



Guidelines for Sexual Purity

by Randy Alcorn

I've developed the following material and presented it to many young people and their parents over the last seventeen years. In the past six years I've honed it further for sharing and discussion with my own daughters and the young men who have asked to date them. Until we have gone over these principles together (my wife and I, our daughter and the boy) and make sure there is complete agreement, we don't allow a dating relationship to begin.

We have found that this is a great help not only to our daughters but to the young men wanting to date them. We make our expectations clear, give them specific guidance and principles (not just rules), and tell them we'll be asking them if they are living up to these standards. This deepens our relationship, opens communication and creates healthy accountability.

Though there are sometimes nervous jitters as family members (and especially the young men) anticipate these sessions, in each case the time together has been strategic, encouraging and rewarding. Having practiced this these last six years, it is impossible for us and for our daughters to imagine them dating a young man without first openly addressing with him all the principles that follow. (And each time we do this, of course, it further reinforces these principles for our daughters and for us.)

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

Part One: What You Need to Know

1. Sex is good. God created it, God called it "good," and it existed before there was any sin in the world.

Sex was not created by Satan, Playboy, Hollywood, HBO, rock musicians, the Internet, or some pervert lurking in the shadows of a porno shop. Sex was created by the holy God of heaven, where purity reigns.

God made sex physically desirable by creating us with sex drives, without which sex wouldn't exist and neither would people. God's Word speaks openly of the pleasure of sex within the marriage relationship (Proverbs 5:18,19; Song of Solomon 4:5; 7:1, 6-9).

We shouldn't be ashamed to talk about what God wasn't ashamed to create. However, God requires us to address the subject in keeping with his intentions and requirements, not the world's. He warns us not to talk about sex in any inappropriate context:

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place." (Ephesians 5:3-4)

God designed sex for the sacred union of marriage, and reserves it for that union. It is both the means by which children are conceived (something very close to God's heart) and a means by which marital intimacy is expressed and cultivated. When it takes place in its proper context, God is definitely pro-sex.

2. Like all good gifts from God, sex can be misused and perverted.

Water is a gift of God, without which we couldn't survive. But floods and tidal waves are water *out of control*, and the effects are devastating. Fire is an energy-producing gift of God that gives warmth and allows us to cook. But a forest fire or a house burning to the ground or a person engulfed in flames is fire *out of control*-it is horrible and frightening. Water and fire are good things which, when they occur outside their God-intended boundaries, become bad.

Likewise, God designed sex to exist within certain boundaries. When exercised in line with God's intended purpose, it is beautiful and constructive. When out of control, violating God's intended purpose, it becomes ugly and destructive. Sex is a good thing which, when it occurs outside its God-designed boundaries, becomes bad.

The problem isn't sex-the problem is us. We're sinners who can pervert, abuse, and rip away from their proper place the good things God created. The greater the gift from God, the more power it has both for good and bad. Inside marriage, sex has great power for good. Outside marriage it has equally great power for bad.

3. The boundaries of sex are the boundaries of marriage.

Sex and marriage go together. *Sexual union is intended as an expression of a lifelong commitment*, a symbol of the spiritual union that exists only within the unconditional commitment of marriage. Apart from marriage, the lasting commitment is absent and the sex act becomes a false expression, a lie.

Every act of sex outside of marriage cheapens both sex and marriage. Sex is a privilege inseparable from the responsibilities of the sacred marriage covenant. To exercise the privilege apart from the responsibility perverts God's intention for sex.

Sex is designed to be the joining of two persons, of two spirits, not just two bodies. Sex should be giving to someone to whom I'm 100% committed (as measured by the state of legal marriage), not taking from someone to whom I'm uncommitted or partially committed.

"But we really love each other" has no bearing on the ethics of sexual intimacy-sex does not become permissible through subjective feelings, but through the objective lifelong commitment of marriage.

4. Your sexual purity is essential to your walk with God.

Sexual purity is not an option for an obedient Christian, it's a requirement. God's will is centered on our character and moral purity much more than on our circumstances, such as job, housing and schooling. You want to know God's will? You don't have to wonder. Here it is: *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality"* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). There is no sense seeking God's will in other areas when you are choosing to live in sexual impurity in your mind or body.

