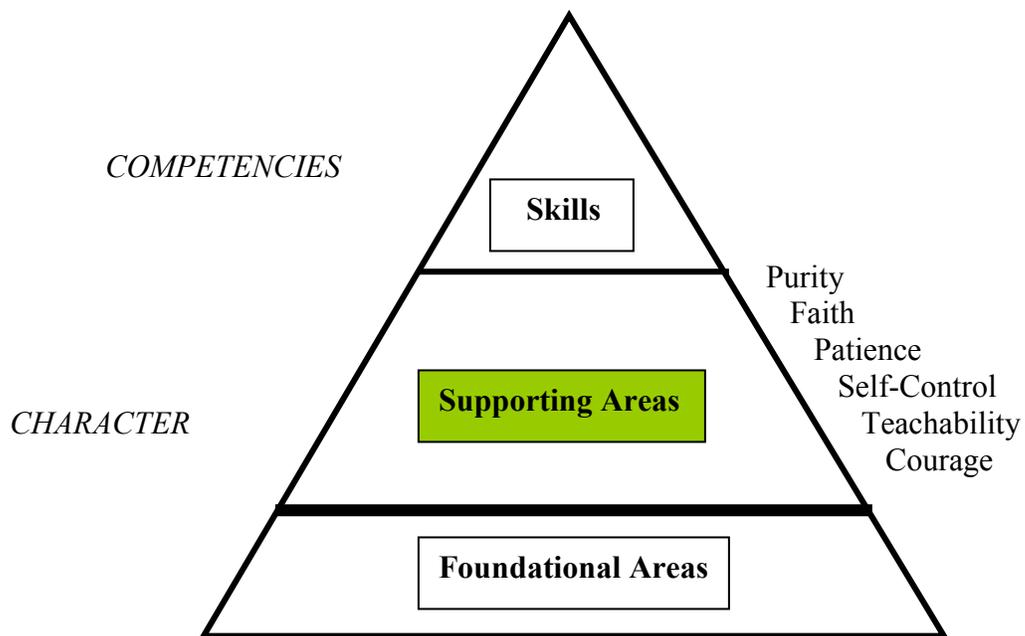


LEADERSHIP PYRAMID



PURITY: It's More Than Just Saying 'No'

You are just about as holy as you want to be.

A.W. Tozer

You can't keep the birds from flying over your house,
But you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.

Martin Luther

Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him.

Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'

Jesus

Hippolomy was a mythical, Greek young man who was in love with the beautiful Atlanta. Atlanta, in addition to her striking beauty, was also a gifted runner, but she had a cruel, sadistic character. Many young men became infatuated with her beauty and desired to marry her. Each of these men was challenged to a foot race with two conditions. If the man won the race, he could marry Atlanta. But if he lost, he would pay with his life. Many a man tried and paid the ultimate price for his second place finish.

Hippolomy also became mesmerized by Atlanta's overwhelming beauty and challenged her to a race. Shortly after the race began he was lagging behind. Reaching into his tunic, he withdrew a golden apple and threw it in front of the streaking Atlanta. The brilliant flash caught her eye and she stopped to pick up the golden fruit as Hippolomy raced by her. She soon recovered and again moved ahead of him. Hippolomy pulled a second golden apple from his tunic and threw it in front of Atlanta who once again stopped to pick it up. As Hippolomy passed the crouching figure, Atlanta realized that the race was nearing the finish and she soon recovered to regain a comfortable lead with a short distance to go.

Hippolomy retrieved the last of his golden apples from his tunic and threw it ahead of Atlanta as she approached the finish. Atlanta was in a quandary; should she stop and pick up the apple or press for the finish line? She reasoned that she certainly could do both, so she stopped and placed the golden fruit in her robe just as Hippolomy passed her and raced towards the finish. She recovered, but now with such a short distance, she was unable to beat him to the finish line. Hippolomy had won!

This is not an illustration on how to find a life partner! Rather, as spiritual leaders race through life, we find the enemy of our souls rolling the "golden apples" of deception, compromise, and sexual temptation in our path. Many a leader has stopped to pick up the tempting fruit, thinking that they could have the fruit and also win the race. The sad result is that many fail to finish the race set out for them; falling victim to sin that eliminates them from leadership roles. Many begin well, but few finish well.

