

# friend of the seeker

*Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them, even to the [spiritual] shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the [spiritual] shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the sheep?... The diseased and weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the hurt and crippled you have not bandaged, those gone astray you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought to find.*

EZEKIEL 34:2,4, AMP

This is God's eternal, chilling warning to His shepherds, and since Christ has made us "a kingdom and priests" (Revelation 5:10), surely God expects each of us to pay close attention to this warning as well. We must think over these words carefully, because never has sin been more rampant in America than it is today, and the percentage of folks in our pews with little Christian heritage is growing rapidly.

When Brenda and I began teaching premarriage classes in the mid-eighties, most of the couples were what we called "normal Brad-and-Joni-types"—both partners were clearly committed to purity and Christian ways in the way they lived. By the time we quit teaching premarriage classes a

mere twelve years later, I would say that one-third of the couples had lived together prior to marriage and two-thirds had already slept together.

I'll never forget my pastor's exclaiming in frustration, "How can so many people in this church be living this way!"

Good question, and if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it's because more and more young people are growing up in broken homes where they never hear what God teaches in the Bible. But I also wonder if we haven't gotten scared? As congregations, are we so afraid of hurting our attendance figures that we've stopped telling the hard truth on Sunday mornings in church and Sunday school? As individuals, have we stopped living and telling the truth on the other days of the week for fear of losing our friends and offending our kids? We've left the weak and crippled to limp hopelessly on in their sin, unaware that they aren't walking normally.

As an illustration, for a while I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I liked to hang out on North Broadway, the downtown's adult-theater district (these were the days before I became a believer). I liked ambling by the doorways so I could get a good look at the barely clad busty women standing in the doorways. Whenever they called out, "Hey, big boy, ya wanna come in and play?" they scared me to death. I might have been up to my neck in porn, but I didn't want to know *what* I might find behind those doorway curtains.

But let me ask you something: Can you guess what those women of the night were wearing as they stood in the doorways? Do you suppose that they looked like Caroline Ingalls of *Little House on the Prairie*, with long sleeves to the wrists, collar to the neck, and skirt to the pavement?

Heavens no, they wanted to get your motor running! They were dressed in little spaghetti-strap dresses with hiked-up hemlines, giving you an eye-ful of every curve on their bodies.

Recently, in our church, I was quickstepping off to Sunday school. As I came around a corner, I nearly ran head-on into a girl I knew from the youth group. Everything happened so fast. We each braked hard, jolting to

a stop and ending up face to face, about two inches apart. She was shorter than me, and when I looked down to apologize, I audibly gasped. Guess what she was wearing? One of those spaghetti-strap dresses, just like the ones I'd left behind in San Francisco.

In amazement, but without a trace of judgment, a thought slammed through my head: *Are our daughters dressing like whores and strippers now?* I meant no harm, but because of my background, that was the first thought that popped through my astonished brain. She didn't even know that what she was doing was wrong. As parents, why aren't we telling the truth? Why aren't we teaching our kids not to dress seductively these days?

Linda grew up in the church and recently approached her youth pastor with a question. "I've been giving oral sex to different boys at our parties for quite a while now. I don't know why, but I just thought I should ask you about it. Is that wrong for me to do?"

Stumbling a bit, the youth pastor asked, "Were these your boyfriends?"

"No, I wasn't dating any of them," she responded. "It's just a casual thing. All the guys know me for it, and that's why they come to the parties. Now they expect it. I feel quite a bit of pressure to keep giving them what they want, because I've become quite popular because of it. Still, I thought maybe I should ask you about it, just to make sure it was okay."

Where were her parents? Her Sunday-school teachers? Her youth-group leaders?

Where are you? We all *know* we should teach some standards of dress and purity in both our homes and our churches, but too often we dawdle and hem and haw and never quite get around to it. We want to be friendly to everyone, and we wouldn't dream of hurting anyone's feelings. But could it be that we've become so friendly that we've forgotten to be their friend?

What is a real friend? A friend tells you the truth about your behavior, even when it's not easy to do. A friend is someone who tells you that you aren't walking normally and, what's more, that you'll never walk normally until you shape up.

We've put in coffee carts and welcome centers to be warm and inviting when the weak and the crippled stagger through our church doors. How can we be so cruel as to hide the truth from them behind these same coffee carts and welcome centers so they never hear it?

I've got nothing against coffee and a relaxed atmosphere at church—I like it. And I'm aware that people are looking for love and acceptance. We all want that.

But it isn't loving to give them only what they want. We must also give them what they need—the truth. When we don't, our church bodies hemorrhage into massive internal bleeding.

We gave a copy of *Every Man's Marriage* to a good Christian friend active in her church and respected as a conservative school-board member in a district across town. After reading several chapters, she burst into tears and stopped reading. "As I read along, the beauty of this picture of marriage only reminded me of what I'd never have with my husband," she explained. "I couldn't stand the pain of reading it any longer."

That's what I mean by internal bleeding. We have all these happy, friendly churches with happy-looking people happily doing work for God, and yet, beneath the surface, nothing is making sense. Husbands aren't sacrificing for holiness and right living, wives are giving up, and behind every whitewashed wall are dead-men's bones.

To be a friend we must define holiness clearly so that we can all walk normally. We did this in *Every Young Man's Battle*, which prompted Kelli to write us this note:

I read your book *Every Young Man's Battle* and have never heard Christians talk so openly about sex. I grew up in church and was always taught that intercourse before marriage was wrong, but that was it. Once a year we went through the True Love Waits program, signed the card, and then didn't talk about it again until the following year. My father even took me out on a date once and gave me a

“purity” ring to remind me not to have intercourse, but no one told me that all the other stuff was wrong too. As I think back, I can’t help feeling that if half the talks about abstinence in our youth group were about foreplay and total purity instead, I wouldn’t have ever gone far enough with a boy to have to worry about intercourse. *Thank you for the truth.*

We are a kingdom and priests. We must each rise up bravely and tell the truth about sin to our kids and to our friends, because only the truth will bring back the straying and strengthen the weak and crippled. People long for the truth, like Kelli. They don’t want to limp along. They want to walk normally. They just need someone to tell them.

Yet somewhere along the way, we decided to stop defining holiness too clearly because we didn’t want to seem too different from other people, scared of what people might think and scared that we might hurt our relationships at home. Now we have our wish—we don’t look much different at all, and we’re too often limping along in the same fog as the lost.

Our girls don’t know the modest from the sensual or that petting and oral sex are wrong. Our divorce rates equal those of our unsaved friends, and our marriages no more picture Christ’s relationship to the church than theirs do. Christian men are just as addicted to pornography as those outside our churches.

Are you strengthening the weak, binding up the crippled, and bringing back the strays? Are you even strengthening yourself, or are you still sucking spiritual milk from baby bottles? The meat of God’s Word is necessary for strength, no matter how tough it can be to bite off and chew. Jesus was the Word in flesh, and the life of the Son is in the Word. An encounter with the meat of God’s Word, then, is an encounter with Jesus, our Healer and our standard for living. Every touch from His life in the truth of His Word has one purpose, to bring your life up to the normal, higher heights in Him.

There is no healing without hard truth, no matter how nice things look on the outside during the week and no matter how good the coffee smells on Sunday morning. The broken bones must be set, and the torn cartilage repaired, by the truth, or the crippled will never walk normally again.

### *Quiz*

Are you afraid to give your family what it needs because it might make them look too different? Or because it might hurt your relationship with them?

Do you have an active plan for teaching standards to your kids, or are you dawdling?