

Asking the Wrong Question

But "How far is too far?" is the wrong question. We should not focus on how close we can get to sin without sinning any more than we should focus on how close we can get to hitting

an oncoming car. When our hearts are right with God, we are concerned with what is truly pure and with how we can glorify God with our bodies. We want every act of affection to be a reflection of the fact that he is first in our lives. Until he is, we'll have a terribly hard time discerning love from lust.

If you truly wish to know the will of God as it relates to purity, come to him in prayer. He will tell you. Do not be afraid to meet him in the silence of your interior life. The closer you get to him, the more perfectly you will be able to love your boyfriend

"Now is the time to begin to prepare yourself for family life. You cannot fulfill this path if you do not know how to love. To love means to want to perfect yourself and your beloved, to overcome your selfishness, and give yourself completely."²⁴—SAINT GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

or girlfriend. In prayer, you will learn that the purpose of chastity is not to isolate couples, but to enable them to express the love of God to each other.

For more information, visit www.chastity.com. This online resource offers a wealth of information on how to practice the virtue of purity. On the site, you can read answers to your specific questions, watch videos, download inspirational audio files, browse a library of articles, shop online, and more.

(Endnotes)

1. *True Love Waits*, "Interview with a Non-virgin," 15 April 2001.
2. Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2001), 128.
3. Greg Burke, ed., *An Irritation to Joy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 49.
4. Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, "Love is a Choice: The Life of St. Gianna Molla" (Ignatius Press (DVD)).

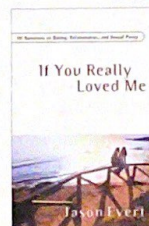
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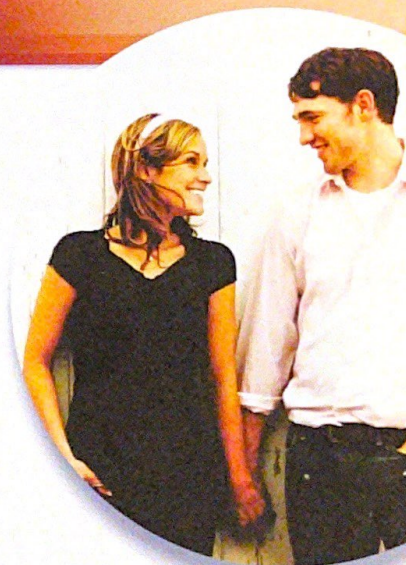
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CHASTITY AND DATING

How far is too far?



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hen it comes to dating and morality, the most commonly asked question is, "How far is too far?"

As a Christian, you desire intimacy with God; but you yearn for human intimacy as well. How do you balance the two?

The first thing to know is that it is not sinful to be sexually attracted to other people. Sexual intimacy is a great gift from God. You might think that if you try to be really holy, your desires will disappear. That is not true. In fact, the closer you get to God, the more you become who he made you to be as a man or woman. God's plan isn't to eliminate your sexual desire, but rather to perfect it in love. How does this take place, and how can you know where to set boundaries when it comes to affection?

Where to Draw the Line

If you are being called to marriage, then your future spouse is out there somewhere. Do you ever wonder what she or he is doing right now? Suppose that he is on a date with someone who is strongly attracted to him. The two are alone and are wondering how far they should go.

If you could speak to the heart of your future spouse right now, would you say, "Live in the moment! It's not a big deal. Just make sure you don't go all the way, honey!" Probably not. Your instinct would be to value the innocence of your future spouse. Why not set the same standards for yourself?

Thinking of your future spouse is a good way to help set boundaries in your own relationships. But there are other ways to know where to draw the line. For example, if you're wondering if a particular form of affection is going "too far," try imagining the expression on her dad's (or his mom's) face if he (or she) were to walk in on you. One young man said, "I heard somebody say that you can judge your own character by the things you do in private. I'd take that a step further and say you can judge your own character by the things you do with your girlfriend."¹

Perhaps the easiest way to find out if your actions conform to authentic love is to imagine God watching you. If such a thought would cause immediate shame, ask

yourself why. If God is love, and you "really love" the other person, shouldn't you be thrilled to have Love himself witness everything you do together? You probably wouldn't be, though. That awkwardness in your heart exists when you know your actions are not pure expressions of love.