Personal purity is a paradox for all believers. The paradox is that though we are positionally pure and holy in Christ (Psalm 103:12, 1 Peter 2:9), experientially we continue to struggle with temptation to sin. We, who are already pure and a holy priesthood, are commanded to put off the old man and take on the new (Ephesians 4:20-24), to purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit (2 Corinthians 7:1), and to lay aside everything that hinders our running life's race and the sin that often entangles us (Hebrews 12:1). We will struggle with temptation and sin as long as we are this side of the doorway of death.

Gaining Control of My Thoughts

Someone has said, "Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a life." Note where this sequence begins—our thought life is the spring from which our actions flow. The heart (soul) is the seat of our mind, will, and emotions. It is here that most often the battle for purity is won or lost. That is why the writer of Proverbs says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The battle is for the mind and thoughts, for our enemy knows that if he gains a foothold here, the actions and life of an individual will soon follow. Many leaders are crippled by the bondage of sinful thoughts.

It is in the secret thoughts of a man or woman that the battle for purity rages. Here, hidden from public view, leaders struggle to keep their minds on things above instead of earthly things (Colossians 3:2). What comes into our minds through our senses greatly influences our thoughts. The senses of sight and sound are most powerful. Jesus reminds us, "Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness" (Luke 11:34). Therefore, we must give special attention to what we see and hear if we are to have purity of thought.

Today we live in a world that is saturated with fantasy. The Internet, film, video, print, and TV industries are constantly feeding us images, creating mental "files" that are hard to erase. The prevalence of those who are in bondage to viewing pornography, especially when delivered through the privacy of the Internet, is a growing concern. Hedonism and the reinforcing values of excess and greed, plague the hearts and minds of followers of Christ. As leaders, we are especially targeted by the enemy because of the multiplying effect brought on by the damaging of one leader. Those who looked to that leader are also now impacted by their downfall. Besides being wise from his vast experience, our enemy is strategic in his tactics.

I'm not suggesting that we seek to avoid all worldly input. Others have done this in the past—confusing being separate from the world (1 John 2:14-15) with being isolated from the world. They chose to isolate themselves rather than risk the temptations of this world. The result was a "holy huddle" with little positive influence for Christ in the world.

But, there is a dynamic tension on how to be in the world and not become contaminated by it, especially in our thoughts. We need to understand our weaknesses, noting carefully how the enemy chooses to influence our minds and hearts and avoid those situations or means that are most impacting on us. We must be wise in what we allow through the gates of our senses, especially our eyes and ears.

As we come to convictions on what is permissible for us in disputable matters, we also must be careful to avoid the mistake of making our convictions the “law” for all believers. God does give us freedom to choose in many areas of conduct and each of us must decide what our standards will be for lifestyle choices. Paul says, “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (Romans 14:22). The example we set, as leaders will be looked to and copied by others. There may be certain freedoms and rights that we choose to forego for the sake of others who may not have the same freedom in the Lord. We live not to please ourselves, but seeking others good and doing whatever is necessary to further the work of the Kingdom.

The Battle for Sexual Purity

The challenge to remain sexually pure in today’s world is an incredible one. Sex pervades our world—from advertising to Internet porn. We are inundated with sexually explicate messages through our eyes and ears. This is especially challenging for men due to the fact that they are more sexually aroused by what they see. Is it any wonder that in incidences of rape, sexual abuse, and other sex related crimes are escalating at an enormous rate?

Sexual drive can be considered to have a certain threshold level where below this level we are in control of our actions and above which we are out of control, following our biological or emotional impulses. Sexual stimulation tends to move us upwards from our basal or normal levels of sexual drive. The more stimulation, the more we move upwards towards this threshold level. When the sexual stimulation exceeds our threshold, our wills give way and we follow our impulses. The Holy Spirit helps believers live within the God-given boundaries for moral purity, helping us control our sexual drives and not simply being controlled by our natural impulses.

