

Maura's Story

UNHOOKED AND SET FREE (PART 2)

Maura, my young friend, has bonded with her boyfriend. She doesn't seem to want to be with anyone else. In fact, she moved in with him with the hope that he will ask her to marry him.

It's really quite remarkable, don't you think? Despite the cultural acceptance of multiple partners most young women want to be married to one man and make a nest for their children. Unfortunately, a woman's consent to play "house" outside the commitment of marriage enables young men to postpone marriage.

So... what is going on with Maura? Why has she bonded with her boyfriend? I believe it's because faith and science are at work in Maura's life. The Creator of life has not only written Himself on Maura but also wired her for monogamous attachment.

Right now, Maura's faith is relegated to Sunday morning or an occasional religious discussion with her dad or me. But I'd like to help Maura see that faith intersects with daily life in all areas including the physical, emotional, and relational. Together, Maura and I are learning that God has designed a woman's body and mind to connect through the biological wonder of neurochemicals.

Oxytocin, or the "cuddle" hormone," is a neurochemical. It is present in both male and female but is primarily active in females. The female body releases oxytocin at four different times. Take note! Each has to do with procreation and the care of children. Oxytocin is released:

- During meaningful or intimate touching with another person (Action: bonding and trust)
- During sexual intercourse (Action: bonding and trust)
- During the onset of labor in a pregnant woman (Action: causes uterine contractions, results in birth)
- After baby's delivery (Action: stimulates nipples and produces flow of milk from mom for nursing)

Oxytocin, which floods a woman's brain during labor, childbirth and breast-feeding, creates a bond between mother and child. But first, it creates a bond between the parents of that child. When a man and a woman touch in familiar and intimate ways, oxytocin is released into the woman's brain. Without being able to explain why, she desires more of that same kind of intimacy. Can you see how oxytocin plays a vital role in the "one flesh" union of one man and one woman in marriage? Oxytocin helps assure the continuation of the human race!

Oxytocin bonding helps produce long-term connectedness. It might be for this reason that an American woman in an intact marriage rarely has sexual intercourse with anyone but her husband. Such stability is affected by oxytocin. Think of the significance. The bonding of father and mother greatly increases the chance for a child to be raised in a healthy, two-

parent home. Such a child is blessed not necessarily with perfect parents but with a mom and dad who mentor faithfulness.

The world speaks about the emotions of love. The emotions of connectedness. The desire to connect, however, is more than an emotional feeling. Bonding is like glue. And it can't be undone or ripped apart without great emotional pain.

The flow of oxytocin serves to promote trust. Oxytocin triggered the bonding process between Maura and her boyfriend even before they went "all the way" but only kissed and hugged. Do parents know this? Do moms who think it's "cute" that their 12-year-old daughter has a "boyfriend" and dads who allow 14-year-old daughters to spend long periods of time alone with a boy realize that they are placing vulnerable girls at risk? A girl's protective boundary of modesty and inhibition gradually breaks down with each kiss, each touch, each pledge of love... even though the boy she's with has no intention of marrying her or having children with her.

Maura confessed, "It's so very strange. The more time I spend with my boyfriend, the more I need to be with him." Maura's neurochemicals are doing what they were designed to do.

Here, then, is one of the failures of sex education. Children are imagined as "sexual from birth." The wonders of sex and sexuality are dangled like sweet treats in front of them from early age through high school and beyond. Then hands are washed when the educators say, "We told them to wait." But can anyone turn off the oxytocin?

As high schoolers approach college, the choices are limitless. Told that they are "sexual from birth" and reminded constantly of their "sexual identity," young men and women "hook up," have "friends with benefits," sexually "recreate," and even experiment with same-sex play. After all, "it's my body, my choice." It all seems so modern. Casual. Harmless.

But, in a functioning body, oxytocin is at work. Every time that a girl and her "friend" break up and she moves on to a new sexual partner, a bond is broken. Brokenness is painful. It leaves scars. It is sometimes paralyzing.

Being sexually intimate with one person, breaking up, and being sexually intimate with another is like a divorce. Repeating this cycle again and again places a girl in danger of negative emotional consequences. Sexual activity creates emotional bonds between partners. Breaking those bonds can damage the brain's natural connecting or bonding mechanism, cause depression, and even make it more difficult to bond in marriage.

Discontent happens when our choices conflict with our conscience, our physical bodies, and the way God designed them to function. More serious is the effect on our relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves any less His child, but every "I'll do it my way" behavior changes our attitude toward Him. As God's children, we are dependent on His love and provision of everything needed for life itself. How, then, can we find contentment when we ignore and disobey Him?

Sexual intimacy, as Maura has discovered, is addictive. But through the honesty of a friend, she is learning why her body, mind, and soul are so interconnected. It is by Divine Design.

As her friend, I can't force a change in her behavior, but I can be a reminder of why God's design for marriage matters.

If you have a friend like Maura, will you speak up? Will you tell her about the "glue" of oxytocin? Will you help her unhook... and be set free to better navigate away from depression and hardness of heart? Will you tell her how "fearfully and wonderfully" she's been made? Will you tell her that the One who knit her together in her mother's womb wrote every one of her days in His book before she was even born (Psalm 139:13-16)?

Will you help her on the good path of life?

TALKING POINTS FOR PARTS 1 & 2

In the modern world, women are always "learning" yet "never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). **Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7.** In historic times, while fathers and husbands were away, people would come to women in their homes and try to persuade them to accept false teachings. **How do you see this happening today?** (Think of social media, the internet, movies, romance novels, magazines, and classroom sex education.)

What does 2 Timothy 4:3-4 have to say to both the "older" and "younger" woman?

Maura believes God is her father but is tempted by worldly ideas of love and her own sinful nature. **What does 2 Timothy 2:21 say to her—and to us? What is the hope and promise for God's children in this passage?**

What does God say to Maura and all His children in 1 Peter 1:14-16? Like most of us, Maura lives, works, and socializes with unbelievers in a secular humanist society. This can be very difficult and confusing. **What does God tell us in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18?**

Look again at 2 Corinthians 6:18. Then read Isaiah 43:1; Romans 6:3-5; Ephesians 4:24; Titus 3:5-8; and 1 Peter 2:9. What does Maura—and all who are baptized—learn about their identity? How does this make a difference in the way we live?

Titus shepherded a congregation on the pagan island of Crete. Temptations were all around. What was Titus to do? St. Paul was inspired to give Titus a model for older men and women to mentor younger men and women. **Read Titus 2:1-8.** It should not be lost on us that this Scripture is gender specific. **How does this same mentoring model instruct young women like Maura? Now read verses 11-14. What is the conflict Maura might be experiencing as she "waits for her blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"?**

Let us remember our Baptism! Because God's Word with the water works faith, forgiveness of sins, and salvation in Jesus Christ, and because we are given an advocate in the Holy Spirit, we can trust that Satan and the world have no power over us. **What does God ask of us in 1 John 2:28-29?** Pray the words of 1 John 5:1-5.