

Pace, Purity, and Perspective

By Pastor Mark Jobe

It soon became apparent to me that the area of sexual purity would be a huge battle we would be fighting. The first couple in the church that came to me with giddy smiles to tell me they had begun dating was in their early twenties. I congratulated them and told them I thought they made a nice couple. Three months later they wanted to see me again. This time it was to tell me that she had just found out she was pregnant. We had been working so hard with this young woman that had come out of a very abusive childhood. I remember how disappointed I felt. I decided I did not want to be in the mop up business, so I came up with a simple healthy courting plan.

Most of the college-aged kids we were dealing with were first generation believers that had no idea how to date in a healthy Christian way. Without some help and mentoring it seemed like many couples on their own would fumble and soon be physically too involved or obsessed with each other to be any good spiritually. I decided we would get serious and proactive about providing some coaching for healthy dating relationships.

First of all, we encouraged teens not to lightly date around. We have found that teens that are still emotionally immature with hormones that are busier than bees on steroids have a hard time managing “dating” during their adolescent years. I believe that our current system of “teen dating” is seriously flawed and sets adolescents up for sexual minefields. I have already talked to my 7 year old son Grant about choosing his wife for him in advance. At this age he has fully agreed and thinks a pre-arranged marriage would work well.

Dee and I began mentoring couples that were dating. We started asking that they would set some standards for their dating relationship. I developed a “3P” approach to dating accountability. We coached them to set standards in the area of PACE: How quickly their relationship progressed. In the area of PERSPECTIVE: Not letting their universe revolve around the other person and of course PURITY: Not crossing physical lines that would cause either person to stumble. When it came to purity the question most of the kids were asking was “How far can I go without sinning?” That seemed to be a slippery slope that always ended with regret, sniffles and tissue. We challenge couples to assume weakness and to take into account the temptations and struggles of the other person. At the beginning of the dating relationship we asked the couple to separately write personal standards that they wanted to maintain during the courtship. From the two lists of standards they compiled one list and made it their guideline. Some of these young couple set some pretty high standards for themselves. We have had at least a few couples that did not kiss until the wedding ceremony. Our youth pastor and his wife also decided during their courting that they would not kiss until their wedding day. All the youth knew that this was one of their standards. Dwayne and Ceci had publicly talked about it to set an example and challenge the youth to high standards of purity. The wedding was packed with youth. When the time came to kiss the bride all the youth stood to their feet in anticipation. I played the moment a little and kept prolonging the wait but finally I gave in and said, “You may now kiss the bride”, all the youth erupted in a thunderous cheer. The pastor of the Methodist church we were renting looked a little shocked and bewildered at the rowdy wedding in his liturgical sanctuary.

Our strong stance on purity in dating and accountability has gotten us in some hot water with parents and relatives who haven't understood our philosophy. I received a phone call after midnight and the man on the other side of the line was obviously agitated. He was ranting about us being a cult and legalistic. His nephew was dating a girl in the church that Dee and I were holding accountable. One of their standards was that they would find separate sleeping lodging when they traveled together. The guy, like a typical male, had failed to plan ahead and found himself taking a pillow to his car parked in the driveway to sleep. His uncle obviously didn't see the humor in it and tried to convince him for a couple of hours to "leave the cult". Another couple Dee and I held accountable was Jeff and Carolyn Anderson who are now part of our missions team in Spain. They had set a standard of not being alone in an apartment together. I received a phone call during a severe storm. Jeff was on the other line asking permission to step into Carolyn's apartment because he was getting soaking wet on the street. He was so committed to keeping his standards he would not set a foot into her apartment without first getting permission from his accountability couple. Not all the guys had as much integrity as Jeff.

We also quickly learned that if accountability was going to work we would have to ask specific questions and go to the hard places right away. Some of our mentoring couples were a little shy at first and they would ask questions like, "How are you doing in the area of physical purity?" The dating couple would give a vague answer like "We're doing a lot better." They quickly learned that this could mean that last month they were having sex every other day and now they were only heavy petting every week. Seasoned mentoring couples learned to ask specific questions and expect specific answers so that the accountability was honest and real.

I personally believe that there is an epidemic of sexual immorality especially among young singles in our churches today. Pastors and parents can rant and rave about the need for abstinence, but unless we roll up our sleeves and get practically involved in coaching dating couples and mentoring singles the epidemic will continue. Most couples, serious about their walk with God, don't go into a relationship planning to get sexually involved, but many do because they are not equipped to navigate the difficult waters of sexual temptation. Dee and I have had many couples come back to thank us for our investment in their dating relationship and future marriage.

STANDARDS FOR A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

Work Sheet

1. Pace: How quickly is this relationship progressing? What can I do to not go too fast and maintain a healthy pace?

(Many couples jump into a relationship too quickly. They become too emotionally, relationally and physically involved before they should. Courting should be a time to get to know one another at a healthy pace. What can I do to keep the pace healthy without going too fast?)

2. Purity: What standards will you set in the area of the physical to guard you from slipping?

(Many couples struggle in this area. When you cross lines in the physical and sexual area you sow seeds of disrespect, distrust and disillusionment into your future relationship. What standards can I put in place that will help us stay pure and above reproach?)

3. Perspective: How can I make sure that my life does not revolve around this relationship?

(Often couples make the mistake of focusing so much on their relationship that they lose their other friendships and become exclusive. This leads to emotional isolation and over-dependence on the person they are dating.)