

MLK Advice Column

MLK on parenting, premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion



By J. Michael Sharman – Editorial Columnist

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When we think of Martin Luther King, we tend to think of the powerful preacher delivering the “I Have a Dream” speech that changed a nation. But rarely do we remember him as a gentle minister, offering pastoral advice to hurting individuals.

Here are some excerpts from the 1957-58 monthly advice column Dr. King wrote for Ebony magazine:

Question: I was in a home the other day where a 3-year-old child read the riot act to his mother. The mother took it with a sheepish smile. This, I am told, is permissiveness. It seems to me that what modern children need is a large dose of parental permissiveness applied to their backsides. Do you agree?

MLK: It is quite true that many modern parents go too far in allowing their children to express themselves with hardly a modicum of discipline. ... This almost “lunatic fringe” of modern child care has been responsible for most strange and fantastic methods of child rearing in many American homes. ... The child must realize that there are rules of the game which he did not make and that he cannot break with impunity.

Question: I was raised in a Christian environment. My father placed great stress on premarital virginity. I am 29. Of late, I have begun to doubt the validity of his teaching. ... Is he right?

MLK: I think you should hold firm to the principle of premarital virginity. The problems created by premarital sex relationships are far greater than the problems created by premarital virginity. The suspicion, fears, and guilt feelings generated by premarital sex relations are contributing factors to the present breakdown of the family. Real men still respect purity and virginity within

women. If a man breaks a relationship with you because you would not allow him to participate in the sexual act, you can be assured that he did not love you from the beginning.

Question: My problem is different from the ones most people have. I am a boy, but I feel about boys the way I ought to feel about girls. I don't want my parents to know about me. What can I do?

MLK: Your problem is not at all an uncommon one. However, it does require careful attention. The type of feeling that you have toward boys is probably not an innate tendency, but something that has been culturally acquired. ... You are already on the right road toward a solution, since you honestly recognize the problem and have a desire to solve it.

Question: About two years ago, I was going with a young lady who became pregnant. I refused to marry her. As a result, I was directly responsible for a crime. It was not until a month later that I realized the awful thing I had done. I begged her to forgive me, to come back, but she has not answered my letters. The thing stays on my mind. What can I do? I have prayed for forgiveness.

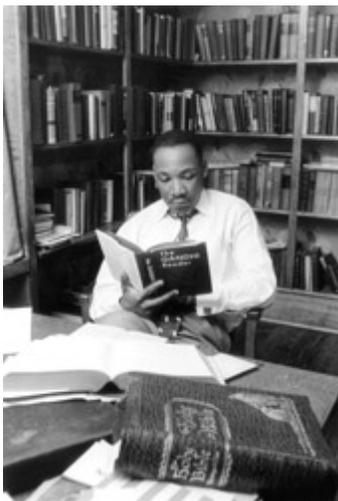
MLK: You have made a mistake. ... One can never rectify a mistake until he admits that a mistake has been made. Now that you have prayed for forgiveness and acknowledged your mistake, you must turn your vision to the future. ... Now that you have repented, don't concentrate on what you failed to do in the past, but what you are determined to do in the future.

[Sharman's column](#) runs every Tuesday. He practices law in Culpeper.

CULTURE

MLK Tribute - Advice for Living

Column written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the October 1958 Ebony



Question: *I am a high school boy, 18 years old. My father drinks and does a lot of things that make me ashamed. About a month ago, he got into some real trouble and since then I haven't been able to gain friendship with any nice boys and girls. What can I do to gain their friendship back? Should I run away to another town?*

