Ministering the Love of Christ to Single Teen Mothers

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Sue pleaded with great emotion in her voice, “Mary, I don’t know what to do! Yesterday I ran into Christine, a friend of mine from high school. She led me to the Lord when we were working together at that time. Since then she’s stopped walking with the Lord, had a baby out of wedlock, and the father has custody. She can’t even see her baby and she has so many problems that she is seeing a psychiatrist and is on more than a dozen drugs. She’s totally incapacitated; she really needs help! Could you help her? Would you be willing to meet with her?”

Answering Sue’s plea for help involved more than merely saying yes to a one-hour counseling session with her friend. I didn’t know it then, but that day I was catapulted into what would become an eighteen year ministry working with young single mothers.

I knew God had answers for Christine. She agreed to meet with me and for the next two years Christine and I met together for weekly Bible study and biblical counsel. There were times before the Bible study that I would help her clean her squalid house. Frequently she was depressed. She dressed in old, out-of-style clothes that did not fit nor flatter her. She would readily admit that she was not at all lovable. Although my feelings were telling me not to help her, I knew what God wanted me to do. My love for her was coming from God himself.

I tried to understand what it would be like not to be able to see my own child for two years. My heart ached for Christine. As she got her life right with the Lord, I helped her find an attorney to help her obtain visitation rights. Christine was finally allowed to see her child for two hours a week as long as I was on hand to supervise the meetings. I rejoiced in watching her freed from her dependency upon prescription drugs and become a God-reliant person. She also got a job, and began what was to become a good relationship with her child and the child’s father. She often called me to let me know how things were going and to submit prayer requests. She learned how to deal with her problems biblically—many of which were the result of her earlier sinful lifestyle.

Those two years of working with Christine required a tremendous commitment of time and emotional output, involving all of my spiritual resources. But I knew it was important to God. It would be his way of reclaiming a life that had been totally cast aside and lost. And
it was a great way for me to see the changes God can bring about in a person’s life. In Christine’s life, God demonstrated his sufficiency. He saw fit to change her life as I took the time to work with her. All the love and sacrifice had paid off. She came back to the fold of the Good Shepherd. It was then that I knew my life had changed as well!

The cries for help did not end with Christine. I was subsequently asked to teach a Bible study in a group home for pregnant teens and teen moms. I did this for a year and a half. By that time, some leaders of an organization called Young Life had seen the need for a ministry to unwed teen moms and I was asked to establish an approach to meeting this need. Since I was already discipling a teen mom from within our church, I expanded upon my existing approach to facilitate these kinds of discipleship relationships on a greater scale. I directed the “Young Lives” ministry for fourteen years, matching up pregnant or parenting teens with women from many local churches.

I do not purport to have even a fraction of the answers for the whole matter of teen pregnancy. It is a vast problem, involving a multitude of issues. I can merely attempt to present the need and pray that you and your church will take up the challenge to make a difference for God’s kingdom. This is an opportunity for ministry that the local church must not pass up. Biblical mandate directs us to minister to these girls; let’s see what we can do to help them. During the course of our ministry we developed a model that you might consider adopting. Look around you. Do you see the need? I invite you to examine this model according to the Scripture and consider its usefulness in your own ministry.

**HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?**
Each year, almost 750,000 U.S. women aged 15-19 become pregnant, and fifty-nine percent of these pregnancies result in the birth of a child. Eighty-eight percent of these teen mothers, according to the statistics for 2010, are unmarried. Although this statistic has declined 44% between 1991 and 2010 and we can praise God for this, the problem and need for a solution is still present. Three quarters of a million teens in this country need assistance with their unplanned and stressful pregnancies! Twenty seven percent of all teen pregnancies end in abortion and 14 percent in miscarriages. Instead of ratios, let’s look at the actual numbers of babies involved—teen mothers had 200,420 abortions in 2006. Over 200 thousand babies dead in one year! Since then over a million lives have been taken.

If these precious women knew that help was available, perhaps more would choose life; and when they do, it is our opportunity to give them our counsel and support for the extreme difficulties they face.

The problems run deep and the solutions commonly offered are superficial at best. Most teen mothers struggle to finish high school and are highly unlikely to have job skills. Our government has developed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) which is a form of welfare to help teen mothers. As the Church, however, we do not look to the government to solve our social problems.

Large percentages of juvenile and adult offenders were raised in homes headed by a teenage mother and an absent father. Teenage mothers, who often live in a poverty-level household, contribute to the crime rate by having babies they are incapable of raising responsibly. This cycle of hardship and poverty is perpetuated because a large percentage of the daughters of teen moms end up becoming teen moms themselves. The world has tried so many different solutions to remedy this situation: sex education, free condoms, abortions under the label of “family planning,” and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy—an organization with an online network that sponsors a National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and many other initiatives.

This is not just their problem; it is ours as well. At one level, we reap the consequences in high crime rates and welfare costs. But most importantly, these teen mothers are our fellow human beings. Many of these women are suffering and perishing without the knowledge and hope of Jesus Christ—the only true solution. Who will offer Christ to these people?

