

5 Ways to Resist Sexual Sin

The Bible teaches, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). It also tells us to turn away from those who are led by various lusts (see 1 Tim.3:5-6).

Many great people in God have fallen into fleshly temptations and potentially ruined their lives and ministries. One person has said, “It takes a lifetime to build integrity and a minute to lose it.” This is a true saying!

I believe one of the most important reasons leaders fall is that most have never intentionally set up mental and emotional firewalls. By “firewall,” I mean something that acts as a barrier so that the temptation does not easily penetrate the heart. Proverbs 4:23 instructs us to guard our heart because out of it flow the issues of life.

Most people have no firewalls set up; thus, as soon as a strong temptation comes their way, the only thing stopping them from sinning is their own will power, which is based on the spiritual and emotional condition they are in at the moment of the test.

In order for the enemy to trip me up and get me to fall into adultery or other forms of sexual sin, he would have to get through not only my will power but also five layers of firewalls I have set up to protect my soul.

No firewall is foolproof, of course. The primary way to resist temptation is to be in the strength of the Lord, as Ephesians 6:10-13 teaches. However, there are times we may not be at a high level of spiritual and emotional strength or times when we are caught off guard. Firewalls are something the Holy Spirit can use to further strengthen our resolve.

The following are some of the firewalls I have set up:

1. Maintaining intimate fellowship with the Lord. By far, the most important relationship I have in my life is my friendship and covenant with the Lord. I told the Lord when I first started in ministry that I would never allow the ministry to be so consuming that I did not have time to pray and walk in His manifest presence. The main reason we were born is to grow in the knowledge of and relationship with the Lord, and I never want to exchange my walk with Him for any earthly pleasure (see Eph. 4:30).

2. Maintaining the trust my spouse and children have in me. Besides my commitment to the Lord, the greatest call and joy of my life is caring for the family God has entrusted to me. Before I fall into temptation, I will think about the commitment I have to my wife and remind myself that I do not want to devastate her. I will also consider that I never want to do anything to destroy the way my children view me and possibly hurt their view of the Lord and His church. Our greatest legacy will be the life we lead, which is the inheritance we pass on to our children's children (see Prov. 13:22).

I want my legacy to include leaving a generational blessing to my biological family that will continue to speak after I am long gone (see Heb. 11:4).

3. Staying true to the purpose of God and His call on my life. I believe a person can derail his purpose and the call of God on his life by the choices he makes. I have worked more than 35 years to fulfill His call, and I do not want to blow it for momentary pleasure.

4. Setting a good example for my spiritual sons and daughters. I have only five biological children, but I have many close spiritual sons and daughters. I have seen and read about how church members and spiritual children become disillusioned with the things of God because of their leader's failure. Of course, I have also seen incredible restoration and

transformation in the lives of fallen leaders because they repented and climbed back up the mountain of their great calling from God.

The bottom line is, people need to put their eyes on Jesus more than on their leaders. But I do not want to allow foolishness in fleshly pursuit on my part to place a stumbling block in others' lives.

5. Maintaining the integrity of the gospel before the world.

The last and one of the most important firewalls I have is to maintain the integrity of the gospel before the world. I do not want to bring shame to God or His Word.

The more influence I have, the more temptations and tests I will experience, so I need to have these five firewalls up perpetually and to continually inspect them to make sure there are no cracks in them. The flesh-driven scandals of the 1980s set back the reputation of the evangelical church in this nation for many decades, and I do not want to set back the gospel in my family, community or city.

I speak about the need to have firewalls in my life because I know that, like all other humans, I am fragile and born with a wicked and sinful nature, and that I have to watch and pray lest I fall into temptation (see Matt. 26:41). Part of the way I “watch” is to construct and maintain these firewalls. But unless I pray and walk in the presence and power of the Spirit, no amount of firewalls will be able to protect me from my wicked flesh.

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y.*