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart." (Psalm 24:3-4)

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." (Psalm 66:18)

"If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable." (Proverbs 28:9)

"'When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,' says the LORD

Almighty." (Zechariah 7:13)

Sexual purity is inseparable from a committed Christian life. If you are not living in sexual purity, God will not hear your other prayers until you offer the prayer of confession and repentance and commit yourself to a life of holiness (1 John 1:9).

5. You are vulnerable to sexual immorality.

Don't kid yourself that it can never happen to you-it can. And if you don't think it can, it almost certainly will.

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12)

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin . . . watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

If you think you'll never be burglarized, you'll fail to take precautions to keep it from happening. If you think you'll never fall sexually, you'll fail to take precautions to keep it from happening.

6. You are targeted for sexual immorality.

Years ago there was scuttlebutt about an international "hit list," a calculated plan for paid assassins to murder strategic world leaders. The Enemy, Satan, has maintained a moral "hit list" throughout the ages. Since God's children are close to God's heart, Christians are at the very top of that list.

The more involved you are in serving Christ, the greater vested interests Satan has in destroying you and God's work in and through you. The evil one wants to take you down *and* to use your life as a bad example to other Christians, who will imitate your moral compromise. God requires that we be holy and pure instruments to be used by him (2 Timothy 2:20-21). More Christians-including Christian leaders-become useless and are lost to serving Christ due to sexual immorality than anything else. (See my booklet [*Sexual Temptation: How Christian Workers can Win the Battle.*](#))

Here's the reality-the forces of evil have taken out a contract on *you*. There's a price on your head. Satan has declared war on you: "Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the invisible realm" (Ephesians 6:12). These evil beings have vested interests in your moral collapse. They will do everything in their power to strike out at Christ and his church through enticing you into immorality.

Satan is neither omnipresent nor omnipotent-there are only so many demons and none of them can be two places at once. Therefore, fallen angels attack and tempt not indiscriminately but with strategic purpose. Satan does not have to waste his time on those who have already made the biggest messes of their lives. Rather, he specially targets those whose fall would have the greatest negative effect on the kingdom of God. That's why God's Word warns Christians:

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil wants to derail you from serving God. He wants you imprisoned to sin. God wants you free. Only by exercising self-control and being on alert can we expect to resist the enemy's plan to lead us into sin. Satan "scouts us out" and knows only too well the chinks in the armor of every Christian. His aim is deadly, he excels at tailor-made temptations, and it is at our points of greatest vulnerability that he will attack.

Don't forget that "the one [Christ] who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). As powerful as the evil one is to tempt us, *God is infinitely more powerful to deliver us* and has given us in Christ

all the resources we need to live godly lives:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

7. Your body belongs to God, not you.

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

If it's my house, I have the right to do what I want with it. If it's someone else's, I don't. Sometimes when I'm speaking I ask to borrow a pencil from someone in the audience. Then I break it in half, throw it to the floor and stomp on it. There's always a wide-eyed silence and expressions of shock and discomfort in the audience. I ask them why they're bothered by what I've done, why they think I did something wrong. Someone always says "because it wasn't your pencil." Then I explain that it really was *my* pencil, that I gave it to the person ahead of time and asked her to hand it to me when I called on her. Suddenly it changes everything, because if it belongs to me, then (and only then) do I have the right to do with it as I please. If it belongs to someone else, I have no such right.

When you came to Christ, when you affirmed him as Lord of your life, you surrendered your entire self, including your body, to God. The title to your life was transferred from you to God. Christ owns you and your body. You are bought and paid for. "Your body" is really *his* body. He paid the ultimate price for it. What price? The shed blood of God Almighty! We are his both by virtue of his creation and his redemption. God has every right to tell me what to do with my mind and body. *I have no right to do whatever I want with what belongs to God.*

8. Sexual purity begins in the mind, not the body.

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7).

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality . . ." (Matthew 15:19-20).

"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

You will inevitably adopt the morality of the programs, movies, books, magazines, music, Internet sites and conversations you participate in. GIGO-Garbage in, garbage out; Godliness in, godliness out. The cognitive is basic to the behavioral-you become what you choose to feed your mind on.

