

HIV prevention / God's Will is Love

Tammy: A little while ago we talked about the disease of HIV-AIDS. Our friend Nurse Rachel was with us and telling us about her patient Kitani. Kitani was pregnant and she had just found out that she had Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV. Today Nurse Rachel is back and we'll learn more about how we can stop this terrible disease from spreading.

Carol: Hello. And welcome to Women of Hope and I'm Carol. It's good to be together again. Do *you* know someone who has HIV-AIDS? Maybe you have the HIV virus yourself. There are probably people in your community with this disease, and it has killed many thousands of people. Fortunately now there are medicines that can keep many people well, even though they still have the HIV virus. But it's still a serious health problem and we all need to know about it. That's why we've asked Nurse Rachel to join us again. Welcome, Rachel!

Rachel: Thank you. Hi there, it's so good to be with you again. I hope you've had a chance to think about some of the things we talked about last time. There's so much to learn about HIV, especially when it's your own body you're learning about.

Tammy: One of the important things I remember from your last visit is that you said HIV can never be cured, but by looking after yourself and taking your medicine correctly, it *is* possible to stay well...

Rachel: That's right, it's possible to *be* sick even though you don't *feel* sick, and you don't always *feel* sick if you have HIV.

Do you remember we talked about the white blood cells, or soldier cells in your body that fight sickness, and how the HIV virus kills the soldiers. We also said that HIV can be passed from one person to another, but we didn't really talk about how to *prevent* HIV being passed on.

Carol: Friend, think about this; Don't you think it's much better to *prevent* HIV than to have to *treat* it? If everyone understood how to prevent HIV, think about how many people could stay HIV-free, and how we could save so many lives!

Rachel: Last time I said that the HIV lives in blood and bodily fluids of a person who has the infection. That includes the sexual fluids of both men and women, and breast milk. So it can pass between people through having sex, sharing injection needles, and other ways, like getting someone else's blood in your wound or stepping on a used injection needle.

This is important: *we should always treat blood as though it could be infected.* For example, we should try to use rubber gloves when we are cleaning any wound, and throw them away afterwards. If someone is hurt and bleeds during a sports game, they should leave the game so that other players don't risk getting that blood in a cut or sore. We don't wait to find out whether a person is infected-treat all blood and body fluids as though they are infectious, and you will be safe. If you need a blood transfusion, make sure it comes from a good blood bank that has checked that it doesn't carry the virus. If you need an injection, make sure that the needle and syringe has not been used on someone else. *All* needles and syringes should only be used once.

But do please remember that HIV is *not spread* by shaking hands with someone. You can't get HIV by using the same toilet, or by eating from the same dishes, or sitting next to them on a bus, or caring for them. It isn't spread through saliva or sweat, though it could be risky to kiss with an open mouth if you have sores around your mouth.

Carol: God is the one who made us and He always knows what is best for us. I believe that the best way of preventing HIV is to follow *God's* plan for marriage & sexual activity. We can find this in the

Bible: That means *no* sex before marriage, and after marriage only have sex with your marriage partner for the rest of your married life together.

Tammy: God was the one who designed sex in the first place, so it must be good – everything God created is good! But it is only good within the limits that God sets, and a faithful marriage is the safe place to enjoy this gift.

Carol: But what about those women who have kept themselves for marriage but are not sure about their husbands? How can they keep safe?

Rachel: A couple really needs to discuss this, and both should get tested. If either is infected they should get treatment as soon as possible. If your husband is infected but still insists on having sex without using a new condom, you should talk to your health worker. They will talk to you about getting some medication that really helps to prevent infection.

I think in many cases, it's a good idea for both of you to have an HIV test before you agree to be married. Some people don't agree with this idea, and that's ok, but I feel it's better to know the situation. If one of you is HIV positive, this will have a big effect on the rest of your lives together.

I strongly believe that two people who intend to get married need the wise counsel and advice of an older married couple. These people have been through their own life experiences and watched the experience of many others.

Carol: I agree - This is important. An older couple will have some wise words for you and may be able to help you in some difficult decisions, especially if one of you has a positive HIV test.