**WHAT IS THE PROPER RESPONSE?**
How is the Church to respond to this dilemma? The Church must make God’s view of sex attractive to teens and talk frankly with them about it. Perhaps you, as a
godly woman, could be called upon to counsel girls in your church regarding abstinence. Young people need to be challenged to make a commitment to postpone sexual activity until marriage on the basis of the vital relationship they have with Jesus Christ. The gospel must be at the heart of our message. They need to be encouraged toward a future built on a biblical lifestyle of one man for one woman for life, as God planned it.

But what about the young men and women inside and outside the Church who get caught up in the sin of fornication? We cannot ignore them. What should we do with them? Reproach them? Shun them? Condone their lifestyle by doing nothing? Or is there a better course of action?

Since Christ is the head of the Church, our first question should be, “What would Christ have us do?” Notice that when He saved us, He left us on earth to function as members of his body. He didn’t call us home right away so that we could live pure, sinless lives with Him in heaven. Rather, when Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave us this mandate:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:19-20)

If we were in heaven, we would not be able to show Christ’s love and grace to a lost and dying world. The reason that we have been left on this earth is to carry out Christ’s Great Commission. Following the example of our Head—Jesus Christ—we must be willing to pursue those whom some in our culture and churches would tell us to shun—single teen moms. We must remember that the grace of Christ extended to us excludes boasting and a pharisaical attitude of self-righteousness. Our worst times are not beyond the reach of God’s grace. In our best times we are never so good that we do not need God’s grace. The grace of the gospel must reach out to young women in their sin, but not leave them there.

Jesus’ Example

Let’s take a closer look at Jesus so we can emulate our leader:

When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?” And hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:16-17) We must guard against self-righteousness and remember from what we were redeemed. God, in his divine love, took the initiative. He did not redeem us because of any good in us. He sent his Son to die for us while we were his enemies (Rom 5:8); He saved us by his grace (Eph 2:8-9). We did not merit salvation in any way. We were dead in our trespasses and sins (Rom 3:23). Only God could enliven us by his Holy Spirit (Eph 2:1). We are all on the same level because we have all sinned and are capable of sinning in every way. We must humbly say, “I am just one hungry beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.”

In his own words, Jesus gave us a vivid illustration portraying his priorities. He told the story of a shepherd who had lost one of his many sheep. He left the other 99 safe in the fold and went after the lost one. When the sheep was found, the shepherd rejoiced over it more than over the 99 that had not gone astray (Matt 18:10-14).

Jesus did not just talk about having compassion for sinners. He lived it. He seized every opportunity. He broke the cultural taboos of his time when he spoke to a Samaritan woman at a well. He wasn’t put off by the fact that she had been married five times and the man that she was presently living with was not her husband. He knew she was thirsty and he offered her living water—eternal life. Jesus chose to minister to her even though He knew all about her sin. What’s more, he chose a woman who was on the lowest rung of the social ladder to be his messenger. She put her faith in
the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and was so excited that she told the whole village. Many listened and were saved. Jesus taught his disciples as they returned with food, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest” (John 4:34-35).

Are we looking to the fields?

We see many similar instances of Jesus’ compassion for stigmatized women throughout the gospels. Mary Magdalene, a woman with seven demons, was one of them. The religious leaders of her day avoided her. But she was important to Jesus. He set her free from Satan’s hold on her life, and she joyfully followed Him to the end.

Jesus’ feet were washed and perfumed by a woman who was a known sinner. He accepted her ministry to Him. his self-righteous friend wanted to stop her to protect Jesus’ dignity, but he turned the tables and reprimanded his friend for not performing even a part of what this woman had done for Him. He then assured the outcast woman that her sins, which were indeed many, had been forgiven. He finished by noting that she loved much because she had been forgiven much, and that “he who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47).

God took the initiative in providing the means of our salvation right where we were, just when we needed it. Jesus gave us numerous examples of seeking out the lost. Now we must take the initiative in reaching out to needy teen moms and their babies. Let’s not wait for them to clean up their act; they can’t do it on their own. Neither can the rest of us. We must remember that we are saved by God’s mercy and grace. The whole Christian life is lived by grace. When we confess our sins, he forgives us, and we can rest in his cleansing power. So why can’t we who have been forgiven offer mercy and grace to young women who need his love as much as we do?

A Substantial Grace

Offering grace does not mean excusing sin like the world does. Because our society can offer no real hope, it has resorted to offering consolation by lowering its standards. Our culture says that sex outside of marriage is to be expected and therefore we should just provide birth control. It says that having sex and children before marriage is acceptable. It says that a child doesn’t need a father to help raise him. Rather, society says it’s sufficient to provide government welfare. The humanists who make policy for our government consider man to be the highest order of animal. They reason that because animals are compelled to follow their natural urges, we shouldn’t expect teens to suppress their urges. Rather, we should facilitate them so that they won’t be hurt in the process.

But does grace simply dismiss sinful behavior? No! On the contrary, grace offers the forgiveness and assistance that is needed in order to answer the call to uncompromising holiness. We aren’t called to accept the norms of the world (Rom 12:1-2). We are to lift up a righteous lifestyle as the standard for a follower of Jesus Christ.

Holiness is not an option. Remember, we are called to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). We know what holiness looks like in the flesh because Jesus Christ was our perfect example. It is impossible to be holy on our own or through the law. Holiness is possible only as we yield to the Holy Spirit and he does his sanctifying work in us through the lifelong pursuit of obedience to God’s Word.