Sow a thought, reap an action;
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Your future can be accurately predicted by what you allow your mind to dwell on. Sinful actions don't come out of nowhere-they are the cumulative product of little moral compromises made over time, which ultimately culminate in ungodly behavior.

There's nothing new about sexual temptation-what's new is how it has invaded our homes. In first century Corinth there were prostitutes all over the streets, but when you entered your home you had a sanctuary from

the temptation. We live in a technological Corinth, where immorality can come into the privacy of our home through airwaves (television) and modems (the Internet). Most of us are only a few pushbuttons away from sexual immorality of the mind. Every choice we make to view and contemplate immorality desensitizes us to its evil.

Actions, habits, character and destiny all start with a thought, and thoughts are fostered by what we choose to take into our minds. Therefore we should take extreme care about what we feed our minds on.

"Above all else, guard your heart [mind, inner being], for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

If someone wants to pollute water, he pollutes it at its source. If he wants to purify water, he purifies it at its source. Our thoughts are the source of our lives. All our lives flow from our mind, and through the choices we make every day we program our minds, either for godliness or ungodliness.

"Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word" (Psalm 119:37)

Our minds are not a vacuum—they will be filled with something. It is necessary to turn our minds from the worthless, but it's not sufficient. We also must fill our minds with good thoughts that crowd out and combat the bad ones. It's not enough to say "don't think about anything bad." (If I say, "don't think about spiders," what do you think about?) We must also choose to think about the good. (If I say "think about your favorite dessert," pretty soon you stop thinking about spiders.) Time in the Word, in prayer, and in conversations with Christ-centered friends reinforces our commitment to purity.

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure . . . think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

We can't avoid every temptation, but we can avoid many of them, and we can certainly resist their attempts to take hold of us. Martin Luther said, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair."

Be careful what you expose your mind to. If you're on a diet, don't go to Baskin & Robin's. If you do, your resistance will break down. If you want to abstain from lust you don't go places and watch movies and programs and read things that stimulate lust.

Your body will go where your mind allows it to. When it comes to your sexual purity, the ultimate battle is in your mind. Don't give your mind junk food. Be sure you're getting spiritual nutrition.

9. Since God doesn't want you to have premarital sex, neither does he want you to do that which prepares your body for premarital sex.

"How far can I go?" This is a common question, but it isn't the best question because usually it means "how close can I get to disobeying God without actually doing it?" If a parent tells his child "Don't step out on the freeway," an obedient child won't go dangle his leg over the freeway, he'll stay far away from it. By putting himself close to the freeway, he subjects himself to unnecessary temptation to act on his impulses, disobey and put himself in grave danger.

God made the body and mind with sex drives, and as those drives are stimulated they move toward a climax—this is a simple fact of life that no one should be naïve about. Caressing each other in sexually stimulating ways is foreplay, and foreplay is designed by God to culminate in sexual intercourse. Since intercourse is forbidden outside marriage, so is foreplay. Since sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong, it is also wrong to engage in activity that propels mind and body toward sexual intercourse.

"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22)

There is a continuum of physical contact that begins with things like sitting close and hand-holding on the near side and moves to sexual intercourse on the far side. In between might be an arm around the shoulder, a brief hug, a kiss on the cheek, a kiss on the mouth, a longer hug, prolonged kissing, fondling, etc. Scripture does not spell out exactly what "intermediate" behavior is permissible, but one thing is certain-the line must be drawn before either of you becomes sexually stimulated. This means that fondling-and anything else that results in a "turn on"-is forbidden.

If one of you begins to be stimulated even by an apparently innocent physical contact, then both of you should back off immediately. If you don't back off, you are choosing to stay on a canoe headed toward a waterfall. This is not just wrong, it's stupid. (Those who allow their minds to dwell on what's immoral and who engage in sexual stimulation together shouldn't be surprised when they have sexual intercourse. It's simply the natural result of the choices they've made. *If you want a different outcome, you must make different choices.*)

Guys are more quickly and easily stimulated than girls. A girl often thinks extended kisses and hugs are fine, naïve to the fact that the guy is sexually stimulated and is tempted to push for more. Again, make sure you draw the line far enough back that *neither* of you crosses it.

