

The Father's Healing Love

About 15 years ago I was in a department store in northern Virginia with my oldest daughter, Margaret. She was a precocious, talkative 6-year-old with a flair for the dramatic. You just never knew what this child might say to perfect strangers.

We walked past the women's lingerie section and Margaret impulsively grabbed a pair of lacy, pink panties off a rack and twirled them in the air with her finger. Then she declared to every shopper within range: "I am going to wear these panties when I am 18!"

Horrificed, I ducked my head and pulled Margaret toward the escalator, trying to avoid eye contact with the amused customers who overheard her awkward proclamation. They were probably thinking to themselves, That little girl is going to be quite a handful when she grows up.

Fast-forward to 2007, on Father's Day, when I received an e-mail from Margaret while I was on a ministry trip to South America. She was writing me from college, just before she was to leave for her own missionary trip to Peru. She wanted to thank me for my influence in her life, and to assure me that she and her boyfriend, Rick, have stayed sexually pure throughout their three-year dating relationship.

Margaret wrote: "It is kind of sad that a lot of Christian couples—though waiting for marriage to have sex—still push their limits. I know you probably already know this but Rick and I don't push limits. We abide by the 'bathing suit rule,' which says that while kissing you should never ever touch anything a modest bathing suit covers."

I kind of lost it emotionally when I read the next sentence: "You have been a wonderful, loving, patient father. That is

probably why it is not hard for me to see God as my loving, patient Father.”

Thanks to God’s grace and my wife’s influence, Margaret did not turn out to be a “handful” when she turned 18. She is 21 today, and is preparing for the ministry. She and my other three daughters have matured into godly women who love Jesus and know their sexual boundaries. I am even more grateful for this when I meet women—in the United States and around the world—who have been scarred emotionally by the men in their lives.

When I got Margaret’s e-mail I was speaking at a women’s conference in Peru, which has the world’s highest percentage of women who have been abused by their own fathers. I spent a week praying for throngs of women who have been abandoned, beaten or neglected by dads, uncles, boyfriends and husbands.

All of them were starving to know that their heavenly Father’s love is tender and compassionate, not abusive. By the end of the week, the Holy Spirit had released waves of healing. Women who had been depressed found new joy, and those who had been burdened by years of secret shame discovered deep forgiveness.

Restoration comes when we truly encounter the Father’s love.

My daughters are fortunate to have two parents who love each other, model sexual faithfulness and live out their faith in front of their children every day. You may not have experienced that kind of healthy family life. And you may think that because your own dad was abusive, distant or a poor example that you will always suffer for it.

That’s a lie. I have found that God’s amazing love is abundantly available no matter how painful your past. He can restore the wounded soul.

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