




THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Personal Purity

Conversation On the Journey

Personal purity involves more than just the dating side of life. That's why this is an important lesson regardless of your disciple's romantic life (or lack of). Making decisions about physical and sexual boundaries early is valuable, and it's also valuable to understand the heart behind the guidelines for boundaries.

If you aren't comfortable talking about sexuality, this could be a tough lesson. As in so many other situations, honesty is the best policy, so tell your disciple about your discomfort. Maybe after you have some nervous laughter together, you'll feel a little more relaxed about jumping into this conversation. Don't let your embarrassment keep you from discussing any of these areas. This is important stuff.

Let's start with some thoughts on dating and sex, since that's probably why you opened this article. First, grab your Bible and look at 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

In the first two verses, Paul affirms the Thessalonians for the way they have carried out the instructions for godly living, and exhorts them to do so more and more.

Next, in verses 3-6, Paul gets to the core of the issue: God's will for our sanctification in the area of sexuality. (Note: people often want to know, "What is God's will for my life?" Well, this is one of the places in Scripture where God's will is clearly laid out for us.) A number of good discussion points are in these verses: What is sanctification? What is sexual immorality? (The greek word for immorality—"porneia" is the same word from which we get the word "pornography.") What does it mean to learn to control your body? What kind of behavior is holy and honorable? What is passionate lust? What does it mean to "wrong" or "take advantage" of someone in this area?

Gulp...look at that last part of verse 6: "...God will punish men for all such sins..." This is a serious matter to God. But the motive in purity is not fear. Look back at 1 Thes 4:1 – the motive is to please God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul mentions the Thessalonians love for God, and then in v. 4, says that they are loved by God. We are not motivated to be sexually pure by a heart that is frightened by God, but by a heart that loves God and wants to please Him.

And finally, look at verses 7-8. God has called us to live a holy life, and we've been given

[Continued >>](#)

This Week's Excursion

Your disciple should understand God's plan for personal purity, and understand from Scripture why God instructs us to refrain from sexual immorality. As well, they should learn how to deal with failure in this area.

Personal Purity

the Holy Spirit, who lives in us. Verse 8 can be a comfort to you, the discipler. If your disciple freaks out and thinks you're crazy for talking about healthy sexual boundaries, remember that you're not the one being rejected; rather, God is.

On the surface, the Bible can appear to be full of negative commandments that seem imposing and dreary. However, we need to remember that God has only one motivation love. When we understand that He always seeks what's best for us, these commands become positive.

You might find the following chart, from an old Cru handout, helpful when talking about purity and pre-marital abstinence with your disciple:

PROTECT your mind from the images of past relationships.	PROVIDE freedom to enjoy your future spouse without detracting mental images.
PROTECT you from mistrust and suspicion in relationships.	PROVIDE a foundation of trust for your current and future relationships.
PROTECT you from confusing the intensity of sex with the intimacy of love.	PROVIDE you with intimacy: true knowledge of the other person outside of the physical.
PROTECT you from the fear and consequences of STDs and unplanned pregnancies.	PROVIDE you peace of mind as you enter a marriage commitment.
PROTECT your Christian testimony.	PROVIDE integrity in your Christian witness which ministers to others.
PROTECT your fellowship with God.	PROVIDE the abundant life.

Look at Romans 8:38-39, Psalms 103:17-18 and Deuteronomy 10:12 to understand why God wants to provide and protect us.

God created sex to deepen the level of trust and acceptance in a marriage relationship. This can provide lasting enjoyment and total fulfillment if it is used in the right context. That's why the abuse of sex produces such enormous disappointments. God protects us by giving us boundaries and limitations to our activities. They are an expression of His love and wisdom, to keep us from doing ourselves harm. When we step outside of God's instructions the eventual and inevitable results are unwanted pregnancies, abortion, STDs, emotional guilt, loss of self respect, etc.

People often want to hear some guidelines for physical touch...so here are two easy thoughts to remember.

- If the swim suit covers it, don't touch it.
- If you wouldn't touch/do it in public, don't touch/do it in private.

The Fires of Passion

"Do not ignite the fires of passion which cannot be righteously extinguished." Ten years after hearing that phrase in a Cru talk, I see how it applies to so many situations, even beyond dating.

Next Steps

Look at 1 Thes 4:1-8 with your disciple. Talk through what Paul is saying and what he means.

Discuss what you've learned personally, and how you arrived at your convictions. It's even good to talk about your struggles, past and on-going. But remember, this session is about your disciple, not about you.

Ask questions about your disciple's behavior and heart attitude in each of these areas.

Personal Purity

What we call “making out” or “fooling around” is often foreplay. Foreplay is the pre-sex that prepares the body and mind for the act of sex. It’s the “do what feels good,” part of making out, when those two little catch-phrases above are often violated. Many people have discovered where that line between physical intimacy and foreplay is for them. When does your body start to prepare for sex? If your mind or your body moves in that direction, then you’re “igniting the fires of passion” and outside of marriage, those “passions cannot be righteously extinguished.”

