The Purity Ring

How a simple gift can change your child's life.

by Judith Hayes

It's no secret that a child's teen years are a tumultuous time for both parents and teenagers. The process of letting a child become more independent brings with it a tremendous amount of fear. As parents, we want nothing more than to see our children make choices that reflect the Christian values we've worked so hard to instill in them. That may be especially true when it comes to sexual activity, where a wrong choice can lead to life-changing consequences.

But what might surprise you is that an increasing number of teenagers are expressing a desire to abstain from sex until they're married. The success of programs like True Love Waits, where teens sign a pledge of purity, and the interest in abstinence-based sex education curriculums in the public schools show that teenagers are eager to hear convincing reasons to say no to premarital sex.

For Mike and Judi Hayes of Chatsworth, California, the desire to develop a godly sense of sexual purity in their daughter inspired a unique gift—a purity ring. The twist is that the idea of the purity ring sprang not from Mike and Judi, but from their 13-year-old daughter, Annabelle. As their story makes clear, this ring was more than just a gesture of love. It was the symbol of a covenant that changed their family forever.

Judi: As our youngest daughter, Annabelle, grew older, it became clear that she and I were in for some nasty power struggles. Annabelle's teen years were like a roller coaster ride—one minute our daughter was a little girl asking for her allowance. The next she was an angry adolescent demanding her independence. Our adorable, curly headed child had developed into a tall, shapely, and gorgeous young woman who loudly, and at times rudely, demanded her freedom.

I can be passionate, opinionated, and hot-tempered, which only contributed to the tension between my daughter and me. I didn't remember having these kinds of struggles with our older daughter, and I often wondered if Annabelle and I would make it through these years with our relationship intact. I prayed, cried, confided in friends, asked for advice, and finally gave up.

Fortunately, my husband, Mike, approaches life much differently than I do. He has a calm, peaceful temperament and as our girls grew up, he provided gentle discipline and guidance that grew out of prayer and patience. As Annabelle became a strong-willed and defiant young teenager, I knew that Mike would find a way of reaching her heart and calming her spirit. Through his steady presence, he stayed connected with Annabelle. The two of them developed an unshakable bond—a bond that paid off as Annabelle began making decisions about the kind of person she wanted to be.

Mike: As a Christian parent, I've come to realize that sometimes the innocent and guileless words of a child can lead an adult toward wisdom, and even into the arms of God himself. I feel fortunate that both of our daughters chose to be believers in Christ. They had relationships with God even before I was saved. I have learned many spiritual lessons by watching them live out their faith.

Annabelle's purity ring didn't come out of some brilliant idea on my part. It came from her genuine desire to be a woman of God. But it did take some careful listening on my part to uncover that desire.

Our girls have often told me that the birthday or Christmas gifts I gave them were the best, not remembering that they had casually mentioned their wishes to me months earlier. That was the case with the purity ring. One day, when Annabelle was 13, she came to me and said, "Dad, my friend Shawna's father gave her a gold ring to remind her of her relationship with the Lord. It's called a purity ring, and I'd really like to wear one, too."

The following week I went to our local Bible bookstore to look at purity rings. While I knew this was a wonderful idea, I had some fears. Could we afford to give a 13-year-old such an expensive gold ring? Would her older sister be jealous or hurt because she never received one? I felt strongly that this ring was not just a pretty piece of jewelry, but it stood for something much deeper—it was to be a symbol of our daughter's commitment to virtue. I called Judi for help. "True," she said, "we can't afford it. Yes, there may be some hurt feelings from our other daughter, but it's the right thing to do. Buy the ring!"

I purchased the gold ring with hearts and doves on it. I felt it reflected both Annabelle's personality and her faith. I decided to give it to her on her 14th birthday. But since this was no ordinary gift, I knew it needed a special presentation. It couldn't just be thrown in with her other gifts. At the same time, I knew I didn't want to present it with a lecture on chastity or some legalistic speech. Annabelle was strong willed, and I knew she would respond openly to her gift if it was given with words of love, encouragement, trust in her integrity, and delight that she was growing into a woman of God.

And that's just what happened. When I presented Annabelle with her purity ring, she knew that this was more than just a token. It was a symbol of everything her mom and I wanted for her. She accepted the ring with joy and immediately placed it on her wedding finger, where it remained throughout her teen and early adult years.

Judi: As a mother, I was very touched by this token of my husband's love for our child. Mike was Annabelle's protector, her hero, her first Prince Charming. That ring was a gift from a father's heart designed to advocate his daughter's modesty and virtue.

I'm not going to tell you that Annabelle's dating years were all fun and games or that she never struggled to hold on to her purity. But her purity ring reminded Annabelle every day that we cared deeply about what happened to her and that we were on her side.

Eventually, Annabelle became engaged to the love of her life. He presented her with a beautiful ring which she placed on her wedding finger. Then, without hesitation, she moved her purity ring to her right hand, where it remained until her wedding day.

When the big day arrived, Annabelle stood at the front of the church looking like an angel in her pure white wedding gown. The vows were shared, the blessings were pronounced, and our daughter and her handsome new husband stood before us blissfully happy and radiant. They had remained pure and virtuous throughout their relationship and had no regrets.

As they were introduced as husband and wife, Annabelle and Gregg stepped forward to greet Mike and me. As we hugged, Annabelle gently slipped her purity ring into my hand and whispered, "Mom, please save this for us until we give birth to our first child."

That ring meant more to our family than any of us realized at the time. It was not just about our hopes that Annabelle would save sex for marriage. It was about our love for her in the face of conflict and change. It was about telling her that she was precious to us and that we cared deeply about the person she was becoming. Most of all, it was about giving Annabelle a constant reminder of God's plans for her.

•*Judith Hayes and her husband are awaiting the arrival of their first grandchild.*

Encouraging Sons

I often speak to groups of teenagers, and inevitably I learn something from them that surprises me. After talking about Annabelle's purity ring with one group of teens, some of the boys in the group made it clear that they, too, long for encouragement and guidance from their parents to abstain from sex until marriage. All of the boys said that they really like the idea of wearing a purity ring (something masculine, of course) to remind them to remain faithful to God and committed to sexual purity.

If you have a teenage son, talk with him about remaining pure in thought and action. Consider giving him a purity ring he can wear on his finger or even on a chain around his neck. Let him know that God will help him rise above the temptations of the world and be a faithful man of God.

—Judith Hayes