

Purity

Lesson 1: Stop Looking for the Line

For as long as I can remember, purity has been a major topic of discussion around student ministries.

How many of you in this group have heard at least one lesson on purity?

What is purity?

For many of us, purity means not having sex until we are married. That is where much of our discussion on purity usually centers, and rightfully so. Look at these statistics from some recent studies:

In 2004, the average age of first sex is 15.8 years

In 1999, 1 in 5 children between the ages of 10 and 17 received a sexual solicitation over the internet

In 2003, the average age of first exposure to internet pornography is 11

90 percent of 8 to 16 year olds have viewed porn online

In 2003, 36 percent of 15 to 17 year olds admitted to having oral sex

I could go on, but you can obviously see that we have a purity problem, and as times and technology change, this trend may continue if we do not do something about it. More and more, younger and younger students are being exposed to sex and becoming sexually active, and with each passing generation more people wonder whether or not it is even wrong.

How many of you know someone who has taken part in some sort of sexual activity?

There is a chance that we all have. If you haven't, you probably will. How many of you think that it is wrong that this person was sexually active? Why or why not?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Depending on your group, you may get a lot of startling or surprising answers. Let them talk and try not to act surprised. Keep the group under control, but you want open honesty at this point. This will allow you to see where your group is and better guide discussion. Again, if you hear a red flag from a student, you may want to pull that student aside privately and dig deeper.

Depending on whom you ask, you will hear a lot of different answers. Usually, all questions and discussions on sex and purity lead to the same question: "How far is too far?" You may have asked this before. No matter what it is in life, it seems like we want to see how far we can push the line. We want to go as far as we can without sinning or getting into trouble. Let's use this idea of a proverbial line, to start and guide our discussion.

1. THE LINE: SEX WAS CREATED BY GOD FOR MARRIAGE.

"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied, "...from the beginning, God made them male and female." And he said, "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together." Matthew 19:4-6

The general idea, once two people get married, is that they join together as one, emotionally, spiritually and physically. And this is God's design; not because he wants us to keep from having fun, but because He loves and cares for us. I could go into a lot of debate and fancy persuasion about this, but why can't we just simplify it: If God loved us enough to sacrifice His only son, don't you think we can trust Him to know what is best for us?

IMPORTANT: Sex is not bad as long as it is inside of marriage. I have so many friends who for so long were taught sex is bad, that even when they get married they struggle with having sex and being ok with it.

So there is "The Line" - the line that God set in place for us. Now let's work our toes off of it, back to where we should be, and try to get a better understanding of God's standards for purity.

2. PURITY IS MORE THAN JUST NOT HAVING SEX.

**"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- Matthew 5:27-28**

God considers merely looking at someone lustfully - meaning with sexual thoughts - as adultery. Are you beginning to see how seriously God takes this? Now check this out:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own... 1 Corinthians 6:18

3. PURITY IS FLEEING FROM ALL SEXUAL IMMORALITY.

Jesus tells us to flee from all sexual immorality. This means **all kinds** of sexual immorality. So:

Don't toe the line; flee from it.

Did you know that this is the only type of sin in the Bible that God calls us to flee from? Why is that? Why does it seem like God treats this like the atomic bomb of sin? I have a few thoughts.

a. IT DOES NOT AFFECT ONLY US.

It affects us, the person we may be within the moment, and the person we might be within the future. Even if you say, "Looking at porn only affects me," or "Masturbating only affects me," you are only partly right. It does affect you. If our bodies are a temple of God, shouldn't we honor God with our bodies? I think that's in scripture or something! But those things affect us in such a way that our sense of reality, beauty, emotion, self control, views toward intimacy, and views towards what sex should be - all these things are lasting effects that will affect our future relationships.

A few things to think about:

This is not only a guy problem; 30% of all porn viewers are female. Girls are becoming more sexually active and are just as often the ones initiating.

A death row inmate was once interviewed and said, "I do not know one person on death row who did not have some form of pornography addiction at one time or another." This stuff is serious. Each time you look at porn, you are literally injuring your brain. It's science.

I know of multiple instances in which a man basically raped his wife on their honeymoon because he had a porn addiction and wanted to act on all the things he had seen. They had to go through serious counseling and I am still not sure that total healing has come about.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Feel free to share stories you may know or personal experiences; just be sensitive to what is appropriate for the moment and what is not.*

