

10 Tips For Maintaining Sexual Integrity

1. Get Real – Recognize that sexual temptation is unavoidable in our sex-obsessed culture. Erotic images on billboards, films, television and a thousand other stimulants are bombarding you daily. Being a Christian doesn't exempt you from temptation — the godliest of men can fall prey to it. So the first step towards maintaining sexual integrity is to get real. Admit to yourself that sexual temptation is a problem that you have to reckon with. Remember John's warning: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

2. Get Serious – You should know by now that sexual sin ravages everyone connected with it. What you may not know is that every sexual fantasy you entertain, every flirtatious conversation you keep up, or every “second look” you indulge in is the seed for AIDS, adultery, a broken heart, a shattered life. Get serious — if you're entertaining lust, you're dancing on a cliff. Take concrete action now while you can. “Lust when it is conceived, brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death.” (James 1:15)

3. Get Ready – If you really believe an earthquake is coming someday, you prepare for it by developing an emergency plan. If you really believe sexual temptation is both common and can become lethal, you'll make an “emergency plan” for it, too. Decide in advance what to do when you're tempted: how to distract yourself, who to call, how to escape close calls. Even St. Paul admitted: “Like an athlete I train my body to do what it should, not what it wants to do. Otherwise, I fear that I myself might be declared unfit.” (I Corinthians 9:27)

4. Get Connected – Sexual sin thrives in the dark. If you're caught up in any sexual vice, one thing is certain: The secrecy surrounding your behavior is what strengthens its hold on you. However ashamed you may feel about admitting your problem to another person, the reality is this: You can't overcome this on your own. If you could, wouldn't you have done so by now? Take a hint from James: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that you might be healed.” (James 5:16) Find a trusted, mature Christian friend to confide in. Make that friend a partner in your recovery, and NEVER assume that you've reached a point where you no longer need accountability.

5. Get Brutal – I believe there's an eleventh commandment somewhere that says “Thou Shalt Not Kid Thy Self.” If you're serious about sexual integrity, you'll distance yourself not only from the particular sexual sin you're most prone to (fantasizing, pornography, affairs, prostitution) but you'll ALSO distance yourself from any person or thing that entices you towards that sin. Sometimes, even a legitimate activity (certain movies, music or clubs, for example) may be OK for other people to indulge in, but not for you. Get brutally honest about your lifestyle: anything in it that makes you prone to sexual sin has to go. “All things are lawful for me,” Paul said, “but not all things are edifying. I will not be brought under the power of anything.” (I Corinthians 6:12)

6. Get Help – Sexual sins are often symptomatic of deeper emotional needs that a man is trying to satisfy in all the wrong ways. Repenting of the sin itself is a necessary first step, but recognizing the conflicts or needs that led you into that behavior may be the next step, requiring some specialized care from a Christian professional. Don't hesitate to seek Godly counsel if you're trapped in cycles of ongoing, out-of-control behavior. The answer you need may be more than just "pray and get over it!" King David (who was no stranger to sexual sin, by the way) found refuge in Samuel's wise mentoring. (I Samuel 19:18) If you're willing to seek professional help for taxes, medical care or career counseling, surely you'll be willing to do the same to maintain your sexual integrity.

7. Get Comfortable – The problem of sexual temptation isn't going anywhere. It's been with us since time immemorial, and no doubt it will plague us until Christ comes. So get comfortable with the idea that you'll need to manage your sexual desires throughout life, always remembering that your sexual integrity is but a part of the general life-long sanctification process all Christians go through. "I count myself not to have attained perfection," Paul told the Philippians. "I am still not all I should be." (Philippians 3:12-13) So learn to love the process of pressing on, not perfection.

8. Get Love – "I've been looking for love in all the wrong places," an old song laments. The sexual sin you're drawn towards may indeed be a cheap (though intense) substitute for love. You can repent of the sin, but not of the need the sin represents. So get love in your life: friendships, family, spouse, fellow believers. A man who truly loves, and knows he's truly loved, is far less likely to search for what he already has in places he'll never find it. "Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, or your labor on that which cannot satisfy?" Isaiah asked. (Isaiah 55:2) Learn to be intimate and authentic. It's one of the best ways to protect your heart and your integrity.

9. Get Grace – It isn't the sinless man who makes it to the end; rather, it's the man who'll learn to pick himself up after he stumbles. If your struggle seems relentless, remember this: when you commit yourself to sexual integrity, you commit yourself to a direction, not to perfection. You may stumble along the way — that's no justification for sin, just a realistic view of life in this fallen world. What determines the success or failure of an imperfect man is his willingness to pick himself up, confess his fault, and continue in the direction he committed himself to. Remember Paul's approach: *Forgetting those things that are behind, I press on towards the mark of the high calling.* (Philippians 3:14)

10. Get a Life – What's your passion? What's your calling? How clear are your goals? And, by the way, do you have any fun? The man who doesn't have a life — a passion, a sense of meaning, an ability to play as hard as he works — is a man with an emptiness tailor-made for sexual sin. Life is about more than keeping yourself sexually pure, as important as purity is. It's about knowing who and why you are, where your priorities lie, and where you're headed.

If you don't know that much about yourself, you have some serious thinking to do. Commit yourself to developing your life as a good steward of your gifts and opportunities, and make that the context in which you seek to maintain your sexual integrity. Sexual integrity for its own sake is a good thing; sexual integrity for the sake of a higher calling is better. So by all means turn from your sin. But as you do, turn towards a goal-oriented, passionate, meaningful life. That is repentance in its truest, finest sense.