10. Once you let your body cross the line, it will neither know nor care about your Christian convictions.

Some Christians pray God will protect their purity, then willfully put themselves into temptation and wonder why God didn't answer their prayer. This is like putting a book at the corner of a table and praying "God please don't let this book fall," when all the while you keep pushing it further and further off the edge. No matter how fervently you pray that the book won't fall, it will fall if you continue to choose to push it. No matter how fervently you pray that you will not fall into immorality, you will fall if you continue to make choices that feed your temptation toward immorality. Don't allow your choices to undermine and invalidate your prayers.

11. If you have sexual intimacy with someone outside marriage, you are stealing from God and the other person.

Since he or she belongs to God, not you, that means you are borrowing this person for the evening. Be careful what you do with what doesn't belong to you. You'll be held accountable to his or her Owner.

12. God has your best interests in mind when he tells you not to have premarital sex.

What's right is always smart, and always for your good. Sex is not just something you do-sex is someone you are. It is linked to the welfare of your whole person.

Having sex outside of marriage is self-destructive in every sense. Sexual purity is always for the best-not only for God and others, but for you.

13. God would not tell you to abstain from impurity if it was impossible to obey him.

God is not cruel. He doesn't command you to abstain from necessities, such as eating or drinking or breathing. Sex is something everyone can abstain from-it is a strong desire, yes, but never an emergency, never a necessity. Christ has given us the resources to resist every temptation:

"The grace of God teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12).

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

You do not have to watch that video. You can turn it off, walk out, go in the other room. You don't have to click on that link to an ungodly website. You don't have to fondle the person you're dating. You can and should draw upon your resources in Christ, and say "no" to temptations to sin.

14. Satan will lie to you about sex, but Jesus tells you the truth.

Jesus said of Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:43-44).

Satan is an expert at telling lies, and he tells them smoothly and convincingly. He has persuaded many young people "it's okay to touch her there, it's okay to let him touch you, it's natural, it won't hurt anything." Soon there's lust, sin, devastation, disillusionment, loss of respect, conflict, insecurity and sometimes unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Many young people end up angry and bitter at themselves and others because they bought the lie, the relationship is ruined and now they are paying the price.

Satan is a liar, but Jesus is the truth and the truth-teller (John 14:6). He said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Those who believe Satan's lies about sex end up in bondage. Those who believe Christ's truth about sex end up free.

Identify and meditate on the truths Christ tells you. Identify and reject the lies Satan tells you.

15. You must learn to think long term, not short term.

Good or bad, you will always reap what you sow-you will always harvest the consequences of your choices.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:7-9)

It doesn't matter how smart you think you are. It doesn't matter whether you have a Ph.D. in physics, if you step off the tenth story of a building, you will fall to your death. Gravity is law-there's just no getting around it. Likewise, God has set up spiritual laws that govern the universe, including laws concerning our sexual behavior. If we break his commandments, ultimately we get broken.

Scripture teaches two basic alternatives in life, the way of God and the way of men, the way of holiness and the way of sin. Proverbs speaks of the path of wisdom and the path of foolishness, and calls upon us to make right choices, which are also wise, and avoid wrong choices, which are also foolish. After laying out the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience, God said,

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

The lifelong consequences of sexual impurity are worse than we can imagine. The lifelong rewards of sexual purity are greater than we can imagine.

Sexual Purity Part Two: What You Need to Do

(Guidelines for Protecting Purity in Dating)

1. Realize you don't have to date.

Much sexual temptation today is created by our social practice of coupling and isolating young people instead of doing what the Hebrew culture and many others have done-requiring that single people spend time together only in a context supervised by parents and other adults.

This structure of direct parental involvement and carefully overseen courtship has been the normal social structure; it is ours that is abnormal. In our culture, the unprecedented combination of young people's leisure time, money, transportation and being permitted to be alone for long hours and late at night-and the large gap between the average age of puberty and marriage-have proven overwhelming temptations to many, Christians included. (This is especially true in a culture that distorts teen sex, making it look romantic and healthy, when in fact it is usually unfulfilling, often emotionally devastating, and always morally wrong.)