So, how are we, as concerned women in the local church, to respond to the overwhelming problem of teen pregnancy? We don’t want to shun nor reproach these young women, but neither do we want to condone their sin. We must share the gospel with them and restore them in love because God in Christ first loved us (see 1 John 4:19).

PUTTING OUR RESPONSE INTO ACTION

How can we put our desire to minister to teen moms into practice? That’s the question we’ll answer as we go through the principles that comprise the rest of this article. As you read on, keep in mind that we must start with the restoration of those in our own body before we have a loving church home into which to bring teen mothers from outside.
First Establish Guidelines
What should a church do when a daughter of a family in the church becomes pregnant? Many people do not know how to react. Often they are at a loss to know whether to congratulate the prospective grandparents or avoid a touchy subject. They don’t know whether to speak to the pregnant teen with enthusiasm about her coming child or ignore the matter. They don’t know whether to express joy or grief. They think that if they express joy, then they are condoning sin. But if they keep quiet and say nothing then they feel that they have let the family down.

When the expectant mother’s situation becomes physically obvious, it often becomes a juicy morsel of gossip. People will take the liberty to express their concern or opinions to one another without any intention of becoming a part of the solution. Many times young women drop out of church as their bodies change shape so that they can avoid the stigma and guilt. They don’t want to be the focus of gossip and scorn. Thus gossip destroys a church’s ability to minister.

We must avoid the confusion and helplessness that lead to destructive, condemning talk. We can do this by establishing a policy that includes guidelines for loving involvement. But because “everybody’s business is nobody’s business,” the church must appoint individuals to carry out these ministry goals. Unless someone is assigned to pursue the restoration process, the pregnant teen could slip through the cracks.

In addition, the elders or leaders of the local church should discuss its position on the whole issue of unwed pregnancy. They should draft a mission statement based on Scripture. These guidelines should be communicated to the church body. Then each case can be handled according to the guidelines, without partiality.

The Importance of a Mission Statement
Here is an example of a mission statement for ministering to single teen moms:

Our church, in the manner of Jesus Christ, extends grace to those who have become pregnant out of wedlock. We do not condone the sin, but we offer the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will seek to minister to each one through the following means:

1. Provide a counselor (a spiritually mature woman and possibly her husband) to meet with the pregnant teen and if possible, the father of the baby, and give her/them biblical counsel that would include steps for repentance and restoration.

2. If repentance follows, they are assured of forgiveness. Then a supportive church body will seek to minister to her/them in the needs of the coming baby and will pledge to support her/them through prayer.

3. A mentor, as the Lord provides, will give continuing care, loving support, and ongoing discipleship.

4. A church shower will be given, under the condition that the mother is willing to forsake the sin of fornication and continue in the fellowship of the church.

5. Follow out the process of church discipline as found in Matthew 18 if she is a member and unrepentant and the same for the father of the baby.

Appoint a Counselor
The church elders or leaders should seek out and appoint a compassionate, godly woman who has a burden for ministering to teen mothers. Older women are commanded to disciple and counsel the younger women within the church; they are given very specific guidelines as to how to do this (Titus 2:3-5). If you want to be involved in this kind of ministry, tell your leaders of your desire. If you are married, it would be helpful if your husband wants to become involved as well so you can work as a team in certain situations.

The Church as a Haven for Teen Moms
The congregation must be informed through the church leaders that the pregnancy is not a matter for consternation and gossip, but rather is an opportunity for involvement. Women within the church can be appointed or may volunteer to be counselors or mentors. Great joy results when the body is assured that people are involved in the young mother’s life, confronting her, helping restore her to a walk with God, and seeking to minister to the needs of the whole family. The church members are able to rejoice because they are free to encourage her without fear that they are condoning her sin. They can rejoice openly and praise her for making the right choice of not aborting the baby. She can be encouraged that
God can use this situation in her life for good, and that this coming child will be a blessing as she continues to make the right choices. And those who do not choose to be directly involved can be reminded of their responsibility to lend loving support and prayer. Through all this the church becomes a haven in the storm—a haven desperately needed by the single teen mom.

**A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**

So that we can see how this kind of ministry takes place, let’s look at a case study. Imagine that you are Jan, the counselor, who is the catalyst for bringing help and hope in this situation.

Stacy grew up in the church. After dating a sophomore at the local junior college for two months and becoming sexually active, she found out that she was pregnant. Stacy knew that her boyfriend was not interested in marrying her right then, and she didn’t know what to do. Stacy had asked Jesus into her heart when she was very young and even though she had not been walking closely with her Savior, she knew that she belonged to Christ. She felt tremendously guilty about what she had done and didn’t know who she could talk to. She avoided her parents at all costs, retreating to her room and her loud stereo whenever she was at home. She felt bad about disappointing her parents, and her church family. Sometimes she thought that abortion was the best option because then no one would know about her sin and she could go on with her life. But she knew that the guilt of having an abortion would devastate her. So Stacy decided to have her baby and keep the child because the other options—abortion and adoption—were unthinkable to her. When she could wait no longer, Stacy got up the nerve and told her parents.

