

Wait Training: Living With Unfulfilled Desires

by Alice Fryling

Does God's abundant forgiveness mean that we can go ahead and sin, knowing that God is gracious? Paul addressed this question in his letter to the Romans. "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2). Paul goes on to give an excellent theological basis for righteous living. But some very honest people get stuck in verse 2. "Wait a minute!" they say. "Would to God my sexual desires were dead! Then I wouldn't be having the problems I'm facing in waiting until marriage to see my desires fulfilled. What am I supposed to do in the meantime?"

While Paul goes on to his theological treatise, let me offer eight suggestions for maintaining healthy relationships in spite of strong sexual desires.

1. *Admit your strong sexual hunger.* Ignoring it won't make it go away. God created us as sexual beings. It was his idea that we experience sexual stimulation. If stimulation becomes a seemingly unbearable temptation, look at your lifestyle to see if you can make changes which will help you cope more effectively with your desires. Maybe there are some situations you can avoid. (Alcoholics avoid cocktail parties. Likewise, there's nothing wrong with avoiding too much sexual stimulation.) Beyond avoiding sexually stimulating situations, do something for others which will help you take the focus off yourself. For many people, vigorous exercise helps calm their strong sexual desires. Be honest with yourself, and remember, "no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

2. *Accept the fact that complete satisfaction has to wait.* A dating relationship is not intended to bring full sexual satisfaction. If that's your goal, you will be disappointed. The potential for complete sexual satisfaction is only found in marital communion and sexual intercourse. The sacrifice you make in the name of Christian obedience is that you will give up that physical fulfillment before marriage, but the pleasure you will receive will be like opening a beautiful gift on just the right occasion.

3. *Value your future mate now.* Keep your future marriage partner in mind as you determine your behavior in your current relationship. Set your goal. What do you want to save for your husband or wife? The answer can lead to some very practical decisions: You may decide not to lie down close beside anyone else. You should save all forms of undressing. Some even decide to save their passionate kisses for their future marriage partners. When you're with your date, ask yourself, "If I marry someone else, will I be sorry about what I am doing right now?"

4. *Set your standards high.* Christians walk along a steep cliff regarding sexual behavior. The idea is not to see how close to the edge you can get without falling off, but to see how carefully you can walk to avoid potential danger. Be honest about the activities which are in your danger zone. If an activity (studying together in your bedroom, seeing "R" rated movies, passionate kissing) is too hot for you to handle, then it's off limits for you, no matter what anyone else says. Try to determine beforehand what these activities are. Be ready and able to verbalize your own standards and guidelines. Don't wait until 1 a.m. when you arrive home with your date to figure out what you believe is appropriate. Fight the battle on a level that you can win.

5. *Guard your commitments carefully.* Never make a commitment on a physical level which you have not already made on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual level. One of the lies of our society is that a romantic relationship needs sexual intercourse in order to be truly intimate. In fact, intercourse merely reflects intimacy; it does not create it. Intimacy is the result of the bonding of hearts, the meeting of

minds and the communion of souls. Too much physical involvement actually detracts from this kind of intimacy. Anyone can kiss, but not everyone can carry on an intimate conversation.

6. *Help each other stay true.* If there is a difference of opinion about what is appropriate behavior in a relationship, the couple should go with the one with the more tender conscience. It's damaging to the relationship when one person is pressured to move too fast into physical intimacy. That tender conscience may be God's gift to the couple to help keep their relationship healthy.

7. *Keep in mind that men and women respond differently to sexual stimulation.* One statistic says that a man is stimulated four times more quickly and more intensely than a woman. A man's sexual arousal is apt to come early in the relationship. This may or may not be followed by emotional bonding. A woman, on the other hand, is more apt to bond emotionally first, and then experience sexual arousal. If a woman doesn't remember this, she may assume that a man's sexual advances imply an emotional bonding which is not necessarily there. If a man doesn't keep this in mind, he may make advances which miscommunicate his level of commitment. In marriage, these differences in sexual timing keep the relationship well-rounded and growing, but it can be confusing to young couples starting to date.

Another difference in stimulation is that men are generally more stimulated by sight and women by touch. Again, this is a creative difference in marriage, but it can wreak havoc for a single person. I remember a single male staff member who was distracted on campus by the skimpy tee shirts and short shorts worn by the women students. If he was distracted in his daily ministry, I can imagine the pressure would be pretty high on a date! Likewise, I've talked with single women who feel deceived by male friends who have communicated with touch more affection than they really feel in the relationship. Just as a woman needs to be loving toward her male companion in what she wears and how she carries herself, likewise a man needs to be loving in the way he chooses to touch or not touch a woman.

8. *Don't let feelings guide your sexual behavior.* Feelings are a wonderful gift from God, but they are risky. If ever there is a time to apply Jeremiah 17:9, it is now: "The heart is deceitful above all things." This is an area of life where we desperately need to follow Paul's instructions: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is" (Romans 12:2). We can "renew our minds" in terms of our sexual behavior by studying Scripture, journaling about our convictions, praying alone and with a friend, and by daily reminding ourselves that God's will for us is good, that he loves us completely, and that he desires only the very best for us, in sex and in life.