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“Chastity is a wealth; it comes from an abundance of love.”

Tagore

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Chapter Two

The Forgotten Virtue

Insight #2 Loving and loyal relationships naturally lead to commitment because sexual desire is not just a physical need; it's also an emotional, intellectual and even spiritual need.

No question about it, chastity--sex only in marriage--has become the forgotten virtue. The words, *morality* and *chastity* have become politically incorrect, generating anger like the use of profanity used to in the old days, “Whose morality? How dare you impose your morality upon me! How dare you attempt to tell me what I ought to be doing? Chastity? You can't be serious; no one believes in that anymore.”

I recall a stimulating talk with a bright, energetic businessman. During our conversation, he asked, “What are you writing about?”

“It's a book on the value of chastity,” I said. After a brief silence, he said, “I thought that went out with the dark ages.”

A few days later I was having lunch with a very successful career woman, discovering how little we had in common. She was career first/ family second--which never happened. I was family first/

career second. We did have a few things in common: a love of nature, horses, and meaningful films. We had both lived through the raging propaganda of the Sexual Revolution. She converted, and I probably would have if not for a stroke of fate that changed my life. I met my future husband and overnight the idea of love and marriage was in fashion.

The conversation was clipping along when she asked, “What are you writing?”

Despite our differences we’d managed to disagree agreeably; I wanted to keep it that way. To tell the truth, I was a little bit intimidated by this woman and desperately wanted to answer, “Oh, the need for recycling and other environmental concerns,” but my integrity was at stake.

“Actually,” I stammered, “right now I’m researching for a book on healthy and unhealthy love relationships. . .”

“Sounds good,” she responded, “we certainly need that.”

“Well. . .specifically, it will show the difference between having sex and making love, or the value of moral discipline in promoting healthy love relationships. The bottom line is that it’s a case for chastity.”

She smiled that look big sisters give to their little know-nothing siblings, and asked, “You’re joking, right? Why would anyone be against sex?”

“Who said anything about being against sex?” I asked.

“I thought chastity meant celibacy, and celibacy means no sex. I’ve always thought it was a part of the whole religious self-deprivation thing--you know like those who eat mush, work all day in the hot sun, and sleep on boards.”

“Well,” I began, “there will always be extremists, but chastity

isn't celibacy. Celibacy means no sex while chastity means holding out for the best."

"You make it sound like chastity can actually mean better sex."

"Chastity can mean better everything--especially better sex. For instance, you could pig out on junk food all day long if you wanted to, so why wait for something better?"

"The anticipation of a great meal?"

"Right. That's what they didn't tell us in the seventies--discipline of the passions could increase sexual fulfillment. There's been a high price for free love."

"So you're saying that people should wait for what--marriage?"

"Well, technically, chastity means sex only-in-marriage, but my point is to promote loving and loyal relationships that naturally lead to commitment, and yes, a legal relationship. Sexual desire is not just a physical need; it's also an emotional, intellectual and even spiritual need. We've bought into the idea that it's all just biological, but it's so much more than that. Making love isn't just a physical workout; it's the whole purpose of life--to make love to one another! The physical act is only part of it. True lovers are making love the whole day through, whether they are washing clothes, preparing dinner, or listening to music together--it's all making love. Those who reduce it down to a romp will never know such a symphony of lovemaking. You could say it's holistic intimacy, not simply intercourse of body, but intercourse of mind, heart, and soul. That's why the one night stands aren't fulfilling--they never fulfill all the desires."

She looked confused, then asked, "How can it be wrong to love?"

"Casual sex isn't love; it's usually exploitation," I answered.

“Well, we would disagree on that one,” she argued. “The way I see it, it’s wonderful to have the ultimate closeness with someone you care about.”

“That’s the problem,” I said, “it usually begins with a warm feeling of closeness and ends with a cold feeling of separateness. Are you still friends with any of these lovers you’ve had?”

“One,” she said. “He’s living at my apartment right now--we’re still great friends, but we’ve learned to leave the sex out.”

“Precisely my point,” I said, “fulfillment doesn’t come with lovers. It comes with love.”

“Come on! I can’t imagine anything else. Why would anyone choose anything else? Is it because you think that you’ll go to hell if you have a good time with someone besides your husband?”

“No,” I answered. “I think it would create a hell for both of us right here. Some things just don’t work.”