“I can’t believe you would do this to us,” Stacy’s father shouted. “After all we’ve done for you, giving you everything that you could want, raising you in the church, teaching you right and wrong; you should know better! I’ll be disgraced in front of the whole church! You haven’t told anyone else yet, have you?” Stacy shook her head between sobs as her mother, Sarah, tried to comfort her. “You better not until you’ve moved out! No daughter of mine is going to be an unwed mom! You can move out! You made your bed; now you can lie in it!” the distraught father screamed as he slammed the door on his way out. “John, how can you say such things?” Sarah shouted after him. “You know he doesn’t mean it, honey,” Stacy’s mother said soothingly while crying tears of disappointment and compassion.

After the ordeal with her parents, Stacy felt even more desolate. She confided in her best friend, Laurie, for support. Laurie knew that the church had some kind of policy for helping teen moms, so she called the pastor to get his help. He then contacted the woman who had been appointed as a counselor over this ministry.

**Ministering to the Teen Mom**

After Jan, the counselor, got off the phone with the pastor, she reviewed the ministry’s purpose statement from Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.” After prayer for guidance and a time of self-evaluation, Jan contacted Stacy to let her know that she wanted to help her, not condemn her. She wanted to help her be restored to fellowship with Christ and the local body of believers.

Jan used utmost grace when the time came for her to meet Stacy. She took Stacy a rosebud—showing her the care and concern of the church family. She then told Stacy that God is the author of life. She read Psalm 139:15 to her which depicts how God forms the child growing in her womb. She told her that although God is the author of life and that he is not responsible for her sin (James 1:13f). But, as she deals with it God’s way, He can use this situation for good in her life. Jan assured Stacy that the church wanted to minister to her at this time in a special way.

Jan then lovingly spoke to Stacy about forgiveness. Because of her knowledge of God’s Word, Stacy realized that what she had done was wrong. Jan showed Stacy Jesus’ response to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11. She pointed out that Jesus showed compassion and grace to the woman. He told the judgmental religious leaders, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). They all walked away, demonstrating their guilt. Perhaps they were not guilty of adultery or fornication, but they
knew they were guilty of other sins. Jesus, the only one who had the right to throw stones, showed mercy—not condemnation. He said, “Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.”

Jan mentioned to Stacy that Jesus, in his love and grace, forgave the woman caught in adultery, but he also commanded her to not continue in her sin. To continue in sin would be to break God’s law, offending a holy God and causing damage to her. Jesus wanted God to be glorified and desired the best for her; he wanted her to turn away from sin and practice righteousness.

Jan then asked Stacy if she was willing to ask God for forgiveness and turn away from her sin. She showed Stacy the wonderful promise of 1 John 1:9 which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But Stacy rejected Jan’s counsel. “I can’t stop being with Brad. My dad is threatening to kick me out. Brad’s the only one who really loves me right now. If you can’t love me the way that I am, then I don’t want to go to your church anymore.”

Jan pointed out that the church was Stacy’s as well. Stacy had grown up in this church. It was her family. The church members loved her. In fact, Jan felt that they might be able to find someone who was willing to let Stacy stay in their home.

In love, Jan pointed out to Stacy that the Bible makes it very clear that the true child of God will not continually practice sin (1 John 3:9). “It’s a terrible thing not to have the assurance of salvation that God desires for us to have, or the fellowship with Him that is maintained as we confess our sin and walk in the light,” she said. She pleaded with Stacy, stressing how much she needed God’s help and blessing with a baby to rear. But Stacy was unmoved. Jan knew that if Stacy was God’s child, God would discipline her. She referred to Heb 12:6-13, which warns of coming discipline to those who continue in sin. Next, Jan showed Stacy Proverbs 28:13, which says that the person who confesses and forsakes her sin will find compassion, but the one who conceals her sin will not prosper.

Stacy, however, refused to accept this offer of hope through forgiveness. Jan, disappointed at Stacy’s response, lovingly assured Stacy that God, like the father of the prodigal son, was waiting for her to come home. His arms were outstretched and ready to receive her, just like the father who welcomed his prodigal son with open arms (Luke 15). Jan told Stacy that she would be praying for her restoration to her Father.

Ministering to the Parents

Jan and her husband, Tom, set up a time to get together with Stacy’s parents, John and Sarah. The purpose of this meeting was to express the church’s support and offer counsel.

When Tom and Jan asked Stacy’s parents how they were doing, John openly told them of their devastation. “Stacy has ruined her life!” he said, pouring out his pain and sorrow over the situation. Sarah joined in “I can’t even describe the overwhelming shock, disbelief, anger, helplessness, and disappointment we felt! It has caused such an upheaval in our lives. I just keep hoping that I’m going to wake up and all this will have been a dream. It seems that all we thought we had instilled in Stacy from childhood has gone out the window.” “Yes,” John added numbly, “I thought we had all our bases covered. Stacy knows God’s plan—the blessings for abstaining and the consequences for sexual promiscuity. Where did we go wrong?”

John and Sarah were crushed by what their daughter had done. Their dreams and hopes for her seemed to have been dashed. They concluded that if they had been better parents, this would never have happened. They also felt that God was partly to blame. “If he is all-powerful, why didn’t he prevent this from happening?” Sarah blurted out. Jan and Tom could see that bitterness was creeping into John and Sarah’s hearts.