This is why Paul’s advice to the believers in Thessalonica was, “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

A wise leader avoids situations and circumstances that would lead to possible sexual temptations. Seemingly innocent situations can lead to temptations that are difficult to reject. Be wise about spending extended time alone with members of the opposite sex,

especially in private situations like offices, meeting rooms, or cars. Many counseling sessions begin innocently, but then move beyond proper limits. Beware of multiple sessions with members of the opposite sex. When emotions rise, convictions often fall!

Long-term dating relationships can also be challenging as our love for one another grows. The enemy whispers, “You’ll be married soon anyway. Why wait?” But those who give in to this temptation reap the devastating results later in marriage. Many begin to wonder about the fidelity of their partners later in marriage, knowing that they gave way to temptation previously. This leads to jealousy and lack of trust between partners with predictable consequences.

For those believers who I lead, who are in long-term relationships (including my own children), I’ve told them that I am committed to helping them maintain their goals of moral purity. In addition to praying for them in this area, I’ve committed myself to regularly ask them three questions as a form of accountability. The first question is, “How’s it going in your struggle for moral purity?” Note—I assume it’s going to be a struggle. You’re normal to struggle with self-control in this area as a couple that love each other and are probably moving towards marriage one day. The second question is, “Have you violated your conscience in this area?” Note—I assume that the Holy Spirit will be speaking to you regarding areas of compromise or sin. The third question is, “How far have you gone in your physical relationship?” A second part to this question soon follows, “How far have you really gone?”

By providing this kind of on-going accountability for those God has given for our care and leadership, we can help them avoid some of the sexual traps of the enemy. Certainly, there are no guarantees that just because someone is checking on us that we will make wise, moral choices. But, it may be better than not doing anything!

All temptation has an appeal, with sexual temptation promising excitement and sensual fulfillment. But like all temptation, it comes with a bitter result. Below are the paths that men and women frequently follow on the way to moral collapse in the area of sexual sin. Know that many leaders have fallen prey to sexual sin. Seek to evaluate your own relationships in light of these patterns. Be advised of the ways of the evil one and avoid his traps!

Men:

1. Enjoyment of another woman's company
2. Appreciation of her body
3. Thoughts of physical lust
4. Emotional desire
5. Initiation of casual encounters
6. Mutual arrangement for frequent meetings
7. The first lustful touch
8. Total deceit with one's wife [if married]
9. Intimacy without full sex
10. The physical act of [sexual intercourse]ⁱ

Women:

1. Enjoyment of another man's personality
2. Attraction towards his status (he's a leader, popular, etc.) and his looks (manly, sexy, etc.)
3. Trying to attract his attention by whatever means is considered appropriate (nothing overt, all done very smoothly and imperceptibly)
4. Flattered by his reciprocating interest
5. Development and expansion of a fantasy thought life - emotional desire
6. Initiation of casual encounters with great pains taken to ensure that you are made-up and dressed up as attractively as possible
7. Romantic desire - no physical touch even necessary; the "romance" of it all is stimulating enough
8. Total deceit with one's husband [if married]
9. Intimacy without full sex
10. The physical act of [sexual intercourse]ⁱⁱ

My Body – God’s House

Our society has an obsession with physical looks! Being and looking young is judged better than old! Thin is better than fat. Smooth, supple skin is valued more than wrinkled. Billions of dollars are spent every year on diet supplements, weight loss schemes, exercise equipment, and anti-aging medications. Focus on the external is what’s important, often to the neglect of internal character maturity.

Some leaders are unknowingly caught up in this focus on the external, believing that how they look will inspire confidence in their ability to lead. They believe that having a good tan, firm muscles, and a flat stomach somehow translate into more authority and influence. In 1 Samuel 16:7 God reminds Samuel of the qualifications for selecting a leader during the search for Saul’s replacement. We read, “But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." There are two truths in this passage: 1) man does look at the outward appearance, and 2) God looks at the heart of an individual when selecting a qualified leader.