This is how the conversation went till the shadows of evening began to work their way across our table. Then with a sigh, she said, “I’d give anything to have what you have. I’ve had some great lovers, but it never lasts. I’ve always wanted to have a couple of kids, but it doesn’t look like that’s going to happen either. In some ways my life has been a fantastic success. After all, I actually produce and direct movies--who wouldn’t want to do what I do? But when the day’s over I go home to an empty apartment. Your life sounds like a fairy tale. I didn’t think love lasted anymore. You’ve been lucky.”

“Luck? I don’t think so. I remember a cartoon that read, ‘Some people think marriages are made in heaven; I think they come in a kit and you have to put them together yourselves.’ This is more in line with reality; at least this is the way it has worked for us.”

“Okay,” she said. “So what you’re saying is that you don’t just stumble onto a good thing, you create it?”

“Right, you can buy a great car, then trash it and have it break down. Same thing happens in relationships. Love relationships are very fragile. They can start out right and good, but if not cared for properly, they can go sour.

“Statistically, our marriage didn’t have a chance, but we have been able to keep our love growing and renewing through the years. It hasn’t been easy, but the truth is I just keep falling in love with the same man over and over--my husband.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Well, we were very young. I was only fifteen when I met my husband; he was nineteen. It seemed like one day I was in high school carrying a load of books, and the next day I was out of high school carrying a baby. The slap into motherhood--and adulthood--was painful. I was haunted by the thought, ‘This isn’t where I belong. This isn’t where I belong.’

“The experience was so traumatic that for years I had nightmares about going back to high school and not remembering where my locker was. Then when I finally found it, I had forgotten the combination. Oh, how I wanted to go back--to again be leading a cheer at a football game! To just walk through the hallways and see everyone. It was so difficult to accept that I would never be with my friends again. Sometimes my girlfriends would come over to see me, but it wasn’t the same anymore; our worlds were different.

“I recall one night; it was late, but I couldn’t sleep. I had turned off all the lights, and was pacing the floor like a caged lion. Everywhere I looked I saw gray. The walls were gray, the junk furniture that we purchased at a garage sale was dirty gray, the cold

tile floor was sprinkled gray, the rain running down the windows was silver gray.

“Questions kept racing through my mind, ‘What am I suppose to do now? Who’s going to tell me what to do? What are my goals now? What do mothers do? What do mothers look forward to? Why didn’t someone tell me this would happen? Why didn’t someone warn me? I don’t know this life; I only know being a teenager and high school.’

“I wanted to run--but where? I wanted to hide--but where? I never felt so lost. I found myself doing something I never thought that I would do--praying. I didn’t know if I even believed in anything like a God, but there was nowhere else to turn. My heart screamed out in silence, Let me go back. Please let me go back; I promise I’ll do better. Let me go back home. Let me be with my family. Just let me be a kid again.

“I figured if there was a God, He ought to be powerful enough to take me back in time. For hours and hours I sobbed and prayed. Then at the point that it seemed I would be swallowed up in complete despair, a thought formed in my mind: ‘You have the power to change your life. You can’t go back, but you *can* go forward.’

“I realized then and there, I had a choice--I could either continue to grieve over my lost life, or I could begin to build a new one. I decided to begin building.

“In my longing to go back, I had been unwilling to go forward. Even though I was going to be a mom, I still had myself. I loved learning, so I began taking classes at the local college. I stopped reading romance magazines and began reading classical literature. I enrolled in ballet classes. I kept growing--learning, becoming,

meeting new people. I stayed alive. Years later, when I was expecting my tenth baby, I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in English and American Studies.

"No, I never regained my carefree teen years, and I'll always feel a nostalgic longing at football games and formal weddings. I will never know what I lost, but I do know what I gained, and I am grateful. Looking back I realize that however painful this experience was, it was that moment in time when I formed resolves that would last my whole life."

Then she asked, "So that's the reason you're writing this book, because of the mistakes you have made?"

"Not really," I said, "I think my experience has helped me to have understanding and compassion for others, but the real reason is because I think those who settle for promiscuous sex are missing out, and they don't even know what they're missing out on. My search for answers has been rewarding. There are solid reasons, rational reasons that support chastity. I just want to share them."

We parted friends. When I arrived home the younger children were outside making a slide in the snow. The teenagers were listening to music and dancing wildly in their room. Our son, Adam, was composing music with his synthesizer. I began to pull food from the refrigerator for dinner--grateful for the noise of family, and the life that surrounded me.