Jan and Tom encouraged Stacy’s parents to thoroughly evaluate the situation before God. They explained that children frequently make wrong choices even when they have been raised by parents who endeavored to be godly role models. There are many examples of that in the Old Testament. They needed to recognize that each person is accountable to God for her own choices. Stacy was responsible for her sin, and they were responsible for their sin.

Jan and Tom then asked if John and Sarah had responded to Stacy in the way that they should have.
Would they set an example to Stacy by evaluating themselves and making a list of the ways in which they may have failed God and their daughter (Matt 7:1-5)? What was their foremost concern—how they would look in the eyes of others, or how to help Stacy in her predicament? After they would ask God for forgiveness, they needed to go to Stacy and ask for her forgiveness.

The counselors encouraged John and Sarah to avoid bitterness by thanking God for this trial and asking for his wisdom (James 1:2-8). God is sovereign and he had placed that new life within their daughter (Ps 139:13-16). There are no accidents with God. This child was in God's mind before he made the world. God would use this situation for good (Rom 8:28), and they had to cling to this truth along with God's other promises.

Jan and Tom also told John and Sarah that they could be glad that their daughter had made the right decision by choosing not to have an abortion. They could also be encouraged that God could use Stacy's sin (and the baby that resulted) to provide a much-needed focus in the life of their teenager. Stacy would be forced to take a serious look at her life and would have to take on many responsibilities that she had previously shunned. They could hope that the baby would cause Stacy to see that the responsibility of being a teen mother was too great for her to bear alone, and that she needed God's help.

It was also possible that God would use this circumstance to draw each member of the family closer to Himself. The child who would be born would be a new soul that they could influence for Christ. The child could bring blessing to the family and could have a great part in furthering Christ's kingdom. Indeed, God is a very present help in trouble (Ps 46:1); he knew their heartache and he would comfort and sustain them. He would give them the strength to go through the whole ordeal one day at a time (2 Cor 12:9).

Jan then told John and Sarah about her meeting with Stacy and shared her sorrow over Stacy's refusal to repent and turn back to the Lord. She assured them that the church would be supporting them fully and would be praying for their daughter's spiritual condition before the Lord.

Jan and Tom also expressed concern about John and Sarah's marriage. They had seen couples break up because of the stress of having to constantly deal with the problems of a daughter's pregnancy and the child coming into their home. A heavy weight of responsibility would now fall on their shoulders. They would have to care for their daughter if she became ill with morning sickness or she had complications in the pregnancy. They would have to cope with the stress of their daughter's emotional ups and downs in her relationship with the father of the baby. There would be new financial pressures from medical bills and the cost of supporting the new baby. With a baby in the house, there would be a loss of privacy, and a change in lifestyle because the baby would need attention day and night. There would also be the constant concern over their daughter and grandchild's future. All these factors can overwhelm a couple, and if the church family doesn't offer support, the results could be disastrous!

Over the following weeks and months, Jan and Tom and a few other close couples faithfully called upon John and Sarah to see how they were doing. They sent notes of encouragement and set up times to go out for dinner together. John and Sarah were encouraged to become part of their small group Bible study for support and accountability and they were counseled to seek out other couples who had weathered similar circumstances.

Eventually, John and Sarah met another couple whose daughter had become pregnant out of wedlock. They said they were glad they had weathered the difficult situation even though it had brought them to the brink of despair when it happened. But now, looking back, they could see how God had used this situation for good. Now they were able to comfort others with the comfort that they had received (see 2 Cor 1:3-7). The couple offered to be John and Sarah's prayer partners.

The church's loving support came as a tremendous relief to John and Sarah. Originally they had expected rejection from the church family because of the shame of their situation. But instead, they were becoming closer to the other members of the body than ever before! People were expressing love and support with mutual tears, hugs, and offers of prayer. All this spiritual help enabled them to focus on the one most important concern in this difficult circumstance; that Stacy would...
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Stacy opened it, she started to cry. “She gave Stacy a beautifully wrapped gift. After
Shortly a Forgiveness Ministering with the Message of Christ’s
of an adult. But she would also be given the privileges
now an adult. Though she was living at home with her parents, was
house, future conflicts would be avoided. Stacy, even
though she was living at home with her parents, was
now an adult. Thus she had to carry the responsibilities
of an adult, but she would also be given the privileges
of an adult.

Ministering with the Message of Christ’s Forgiveness
Shortly after Stacy gave birth to her baby, Jan went to visit. She gave Stacy a beautifully wrapped gift. After
Stacy opened it, she started to cry. “I can’t believe how much love my parents are showing for me now, and the
way the people in the church really care. I have a whole stack of letters from people saying how much they have
missed me at church. Now I have this new baby, and Brad is too busy with football to spend much time with me. I just can’t understand it; this is his daughter too.
I know I made a big mistake, but I really want to be a

good mom for Cassidy! I want a new start. Will you help me? I want to do things God’s way.”
Jan asked Stacy if she would like to receive Christ’s forgiveness, and Stacy said yes. Jan then explained that
Stacy needed to acknowledge her sin against God, and showed Stacy what David said about his sin of adultery
in Psalm 51. Through tears Stacy acknowledged her sin to God and asked Him for the strength to live in a way
that pleased Him. Then Jan prayed and thanked God for working in Stacy’s heart and bringing her back to Himself. She also prayed for Stacy’s continued obedience to his leading in her life.