This analogy is helpful in some respects, but we should be careful to avoid thinking about God as nothing more than a strict law-giver. He gives us laws—like any good father—but more important than the rules are his reasons behind them. He created us for love, and he knows that we will never be satisfied with its counterfeit, which is lust.

There are two essential elements of love. The first is the desire for union. For people in love, that comes naturally. The second and more important element of love is the desire for what is best for the other, that is, to desire heaven for him or her. As Pope John Paul II said, "When a

*"Young people are always searching for the beauty in love. They want their love to be beautiful. If they give in to weakness, following [worldly] models of behavior . . . in the depths of their hearts they still desire a beautiful and pure love. This is as true of boys as it is of girls. Ultimately, they know that only God can give them this love. As a result, they are willing to follow Christ, without caring about the sacrifices this may entail."*²

—POPE JOHN PAUL II

man and a woman are united by true love, each one takes on the destiny, the future of the other, as his or her own."³

Such love elevates and intensifies the desire for unity so that the two want to be together not for just a night but for eternity.



If a man craves unity with a woman but he does not care about her salvation, it is not love.

In regards to drawing the line between right and wrong, some people assume, "As long as I'm being a virgin, I'm being good." They compare themselves to others who are sleeping around, and in comparison, they feel they are right on track. Meanwhile, they give away bits of themselves in passing relationships, while assuring themselves that their classmates or co-workers are worse.

Where does the line belong? For starters, know that the line begins in your mind. Purity is not simply a matter of obeying rules or staying on one side of a boundary that you've created. It is a battle for your motives and imagination—your heart and mind—as well as your body. So, as soon as you begin to lust, to think about someone as an object for your gratification, stop. Sexual temptations are bound to come, but you do not have to give in to them. As the saying goes, "There is a difference between a bird flying over your head, and letting it make a nest in your hair."

Do not allow yourself to be disturbed if you are trying to grow in purity yet sexual thoughts continue to rise up within you. Let them fly by, like a bird overhead. When you find yourself strongly attracted to another person, thank God for making him or her so attractive. You can use the temptations as a reminder to pray. Just think how often you'd pray if you said a Hail Mary every time you were tempted!

Another guideline is to save sexual arousal for marriage. When it comes to embraces and kisses, keep things simple. The purpose of sexual arousal is to prepare for sex. Since you're not married and therefore not ready for sex, foreplay will only bring about greater temptations instead of greater love. Many couples want to stay pure, but fall into the same sexual sins; they want to keep some sexual intimacy but avoid going "too far." But they soon discover that men and women are not made to work that way. Perfect purity is easier to live out than fifty percent purity because you're not constantly teasing yourself.

Save the passion for your bride or groom. Not only will your purity be a gift to your spouse, but it will make his or her affection more unique to you as well. In the long run, it will bond the two of you much closer than all the "experience" the world recommends you have before marriage.

How to Draw the Line

Only date people who share your moral standards. If you don't know a person's values, then you don't know him well enough to date him. Take your time building the foundation of a graced friendship and only commit to someone who can be strong with you when you're tempted. Also, don't be afraid to discuss the importance of purity, even before the relationship begins. By persevering in purity, you'll not only glorify God, you will increase your ability to love.

To stay pure, it's best to avoid the situations and relationships in which you're likely to sin. But how do you cool things off if you're going too far? Some situations require you to stop the other person abruptly with your words and your actions. Sometimes a more subtle technique will work. For example, a dating couple could use a signal, such as a kiss on the forehead, to indicate to the other in an affectionate way that they need to stop.

A pure couple still desires to be close. But because of their standards, they choose to channel their powerful desires into creative ways of expressing love. As a result, their friendship and intimacy deepens and their relationship becomes stronger. They discover that purity isn't just the absence of sex; it's an expression of love. The exercise of maturity, patience, and sacrifice will prepare a young couple for the challenges that await them in marriage.

"This is the will of God, your holiness: that you refrain from immorality, that each of you know how to acquire a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion as do the Gentiles who do not know God."

—1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–5. NEW AMERICAN BIBLE