Because people do note our appearance, it would be inappropriate to totally disregard our outward appearance. We are stewards of the bodies God has given us and we must care for them so that they serve us well for however long the Lord chooses to give us. Nor do we don’t want to have our appearance distract from the opportunity for influence that God gives us. It is this principle Paul applied when he said, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might

save some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Paul was willing to change the externals in his life in order to further his influence for Christ.

But, neither are we to focus on the outward appearance, making it a high priority in life. Our bodies will age and decay, eventually being left behind for new, perfect ones that do not change. Rather, our focus should be on the inward person, not the external one. That’s why Peter says, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Peter 3:3-4). Lasting authority and power for life and leadership influence does not come from perfect hair, white teeth, large muscles, or designer label clothes.

Being good stewards of our bodies means that we must get adequate rest and exercise. Many leaders are energized accomplishing goals or interacting with people. They can feel guilty taking a break, a nap, sleeping late (if they’ve been out late the night before), taking a vacation, or working at an exercise plan or hobbies that refresh both physically and mentally. This guilt is a false guilt that arises from wrong thinking and improper values. Even Jesus took a nap (Mark 4:38) and told the Twelve, after an intensive time of service, “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest’” (Mark 6:31).

Eating a balanced diet (not just what we like, but what we need), and being careful not to develop habits that can control us, are parts of good stewardship of our bodies. The enjoyment of food is a wonderful gift from God. But like all gifts, we must enjoy it within God-given limits. These limits are given for our protection, not limitation of enjoyment. ““Everything is permissible for me”--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"--but I will not be mastered by anything. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"--but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:12-13). Control of our bodies belongs to Christ for “...You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Dealing With Temptation

Many believers are discouraged because they deal with frequent temptations, especially in the area of moral purity. Because of their frequent temptations, they feel guilty, thinking that if they were more spiritually mature the temptations would diminish. It is a mistake to confuse temptation and sin.

Temptation is simply the enticement or allure of sin. When we give in to this enticement, it becomes sin for us. Any guilt that arises from frequent temptations is false guilt coming from the evil one who constantly accuses us. But, if we yield to temptation and have a resulting sense of guilt, this is real guilt from the Holy Spirit and it must be dealt with.

Below are some suggestions on dealing with temptations.

1. Decide to live a holy life.
If we wait until we are in the middle of the temptation, the battle is often already lost. We must purpose in our hearts, by His grace and help, to live a life pleasing to God.
2. Pray it into your life!
Praying to be led away from temptation is part of how Jesus instructed us to pray (Luke 11:4). We should make it a part of our daily prayers.
3. Memorize passages on holiness.
The psalmist says that by hiding God's Word in our hearts we can keep our way pure and not sin against Him (Psalm 119:9,11). The Holy Spirit can remind us of God's commands as we move through life's decisions by bringing to mind passages of Scripture that we have memorized.
4. Flee tempting situations.
Don't try to fight it—flee! Avoid situations where you know that you will be exposed to temptation.
5. When tempted, reject the temptation by the authority of Christ.
We are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). Sin has no power over us as children of God (Romans 6:14,18). We do not have to give in to temptation because we are freed from sin's slavery by the power of Christ and His power enables us to say "no" to temptation.
6. Ask for help from Christ when in temptation.
Just as Peter called out for help with a simple, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30), we too can call for help in deliverance from temptation.

What To Do If You Fall

Should we fail in our struggle with temptation and give in to sin; below are some suggested steps in dealing with our failure.

1. Confess sins when you fall.
Confession means that we agree with God regarding our sin and rebellion against Him. 1 John 1:9 was written to believers who give in to temptation. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Keep short accounts with God!
2. Believe you are forgiven.
Another frequent tactic of the enemy is to remind us of our past failings, seeking to convince us that we are worthless to God and will never be used of Him to serve others because of our sinfulness. When God says we are forgiven and that He removes our sin "as far as the east is from the west," we are not to doubt Him. We are forgiven and our sin is forgotten (Hebrews 8:12).

3. We repent of our sins.
The word “repent” literally means to “turn from.” That is, we were once going in one direction, but now have turned to a new one, a way that is pleasing to God. By the Holy Spirit’s help, we change directions, actions, habits or whatever is necessary in order to please Him.