The next time Jan met with Stacy, she told her that when we sin, we need to ask forgiveness from everyone
who was hurt by it. That is God’s method of restoration. It is not easy to do this, but the benefit is that when we
think of how other people were hurt by our sin, we are deterred from repeating the same sin over again.

With that in mind, Jan asked Stacy if she was ready to make everything right by asking forgiveness from those
who had been affected by her sin. Stacy said yes, and immediately her parents, her boyfriend, and friends
at church came to mind.

This was a big step for Stacy, but Jan was available to help and encourage her each step of the way. Stacy
worked on what she should say and how she should say it. Jan helped her to realize that simply saying, “I’m sorry” wouldn’t be sufficient or fully biblical; rather, Stacy needed to say “I was wrong; what I did was sin-ful. Will you forgive me?” Once Stacy knew what she wanted to say, Jan prayed with her for God’s strength and blessing.

When Stacy acknowledged to her parents that she recognized her actions did not honor what she knew to
be their will for her as their daughter, they received her with open arms. She then told them she knew she had
caused them a great deal of heartache. “What I did was wrong. Will you forgive me?” she asked. They forgave her and all cried together and hugged one another. Then they committed the future to the Lord in prayer.

The next step for Stacy was to talk to her pastor along with Jan. Stacy humbly requested the church’s forgiveness for sinning against the body of Christ. She acknowledged that she had caused the whole body to suffer (1 Cor 12:26-27). The pastor, who was pleased
about Stacy’s change of heart, enthusiastically communicated the church’s forgiveness. He told Stacy that she was not a second-class citizen in God’s kingdom because of what she had done. He assured her that she would enjoy God’s blessing on her life because she had chosen to follow Christ and obey his Word. Stacy left the church feeling much better, for the burden of guilt that she had been carrying for months had finally been lifted.

Stacy then went to her boyfriend, Brad, to ask for his forgiveness. Although the sin was his fault too, she knew she had to take responsibility for her part in it. She also told him that her commitment was to not have sex again with him as long as they were not married, because she wanted to do things God’s way. Brad was touched by Stacy’s willingness to come to him for forgiveness. He told her not to worry about it, and it was obvious that he didn’t recognize his own sin. He said, “Stacy, I know how much we love each other and if you want to wait until marriage, we can.” Stacy was surprised at Brad’s positive response, but she knew that more changes had to take place in Brad’s heart.

Stacy was now committed to living for Christ and she began to go to church again. After the baby was born, the church checked with Stacy’s family to see if they could welcome the baby the same way other babies were welcomed—with a rose on the pulpit and a notice in the bulletin. Dinners were brought to the house; cards and gifts were sent. Stacy was given help in securing needed baby items, such as a crib and a car seat. Other women offered to give her relief by babysitting.

Some ladies in the church offered to give Stacy a baby shower to help her care for the needs of her baby. This outpouring of love was a great encouragement to Stacy and her family. Stacy knew that life wouldn’t be easy as a single mom, but she had learned that her family in the Lord was fully supportive.

The youth pastor welcomed Stacy back into the youth group. She was not able to go very often because she was in a different situation from the rest of her peers. Eventually she began to replace her old friends with new friends who had children.

Some weeks after Stacy had returned to church, she was asked if she could share with the youth group how God had used her circumstances for his glory. The young people listened attentively as she shared the valuable lessons she had learned through becoming a mother unintentionally. She emphasized that she had gone against God’s intended order, but God had still used her situation for her good. She said she hoped that the young people would remember what she had endured when they found themselves being sexually tempted.

Stacy’s time of sharing allowed the youth pastor to talk to the young people about the whole issue of teen pregnancy outside of marriage. He explained that the church is a place for forgiven sinners who are pursuing God in their lives, not for people who think they have arrived. He encouraged the young people to reach out to other teen moms within the church and in their schools with the love of Jesus Christ.

The following Sunday, a few parents of the young people approached the youth pastor and complained that a poor example was being set for their children by allowing a teen mom to attend the youth group and speak before them. The youth pastor responded by telling the parents that the church was not putting their stamp of approval on sex before marriage by encouraging a teen mom to attend, but seeking to make the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ available. He reminded them that every Christian needs God’s grace on a daily basis.

Having a teen mom in the church helps to serve as a good deterrent for other young people because then the consequences of sexual sin becomes obvious. A baby, as precious as he or she is, is a large responsibility that curtails the freedoms enjoyed by most teenagers. After babysitting all day for a Young Lives group outing, one teenage boy remarked, “This is the best sex-ed class I’ve ever taken. I’m not having sex until I’m married!”

Ministering to the Father of the Baby

Brad had not intended for Stacy to become pregnant. Because he was in college, he wasn’t ready to settle down and parent a child. He was very surprised when Jan and Tom, a couple from Stacy’s church, invited him and Stacy over for dinner. During their time together, Brad and Tom had a good time talking about their shared interest in sports. Eventually, however, the conversation turned to deeper issues. Tom asked Brad if he understood what it meant to be a Christian. Brad said that
although he accepted Christ as a child, he knew he hadn’t really been living for God. But in recent months, because of the good changes he had seen in Stacy, he was interested in learning more about God. Tom asked Brad if he would like to get together weekly for a Bible study. “Oh, sure,” Brad said without thinking.