Rachel: Remember last time we said that the HIV virus can pass from the mother to the baby during pregnancy, or birth, or by breastfeeding? Well, we didn't get a chance to talk about testing our other children. What if a mother had HIV for a few years without knowing it, which is possible? Some of her other children might be HIV positive...but we won't know for sure unless they have a test for the HIV virus. Young children who are HIV positive are often sick for a long time – with things like chest infections, ear infections, some unusual skin rashes, and they might gain weight very slowly. It's important for all children of an HIV positive mother to have HIV testing. Then those who are HIV positive can be helped.

After my patient, Kitani's, HIV test was positive, they started her on HIV medicines at the hospital clinic. She was three months pregnant. In most countries they usually give HIV medicines to pregnant women with HIV. These medicines are called ARV's – that's short for anti-retro-virals. This means that now Kitani has fewer HIV viruses travelling around her body, and less chance of her baby getting HIV from her.

Tammy: What happens after the baby is born to a mother with HIV?

Rachel: Usually the *babies* take ARV's while they are breastfeeding. This means they have much less chance of getting HIV from their mothers while they are breastfeeding. Some mothers decide they would rather bottle feed their babies to be safer.

Carol: Rachel, you've talked a lot about these anti-retroviral medicines. Do you want to say something about how to take them?

Rachel: If you have HIV, I want to make sure you really understand how important this is: you must *not* change the way you take your ARV medicines. Talk to someone at the HIV clinic first. Some people think that the ARV's are so powerful that they should take more tablets so that they will be cured. This is not true. Other people think that if they take the tablets more often, maybe twice or three times a day, instead of just once, they will get better faster. But that is also *not true*. HIV medicines can be very dangerous if they are used in the wrong way. Even though they can help your

body make more soldier cells, they can be dangerous to other parts of your body like your kidneys. So you should never take them unless your doctor has prescribed them- don't think you can just take them and then expose yourself to risks of infection. Maybe you have some problems with your HIV medicines. Sometimes they might make you feel nauseated or very tired, or you might lose your appetite or have strange dreams at night. If you do have any of these problems, you *must* go and see your health worker so they can help you. Don't just stop taking the medicine. If you stop taking the medicine, and then start again later, then stop again, and start again later, and keep going like that, the medicine will not work in your body any more. The soldier cells in your body might start to die, and you might get sick again. Although there are sometimes other HIV medicines that can be used, it is better not to be in this situation if possible.

Tammy: Thank you Rachel. I do hope Kitani and her baby do well and are healthy. That was so helpful. I must remember to treat all blood as though it is infectious, and be very careful about injection needles.

Carol: ...and please, if you have HIV, remember how important it is to take HIV medicine exactly as the doctor tells you. And be careful not to pass it on to anyone else.

Rachel: But, if you don't have HIV the best thing to do is to follow God's plan for marriage, and then you are much less likely to get infected. God's rules are part of his plan to keep us safe and happy.

Tammy: We're here on Women of Hope, and we've just been hearing more about how to prevent and treat HIV-AIDS. Now Carol has a story for us. Can you sit down with a cup of tea, like the women in this story?

Carol: I've told you before about Kate, who travelled across the world to help people in a country that was damaged by war. One year, she and her friend decided to have a party to celebrate International Women's Day. They gave invitations to all the women they knew, and the women all accepted, because they didn't go to many parties, and they were curious to see the inside of the foreigner's house. I can understand that- most of us are curious about people who are different to us.

So the day came and the women arrived, and took off their outer clothes. They admired each other's colorful best clothes, and asked about their families. They sat on cushions, drinking tea and eating sweets, cakes and fruit. They loved the popcorn Kate made- that was a new treat for them.

Kate's friend made a speech about the importance of women, and a guest read her poem all about women's roles. Then it was Kate's turn. She had practiced her speech in their language, because she had an important message. This is what she said:

'In the beginning, the great and powerful God of the universe created the world and it was good and beautiful. He created Father Adam and Mother Eve, and saw that they were good and beautiful. He put them in a wonderful garden, where they were very happy. They loved each other and they loved God. This was the will of God and God said it was good.

