

Does true love really wait? Apparently not for many...

by Vicki Courtney

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As someone who writes books on teen culture and more specifically, issues impacting teen girls, it is rare that I am caught off-guard and rendered speechless by any of the new stats concerning sexually active teens. However, such was the case a few days ago. I was familiar with the statistic stating that 66% of teens will have had sex by the time they graduate from high school, but I had often wondered how much the statistic would increase by the end of the college years. While reading the book, "Teenage Girls: Exploring Issues Adolescent Girls Face and Strategies to Help Them" by Ginny Olson, I got my answer. I stumbled upon the statistic that 92% of girls ages 20-22 have had sexual intercourse. And before you assume that a mere 8% will make it to their wedding day with their virginity intact, keep in mind that the average age of marriage is 26 for women and 28 for men. The virgin bride is clearly a rarity.

As a Christian who believes that sex was created by God to be celebrated in the confines of marriage and is raising my children accordingly, I think this should be a wake-up call for Christians to examine the effectiveness of virginity pledges and our current abstinence programs. When you couple the statistic cited above with the statistic that approximately 88% of those making virginity pledges will end up breaking their pledges, clearly something is wrong. Suffice it to say, true love is *not* waiting. Perhaps we should focus some of our attention on the ever-increasing average age of marriage. In 1950 it was 20 for women and 22 for men, and the divorce rate was *half* what it is today. It was not only acceptable to be a virgin, but preferable. And let's be honest, it was probably a heck of a lot easier for teens to hold off on sex if they knew they were likely to walk down the aisle by the age of 20-22. I am certainly not suggesting that we encourage our daughters and sons to wed by 20-22, but I do think we need a serious attitude adjustment when it comes to marriage. Christians seem to have bought into the culture's mindset that successful marriages are delayed marriages. We tell our kids to go to college, experience the working world, and get their feet on the ground before considering marriage. "Enjoy being single while you can," seems to be the new mantra. Of course we stop there and fail to mention that there may be a price to pay on down the road when one opts to "enjoy being single into their late 20's and 30's." No one talks about the increase in cohabitation (and expectation among men), the prevalence of hooking-up, the increase in STD's and out of wedlock births among those in their 20's, the increased likelihood of infertility among women who delay childbirth, not to mention, the physical toll that comes from parenting preschoolers in your 40's. I had all three of my children by my 30th birthday and will have them all out of the nest by the time I'm 47. I'm absolutely exhausted and I can't even imagine what I would feel like if I had to add another ten years to the equation.

Today's young adults (often referred to as "kidults") are in no hurry to grow up and their parents often oblige them. And therein lies the real problem. The solution? I'm still fleshing it out myself, but as a parent of three teens, I'm going to be expanding my "save sex for marriage" talk." I am going to be purposeful in

raising my kids to be adults when they leave home rather than toss them out the door and put them on the self-paced-journey-to-adulthood program. And, last of all, and get ready, it's a bit radical---I'm going to plant the seed that when it comes to those who are committed Christians, God didn't likely plan for them to wait until their late 20's and 30's to marry. It doesn't make sense that God would give teens raging hormones and then have them wait another decade or so to act upon them. I am certainly not endorsing high school marriages and am more than aware of the high failure rate among teen marriages. But what about the early 20's? If one of my children were to meet their future spouse in late college and said future spouse is a responsible, God-fearing, Jesus-loving individual who believes in marriage until "death do us part," I'm not sure I would object to a wedding before they completed college. Of course, this also assumes they have a plan in place for paying the bills. Marriage is going to be tough, regardless of whether they are young and struggling to make ends meet or they are older and trying to cope with an endless stream of broken relationships, possible flashbacks from past hook-ups, and a slew of selfish habits aquired in their years of prolonged singleness. In the end, I will leave the results up to God, but I am allowed to put in my request, right? Besides, I want to enjoy my grandkids when I'm young! Comment back and let me know what YOU think...