

Lessons From Moral Failures in a Family

The tragedy

The parents were shocked and grieved as social workers visited their home and confirmed reports that an older brother was guilty of sexually abusing younger ones in his family. The damage to the younger children, the ridicule to the cause of Christ, the shame of detailed publicity, and the scars to the life and reputation of the boy were indescribably painful to the family and their friends. The boy did repent of what he had done; now that time has passed, he was asked the following questions:

1. What were the early indications that you had the problem?
2. What conditions or circumstances contributed to the problem?
3. What steps could your parents have taken before it happened?
4. What could have been done to avoid it?
5. What teaching could have been given to each child to resist evil?
6. What factors in the home contributed to immodesty and temptation?

The boy wrote out the following answers to these questions. The information he gives is so helpful that every parent should read it and diligently apply the lessons that this family learned the hard way.

Background to the tragedy

I think that the laziness I demonstrated toward my responsibilities around the house and towards other people who asked me for assistance, was probably the only symptom my parents saw that would have shown any problem in my life. One way I showed this laziness was by arguing with my parents when I was asked to help around the house.

This behavior of course did not help me and only created strife between my parents and myself. The root problem of moral purity created in me a lack of self-control. With the arguing that I did with my parents, I became depressed. I tried to fight it by trying to make myself feel good. This only led to immoral habits that eventually led to offending.

Laziness is similar to slothfulness, and both words point to the spirit of doing what I want vs. doing what I ought, or better put for me, obeying the flesh vs. obeying Scripture. In my case, it was displayed physically and morally. If a parent sees that his son is showing signs of being lazy, it is highly likely that his son is also struggling in other areas of his life.

If the parent addressed this outward sign by keeping him extremely busy, I think there would have been some change. Either the inside would start to apply this and he would become more disciplined, or he would react outwardly and display more signs of what the root problem was. The problem can not just stay in one place when under pressure; it will grow or be overcome.

I am one of the older sons of a large family. I was expected to baby-sit and change diapers, etc. Baby-sitting gave me the opportunity to offend; without it I think it is possible that I might not have offended. I would still have had a problem with the immorality, but I do not think I would have violated my sister in such a way.

The need for modesty in the home

Modesty was a factor. It was not at the level it should have been in my family. It was not uncommon for my younger siblings to come out of their baths naked or with a towel. They would often run around the house for the next twenty minutes until my mom or sister got around to dressing them.

Changing my younger sisters' diapers when they were really young may not have been a big thing, but it really did not have to be that way (if we had only applied Levitical law). My younger sisters used to wear dresses often, but as they were young and not aware of modesty, they did not behave in them as they should.

Mom did not push the modesty unless we were in public, and Dad only had the opportunity to mention it during weekends. Little people do not realize their nakedness right away. It takes several years before they grasp it. It needs to be taught to them. My mom is a nurse, and the human body was not a big deal to her. I guess she didn't want it to be for her children either.

She and I have talked about it. She explained to me that she had no idea how visual male sexuality is, compared to women who are mainly by touch. I am so grateful my parents have changed so much of this area in our home. This was not a major reason for the offending, but it allowed my little sister to be open to what I made her do. I don't think so much teaching was necessary because everyone was so young. However, a different lifestyle, with more modesty, might have prevented what happened.

The quick destruction of pornography

Pornography has been a stumbling point for me for a long time. It started when I was working at a store near my home. They did not have porn there, but a customer would use the dumpster as a place to get rid of his. It was late January 1993. I had just been working there for two months or so when I went to take out the trash, and I looked in the dumpster and saw a pornographic magazine. It hit me hard, and temptation came over me like a flood. I could not believe the war that was going on in my head. Should I look or not was the question, but I had already given ground through other things of a sensual nature.

I had not gained this ground back. I had seen movies when I went to friends' and relatives' houses where there was not the same standard as in our home. I had the desire to look for sensual things, and I did, but this was a boundary that I had created, like a line I promised never to cross. Funny thing was I had never had the chance to cross it before, so it was easy to keep. I thought that I could look at "just one." That was not the case. I became a living testimony of what it says in Proverbs. "The eyes of man are never satisfied." It didn't satisfy me, and it seemed to just bring more temptation.

One of the problems that came with this immorality was guilt and hiding my problem. I should have spoken to my parents and told them all that was going on in my life, but I didn't. I felt I would be rejected by them and not understood. The arguing I was doing was pride. I was not going to humble myself before them. Before the problem had gone this far, I wish that my parents had established a mutual trust so that there could have been open communication between me and them. I wanted to be able to tell them anything and feel like they would help me through the problem and not just give me a consequence for it. I believe that would have made a difference. I might be asking too much, but at the least it would have challenged my thought life—asking me what

I thought about when I went to sleep, if I had any immoral thoughts, or were there any challenges that were a struggle for me.