But Brad wasn’t very consistent. He let other commitments interfere. With school, sports, and a part-time job, his time was limited. However, Tom did not give up. His perseverance paid off, for Brad could see that Tom was not going to quit pursuing him. Brad knew that Tom really cared. He was also at the receiving end of loving gestures of friendship from other church members. Eventually Brad was also confronted in the same way that Stacy was. He was taught about the reality of God’s forgiveness and restoration when sin is acknowledged. Convicted by the Holy Spirit, Brad asked God for forgiveness. He confessed his sin against God, Stacy, her family, and his family. Ultimately he came to the realization that he needed to take responsibility for Stacy and the baby.

Jan was thrilled with the progress Stacy and Brad were making, but she knew that they would need ongoing discipleship. She knew that Stacy especially would need in-depth follow-up and support. Even if the teen mom’s mother is supportive, it is still very helpful to have another woman involved for support. The father of the baby also needs a mentor, possibly the husband of the girlfriend’s mentor.

In summary, based on this case study, we can see that a mentor will minister the love of Christ to the teen mom and her boyfriend (if he is still in the picture). She will do this through friendship and encouragement. She will follow Paul’s example in not only imparting the gospel to the people, but her own life as well (1 Thess 2:8-12).

**SETTING UP A MENTOR MOMS MINISTRY**

Churches can mobilize church members to the needs of the teen moms within their own church. They can also reach out to many who would never have entered the doors of their church in any other way. Evangelism is a large part of the Mentor Mom ministry and provides a perfect opportunity for needy young women to learn about the love of Christ as they see it displayed in tangible ways during their time of need. (The ministry can also be coordinated to address teen dads as well.)

**Steps to Starting the Ministry**

Once the leaders in your church have agreed to minister to young single moms, here are some key steps to beginning a Mentor Moms ministry in your church.

1. **Appoint a Director** The ministry needs to be organized and directed by a committed Christian woman who has a burden for unwed teen mothers. She may then want to delegate the responsibilities so that the workload isn’t all on one person. Perhaps you are that woman, or you know someone who could be encouraged to take on this ministry.

2. **Recruit Mentors** The director is responsible for recruiting caring Christian women who can mentor teen moms in a one-on-one relationship. These mentors will be asked to build bridges of friendship by sharing their lives and their faith with the teen women. Ideally these mentor mom/teen mom pairs will meet once a week for friendship-building activities over a span of one year.

3. **Conduct Mentor Meetings** The director plans and directs the Mentor Meetings, which are designed to help equip the mentors for ministering to the needs of the teen moms. In these meetings, the director disciples the mentors through the Word of God. These women must first and foremost be seekers of God who can have a godly impact on the lives of the teen mothers. The Mentor Meetings also provide the mentors with an opportunity to encourage and pray for one another.

4. **Recruit Unwed Teen Moms** The director also helps to seek out teen moms who would like the support and encouragement of a mentor while they are pregnant or parenting. The director will initially want to recruit teen moms from within the church; then she will want to reach out to others—through friends of the teen moms, through the local Crisis Pregnancy Centers, and through school counseling programs. She then can match up the teen moms with the mentors for what could very well become wonderful lifelong friendships.

5. **Conduct Mentor/Teen-Mom Clubs** The purpose of the club is to allow all the mentors, teen moms, and their babies to get together once a month for fellow-
ship and spiritual input. The babies are cared for in the church nursery so the teen moms can be free to enjoy the program, which usually includes a fun, mixer-type game, some praise choruses, and a time for sharing prayer requests and praying for one another. Then a speaker gives a gospel-centered presentation on how Jesus can make a difference in a teen mom’s life. That can be followed by a craft activity and some time for refreshments or a meal and fellowship—allowing the teen moms the opportunity to talk with the speaker. This kind of meeting also lets a teen mom experience the loving support of all the other mentors whom she meets. And ultimately, it provides a friendly environment for sharing the gospel with those who have not yet committed their lives to Jesus Christ.

**THE TASK OF MENTORING**

Webster’s dictionary tells us that a mentor is “an experienced, trusted friend and advisor.” In our context, she is a woman who helps young moms achieve that God-given potential through sacrificially providing friendship, example and teaching. It is an intentional, clearly defined relationship in which expectations are spelled out between the mentor and teen mom beforehand. And it is the kind of relationship in which in-depth time spent with one young woman can produce lasting results and even a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A mentor is a loving friend and a positive role model. She teaches more by her example than by her word, knowing that the teen mom will watch how she handles life. It is hoped that as the mentor displays Christ’s love and grace, the teen woman will desire to have Christ in her own life in a vibrant and meaningful way.

A key goal in this relationship is for the mentor to demonstrate the love of Christ in very practical ways. She can do this by lending a listening ear and participating in activities with the teen mother. These activities may include homemaking activities or just fun things. The mentor can offer emotional support by listening to the young mother’s thoughts, dreams, and hopes. She can encourage her to overcome difficulties, picking her up when she fails and rejoicing in her successes. She can help the teen mom to get biblical answers and spiritual counsel for her problems.

