

**SSG Monthly****July 2005**

# *The Cost of Sexual Sin*

Greetings from the Pacific Northwest! I recently moved from Cleveland, OH to Tacoma, WA to start my active duty Air Force job, and that's why this article is so close to the wire. I pray you will be edified as you read.

I was recently doing a radio interview about *Sex and the Single Guy: Winning Your Battle for Purity* when the host asked me a peculiar question: "Are you a virgin?" I wasn't particularly startled by the question, as the topic we were discussing—single guys and sexual purity—was rather strange to begin with. I gave my standard answer to the question, which usually comes during a purity meeting or conference: "By the grace of God and the skin of my teeth, yes." And I always mean every bit of it. The host seemed satisfied by the answer, and we moved right along with the interview.

When the interview was over, I thought more about her question and my answer. A question grabbed me that would challenge everything I've been sharing, and even the messages of many others I look up to for guidance. Would it have made any difference? The host asked me a question that's on the minds of many who listen to someone sharing a message of sexual purity, and those that share this message all have such different answers. (A similar question for married folks is, 'Were you a virgin when you got married?') Some people that speak on purity have had many sex partners, and yet God uses them. Other people share testimonies of God's protection of their purity and how they saved it all for their spouse, and God uses them. Yet we're all working to convince our audiences that sexual sin is destructive and devastating and we're trying to inspire them to run from it. But on the other hand we're telling those who have fallen not to worry; you can be completely restored and everything is OK. So which is it? Are we talking out of both sides of our mouths? Have I missed a huge contradiction in the message I've been sharing, and in others' messages I've been advocating, and I just now realize it?

Any time we sense a possible contradiction like this we should not ignore it. We should wrestle with it until it is honestly and fairly resolved, and if we find that what we've been sharing to be false, then we should hit the brakes hard and edit it for truth, or we should pack up our things and go home. I feared I might have to do that, but I had resolved not to ignore this. It is when apparent contradictions or questions are ignored that Christians are made weaker and seeds are planted for future doubt.

I thought, prayed, and talked through this with friends, and I found some brilliant wisdom in the Word of God. There are two men whose lives illustrate the two different scenarios

discussed above: a man who abstained from sexual sin and God used him because of it, and a man who indulged sexual temptation and God used him in spite of it. Both characters are very familiar to most of us: Joseph and David.

Joseph is the man who chose purity in his moment of great temptation. After being betrayed and sold by his brothers, Joseph was resold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials (Gen 37). Joseph was very successful and Potiphar trusted him with everything he owned (Gen 39). One day, Potiphar's wife came on to Joseph and asked him to sleep with her (39:7). Joseph did not even flinch; he refused her request, and he guarded himself against temptation by refusing to even be around her (39:10). Even when she grabbed Joseph by his cloak and demanded that he sleep with her, he slipped out of his cloak and ran out of the house to get away from her.

David had a very different response when faced with his great sexual temptation. David's beginning was marked with greatness, much like Joseph's. As a very young man, despite being mocked by his brothers, David volunteered to face the mighty Goliath in battle (1 Sam 17). It quickly became clear that David was destined for great things. David was eventually made king over all Israel (2 Sam 5), and after many valiant military victories, David uncharacteristically stayed behind. While away from battle, David stumbled upon a beautiful woman named Bathsheba bathing on a rooftop (2 Sam 11). She was the wife of Uriah, one of David's warriors. The text (11:3-4) suggests that he didn't even think it over; he just quickly indulged his sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba (11:4), and then he schemed, lied, and murdered to cover it up (11:6-17).

But we know both of these stories: Joseph did great things and God used him in Egypt, and David did great things and God used him in Israel. I'm confident both men will spend eternity with God in Glory. Did their decisions make a difference? Let's take a closer look at how each man's choice to abstain from or indulge immorality impacted the rest of their lives.

