

Emotional Protection for Girls

I consider this a subject not sufficiently addressed in our days, especially in the church. When it comes to emotions and talking to young people, according to the Bible, the emphasis is commonly on safeguarding sexual intimacy for marriage. However, I believe there is an emotional reality to be cared for and taken into account for this to happen. Therefore, there are some principles that are important to keep in mind so that relationships with peers do not become a source of hurt, low self-esteem, or negative influences on future relationships.

The Bible says: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23); and also: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Often, throughout life, but especially in adolescence and youth, we are tempted to follow what our eyes see, our emotions, and what we feel, rather than reason, the advice of our family and leaders, or the guidelines presented in the Bible.

Girls, who have a special need for a male role model in their lives, sooner or later start to be interested in the opposite sex, desiring to have a boyfriend, a friend, a special companion, a husband - someone with whom they can exchange affection and tenderness, someone who finds them beautiful and special, someone who makes them feel important and loved.

Some girls may even feel incomplete without this male presence. After the woman (Eve) disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, God said to her, "Your desire will be for your husband" (Genesis 3:16). Therefore, the desire for the opposite sex is normal as inherent to human beings. And I believe that this desire will appear sooner and be even greater the fewer male references there are in a girl's or young woman's life. An absent or insufficiently affirming father can increase the daughter's search for that reference in another person of the opposite sex. Note that there may be men (family or others) present in a young woman's life, but if they do not become emotionally significant people, emotional deprivation can set in, and the girl may try to fill it in other ways.

When I think of the story of Dinah in Genesis 34, I think about these and other issues surrounding the dynamics of a teenager's life and her relationships - and everything the Bible teaches us about it beyond first impressions. Dinah was a young woman from "good families," as we often say in Portugal. Indeed, from the best of all families: the family that inherited the promise to be the beginning of the nation chosen by God, the nation of Israel. (First lesson: sometimes problems also happen in "good families," in families faithful to God, and this is not necessarily a consequence of a lack of interest in spiritual life or neglect of parents).

So, back to our story: Dinah was the only girl among 11 brothers at that time. After her, the one who would be "Jacob's beloved son" was born - Joseph. The Bible says that Dinah wanted to go meet the girls of that city where they lived, a city of people who did not fear the God of Israel or follow His principles - Shechem.

Nothing seems more natural! A young woman who only had brothers, in a society where the voice and will were predominantly male, just wanted to have friends, girls... On that journey, however, she met the prince of the city. We could almost say with certainty that he would be the most coveted boy. The other girls must have said to Dinah: "Look, see that boy there? That's Shechem. So handsome... And he doesn't have a girlfriend yet." The boy looked at Dinah and surely was suddenly enchanted with what was different. We often look at what is different... Especially the younger ones. Suddenly, what is different from what we know gains special interest. Shechem didn't know anyone like Dinah...

In verse 2, it is understood that Shechem, the prince, forced Dinah to have sexual relations with him. What followed, even from a God-fearing family, was a terrible revenge and a carnage that ended with the death of all the men in the city, carried out by Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers (v. 25).

A story with a tragic ending, in the midst of a promising family. I can't imagine how Dinah felt after this situation. Although not guilty of what happened to her, because of her feminine condition and the importance that honor held in society at that time, Dinah must have internalized an unspeakable guilt and shame. Sometimes, when others try to fix complicated situations by applying "zeal without knowledge" (Proverbs 19:2; Romans 10:2-3), they can cause even greater disasters.

And after this story, what remains if you are a girl, young woman, or young person? Here are some suggestions to guard your heart and continue as a victor:

- Young men may approach you with the intention of satisfying their ego. They may seek some closeness and attention because it makes them feel "conquerors" and not necessarily because they genuinely have a special interest or respect for who you are. Seek to understand their intentions and way of acting. Men who fear God take relationships seriously.
- Look for an older, experienced, and God-fearing woman with whom you can establish a relationship of trust. Share with her your feelings, anxieties, questions, and fears, no matter how ridiculous they may seem. This person should help you with healthy advice for this stage of your life.
- Strive to belong to a community, association, church, where you can have a group of friends with healthy habits, of your age or similar age, both boys and girls, married and single. Isolation can be harmful and is not at all God's plan

for our lives: "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment" (Proverbs 18:1).

- Engage in activities that make you feel fulfilled. Do you like to read? Play sports? Listen to music? Help people? Paint? Study? Occupy your mind and body with diverse activities that make you feel useful. Discover and enhance your gifts! Surely, you have many. God endowed us all with different abilities and capacities.
- Be observant. As much as possible, learn from the mistakes of others to avoid falling into the same errors. Observe the relationships around you: see what, from others' experience, you should avoid because it will bring adverse consequences or the positive characteristics that you can apply in your life.
- If your thoughts tend to self-criticism, devaluation, feeling ugly or incapable, seek help, whether from an older and balanced friend, a pastor, or a therapist. You have value! God says that in His Word many times! You need to believe, think, and say that! Say: "I was created by God, every part of me, I have value!"
- Do not place overly high expectations on people. People can hurt and be hurt. There are no perfect relationships or people. Do not base your worth on what others may say to you, but remember that God loves you, and you are His favorite girl (Isaiah 62:4).
- Finally, and most importantly, live a personal relationship with Christ. Know that He is your Savior and can help you in any situation. Know that He loves you as you are, has a good, perfect, and pleasing plan for your life, left His Word - the Bible - for your guidance, and wants you to feel the most special, important, and loved. He wants to give you a crown instead of ashes, a perfume of happiness instead of a sad face, a party dress instead of a downcast face (Isaiah 61:3). Put your heart in God's hands because He is the safest place for us.

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