

What Missionaries Ought to Know About Maintaining Sexual Purity

While watching TV, you have noticed that you pick up on something you have seen or heard, and your thoughts become more sexual. You have also noticed how attractive that other person at the office is, and you have begun imagining... You are taken by surprise because missionaries like you are so deeply committed to Christ. You are on the frontlines of spiritual battles, taking Christ to people who have never heard. Such missionaries certainly would not get into sexual sin, would they?

Of course, they would. For centuries military personnel in any conflict have been notorious for their sexual immorality. Engaged in physical/ideological battles in strange cultures far from family, friends, community, and church, they engage in sexual exploits. Why would you expect any less temptation for you, as you engage in the spiritual battles against the forces of evil? You are lonely. With social support absent, emotional needs unmet, and living in a strange culture with greater sexual freedom than at home, why would Satan not take advantage of you as well?

Most missionaries can quote 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” “Seized” is the proper word because sexual temptation can become so strong that a person is willing to give up everything—relationships with God,

spouse, and family; reputation, ministry, everything. Before quoting the verse above and thinking you are surely safe, read the verse before it, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10: 11-12)

Same-Old. Same-Old. New-New!

The Bible specifies three intertwined sources of temptation, commonly called “the world, the flesh, and the Devil.” Two of these are relatively unchanged since Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians, but one has changed dramatically during the last century,

- The Devil, “...the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). As he has done for thousands of years, at some times the devil goes around as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, but more often relative to sexual temptation he slips in almost unnoticed, sowing small seeds that will grow into sinful behavior.
- The Flesh, “...gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Ephesians 2:3). Missionaries are tempted simply because they are human. As James puts it, “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (1:14). Human nature has not changed over the years, so people today are tempted just as they were when James wrote that 200 years ago.
- The World “...when you followed the ways of this world” (Ephesians 2:2). The writer to the Romans (12: 2) warned to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.” The “ways of the world” and

the “pattern of the world” have not changed relative to sexual temptation since Paul’s time. However these sexual temptations literally come through the air and the walls as the “prince of the power of the air” sends them into missionaries’ homes through radios, TV satellite receivers, email, and Internet connections.

The Devil and the Flesh are relatively unchanged, but technology in our world is new. Even after the invention of printing, missionaries could be quite effective in keeping obscene, pornographic, and suggestive material out of their homes. However, most missionaries today are required to have at least email, if not Internet connections. Since about 40% of all email is spam and about 30% of all spam is pornographic, about one in every eight emails is pornographic, and some of it will get through even the best filters. Filters block many pornographic sites on the Internet, but some still gets through—and pop-ups may suddenly appear on your screen at any time.

What can missionaries do in this new world to maintain sexual purity? As is so often the case, the answer to resisting temptation is in what we call the Great Commandment, originating when the Law was given to Moses and cited by Jesus himself.

Love God

The most important thing missionaries can do to maintain sexual purity is to love God with their whole beings, their heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10, Deuteronomy 6). Your relationship to God must take top priority

- Have a daily, consistent devotional time to maintain your relationship with God. Include at least reading Scripture,

meditating, and praying. (Bible study for sermon preparation, writing, teaching preparation, and so forth does not count!)

- Make a specific commitment to God to live a holy life free of sexual sin. Write this commitment down and place it where you will see it daily (desk, mirror, etc.)
- Study, meditate on, memorize, and apply Scripture on this topic. Note that in the major passages where the Bible talks about being holy it is in the context of sexual sin (Leviticus 18-20, I Corinthians 5-7). Review these periodically on a regular basis.

Love Others

The second most important thing missionaries can do to maintain sexual purity is to love others (Luke 10, Leviticus 19). Your love relationships with others must have a high priority as well. Relative to sexual purity this would include the following.

- Learn the cues in your host country that signal sexual purity and sexual availability. These include such things as dress, eye contact, posture, gestures, and so forth.
- Be aware that even within cultures people vary widely on the meaning of touch. Something you consider indicating only friendship may be interpreted as sexual by another person. Touch is not improper, but be aware that what you mean as “good touch” may be interpreted by another as “bad touch” or erotic touch.
- Be especially alert when in “high risk” situations, such as being alone with another person, spending prolonged time working with another person, and so forth.

- Meet weekly an accountability partner (or group) to answer specific questions about your sexual purity.
- If married, make your relationship with your spouse of highest priority (of all people). Set aside regular times to be together, just as you set aside time for God. Spouses who do not communicate on a regular basis about how they really feel grow further and further apart, regardless of how close they think they are.
- If married, make the same commitment to your spouse (relative to sexual purity) that you make to God.
- If married, be intentional about meeting the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of your spouse.

Love Yourself

The third most important thing that missionaries can do to maintain sexual purity is to love themselves, to care for themselves as they care for others.

- Accept your own vulnerability. 1 Corinthians 10:12 reminds us that if we think we are standing firm, we must be careful or we will fall.
- List (actually write them down) sexual things you will not do, such as those found in Leviticus 18-20.
- List sexual things that may be permissible but not beneficial, things that may master you as in 1 Corinthians 6. These are things not specifically mentioned in Scripture, such as certain movies, music, TV shows, books, Internet sites, and so forth. These are not necessarily sinful, but they may lead to sinful behavior.

- Concentrate on “renewing your mind” as described in Colossians 3 and in Ephesians 4. Take every thought captive to make it obedient to God as described in 2 Corinthians 10. Think on the kinds of things mentioned in Philippians 4.
- Avoid danger zones for you. If you know that you are tempted visually, do not watch videos or TV shows that you know will contain graphic sexual images. If you know that you are tempted verbally, do not visit Internet chat rooms or read explicit romance novels.
- Develop an early warning system to increase your awareness of problems coming. Knowing that you will be talking with an accountability partner is likely to make you more aware of danger zones. If you are married and feel the slightest attraction for someone other than your spouse, take action immediately.
- Develop a plan for combating temptations which will occur in spite of your attempts to avoid them. If your greatest temptation is visual images, train your eyes to “bounce” away from such images as soon as they appear. If your temptation is through touch, train yourself to withdraw as soon as any touch becomes erotic.

Joseph was a handsome, single, young man with hormones raging (just past puberty) when he was taken to a different culture. When his boss’ wife asked him to have sex with her, he politely refused and gave her good reasons for his refusal. He refused her repeated requests. One time when he went to work and they were alone in the house, she grabbed his coat and asked for sex, but he left his coat and ran out of the house. You can maintain your sexual purity too, but you may have to run from a person, or your computer!

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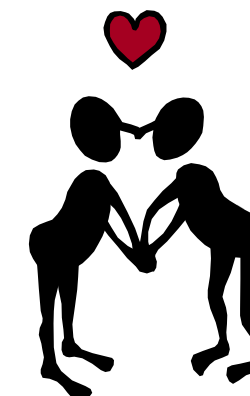
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