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Lewis Carroll who wrote Alice's Adventures in Wonderland once said, "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well".

If you're going to start dating then it is definitely something you want to do well. This is a collection of tips and advice to help you to have a happy, healthy relationship that honours God and blesses Him.

I was in a relationship for 7 years with my girlfriend before she became my wife, some of these things we were told by friends, parents and leaders and some are things we wish we had been told, but all are tried, tested and helped us to navigate some of the challenges and temptations that come from being in a relationship.

For all of us our desire above all else is to honour God with our whole lives, Jesus gave up everything so we could be in a relationship with Him and in response we want to, like Paul, present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (**Rom 12:1**).

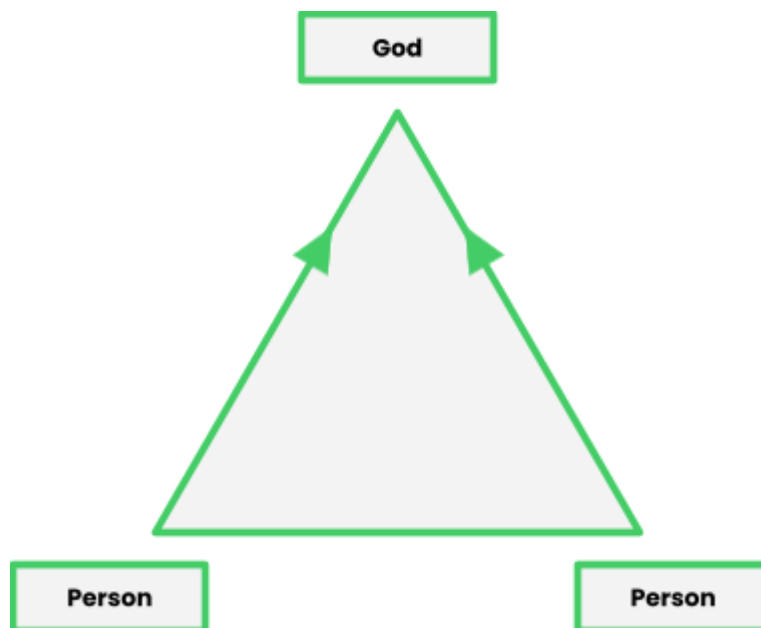
Romantic relationships are a huge part of life at the beginning they may not seem that important or life changing and certainly not worth reading a booklet about and taking so seriously! But these relationships lead to the people that we end up living this life with and that is a huge thing whatever age you start dating.

To not want to invest in these relationships and handle them in the best way possible is to leave God out of one of the most important, time consuming and enjoyable areas of your life.

1 Stay Focussed

The first and most important tip when it comes to looking at purity in dating is to remember that your new relationship is not the most important relationship in your life. Even if things progress and you get married, still that relationship is not the most important one you have.

First and foremost, our primary relationship is with God. It is the most important, most valuable and most fulfilling relationship you will ever have. He will never let us down, never disappoint and it is from this relationship that we have all we need to make every other relationship in our lives work. He is the source of all the things that make a relationship work, love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Through His Word and by His Spirit He teaches us how to live and live in harmony with others. When you have two people in a relationship who are learning to grow in greater communion with God will, as a consequence, grow closer to each other.



We must make sure that when getting into a relationship that God's Kingdom, His plan and fellowship with Him always remain our priority. This is part of the reason as Christians it is always difficult to be in a relationship with someone who is an unbeliever and why the Word commands us not to be "unevenly yoked" (2 Cor 6:14). Don't compromise and don't become impatient in waiting for the person who will not only spur you on into all God has for your life but also wants to be spurred on into all God has for them. Make sure the person you are in a relationship has the same goal as you, Jesus Christ and the extension of His Kingdom.

| 2 Be Intentional

It's important that when you start a relationship that you are clear what each person is expecting.

Are you just getting to know each other? Are you just friends or are you in a relationship? Are you thinking about marriage down the line or is that something either just one of you or neither of you are thinking about yet?

There is nothing wrong with what the answers of these questions might be but it is important to make sure you're on the same page. It will only lead to problems if one of you is expecting a proposal and the other one isn't even thinking about marriage.

Whatever the intention of your relationship, make it clear to one another and talk if things change. Communication is one of the biggest keys to making a relationship of any kind work.

At this point it's worth saying, as Christians the purpose of dating is very different to the purpose for a lot of people. Ultimately the goal is marriage, have fun getting to know each other, don't ever feel you should rush things but as a relationship progresses if it becomes clear that isn't going to happen; it might be time to bring the relationship to an end.

