

7 Stumbling Blocks to Sexual Purity

Men aren't the only ones who wrestle with sexual temptation. In fact, women today need clear guidance on where to draw the line.

Indulging in a steamy romance novel ... going out of your way to pass by the attentive co-worker's desk ... surfing in cyberspace to find a chat room buddy who'll stroke your ego. None of these seemingly innocent activities could be considered cheating or sexually compromising, right? Or could they?

Where is the line between sexual integrity and compromise? What constitutes marital unfaithfulness? Can we consider ourselves "pure" as long as we've not been physical with another man? Or, does sexual purity go deeper than that?

Even Christians often assume that until they actually engage in intercourse with another person, they're acting with sexual integrity. But our sexuality isn't just what we do, but rather who we are.

God created us with not just a body, but also with a mind, heart and spirit. These four components combine to form the whole of who God made us to be.

Therefore, our bodies are only one aspect that we must guard against sexual compromise. It is vital that we also carefully guard our minds, hearts and spirits.

The Components of Sexuality

Over the last decade, pursuing my own healing from these issues, as well as teaching on the topic of sexual purity, I have come to understand that in some way or another sexual integrity is a battle that every woman fights.

Perhaps Kevin and Ruth's experience can help you visualize this four-component concept. After their wedding, they proceeded into the reception hall where a long, lace-covered banquet table displayed the beautiful multitiered wedding cake, the crystal punch bowl and cups, sterling silverware and frou-frou monogrammed napkins. The only problem was that whoever set up the table forgot to fasten the latch on one of the folding legs. As soon as the red punch was poured into the crystal punch bowl, the leg buckled and everything slid down to the floor with a clatter!

When all four of a table's legs aren't securely fastened, the possibility of a mishap is pretty good. The same can be said of our sexuality. All four components-mind, body, heart and spirit-must be guarded in order for our lives to reflect purity and integrity.

So how can we securely guard our minds, bodies, hearts and spirits from sexual compromise? What things are women prone to do that undermine our sexual integrity? We'll need to examine the most common temptations women face.

Seven Pitfalls to Sexual Purity

1. Unhealthy comparisons. Whether it's the Hollywood hunk, the passionate pastor or the charming neighbor, it's tempting to compare our mates to other men and meditate on the many ways he fails to measure up. But what man can possibly live up to the bright and shining qualities of all others?

When we compare ourselves to the magazine model or the younger, smarter, prettier secretary in his office, discontentment is sure to follow. We can become so disillusioned with our less-than-perfect partners or with ourselves that our sex lives are negatively affected. If you find yourself falling prey to unhealthy comparisons, remind yourself of three wonderful things about your husband (or about yourself), then say a prayer of thanks to God for His

wonderful creation.

2. Mental fantasies involving others. If you discovered that your husband fantasizes about other women while being intimate with you, would you feel offended? Sure. And most husbands would feel the same way if the tables were turned.

To safeguard your mind from straying outside of your marriage bed, I recommend leaving the lights on and keeping your eyes open during intimate moments together. It may seem unusual at first, but think about it: When we talk with someone, we don't usually turn our backs or close our eyes. We prefer the intimate connection of face-to-face and eye-to-eye contact.

A dark room or closed eyes can hinder, rather than foster, genuine intimacy if our minds are prone to wandering. Remaining mentally and visually focused on your husband during lovemaking will help you feel more connected.

Single women, too, must be aware that allowing their minds to envision inappropriate activities or relationships paves the way for their defenses to become so weakened that they eventually act out their thoughts. Avoid tempting fantasies by limiting their access to your mind.

3. Emotional affairs. Many women protect their bodies from sexual sin, but allow their hearts to stray far from home. Even if the relationship never becomes sexual, for a man to lose his wife's heart to another is a crushing blow. Some women seek to medicate the pain of loneliness or rejection when they feel love is eluding them. Some take solace in food; others in sexual relationships with any willing partner.

Women don't usually intend to get tangled up in an emotional affair. If you find yourself sensing an improper attraction to or from a man, avoid being alone with him (even in a public place) and refrain from conversations that you wouldn't want others to know about, including private e-mails, chat rooms and telephone conversations.

Remember, the heart is to be guarded above all else! (See Prov. 4:23.) Find an accountability partner, and give her permission to ask you the hard questions to keep you from falling into an emotional affair.

4. Pornography and Internet chat rooms. Men aren't the only ones tempted to peep at porn. Many women admit to compulsively accessing Internet pornography, at first perhaps out of curiosity or to see what their husbands were looking at, but later to satisfy their own lustful curiosities.

Looking at pornography pulls our minds away from God's plan for sexual purity within marriage like nothing else. Those graphic images of other people often continue to flash through our minds even when we are making love with our spouses.

Many women prefer cyber sex (or cyber foreplay) in chat rooms with strangers. While it may feel exciting to be intimate with a stranger, divulging and learning new things about each other, such isn't intimacy-it's just intensity-a cheap substitute for the real thing. Genuine intimacy is achieved only by personal contact over long periods of time, such as in marriage.

