginning to realize that when you drill down to the root of a person’s soul, we all just want to be loved, not for what we can do or for what we bring to the table but to simply be loved, even though we all realize we don’t deserve it. Thankfully, God is the only one in existence who can offer this. The fact that He does offer it to each and every one of us is scandalously mind-blowing.

As true as this may be, I’ve also realized we are all in process, and we are all on our own personal journeys with God. And this is where things get tricky because for those of us who may be in a different stage of our journey, to look around and see someone we love making poor decisions in their own journey often makes us want to reach out and grab them and forcibly put them on a better path. The only problem is that

quite often, their hearts are not yet ready for change, and what we think is a loving act is perceived as a controlling one. What is meant as a loving act is actually an act of coercion born out of our own fears. This, in turn, makes the person in question feel like a spiritual prostitute, and it turns us into spiritual pimps.

So what do we do? Do we simply stand by idly while the people we love storm headlong into disaster? God makes it clear in Ephesians 6:12a that “our fight is not against flesh and blood.” Our fight isn’t physical but spiritual. Prayer is our weapon against the enemy, and love is our battle cry. Love and pray, and never cease doing both. In the end, we are responsible for ourselves alone, but that doesn’t mean we stop fighting for the ones we love. The fight just looks a little different than we may have thought.