'God created each one of you. We are unique, like flowers in a garden. Some of us are big bright flowers; some are small and sweet-smelling. And just like flowers, we are different colors and shapes. We are all beautiful and precious, because God made us this way.

God knows each one of us. He saw us, even before we were born. He sees us now. His spirit is with us everywhere, all the time. Each of us is unique and wonderful and precious to God.

'God loves you because God is love. He loves us when we are good, and when we are not good. He has loved us from the very beginning of the world. God loves *you*.'

When Kate had finished the room was quiet. Their faces were relaxed, and the room felt sweet. Their

eyes all seemed to say, 'Really? Me? Thank you.'

Then an old woman spoke. She told her story about what happened during the civil war. In one day, her husband, brother and son were killed by rockets, and she and her children ran away with nothing. Somewhere on the road, she stopped, and cried out, 'God what have we done wrong? Why do you hate us?' She believed that whatever happened, it was the will of God. That was the way they thought.

The other women waited. Many of them had lost families in the bombing. Kate felt how sad they were, and tears rose in her eyes. She prayed quietly. Then Kate's friend spoke carefully. 'That bombing was evil. God loves you. His will is to bless you. He does not curse you. He loves you.'

When people do what is evil, they are not doing the will of God. God wants us to love each other in the same way he loves us. Killing people is not the will of God. He wants to give us rich, full lives. Satan came to destroy, and kill, and hurt. That is the work of Satan, the enemy of God and people. If a man kills his neighbor, he is doing the work of Satan, not God. God will judge him.'

All the women agreed. 'If a man kills his neighbor that is not the will of God. God is love.'

Tammy: Do you agree that it is not God's will for people to do evil things? I want to read you some words from God's Word the Bible, from the first letter of John. John was one of the Lord Jesus Christ's closest friends. When John was an old man he wrote to some new Christians. This is what he wrote: 'God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him. If, then, we say that we are on God's side, but at the same time we live in the darkness, we are telling lies, in our words and our actions.' (1 John 1:5-6) John meant that if we love God we try to show love like God does. Then he reminded them about a story from the very beginning of the Bible, about the two oldest sons of Adam and Eve. Here is the story of Cain and Abel.

Carol: Abel brought a lamb as an offering to God, as he had been taught. But Cain brought some vegetables he grew - and that wasn't a right or suitable offering. When God showed he was pleased with Abel's offering, Cain was angry and jealous, and he killed Abel.

Tammy: So the old man John wrote: 'The message you heard from the very beginning is this: we must love one another. We must not be like Cain; he belonged to the evil one and murdered his own brother Abel. Why did Cain murder him? Because the things Cain did were wrong, but the things his brother did were right... Whoever hates his brother or sister is just like a murderer, and you know that a murderer does not have eternal life in him. But this is how we know what *love* is: Jesus Christ *gave his life* for us. So we also should give our lives for our brothers and sisters. For example, if a rich person sees that his brother or sister needs help, yet he closes up his heart against them, how can he say that he loves God? My children, our love should not be just *words* and talk: true love makes us do loving *actions*.' (1 John 3:11-18 based on TEV)

Carol: That's the end of this part of John's letter. This old man John was sometimes called 'the apostle of love' because he was so excited that the Lord Jesus loved him. John was famous for the love that he showed to others. Those words really challenge me. I love God, but I need God to *help* me to show love to other people. Some people are easy to love, aren't they, but, honestly some are not. God didn't wait for us to be good and nice before he loved us. Listen to some more words from John: he wrote: 'This is what love is: it's not that we loved God, but that he loved us first and sent his Son Jesus to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.' (1 John 4:10)

Tammy: So let's remember that God is love, and he wants us to be like him and show love to other people. It is never the will of God for people to do evil things. Let's ask God to help us now. Will you pray with me?

Dear God, we thank you so much that you love us and sent Jesus to save us and show us how to

live. Please help us to be more like you, and show your love to others. We pray in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Carol: Well, my friend, it's time for us to go now. We always say that we would love to hear from you - thank you if you have already written to us.

Tammy: We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings
Goodbye now.

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