3 Stay Pure

It's important to understand that we are only righteous because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. We could not earn it:

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— not from works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

It is also important to understand that this salvation and righteousness have not been given to us to be abused. **Romans 1 1-2** is pretty clear...What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

We have been made a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light (**1 Pet 2:9**). We have been saved redeemed and made pure and holy FOR A REASON. Let's not abuse the gift of purity we have been given by Jesus' sacrifice.

Please understand that if you have made mistakes, as we all have, the blood of Christ is more than sufficient. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:1-9**). I am writing this to encourage not condemn, your purity is precious and worth protecting even if you have already made mistakes. If you damaged a car and then repaired it so perfectly that it looked brand new you wouldn't then think "Now I'm just going to ruin this car because it's been damaged before" You would want to make sure that it didn't get damaged again. God decided that our righteousness was worth the cost of Jesus Christ that is worth protecting and fighting for.

When we come to look at boundaries, accountability and other tips in this booklet some of them can seem embarrassing, inconvenient or even in some cases unnecessary but when we see our purity the way God sees it there is nothing we won't do to maintain it and protect it.

| 4 Be Honest

There are 3 people in your relationship that you always need to be honest with:

1. God
2. Yourself
3. Your partner

Honesty is a staple value of the Christian faith however it is often more difficult than we think and can damage relationships over a prolonged period of time if honesty isn't central to your relationship.

First, we must be honest with God, about our fears, failures and temptations. We sometimes forget that He knows anyway! His love is strong enough to cast out any fears we might have of punishment or repercussions for mistakes we might have made, His mercy is vast enough to forgive us for any sin we might have committed and His grace is sufficient for us to deal with any temptation we might face.

Secondly, we need to be honest with ourselves. Honest about our weaknesses and temptations. When we talk about boundaries if we can't be honest about the kind of things that tempt us then we won't put in effective boundaries to protect ourselves or the person we care about. We also can't be people who ignore, make excuses or minimise the significance of our mistakes or we won't really be able to repent of them and move past them.

Finally, we must be honest with our partner, tell them what they do that tempts you. There might be times when you're feeling particularly tempted so you need to be extra careful, talk to them!

Being honest with these 3 people will make your relationship happier, easier and will enable you to have the right conversations to stay pure in your relationship.

| 5 Have Boundaries

If you really intend to remain pure in your relationship you will need to set boundaries. If you decide to lay down alone in a dark room, parents out of the house, cuddling up together kissing it isn't going to take long before you're going to want to be doing a lot more!

When we talk about purity we aren't trying to find out how much we can get away with or how far is too far but we must fight to live the pure and holy life that we have been called to. We don't do this on our own but with the strength that God provides but He also gives us wisdom so we don't get ourselves into situations we could avoid in the first place.

As with many of the other pieces of advice, communication is key, you will need to discuss and agree these boundaries together so you're both on the same page. Some things would be a compromising position for one person but not another. Some examples of the minimum boundaries you would want to put in place are below. You might want to share these with the people you are accountable to.

- Don't go into each other's rooms
- Don't be in a house on your own together
- If you decide to kiss don't kiss anywhere other than the lips
- Don't lay down together
- Don't feel each other up
- Always stay fully clothed

These are just an idea of where to start you can build on these and make them specific to your relationship. If you're unsure about where to start it's always better to err on the side of caution, remember your purity is precious and honouring Jesus with your life is worth any inconvenience you might feel.

6 Be Accountable

Accountability is one of the most valuable tools we have to protect our purity in a relationship and navigate the challenges that come with one.

Our culture constantly tries to insist that how you live your life is totally up to you and how you want to do things. As Christians we have a perfect way of living set out for us in the bible. Part of that way of living is to live in community, that doesn't mean that we shout from the rooftops all our challenges and mistakes but it does mean that we involve people in our lives who we trust that can help us to live the way God wants us to live. We cannot do everything God wants us to do without having other Christians involved in our lives.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17

If you've ever tried sharpening anything you'll know that the 2 pieces of metal have to be close to make it work, this isn't something that can be done at a distance, there has to be a close connection for sharpening to take place.

If we have been called to be pure then accountability is one of the gifts God gives us to live that way.

Practically, having an older couple who are married that you can talk to about your relationship will really help you. People who you can share your challenges and mistakes with and people who love you and will be praying for you.