Many people think that to be normal you have to date. But just because lots of other people do doesn't mean you have to. It's an option, not a need. With the upside comes the downside of definite risks and temptations. You can enjoy fun positive friendships with people of the opposite sex and be involved in all sorts of activities without coupling up with one person. If you're interested in the case for courtship rather than dating, see the best-selling *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris (Multnomah, 1997).

If you do choose to date, the following guidelines can help you maintain a walk with God and guard your purity.

2. If you're a Christian, only date Christians.

Dating is the path to marriage. You will not marry every person you date. But the person you marry will be someone you dated. Therefore every date is a potential mate. There is no such thing as "just dating"-you don't "just" bungee jump from a helicopter, or "just" fight on the front lines of a battle and you don't "just" date. It's too important to say "just." Too much is at stake.

God says "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers . . . what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6: 14). Don't enter into any relationship that could compromise your convictions. The closer the relationship the greater the danger.

There are many contexts in which to do evangelism-dating isn't one of them. God doesn't call anyone to missionary dating. Far too much is at risk. For the same reason you wouldn't marry a nonchristian, you shouldn't date one. If you wouldn't eat poison mushrooms, don't put them on your plate. If that seems an unfair comparison to dating an unbeliever, reread 2 Corinthians 6: 14.

If you wouldn't marry a person because they don't know Christ, that's a good enough reason not to date them. More young men and women are derailed from their walk with Christ by dating nonbelievers than anything else. The longer you allow a relationship to go on with a nonbeliever, the more cloudy your judgment will become and the more likely you will commit immorality and turn your back on the Lord in other ways. Convictions waver when we place ourselves in the realm of temptation. There is only one way to be sure you do not marry an unbeliever: never date an unbeliever.

3. If you're a committed disciple, only date committed disciples. (And if you're not a committed disciple, why aren't you?)

It is necessary to date only Christians, but it is not sufficient. Many Christians lack moral fiber, convictions, maturity, and discipline. Just because a person is a Christian doesn't make him or her morally safe or a

worthy partner. Let's face it-some Christians are still jerks, and a Christian jerk is still a jerk.

Don't expect perfection in the person you date. But do expect character and godliness. Don't date someone with spiritual problems or character deficiencies that would cause you not to marry them.

This assumes that you yourself are a growing Christian, that you are developing a strong character and strong convictions. If you're not a committed, growing disciple, then a committed, growing disciple shouldn't be dating you. Don't only think about being out of God's will if you date the wrong person -also think about whether someone else would be out of God's will dating you. The first key is being the right person, the second key is dating the right person.

4. Choose dates by character, not just appearance.

"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Appearances change over time. You'll find that out at your ten year and twenty year class reunions! But even in the short-run, a person who looks great at first glance but who lacks character and depth quickly becomes less attractive. A person with strong character quickly becomes more attractive. When we judge people by their appearances, often we turn out to be dead wrong-and meanwhile we may have made foolish choices.

5. Realize Christ is watching and is with you all evening-wherever you go and whatever you do.

He is watching you because he is omniscient. He is with you because he's omnipresent, but as a believer he is with you in a very special way-he indwells you, you are his holy temple. You are the holy of holies, the dwelling place of the Almighty: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and join them to a prostitute (or anyone else in an immoral action)? Never!" (1 Corinthians 6:15). Since the Holy Spirit of God is within us, when we do evil with our bodies we bring God himself to the evil with us. This should be an unthinkable blasphemy for any Christian.

6. Realize where you go and who you go with will influence your sexual desires.

It's our nature to be influenced by our surroundings. When we put ourselves in a godly atmosphere with godly people, we are influenced toward godliness. When we put ourselves in an ungodly atmosphere with ungodly people we are influenced toward ungodliness.

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" (1 Corinthians 15:28)

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."
(Proverbs 13:20)

"Stay away from the foolish man, because you will not find knowledge on his lips."
(Proverbs 14:7)

". . . rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . . Have nothing to do with them." (2 Timothy 3:4-5)

7. Realize your date is your brother or sister in Christ-not your "lover."

"Treat older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Timothy 5:2). Don't go into dating with the goal of romance, but the goal of spending time with your brother or sister. When you begin a relationship, a rule of thumb is, don't do anything physically you wouldn't do with your brother or sister.