Joseph was rewarded for his decision to remain pure. Though he suffered the setback of wrongful imprisonment (Gen 39:13-40), he was soon made the number two guy in all of Egypt (41:43) and his faithful decisions helped put him in a position to save his own family when famine struck the land (Gen 42-47).

David was also used of God throughout his lifetime, but there were some severe consequences to his actions. Some effects were immediate: Uriah, one of David's own men, was killed, and this hurt his widowed wife Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:26). The Lord was displeased with David (2 Sam 11:27). David was ridden with anguish and guilt (Psalm 51:1-9, 2 Sam 12:13). Other consequences would play out in the weeks and years to come. The firstborn son that Bathsheba bore David would die (2 Sam 12:14) and David's own house would become a house of incest, rape, murder, conspiracy, and heartbreak. These things infuriated King David (13:21) and broke his heart (18:33), but the door to such unthinkable acts in David's family was opened the day he sinned against the Lord.

Take these examples for what they're worth. Both of these men lived before Christ and

His propitiation of our sins on the Cross. I don't know that the consequences of our mistakes will be so severe as David's or the rewards of our faithfulness so great as Joseph's. But these stories do illustrate a reality that is still true for today: God can wipe away and cleanse us from all spiritual consequences of our sin, but there may be some earthly consequences that remain. And THAT is the mystery that reconciles the two messages above that I suspected were contradictory. The two messages—There are severe consequences for our actions regarding sexuality, and God can rescue us and cleanse us from any sin we've committed and still use us, no matter how severe—are both true! God often seems to use people who have fallen the hardest for great and glorious assignments, such as Mary Magdalene and King David, but God may also allow a number of earthly consequences to remain.

Please understand I'm not in any way setting myself up as an example of purity. In fact, in many ways I can serve as an example of the opposite. The choices I have made to indulge sexual temptation throughout my lifetime have left many earthy consequences. Consider which of these may apply to you. Some consequences are immediate: if my heart is full of lust or other sin, I'm robbing myself of the joy I could enjoy at that moment, and I'm robbing my potential as a disciple of Christ, as a friend, and as everything else. Lust and sin steal my motivation to serve my God, and to do anything else productive or beneficial. Other consequences are unveiled for a long time to come. Many choices we make can hurt others with wounds that may never recover. I know girls who were taken advantage of by guys, and that moment is still a source of great suffering many years later. Some results are obvious, such as STDs and unwanted pregnancies.

Other consequences aren't as apparent: each sexual experience or image will make us less likely to be satisfied sexually in marriage, and each one becomes another hurdle to overcome in our daily battle for purity. I know that despite my sin, the battle is still winnable for me, but I know it's a hundred times harder than it would be if I hadn't made so many choices to fill my mind with lustful images and experiences. I want to emphasize this most of all, because this is something that can truly help us to walk in purity for the long haul. We can debate with ourselves on whether to enjoy this moment of sin or to be faithful to God until we're blue in the face, but the truth is that each time we sin we just make life so much harder on ourselves! We're running a marathon and throwing poisonous darts in our feet; it makes the race so much more difficult!

So once again, if you've already fallen, take heart: there is hope for you! God can cleanse you from your guilt and your sin and restore you to fellowship and service to Him, like He did with David, and Mary, and me, and so many others, but you may have extra mountains to climb and special dragons to slay that you wouldn't have to otherwise. God's promises still hold true for you: He won't allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, and He will always provide a way out (1 Cor 10:13), and He will always be there to help you (Heb 2:18). The warning and admonition is also issued for the one who has not fallen that you may avoid these mountains and dragons, and avoid all the pain that those decisions will cause. The moment of pleasure that sin brings is just not worth all the pain that follows—to God, to others, or to yourself. So heed Joseph's example,

and RUN (Gen 39:12)!

- Joseph Knable

Share Your Story!

This is what I have been learning this month. What about you? What's your story regarding sexual purity? If you have a story to share or feedback from reading the book, please go to [www.josephknable.com](http://www.josephknable.com) and click on "Contact" and then "Share Your Story." I hope to hear from you!

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