

Christian teens prove purity is possible

By Patti Smith | psmith@secc.org

When peers pressure Bruce Dickson about his virginity, he gently reminds them of his commitment to abstain from sex until marriage. At age 13, Bruce told his dad, Mike Dickson, that he wouldn't be intimate with a girl—not even kiss her—until their wedding day.

Bruce, whose decision is based on his Christian faith, has not wavered.

"It can be tough," said Bruce, who now is 20. "That relationship is something that every man desires, and it's just something I want to save for her. I know it's going to be really special." Christian young adults say making the decision for sexual purity is easy. Following through on the commitment is hard.

The ones who are succeeding protect their purity by studying the Bible, having strong accountability and avoiding one-on-one dates.

In today's society, just less than half of high school students are sexually active, and the majority of the ones that aren't are freshman and sophomores. Statistics show that 46.3 percent of teens in Kentucky and 44.5 percent in Indiana are sexually active. (Center for Disease Control Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Sexual Behaviors Study 2005)

When Bruce, who lives in Bastrop, Texas, is faced with criticism or pressure from his peers, he stands his ground—the way he did on national television at his audition for the popular reality show American Idol. He told judges Randy Jackson, Paula Abdul and Simon Cowell about his decision to save his first kiss when they asked him what made him different from the others auditioning.

Jackson gave him some encouragement on the singing end by telling him to come back next year, and that his voice was "almost there." But when Bruce asked for some advice on how he could improve on his singing, Jackson said "kiss some girls."

"I was thinking: 'Well, thanks, that's really going to help me with my career,'" Bruce said. A video clip of an interview done on American Idol with Bruce and his dad can be viewed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZSLGMRKkI

At the end of the clip, the show's host Ryan Seacrest said: "Maybe if Bruce does come back next year, he'll return less boy and more man."

"Nowadays, in order to become a man you have to take advantage of some girls first—that's how society views it, I guess," Bruce said. "I think it takes more man to save yourself for that one person than to do whatever with whoever."

Bruce said he doesn't judge people for dating, but he gets concerned about nonchalant attitudes toward commitment.

"They make a commitment until something doesn't work out, or until they find something else better," he said. "It becomes a commitment that's not really a commitment."

Bruce is starting now, and waiting on God's timing to meet that one woman He has for him.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DICKSON FAMILY

In regard to sexual purity, Bruce Dickson, who auditioned for "American Idol," said, "It takes more man to save yourself for that one person than to do whatever with whoever."

"If I'm committed to her, and I don't even know her name, how much more will I be committed when we're married?"

Bruce draws his strength from reading God's Word, and he wants to be a role model for other young people—especially his four younger siblings.

Perhaps Bruce's greatest role model is his 24-year-old sister who got married the day before his final Idol audition.

"She had her first kiss at the altar. She's been a big example to me and all my siblings. I hope I can be the same," he said.

Before Bruce starts thinking about marriage, he wants to build his music career. He is recording his first CD, which will include the track *The Key*—a song he wrote to his future wife, whose heart he will unlock one day.

His decision to remain pure was influenced by his parents' teaching, but eventually, that wasn't enough anymore.

"You've got to make that decision for your life. You've got to own it," he said. Her love for the Lord was the main reason Kathryn Smith, 23, committed to living a pure life. Watching girls suffer after broken relationships with boys reinforced the decision she made in her high school years.

"They put so much of their hope, life, identity and self-confidence in their relationships with guys," she said of the pain she has witnessed among many girls.

Purity isn't just about the physical. It's a total package of the heart, mind and body. "One thing I treasure the most is my virginity," said Selena DeRossett, 21, who was a junior in high school when she made the decision for purity. "People say, 'Oh, well, that means you don't have sex.' But it's more than just that. Your thoughts have to be pure before your actions can be pure."

Selena, who is a psychology major at University of Louisville, was on her way home from a Governor's Scholar program the summer of 2004 when she stopped at Southeast to visit The Living Word bookstore. She bought a book and a purity ring, which some people wear to symbolize their commitment to purity.

Selena is committed to Bible study, meeting with other young women who help hold her accountable and going out with her boyfriend—not staying in.

Kellie Raines, 21, said it's easy to slip—even in Christian relationships, so avoiding compromising circumstances is crucial to protecting not only her purity, but that of her boyfriend's as well.

"We know what our commitment is," she said. The two plan a long courtship, but a short engagement.

While courting—being in a relationship that will one day lead to marriage—Kellie and her boyfriend go out in groups with other couples who have the same goal. When they do want some time for just the two of them, they go to a restaurant or some other public place where there are lots of people around.

"If it's been a very romantic date, we'll go home early. We don't go back to each other's homes. We're pretty strict about that," she said.

Susan St. Clair, Blended Families Ministry Leader, has two adult children in courtship relationships.

St. Clair and her husband, Lance, worked to instill the mindset of purity in their children from the time they were little because it can be more difficult to accept in the teenage years. "It's one thing for the parents to attempt to instill this mindset in their children, but the victory is won when the children adopt it for themselves," she said.

As for the almost Idol contender, Bruce said his dad sat him down when he was about 7 years old and asked him what his qualifications were in a wife.

That seems like a pretty heavy conversation for a 7-year-old, but it's one that has stuck with Bruce all of these years.

His only non-negotiable is that she must share his faith in Christ.

David Baird, executive director of Country Lake Christian Retreat in Underwood, Ind., has taken his role of mentoring his two sons seriously.

He took each of them out on a weekend retreat of sorts when they turned 13 to talk in-depth about what it means to walk in purity with the Lord.

He also has involved other men in his sons' lives who help encourage them in their journey to manhood—to help them become men of honor who glorify God in every aspect of their lives. The young men and women interviewed for this article said that the more they study God's Word, the deeper their conviction has become to stay pure.

Simple things that seem harmless like flirting, hand-holding or a kiss can lead to lustful thoughts and behavior.

Kathryn has set boundaries for herself, but she recalled a time where she and her boyfriend were going to go out, and he asked her to change her shirt because it made him struggle. "That's why the Bible says '... there must not be even a hint,'" she said, "of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Eph. 5:2-4).

It's never too late to experience sexual purity—even if you're not a virgin. "It's not over," Bruce said. "You start from where you are now, and you move forward."