**Expectations in Mentoring**

In spite of the possibility of many wonderful blessings, a mentor should enter the relationship expecting nothing in return. If all expectations are submitted to the Lord at the start relationship, there will be more consistent dependency on the Lord when the teen mom chooses to move in the wrong direction. Don’t expect to see a teen mother’s tangled web of sin unravel quickly. Don’t expect things to go smoothly.

This ministry must be done as unto Christ Himself (see Matthew 10:42). Success in mentoring is defined as extending love and presenting Christ in the power of the Spirit. Leave the results to God. Keep in mind that you are sowing seeds of the gospel and planting love in the garden of this young woman’s heart—all of which may bear fruit at some time in the future.

**Perseverance in Mentoring**

Prayer and perseverance are the keys to success in this ministry. There may be times when your heart aches and you literally become sick because it looks like all you have invested in this precious young woman is to no avail. You may weep and cry out to God. “Why, Lord, has she gone back to her empty and fruitless way of life?” You may want to give up in utter discouragement. Keep persevering, and trust God to work in answer to your prayers. Remember that whatever is accomplished is accomplished through answered prayer (James 5:16). Keep a record of your answered prayers so that you can better see God’s faithfulness.

Remember, nothing done for Christ is ever wasted. We were created to do good works (Eph 2:10). He will abundantly reward service done in his name.

**Leading a Bible Study**

Mentors will want to encourage Christian teen moms to study God’s Word, which will give them assurance of their salvation and help them to grow in the faith. It is in Bible study that teen mothers will discover how to live their lives in a way that pleases God. As they hide God’s Word in their hearts, they will be kept from sin.
Sexual Purity

Sexual conduct is one important area in which teen moms must learn to submit to the standard of the Bible. It is very hard for the teen mom to stop having sex with the father of her baby or to not get sexually involved with someone else when she and the father break up. She may think it’s too late! Sexual activity can become a life-dominating sin that is difficult to break without the persistent encouragement and support of a mentor who helps her draw on Christ’s resurrection power.

Returning to our case study, you will remember that Stacy told Brad of her commitment to stay sexually pure. But that does not mean that she will no longer be tempted. Even though Brad was beginning to be discipled, there could come times when he would pressure Stacy into having sex again. She may think that to keep Brad in the picture, she will have to continue having sex with him or he will lose interest and find someone else. In addition, the sexual relationship offers many pleasures including the intimacy and security Stacy desires in her relationship with Brad. It would be much easier to continue than to resist. That’s why it’s essential for mentors to continually encourage teen moms to stay pure through a vital relationship with Jesus Christ which is bolstered by Bible study, scripture memorization, and fellowship and accountability with other believers.

Marriage

If the teen mother is a Christian who wants to do things God’s way, she will not marry a non-Christian even if he is the father of her baby (see I Cor 7:39). She will wait until he makes a commitment to the Lord. Of course, if they are both non-Christians, then there would be no teaching that would prohibit them from marrying, although they would certainly receive counsel concerning marriage—and all of life—being designed by God to worship Jesus Christ, and so also designed to function best by following God’s ways. Again, let’s return to Brad and Stacy. After several months of discipleship, Brad showed definite signs of growth in his spiritual walk with God. One day he approached Stacy’s father, John, to ask if he could have Stacy’s hand in marriage. John, unsure of what to say, went to his pastor for advice. He was glad that Brad wanted to take his rightful responsibility for his child, but he was also concerned about how young the couple was. How would Brad support Stacy and the child? What if they ended up being ill-prepared for marriage, or marriage to each other?

John’s pastor pointed out that because both Brad and Stacy were Christians there was no biblical reason to forbid the marriage. On the contrary, men who fathered children needed to be encouraged to take their responsibility even if it posed a hardship and the couple had to start out poor. God intended for the family to consist of two parents for the stability and care of the children. And, with God’s help, the couple could overcome any incompatibilities and choose to love each other sacrificially. With a relationship centered on Christ and grounded in God’s Word, and with the body of Christ standing behind them, this young couple could achieve a lasting and happy marriage in which to raise their children.

At the close of their conversation, John’s pastor offered to do extra pre-marital counseling to help the couple deal with all the strikes they had against them by entering into a marriage prompted by a pregnancy. John, greatly encouraged by what his pastor said, went home to tell Brad the good news.

After Stacy graduated from high school, she and Brad had a beautiful wedding attended by the entire church. During the ceremony, tears streamed down Jan and Tom’s faces as they thanked God for answering their prayers. As they watched the bride walk down the aisle in her white dress, they remembered the many days and months of praying and trusting God to work—and knew that it had all been worthwhile.

THE BLESSING OF BEING A MENTOR

God will richly bless those who follow Jesus’ commands. Christ has promised to be with you in a special way. Your life will take on real joy as you see God use you to rescue a teen mom/dad from Satan’s clutches by the transforming power of Christ. As you reach this young couple for Christ, remember that you are not only influencing this generation, but the next. Many other lives will be affected through theirs and the ministry
of Christ’s Church. When Jesus comes to receive us to himself, may we hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21).

Adapted from: WOMEN HELPING WOMEN
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ENDNOTES
1 The Alan Guttmacher Institute, Facts on American Teens’ Sexual and Reproductive Health, December 2011.