

Sexual Purity—Challenge, Choice, Cherish

As single adults, we face numerous challenges and temptations in choosing sexual purity for our lives. For most of us, we are regularly faced with the difficulty of making choices that align with God's design for us.

We may find ourselves enticed through anything from television to movies to advertisements to books that we read. Many television shows are designed specifically with single adults in mind. Their main characters are single and sexually active. Shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and the new *Studio 60* have single adults as the main characters in their plots. Most if not all promote a lifestyle of physical intimacy early in one's dating life, if not on the first date! Choosing sexual purity and abstaining from sex prior to marriage is set in contrast to lives that seem to regularly have enjoyable and inconsequential sexual encounters. These examples, if we allow them, cause us to ask questions of God's call on our lives. We wonder if the reality of choosing purity is really worth the difficulty and effort of living it out especially when there is no obvious end in sight, meaning marriage.

We also face the social stigma of choosing not be sexually active. Virginity is seen as problematic and indicative of prudishness or a repression of sexual desires. Questions about sexual orientation may also come into play as we make choices towards abstinence and sexual purity. The possibility of being seen as gay or lesbian enters the mind of individuals as they wonder about the choices we are making.

When in a dating relationship, the challenge to be sexually pure is even more difficult. Many single adults have been previously married or, in the past, sexually active outside of marriage. Among adult singles this percentage is close to 90%. Our circumstances or past choices only enhance the challenge to live sexually pure and sexually abstinent lives. If we have been sexually active, the struggle becomes even more poignant. We long for levels of intimacy and connection. When in a relationship, the temptation to fulfill those desires is great. Often sexual intimacy is chosen both for pleasure and connection. For women, the temptation is not only for pleasure but the longing to be intimate and close. If we are not connected in emotionally intimate friendships that support and encourage our value of purity, our temptations may only be enhanced. It can be tempting to choose sex as a replacement for more vulnerable forms of intimacy. By doing so it becomes a cheap short cut rather than choosing the hard road of establishing emotional intimacy in our dating relationships. It may feel good but does not promote the choices and behaviors that sustain a relationship and get it started on a more solid foundation. Other sexual temptations may include masturbation, pornography and other means of obtaining sexual gratification and pleasure outside of God's design.

For most of us, we have a difficult time defining purity. We know that abstinence is a part of that, but the challenge and clarity of guarding our thought life and hearts is unclear. We may remain abstinent yet struggle with fantasy lives that include not only sexual fantasy and lust, but romantic fantasies that increase our temptations. Living lives of sexual purity is a daily challenge of guarding not only our behaviors but our minds and hearts and having them aligned with God's heart and desires. For most of us, we need a vision for purity that draws us toward Godly obedience in a positive way and instead is not just a negative choice of giving something up that can be a powerful longing and desire.

In a recent survey of our single adult ministry, when asked about some of the struggles and benefits in regards to sexual purity, some of the following were mentioned:

- *Purity helps me to not substitute sex for what is missing in a relationship.*
- *My biggest challenge to maintaining sexual purity is to not let loneliness get a hold of me and be an excuse to fantasize.*

- *Maintaining sexual purity is difficult. It is easier to wait when there is no one in my life; when there is someone it is horribly difficult.*
- *I find it difficult at this age to refrain even though I want to choose purity. Outside pressures influence me. I find most dates pressure me and don't want to wait until marriage.*
- *It's difficult to be rejected by our culture and to be ridiculed and called a prude.*
- *Sexual purity has been too difficult. I haven't been successful.*
- *I want to live a more Christ-centered life and to honor Him in all that I do*
- *Choosing purity will strengthen and honor any future marriage I may have.*

As single adults, we don't know the length and time of our season of singleness. Often these choices need to be made without the assurance that God will provide us with a marriage partner. Enduring would be easier if there were an end in sight. But, the challenge is facing the choice for purity when there is a possibility of not experiencing for the first time, or having again, a marriage partner in our lives. Sexual purity is a challenge for single adults, and one that is enhanced both by our culture and our own history of personal choices, but it is not only a problem for single adults.

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