If a Christ-centered and positive relationship develops, then you might move to cautious displays of affection such as hand-holding. But be alert to the difference between appropriate affection and intimacy. You must stay safely back from the line where either one is propelled toward sexual intimacy. It's very hard to move back once you've crossed a line—so don't cross it in the first place.

This person may end up being a lifelong friend, or married to your best friend. Don't do anything with him or her that would cause you to be embarrassed or self-conscious if you end up being best man or maid of honor at his wedding.

8. Focus on talk, not touch; conversation, not contact.

Dating is a time to explore minds and souls, not bodies. Treat your date as a subject to listen to and understand and appreciate, not an object to experiment with, conquer or satisfy your desires.

9. Avoid fast moving relationships and instant intimacy.

Pace your relationship. Take it step by step, don't go into a free fall. A car moving too fast is likely to swerve out of control when it hits a slick spot. Keep your foot near the brake. Don't let this relationship get out of control.

10. Plan the entire evening in advance, with no big gaps.

Gaps always get filled, often with temptations to sexual impurity. Know what you're doing and either stick with the plan or go somewhere safe, where you're in the sight of others (particularly others who respect the need for purity). You can still have a private conversation even in a room full of people. But their presence will encourage you to focus on the conversation rather than on temptation to impurity.

11. Avoid setups like the plague.

Setups include such things as being alone on a couch or in a car late at night or in a bedroom. (Stay out of each other's bedrooms!) Learn not to trust yourself too much. Psychologist Henry Brandt's teenage son asked him, "Dad, don't you trust me?" Brandt responded, "Alone, late at night, in a car, with a girl? I don't trust me—why should I trust you?"

Determine to stay away from the setup, rather than putting yourself in the setup and having to call on your convictions when your resistance is at its lowest, and you're most likely to give in. In the moment of strength, make decisions that will avoid temptation in the moment of weakness. When you're on a diet, don't step foot in a doughnut shop. In fact, don't even walk down the street the doughnut shop's on.

12. Be accountable to someone about your physical relationship.

This should be a committed brother or sister in Christ, usually the same gender as you. It should be someone who takes sexual purity seriously, someone with wise advice, who will pray for you and help hold you accountable to high standards.

Parents should talk openly with their children involved in dating relationships. They should go over these guidelines for purity and tell their kids, "Because we love you and it's our job to protect you, from time to time we're going to ask you how you're doing in maintaining purity in your relationship." It is not only a parent's right to ask such a question, but his responsibility.

We all need someone to be honest with us. It's a great help just to have someone ask you, "How did it go last night? Did you honor the Lord? Did you maintain your purity?" If you know someone's going to ask, it's a great motivator to choose wisely.

13. Pray together at the beginning and end of each date.

Commit the evening or day in advance to the Lord. Ask him to be pleased in everything you do. Plan to pray at the end of the date to thank him for the evening. If you know this prayer is coming, it will help you to be sure to control yourself and please God.

14. Imagine your parents and church leaders are watching you through the window.

Would that change how you behave? Then realize your life is not private, it's an open book to be seen by a watching world:

"What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs" (Luke 12:3).

Meditate on the fact that someone much more holy than your parents and church leaders, and to whom you are even more accountable, is watching you, even when you tell yourself you're alone. God is omniscient and omnipresent. He is the Audience of One:

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence. If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."
(Psalm 139:7-10)

"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD.
"Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good"
(Proverbs 15:3).

"My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes." (Jeremiah 16:17)

God not only sees our actions, he knows our thoughts:

"You perceive my thoughts from afar. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord." (Psalm 139:2, 4)

"[God] knows the secrets of the heart." (Psalm 44:21)

"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind." (Jeremiah 17:10)

In temptation our theology becomes very cloudy. The truth is, *there is no such thing as a private moment*. God is never in the dark. He is always watching. We may fool ourselves and others, but never God. He knows what we're thinking about and what we're doing. And it is his appraisal of our life that ultimately matters.

