

Waiting for the One: Keeping Clean in a Dirty World

The fourth finger of my left hand is bound by a small, silver ring. It's nothing fancy, hardly stylish, and rarely is noticed by even those who know me well. But that does not subtract from its importance. It is the representation of a pledge, the symbol of a sacrifice, the seal of a promise. My purity ring fortifies me with an invisible standard, and signs my name to a promise that so often is left cruelly shattered on the floor.

Today's culture has penned its own version of what is right, wrong, and in-between, leaving the truth buried somewhere in the pages of history to rust into a memory. In relation to anything from simple communication to long-term dating, television, movies, music, clothing, and any other advertising force has tossed sentiment to the sidewalk, and ushered in sexual passion to be hailed as the supreme chancellor of relationship etiquette. Sex before marriage has come to be seen as a harmless normality that is almost expected, if not approved. Its lucrative pleasures blind society to the unwanted pregnancies, life-threatening diseases, emotional landslides, and esteem-slashing degradations that linger in its shadow.

Because such hedonistic doctrines stifle all they touch with such unbearable weight, my generation is deaf, blinded, numb, crippled and dying, and doesn't know why. Girls my age are softly whispered throaty lies and lullabies of how sex is the equivalence of proven love. Such deceit rots into their very souls until the flowers of their innocence are slowly stripped of their last wilted petals. Girls my age are unmasked to a world of steamy, flesh-woven fantasies, images and experiences that sear into once bright, wide eyes, blackening life's vivacious color until its last strands fade. Girls my age are used like animals and objects, all for the sake of a rush and the tingle of desire. This very shot of adrenaline-spiked attention sucks the feeling from their

limbs and turns hearts that once raced and fluttered cold and calloused. Girls my age surrender their soaring ambitions, glittering hopes, and fantastical dreams to the tempting hand that reaches out, promising them the stars. The galaxies remain unmoving and constant as yet another life is wrenched apart by pain. Girls *my* age give up their lives for the echo of a promise someone never intended to keep, hoping someday that the fairytale they dreamt of in their youth might fall from the sky to whisk them far away to never return. Their spirits are slowly drowned in the steadily deepening pools of putrid poison that quench one's thirst for a moment, only to scorch the soul for eternity. People just like me are suffering, hurt, abandoned and alone because they decided to have sex with someone who refused to give them a vow.

Mine is a somewhat sheltered life, structured by a value-based family, private education, and strong conscience to fill my experiences with what is upstanding and pure. At sixteen years of age, I committed to myself, my family, my faith, and my future spouse, that I would not participate in sex before marriage. Yet, I have siblings, friends, classmates and neighbors who have dangled their boundaries over a pit of destruction, and reaped sorrow. I've cried with boys who aren't ready to be fathers. I've mourned with best friends who chose to abort a child. I've held the hands of rape victims, and cried with girls who believe their worth is nonexistent. With every tear I wipe from my own eyes while grieving beside those I love, the ring on my finger wraps itself tighter around my skin.

Webster says that ethics are "the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, etc." I've learned that setting strict codes and uptight regulations to living life drain it of the zesty flavor it's intended to have. I've also

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experienced how tolling a bell for reckless anarchy taints the name of freedom, and ultimately leaves only questions where answers should reside. So what, at their very core, once generalities, politics, and expectations have been swept away, are unadulterated ethics? Ethics are the guidelines that light a path paved by following the good pulsing through one's heart. In a world overshadowed by corruption and immorality, ethics beckon lost souls to turn from wicked and follow the way home.