“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:9-11).
4. Saturate your life with God’s Word.
There is a cleansing affect brought about by God’s Word in our hearts and minds (John 15:3). Read and memorize the Bible and allow God’s Word, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to cleanse and rebuild God-honoring thoughts.
5. Seek an accountability partner or community.
Some cynically say, “All accountability relationships do is turn us into good liars.” Though this can be true for some, these relationships can also provide great strength and support in times of need. Isolation is a tactic of the enemy. Stay connected to other believers and ask for help.

Leaders Who Suffer Moral Failure

There are numerous examples of spiritual leaders who have lost their influence and positions of leadership due to moral failure. Thought most of these seem to be due to sexual sin; upon closer examination there is a deeper issue. Many spiritual leaders who fall into moral collapse started down a path of ruin long before they gave in to temptation. The root cause was frequently a lack of a vital, growing love relationship with the Lord. This in turn led to a spiritual shallowness, a lack of spiritual sensitivity, and hardening of their hearts. Eventually this gave opportunity to give in to temptation with the resulting ruinous consequences.

Leaders who lack personal purity fear exposure to others. They spend much energy maintaining a duplicitous life that outwardly appears “clean” but secretly is full of sin. They compromise their convictions; rather than seeing how far they can stay from sin, they adopt an attitude of seeing how close they can get without giving in. But God reminds us, “Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?” (Proverbs 6:27).

Another surprising reality is that leaders who are caught in this duplicity seem to continue to have the blessing of God on their ministries, at least for a while. They give in to temptation and when they fail to see any immediate consequences (lighten bolts striking

the ground near them), they conclude that it wasn't that big of a deal! This conclusion in turn gives rise to more license to sin and a downward spiral begins.

The truth is that all sin produces disastrous consequences. But there is often a delay between the sin and God's judgment. Just as there is a delay between the time of sowing and the time of reaping, so too there is a delay between the time of sinning and judgment. But we must not be fooled into thinking that this delay is a denial of God's judgment. Rather, it shows God's mercy in giving us time to confess and repent of our sins. But, failing to respond to His mercy, we will face His punishment. For He says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7).

Summary

Moral purity is a real challenge for all believers in today's world. But it is especially challenging for leaders because the enemy will target them for temptation, knowing that by eliminating them he can also cancel their broader influence in the Kingdom. Leaders must be on their guard and sensitive to compromise in seemingly small areas of life and ministry. "It only takes a small leak to sink a big ship, given enough time." The author of Song of Songs says the same, "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom" (Song of Songs 2:15).

For further development in this vital character area, see the following for some suggested, practical ideas on how to continue your character growth.

Character Development – PURITY

Bible Study

What do the following verses say about the spiritual condition of a believer who has put their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior?

Romans 6:2, 6-7 -

Romans 6:11-14 -

1 Thessalonians 4:7 -

1 Peter 1:22; 2:9 -

What do the following passages say is the responsibility of the believer in the pursuit of holiness?

Romans 12:1-2 -

2 Corinthians 7:1 -

Hebrews 12:1-2 -

James 1:27 -

The soul includes our mind, will, and emotions. Note any observations you can from the following passages regarding the struggle for moral purity in these areas.

Purity of Thought

Romans 16:9 -

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 -

Colossians 3:1-2 -

Purity of Word and Deed

1 Corinthians 6:12-17 -

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 -

1 Corinthians 15:33 -

2 Corinthians 6:14 -

Ephesians 4:29 -

Ephesians 5:3-4 -

1 Thessalonians 5:22 -

2 Timothy 2:19 -

What other general principles can you glean from the following passages regarding personal purity?

Mark 7:14-23 -

Romans 12:9 -

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 -

1 Timothy 4:7 -

1 Peter 1:15-16 -

1 Peter 2:11 -

Memory Verses

2 Corinthians 7:1

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Peter 1:15-16

Prayer

In addition to asking God to make you a person who lives for moral righteousness and holiness, below are some items to stimulate your prayers in the area of personal purity. Be sure to pray regularly about these items.