I think my dad asked me once how I was doing and hinted about that area, but it was not direct and to the point. I can remember thinking, "Does he really want to know about that?" I went on to tell him, "I'm fine," while thinking, "If he would ask one more time, a little more directly, then I would know if he really wanted to know." I should have told then, but I didn't. (My fault.) If the question was constantly before me and asked regularly of me, I would have begun to feel as if it really mattered. I think it would make me feel as if I was being held accountable. For me that would have brought guilt, forcing me to confess my faults.

Sex was not and is not a major topic in our family, not that it should be, but I felt that the subject was not allowed as far as what I could bring into a conversation. Maybe if my parents had told me about sex around age twelve or so, I could have asked a lot of questions, and maybe I would have had something to go on. As it was, my sex education came from what I pieced together from movies, friends, and the jokes that I heard.

If I had a twelve-year-old son, I don't know how I would tell him about sex, but if I didn't, someone else would, if they hadn't already. I would guess he would already have some questions. I think that most problems in families start with poor communication between people. I see a need for "open, honest communication," the freedom to be listened to when needed, and to have questions answered in an understanding way. If started at a young age, it could be a foundation when they get older and problems get more difficult.

One of the things that I learned about in the two years of counseling was personal boundaries. There are some basic steps to keep the opportunities of offending away from young men. For example, not letting myself baby-sit, have little kids sit on my lap, or hang on me, or even be alone with a little person. There is also no roughhousing or wrestling that could encourage inappropriate touching.

If I had applied these before I offended, it would not have been easy to offend. The simplicity of these boundaries is a small price to pay for such protection. I don't want to say I forbid my younger sisters to touch me, but I do make sure that when we make physical contact with each other it is done properly.

For example, if the little people want a hug, I get down on one knee and hug them on their level. I don't pick them up or let them hang on me. My mom thought I should mention that one should ask when you want a hug or when you want to be in someone's personal space (within twelve inches of their body), or touch them.

A letter from the mother of the offending boy

One thing that stands out to me is how I was suspicious that something had, or was, going on. No one wants to think that this could happen in his home. If we come to grips with the fact that it did, there are two things that become paramount. One, what will happen to my family, and, do I report this. The other thing is the guilt associated with not protecting younger siblings. It is very easy for a mom to let her son talk her out of her suspicions or to downplay the suspicions. It can be overwhelming not to know what to do.

When my daughter had indicated something was going on, and the son denied it, I had no evidence. I thought if I put some fear into him, if it did happen, he would not

do anything again. That is not true. The temptation can become an addiction and works like other addictions.

As Christians in a secular world, we can become fearful of what could happen to our families if authorities or counselors get involved. We want to hide the problem. That may not be God's best. It would take far too long to go through what happened when the authorities became involved in our problem, but I will say, God was faithful to us. We now have some people we would consider friends that have very difficult jobs in the juvenile system.

I might add that because of time spent in Indianapolis, he spent no time in detention in this state. The judge that heard his case accepted the two weeks in Indianapolis as detention time. That was just one area where God was faithful to us.

It is difficult if a parent does not experience things that his child may. My husband did not have the same struggles as his son and was not prepared for this problem. He had thought caring for other siblings was a good experience, one that would prepare his sons for fatherhood.

Looking back, if we had known the struggle it could cause for our sons, we never would have allowed or encouraged baby-sitting, or any other unsupervised care of the younger children by the older sons. The saying "ignorance is bliss" is so true, but it can also be our stumbling block. Sexual matters can also be uncomfortable to talk about so that they become easy to subtly avoid.

Recommended changes based on this report

Every precaution should be taken by families so that a similar tragedy will not happen among their children. Once it does happen, it can never be undone, and the scars last a lifetime. Therefore, the following factors should be carefully considered for application in every home.

- ☐ Do not tolerate laziness by any child. Plan a full day's schedule.
- ☐ Do not argue with your children over surface problems. Probe for root problems.
- ☐ Do not neglect moods of depression in your children. Plan a time to talk it out.
- ☐ Do not allow boys to change diapers, especially of baby sisters.
- ☐ Insist on modesty at all times.
- ☐ Teach the children to recognize wrong behavior in moral areas.
- ☐ Pray for protection from pornography. Prepare them to resist it by reading Prov. 1-7.
- ☐ Establish open, honest accountability for daily victory in thoughts, words, and actions.
- ☐ Provide warnings on immorality from Biblical accounts such as Samson, Tamar, etc.
- ☐ Provide guidelines on all physical contacts between children.
- ☐ Prohibit roughhousing, wrestling, and inappropriate touching of brothers with sisters.