Answer: You have my deepest sympathy in the problem you present to me. I know how sensitive a youth of eighteen can be of the public behavior of his parents. However, running away to another city will not solve your problem. It may remove you from the external expression of the problem, but you will still confront the internal reactions in your own life. I can realize how difficult it is to face other young people who shun you because of your father's condition. But these young people are not the sincere friends that you need if they judge you by your father's actions. I would suggest that you get some person whom your father has implicit confidence in to talk with him – maybe your minister. You must come to see that he is ill. Alcoholism is a disease, which needs the most expert medical care. A person whom he trusts can probably persuade him to seek this expert treatment. He could probably be directed to Alcoholics Anonymous, a very fine organization which helps people who to be helped. I would further suggest that you yourself try talking with your father in one of his sober moments. Tell him how hurt you are of his acts. It may well be that his frank expression will be the one thing that will shock your father back to reality. Running away is not the answer because this may start you on a course of running as soon as a problem, which seems insurmountable confronts you. Everywhere you go you will have problems, maybe not so potent as this one, but nevertheless problems. And if you solve this one each succeeding one will be easier. You have youth, health and strength – and I hope love- on your side. So you can afford to be patient with your father and help him out of this abyss that he is too weak to rise from without outside help.

Question: *I have been in the South only once in my life. Now my husband, who is in the air force, has been transferred to Georgia. Our little girl, who is 9, is an honor student in a very good school in our community. She knows little about prejudice and discrimination. My parents say I should not take her out of the integrated New York school and expose her to the bias of Georgia. Do you agree?*

Answer: There is a great deal of truth in the advice that your parents have given you. It would certainly be a difficult transition for a child who has attended integrated schools all her life to suddenly be shifted to a segregated school with inadequate facilities and an inferior curriculum. Such a transition could easily lead to inner conflicts and other psychological problems. However, your problem may be solved if your husband lives on the base. It is a definite policy now, as a result of a Federal executive order, that there can be no segregation in schools on army, naval and air force bases. If you can get your daughter in an integrated school on the base, I don't think the other aspects of southern life would do her extreme harm, since she would have little contact with segregation per se. If living quarters cannot be arranged on the base it might be better for you to sacrifice a few months and keep your daughter in the New York school.

Question: *A horrible car accident wrecked my family a year ago. My five year-old son was killed and my husband has been in the hospital since last July. I am still bothered by my arm, which was fractured. I worry and I am lonely and I have fears. Please help me. I am 28.*

Answer: You are probably lonely and in fear today because you have not succeeded in getting the tragedy which befell your family out of your mind. Lonesomeness and fearfulness almost always stem from an over absorption in self. When one thinks only about his problems and misfortunes he cannot help living in fear and worry. First, you must rise above your misfortune enough to see that it is not so bad that it couldn't be worse. Second, you must find proper avenues of escape from self-pity. Cultivate a love for great music. Give yourself to some purpose or cause beyond yourself. Develop a genuine love for your life's work. Cultivate genuine and abiding friendships. And above all develop regular habits of religious worship. These are just a few things that can help you transcend your worries and fears.

Question: *My problem is men. I am 24 and a high school graduate. I have never had a steady boyfriend. I meet a young man and we are friends for a while and then when sex comes up we just don't see eye to eye. What can I do to find a nice young man, one who will want to be with me because he knows that I am a nice girl?*

Answer: One of the first things that you should do in an attempt to get at your problem is to go through a process of self-examination. Are you sure that you a radiating personality, a pleasant disposition, and that feminine charm which every man admires? These are questions, which you must honestly ask yourself. If you fall short in any of these qualities you should seek to improve them. It may be a lack of some of these qualities, rather than disagreement on the question of sex, which prevents you from having a steady boyfriend. If a fellow ceases dating you because you refuse to engage in the sexual act, you can be assured that he is not genuinely interested in you, and therefore would make an undesirable husband. Every well thinking man admires a woman who has high moral standards on the question of sex. Maintain your moral standards and improve your personality traits- if such improvement is needed – and the right fellow will come along.

Question: *I am publicity director of a civic organization in Tennessee. My problem is that I find it hard to find words that will satisfy white people and Negroes at the same time. If I please the whites, the Negroes get mad. If I please the Negroes, the white get mad. What should I do?*

Answer: There is only one way to deal with this problem- tell the truth with sincerity and love. All people of goodwill are moved by truth when it is honestly and sincerely told. Too many public figures spend time attempting to win the admiration of certain groups or individuals by smooth words and perfunctory back slaps. Often these methods lead to the opposite effect. People soon look beneath the surface and discover signs of insincerity. So your first concern must be to tell the truth without rancor or bitterness. Both whites and Negroes will respect you for this. And remember, no matter what approach you use, you can never please all the people.