15. When you sense the temptation coming, before things start to get out of control, RUN.

"Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). When it comes to sexual temptation, it always pays to be a coward. In this battle, retreat is always the first line of defense. He who hesitates (and rationalizes) is lost.

Joseph demonstrated this with Potiphar's wife:

"And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her . . . She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!'

But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house." (Genesis 39:10, 12)

Joseph not only refused to go to bed with her but to "even be with her." He saw the danger signs and avoided her. And when she finally pushed herself on him, he did not trust himself to stay where he was, but ran out of the house. Don't stay and try to "resist" temptation when you have the option of running from it. And don't choose to be near someone when that person is a source of temptation to you, or you are to her.

16. Write out your own standards and enforce them yourself-never depend on your date.

You as an individual are responsible and accountable to God for what you do (Romans 14:10-12; Corinthians 5:10). Someone else's convictions or lack of convictions, or self-control or lack of self-control is not the issue. (Though you should never be dating someone who lacks convictions and self-control). You are fully responsible for your behavior. If you fall into sexual immorality you have yourself to blame. Pointing the finger at someone else doesn't cut it.

17. Make your moral decisions in advance-not in the time of temptation.

If you set your alarm clock at night and tell yourself you'll decide in the morning whether you need to get up when the alarm goes off, you may as well not set it. Either you are committed to getting up or you're not. If it's left to your feelings in the moment of truth, you'll make the wrong decision. Again: in the moment of strength make choices that will serve you well in the moment of weakness.

18. Memorize Scripture on sexual purity and quote it when tempted.

"I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). When Satan tempted him, Jesus quoted Scripture to resist. When the attacks come, and they will, be ready to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). There are many Scripture passages in this handout. Choose some, then write each one on a note card and work on memorizing them.

19. Don't do anything with your date you wouldn't want someone else doing with your future mate.

Somewhere out there is the man or woman you're going to marry. What do you want them to be doing now with someone else? Then live by that standard yourself. "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

20. Look out for the "moral wear down" of long dating relationships and long engagements.

It's easy to peak out emotionally, to wear down in the battle for sexual purity, to begin to rationalize that you're really a couple, and after all you've been dating for years and maybe you think you're going to get married anyway, so you're "almost" or "sort of" married, right? Wrong. When it comes to the freedom to have sex there's just two kinds of people-the unmarried, who don't have that freedom, and the married, who do.

Don't get engaged until you can put the wedding in sight. When you're engaged people begin to treat you as no longer single, when in fact you are. You can be deceived into slipping into some of the privileges of marriage before marriage, especially sexual intimacy.

21. If you've violated some of these guidelines, confess, repent and implement a plan to prevent future violations.

When you confess and repent of your sins, God will cleanse you:

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

A man once confessed to his priest, "Father, forgive me for stealing a half load of hay last night . . . no, make it a whole load." The priest said, "Which was it, a half load or a whole load?" The man replied, "Make it a whole load . . . I'm going back tonight for the other half."

Confession is not genuine when you are planning to repeat the same sin. There must be true repentance.

Even if you are no longer a virgin you can and should commit yourself to secondary virginity -to remain sexually pure from this day forward, preserving yourself only for your marriage partner, should God choose to give you one. You need more than good intentions to maintain your purity -you need a plan. The plan you formulate may incorporate a number of elements we've mentioned, but it should include avoidance and accountability. If you are committed to a relationship with a growing Christian discuss it honestly and formulate a plan to prevent falling back into premarital intimacy.

22. Be radical-do whatever it takes to guard your sexual purity.

When it comes to causes of sin, don't wait for them to taper off on their own (they never will), take decisive steps to cut them off. Consider Christ's powerful words in Matthew 5 (repeated in 18:8-9):

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:27-30)

I believe Jesus uses this shocking picture to persuade his listeners to do whatever is necessary to deal with temptation. (The hand and eye are *not* the causes of sin, but the eye is a means of access for both godly input and temptation, and the hand an instrument of action, either sinful or righteous. What the eye looks at and the hand touches is what we must carefully govern to guard our purity.) Removing a television from a home, getting rid of a computer, or going out of your way to never walk by a magazine rack may appear drastic measures, but they're nothing compared to gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand! Jesus is teaching us that we need to think much more radically and counter-culturally in our efforts to be sexually pure.