Pray about who this should be for you and trust that God will speak to you about the kind of people that will help you in your relationship. If you're not sure then maybe speak to your leaders about who they would recommend you speak to.

I would always recommend you seek out a couple like this as soon as possible into your relationship. Their purpose is to help you so having that help sooner rather than later is always a good thing!

7 Stay Strong

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

The key to staying strong in the temptations that come from being in a relationship is to consistently be submitted to God. We should acknowledge that without Him we are unable to succeed in living the life we have been called to live. The promise in the scripture above is that as we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil the enemy WILL flee from us.

The temptations that come while we're awaiting being married don't totally go away when we are. Lust can still be a temptation once we're married but if we can exercise self-control before we are married then, when we are, we have spent time learning to control our passions and now we will have an outlet for them within a marriage as well.

The other thing to realise is that depending on what is going on in your life or the life of your partner some days you might be feeling stronger than others. Staying strong is not something you do purely on your own but as a couple, pray for one another and tell each other if one of you is feeling particularly tempted, it doesn't mean you've then passed on all responsibility to your partner but it does mean they can be aware of your challenges.

Depending on your age, life stage and other factors it could be a long time from when you start dating to when you get married. You can start, stay and finish strong together. Protecting your purity and honouring God.

| 8 Be Patient

When it comes to God growing patience in us. Waiting to be married is definitely something God uses to do it!

It's not easy to wait but it is something we must all do. This is something you will really want to consider if you're getting into a relationship at a young age. Realistically if you start dating at 16 most people will want to wait until they finish their education until they get married. If you go to university that means that you might want to wait to get married until you're 21. That means you'd be waiting for 5 years minimum in a relationship before you were thinking about marriage.

I don't say this to put you off dating (I dated my now-wife for 7 years before we got married) but to be realistic that it won't be easy and if you want to make it to your wedding day having guarded your purity for the duration of your relationship it will take a lot of grace, hard work and patience.

Song of Solomon 8:4b says "do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time." It's important that we don't start to date until we have prayed and considered if it is the right time to do so. Being single is not the waiting room for being married but a wonderful season of life that God wants you to use to its fullest, and sometimes, that means waiting to start a relationship.

When you've decided it is the right time it's important we still don't awaken love until the right time. Sex is reserved for marriage, if you've made a mistake in a previous relationship or in the one you're in now it doesn't mean that the waiting is over. Jesus is so gracious and merciful we repent and we begin to exercise patience again. If right now you're waiting patiently, keep going.

You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Colossians 3:12

| 9 Have Fun

One of the fundamental things people sometimes forget in relationships is to have fun! It may seem unlikely but people often obsess so much over what they can't do in a relationship that they forget what they can do.

If you are going through a particularly tough patch of being tempted sexually in your relationship things can become very intense and very difficult but it's amazing how quickly the urge to sin disappears when you're having the kind of fun God intended you to have within your relationship, remember "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (**Neh 8:10**) The full scripture there is:

Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah 8:10

Basically, Nehemiah tells the people "go have fun, forget about your struggles for a minute as you do this you'll experience the joy of God which is your strength" The joy of the Lord doesn't only come through praying and reading the scriptures but through enjoying the things, whatever they are, that he has given us to enjoy.

Get out of the house, go for a walk or for dinner, play games, pray, study the word, hang out with friends, learn to do something new together. Whatever you do, don't just sit around kissing and then complain how hard it is to resist temptation! Don't let the challenges and frustrations of a relationship be the things that define it but let the joy of the Lord be your strength.

| 10 Have Friends

When you start dating for the first time or just dating someone new it's all too common to see your new partner become the focus of everything. As we've already said it's important to remain focused first and foremost on our relationship with God.

Often though with all this attention now being put on our partner other relationships can be impacted, especially those with friends. It's important that we don't focus so much on our new relationship that we don't invest time and effort into our existing ones. Our relationships with our friends are so important, they spur us on in the things of God, provide comfort and fun and depending on who you start dating might be there long after your relationship isn't anymore!

The other thing I would encourage you to do is to spend time in groups with your partner, this provides a great opportunity for your friends to get to know them and also creates a safe environment for you to spend time together without some of the temptations that come from hanging out on your own.

You will also find that at the beginning of a relationship there are times where you will feel like you don't need anyone else in the world. After being in a relationship for a little while you will realise that men need time with men and women need time with women, to be fulfilled and encouraged we need friends not just the people we're in a relationship with. Don't leave them behind or dismiss them because you're so busy with your new relationship.