An unmarried woman demonstrates her love for God by focusing her thoughts on Him and on those things He has prepared for her to do that are pleasing to Him. Cyber relationships of a sexual nature fuel unhealthy appetites and foster a sense of guilt that will inhibit intimacy with the Lord.

5. Romance novels and soap operas. It's no coincidence that I was experiencing the most extramarital temptation during the days that I watched All My Children, One Life to Live and General Hospital while my children were napping. When we put garbage into our minds, we can expect it to rot and create a stench that infects our lives.

Romance novels can have a similar effect, stirring up cravings for illicit sexual encounters. Even though there are some

great Christian romance novels out there, if you find yourself feeling disappointed that your husband doesn't sweep you off your feet like the hero in the story, it's a threat to your emotional sobriety and faithfulness in marriage.

Singles who indulge in this kind of sexually suggestive entertainment can find their struggle with temptation intensified, as I did. They may also find their future attempts at enjoying intimacy in marriage hampered.

6. Self-sex. While some experts say that masturbation doesn't hurt anyone, we are being selfish lovers when engaging in sexual pleasure apart from our spouses rather than sharing a mutually satisfying experience. I suggest incorporating a "no masturbation" rule in marriage. When sexual tension is felt by either or both partners, it's a great motivator for us to draw closer to one another, creating a stronger, more intimate bond.

Singles often think, "Once I have a husband, I won't feel the need to masturbate any longer." However, a wedding band on your finger and the freedom to have guilt-free sex doesn't always remove the craving for self-gratification.

Many women remain addicted to masturbation even after marriage. We train our bodies as to what it finds pleasurable, and once you train your body to fly solo, sharing the experience with a partner can prove challenging and frustrating.

It's often argued that the Bible doesn't expressly forbid it. However, let's be honest, when women masturbate, they don't think pure thoughts, and the Bible is very clear about that issue (see Phil. 4:8). Masturbation enslaves you and is a very proud response to our human desires. Such actions tell God: "You can't satisfy me, nor is Your Holy Spirit strong enough to control me. I must take care of my own physical desires."

But God does know what will truly satisfy you. Once you allow Him to prove Himself in this area, you will understand that God-gratification instead of self-gratification will ensure that your body, mind, heart and spirit remain pure.

7. Using sex to manipulate or control. A woman doesn't have to engage in secretive extramarital acts to defile her own marriage bed. Using sex as a reward for good behavior or withholding sex as punishment for not-so-good behavior makes a mockery of God's design for sexual intimacy. Marriage should be about ministering to each other's needs, not manipulating each other.

If you have a tendency to use sex as a bargaining tool, make a concerted effort to engage in sexual pleasure with absolutely no strings attached. Some women may also use sex as a form of control, avoiding it altogether while appearing to be disinterested.

However, a sexless marriage is a sure sign of trouble. God created us to be sexual beings and if our libido is low, there are likely medical or emotional issues hindering your natural sexual desires. Talk to your doctor or professional counselor if such is the case.

The issue of sexual flirtation should also be addressed here. Some women are too naive to recognize the impact of their words and mannerisms on men. Others are so hungry for affirmation that they will continue to jeopardize their integrity in order to fish for compliments anyway.

We must recognize when our communication begins to border on becoming flirtatious. Whether the relationship is a forbidden one or one you do not want to cultivate, keep your conversations on a level that does not lead to intimate talk and compromise.

The Rewards of Sexual Integrity Once a woman learns to guard her mind, heart, spirit and body from sexual compromise, she

is free to discover the joy of connecting physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually with her husband.

To help you visualize the powerful bond that such a connection creates, imagine a light bulb and a laser beam. The power of a single light bulb is limited because it sends light in many different directions. But with a laser beam, light rays are parallel to one another, instead of fanning out in all directions. A laser beam is so concentrated that you can cut metal or perform surgery with it.

Many marriages have only experienced “light bulb sex.” Because of pornography, masturbation, emotional affairs, fantasies and such, our sexual energies are often spread out in a multitude of different directions. But I want to challenge you to concentrate your sexual energies just like rays of light are concentrated in a laser beam.

There is nothing sexier or more satisfying than two people, committed for life, focused solely on each other’s pleasure, and on meeting each other’s sexual and emotional needs. Make your spouse the sole object of your sexual desires and the beneficiary of your passions, and you will both discover the definition of sexual integrity and fulfillment.

If you are single, allow yourself to be courted by our Creator. Focus your energies on Him. The same God whose words formed the entire universe longs to whisper into your hungry heart words that have the power to thrill you, heal you and draw you into the deepest love relationship of your life.

One day a husband may say to you, “I’m committed to you until death,” but God says to all of us today, “‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'” (Heb. 13:5, NIV).

I encourage you to draw a hard line against sexual and emotional compromise. Be honest with yourself about any hidden motives you may have and, above all, pursue a love relationship with Jesus Christ. Once you experience a love so

pure and so passionate, your heart will be strengthened in a way that you never imagined possible.

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