Don't be casual or gradual, be decisive. If that means never going onto the Internet, never going into a video store, never being with a certain person, never listening to certain kinds of music, then make that resolution, no matter how radical or extreme it seems. (The Bible doesn't tell me I must watch TV or videos or send email-it *does* tell me I must guard my mind from impurity.) You might think "I should be strong enough to resist this temptation," but if you aren't, take every step to avoid it. If these things seem like crutches, fine-use whatever crutches you need to help you walk.

A Christian businessman who travels nearly every week told me his walk with God had been completely eroded because of one reason-he stayed in hotels and had a long history of failing to resist the temptation presented by the "black box" on top of the TV set, which kept enticing him to view pornographic movies.

After years of guilt and regret, followed by succumbing again and again to this same temptation, he finally changed his strategy. One day when he checked into a hotel, he said "Please have the TV removed from my room."

When the desk clerk said, "Sir, if you don't want to watch TV, just don't turn it on," he replied, "I'm a paying customer, and I'd like the television removed." They sent in a maintenance man to remove it and he spent his

late evenings reading Scripture and Christian books with no temptation toward viewing.

In the moment of strength he made a decision that kept him from temptation in the moment of weakness. He told me he has done this in every hotel he stays at for the last three years and said, "This single action has revolutionized my Christian life."

If this means *never* being alone behind closed doors with your date, so be it. Do whatever it takes. Get creative, get radical, and do all you can to avoid temptation.

23. Count the cost of impurity.

Rehearse in advance the devastating consequences of sexual sin and you'll be less likely to commit it.

The consequences are serious and many of them are ongoing-losing your virginity, disappointing your Lord, being a bad example to family or friends, having in the future to tell someone you love; the strong possibility of unwanted pregnancy and serious sexually transmitted diseases; the mental images of your sexual sin that can plague you; the hindrances to marriage produced by premarital sex; the greater possibility of extramarital sex (adultery) among those who've had premarital sex.

Remember that if you do commit the sin of fornication, that can never be neutralized by the greater sin of abortion. Premarital sex is a sin; pregnancy isn't a sin. Don't make a child pay the consequences for your wrong choice. Have the courage to make the right choice now.

Don't tell yourself you may as well go ahead and sin since God will forgive you anyway. This cheapens the grace of God. Any concept of grace that makes sin seem unimportant is not biblical. God forgives when we sincerely repent, but if we sincerely repent we will show it by taking necessary steps to avoid temptation. Even a forgiven person must deal with many consequences to his sin. If I get drunk, drive recklessly, run over a six year old girl and kill her, if I repent, God will forgive me. But his forgiveness will not bring the girl back to life, nor will it absolve me of legal and relational consequences of my sin. Sexual sin has lasting consequences-don't presume upon God's forgiveness to take them all away. He removes guilt, but he doesn't always remove consequences. That's just how life works.

Final Thoughts:

Are you ready to commit or recommit yourself to a life of sexual purity? Now is the time. Nothing is more fleeting than the moment of conviction. Respond now, or you may never respond.

Don't deny reality. God made a universe in which righteousness is always rewarded in the long run, and unrighteousness is always punished in the long run. What's right is always what's smart:

"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (Jeremiah 17:10).

"Does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Proverbs 24:12)

"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done." (Matthew 16:27)

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'" (Luke 19:17)

"God will give to each person according to what he has done." (Romans 2:6)

"Because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does." (Ephesians 6:8)

Live in such a way as to hear your Lord say to you one day, "Well done." Get on the right side of the universe's moral system. Honor God by living in sexual purity. If you do, you'll experience his blessing and rewards not only today, tomorrow, and ten years from now, but throughout eternity. **"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step? If I have walked in falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit-let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless-if my steps have turned from the path, if my heart has been led by my eyes, or if my hands have been defiled, then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted. If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest."** (Job 31:1-12)

[Back To Top](#)

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