- ❑ Ask God to reveal to you if there is an area where you are lacking moral purity. Ask Him to sensitize you to blind spots in your behavior that may be lacking in purity.
- ❑ Ask God daily to deliver you from temptation.
- ❑ If you are frequently reminded of and continue to feel guilty for past sin that has been confessed and dealt with before God, ask Him to show you the truth about your forgiveness and freedom in Christ.
- ❑ Pray for discernment over yourself to recognize patterns in your life that open you to temptation. Knowing the tactics of the enemy can help you defeat him.
- ❑ Ask God to open the eyes of your mind to see and understand the consequences of sexual sin and sexual addiction in the lives of those who are entrapped by it.
- ❑ If you struggle with a thought life clouded with images and fantasies that are not holy, ask God to cleanse these images from your mind and take steps to avoid filling your mind with new images.
- ❑ When you look in a mirror, do you wish you could change something about your physical appearance? Do you believe that God made a mistake when He made you the way He did? How important is your physical appearance to your personal happiness? Thank God for every part of your appearance, especially those parts that you think are less than perfect. God does not make mistakes! He is perfect and all He does is good!

Exercises

Here are some practical exercises to help develop in this area of personal purity.

- 1) Ask for feedback in this area from those you lead. Let them know that you want to grow in this area and need their help. Ask them for any suggestions on how you can

demonstrate holiness in your leadership. Make the feedback anonymous or to a third-party so that people are free to be honest.

- 2) Is there a habit that is mastering your body? Take steps today to begin to get free from this master. Seek and ask for help from others, especially those who have dealt with similar habits and conquered them.
- 3) If you are struggling with pornography, especially on the Internet, find an accountability partner or community that will ask the hard questions. New Internet services can provide filters and accountability by sending lists of web sites viewed to those whom you designate.
- 4) Seek an accountability partner or community to help in the battle for moral purity. Covenant to pray for one another as well as to ask each other straight questions and to give truthful answers.
- 5) Look back over your schedule the past month. Are you getting adequate rest and refreshment? Do you have enough margin in your schedule to relax and enjoy life? When was the last time you took a real vacation without taking any work with you? Plan a break into your schedule this week or this month, and add some margin into your daily schedule.
- 6) Have you become so concerned about holiness and contamination from the world that you've become isolated instead of separated? What can you do to develop or maintain contact with the world's desperately needy people in order to be salt and light for them? Begin to engage with the unbelieving friends that God has sovereignly placed in your life. Build bridges of friendship to your neighbors and co-workers. Join a community group. Make some new friends!
- 7) If still single, have you determined the limits of your physical relationship when you enter a dating relationship? If you are already in a relationship, have you established limits with your partner? Determine those limits now and pledge not to compromise them. Remember, the partner with the most sensitive conscience determines the limits, not the one with the most freedom. Love does not seek its own; it is not selfish. It always wants what's best for the other person.
- 8) Are you in a long-term dating relationship? How's it going in your struggle for moral purity? Would you be ashamed if others knew about your physical relationship with your partner? Talk and pray about this with your partner. Determine to re-establish God-honoring limits in your physical relationship. Ask a spiritual mentor / leader to regularly check with you both in this area until you're married.
- 9) Practice self-denial and self-control by abstaining from a favorite food or other habit for a week or more. This is not dealing with a sin issue, but a training exercise to learn to control your desires. Remember, God is not impressed by our abstinence.

But, this type of training can help develop an inward strength of saying “no” to our desires and help in controlling our bodies.

- 10) Examine what you are allowing to enter in through your eyes and ears. Do you have doubts about anything as to whether you should be doing it? Do you have clear convictions about what you will and will not participate in? Have you lowered your standards? Take whatever steps necessary to develop a lifestyle that is honoring to God and remember not to make your personal convictions the law for all other believers.

ⁱ Parshall, Phil. *The Tiger of Lust - The Downward Path of Moral Ruin*
Paper, publisher unknown

ⁱⁱ This description comes from Mrs. Fran Love, a missionary and mission leader, in a personal paper given to the author.