If you’ve ignited those passions, change the scenery. Keep the lights on. Don’t lie down. Hands off. There are all kinds of guidelines I can suggest, but when push comes to shove, helping your disciple think through boundaries before reaching the “fires of passion” point is a good prescription for healthy dating. The next challenge is actually sticking to those guidelines. And that’s where an accountability partner comes into play. More on that later.

The “M’ Word

Yup. We’re going there now. (For you innocent types, the “M” word is masturbation.) This falls into the “fires of passion” thing, too. But one of the sad consequences of masturbation, or self-gratification, is that you learn how to please yourself sexually. How can your spouse compete with you? Self-gratification cheats a marriage just as extra-marital sex can. These urges were designed to be satisfied by your spouse in an act that confirms committed love, intimacy, safety, and acceptance, but not by you.

Pornography and the Internet

Remember that “fires of passion” phrase? It applies here, too. It’s so universal. But let’s get a few things straight, first. Pornography isn’t always an issue of sex. Power, dominance, curiosity, and the excitement of not getting caught... these all come into play, too. And sometimes a sexual addiction to pornography needs to be referred to a trained, professional counselor. It is a destructive issue, and is even more accessible because of the internet. It’s becoming a gender-neutral issue, too. So you women disciples, don’t assume this is just a man’s issue.

So, why is it so bad? Your mind is the most powerful organ when it comes to sex. Pornography imprints the mind with images that flashback at will. Married couples in counseling tell of how these images defile marital sex and cheat them of intimacy. Often the images are degrading to both men and women.

The internet can make voyeuristic journeys easy. Internet accountability is becoming a bigger issue, and there are several ways to go about it. Discussing sites visited, or having a report of your sites sent to a trusted friend through an organization like Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com) may be useful.

People often hide sins of self-gratification and pornography because of the associated shame and embarrassment. Before you talk with your disciple about these issues, talk to the Lord. What’s in your heart? Pray for kindness and tenderness and grace. Hopefully your disciple can confess struggle and failure without fear of condemnation and judgment from you. Pray also that you will not be tempted or disgusted, so that you can show compassion. Respond to your disciple and commend their courage to bring light into a dark part of life and thank them for trusting you. Don’t forget to follow up by asking how they’re doing, how you can help, and what success they’ve experienced when you meet the next time.

Side Trails

And the Bride Wore White.

Dannah Gresh. Moody Publishers.
Boundaries in Dating. Dr. Henry Cloud.
Zondervan.

Passion and Purity. Elisabeth Elliot. Baker.

Every Young Man’s Battle. Steve Arterburn,
et al. Random House.

The Secret of Loving. Josh McDowell. Tyn-
dale House.

Order at christianbook.com

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Personal Purity

Notes to Self

Accountability

It means that you answer for your actions and take responsibility for what you do. Through accountability, we learn self-control and self-discipline - fruits of the Spirit. God already knows when we've blown it, but confession is a huge part of forgiveness because that's where we acknowledge our responsibility to uphold God's command for holiness and purity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says when we confess our sins to a Christian brother or sister, we experience God's forgiveness in an audible voice. That's why accountability can be so powerful: it can protect from temptations and the pitfalls of sin by making us face our failures and admit our weaknesses. Sometimes just the verbal admission of failure is enough to break the hold of sin. But often a series of hard questions asked repeatedly over time is the healing option.

If Your Disciple Has Blown It...Fresh Start Forgiveness

One of the greatest mistakes people can make is to assume that since they failed to keep God's command regarding purity, God wants nothing to do with them. That is simply not true. God is well aware of our sinful tendencies: that's why Jesus Christ came. For King David, what began with a stare led not only to adultery and an unwanted pregnancy, but also to murder. David really blew it. Read Psalm 51:1-17. Notice how David admitted his sin and asked God for forgiveness. Like David, we can receive God's complete forgiveness and make a clean start.

A. Confess the sin. Specifically name your sin before God and ask His forgiveness. (1 John 1:9)

B. Forgive Yourself. If you are not willing to forgive yourself, you are saying two things to God: (1) Christ's death was not enough for your sins; and (2) you are a higher judge of what can be forgiven than God is. God's grace is extended to you out of His heart of love. When you do not forgive yourself, you throw God's grace right back into His face. If God's grace can't cover your sin, it can't cover ANY sin. (Romans 8:1)

C. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Allow God's Spirit to fill you with His power to say no to future temptation. (Eph. 5:18)

D. Show Fruits of Repentance. Repentance means turning around, changing one's mind. Matt 3:8 says, "Bear fruits worthy of repentance." This might mean breaking off a relationship, or perhaps making a decision not to be alone together. It might be something else. Whatever it is, your actions should show that you have changed. The individual who professes to be a Christian, but who continues to practice sin, should realize that he might not be a Christian at all. (John 14:21, 1 John 2:3)

God's complete love and forgiveness enables us to make a clean start and live a life pleasing to Him.

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