b. IT'S PHYSICAL

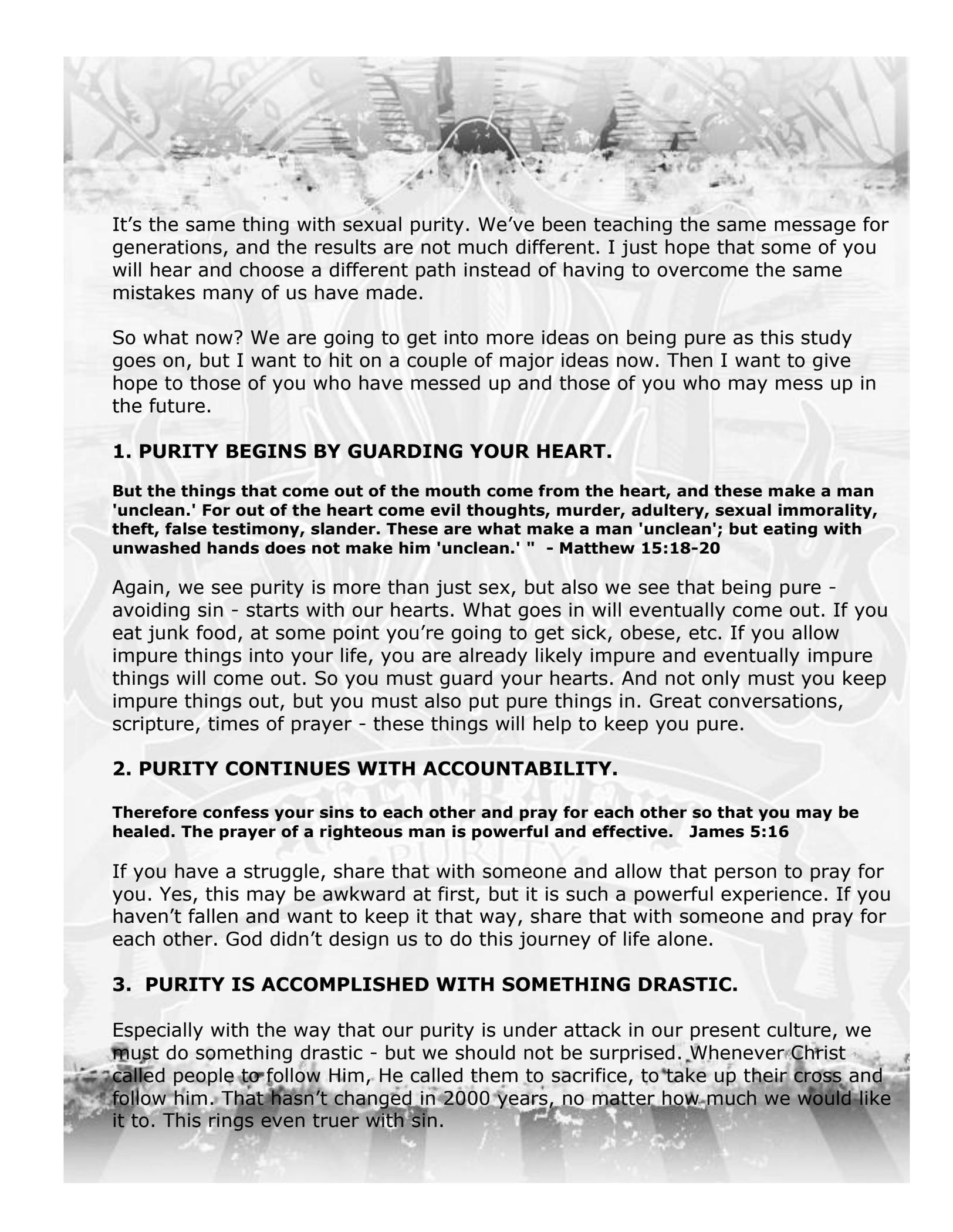
It affects your body. There are more than 50 types of STDs out there, and the number keeps growing. I'm not trying to scare you or ruin your fun; I just want to challenge you to think beyond the moment.

c. IT'S ALSO EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL.

There is an emotional and mental bond that is formed, and even when a relationship ends that bond is still there to an extent, and you have to deal with that baggage.

I do not know that I can think of any other sin that affects us so completely. I firmly believe that this is why God takes this so seriously.

Now, I am not naïve; I know some of you will fall to sexual immorality, and many of you already have. For generations, parents have been telling kids not to touch the stove, and there are a lot of kids out there who still are walking around with burnt hands.



It's the same thing with sexual purity. We've been teaching the same message for generations, and the results are not much different. I just hope that some of you will hear and choose a different path instead of having to overcome the same mistakes many of us have made.

So what now? We are going to get into more ideas on being pure as this study goes on, but I want to hit on a couple of major ideas now. Then I want to give hope to those of you who have messed up and those of you who may mess up in the future.

1. PURITY BEGINS BY GUARDING YOUR HEART.

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.' " - Matthew 15:18-20

Again, we see purity is more than just sex, but also we see that being pure - avoiding sin - starts with our hearts. What goes in will eventually come out. If you eat junk food, at some point you're going to get sick, obese, etc. If you allow impure things into your life, you are already likely impure and eventually impure things will come out. So you must guard your hearts. And not only must you keep impure things out, but you must also put pure things in. Great conversations, scripture, times of prayer - these things will help to keep you pure.

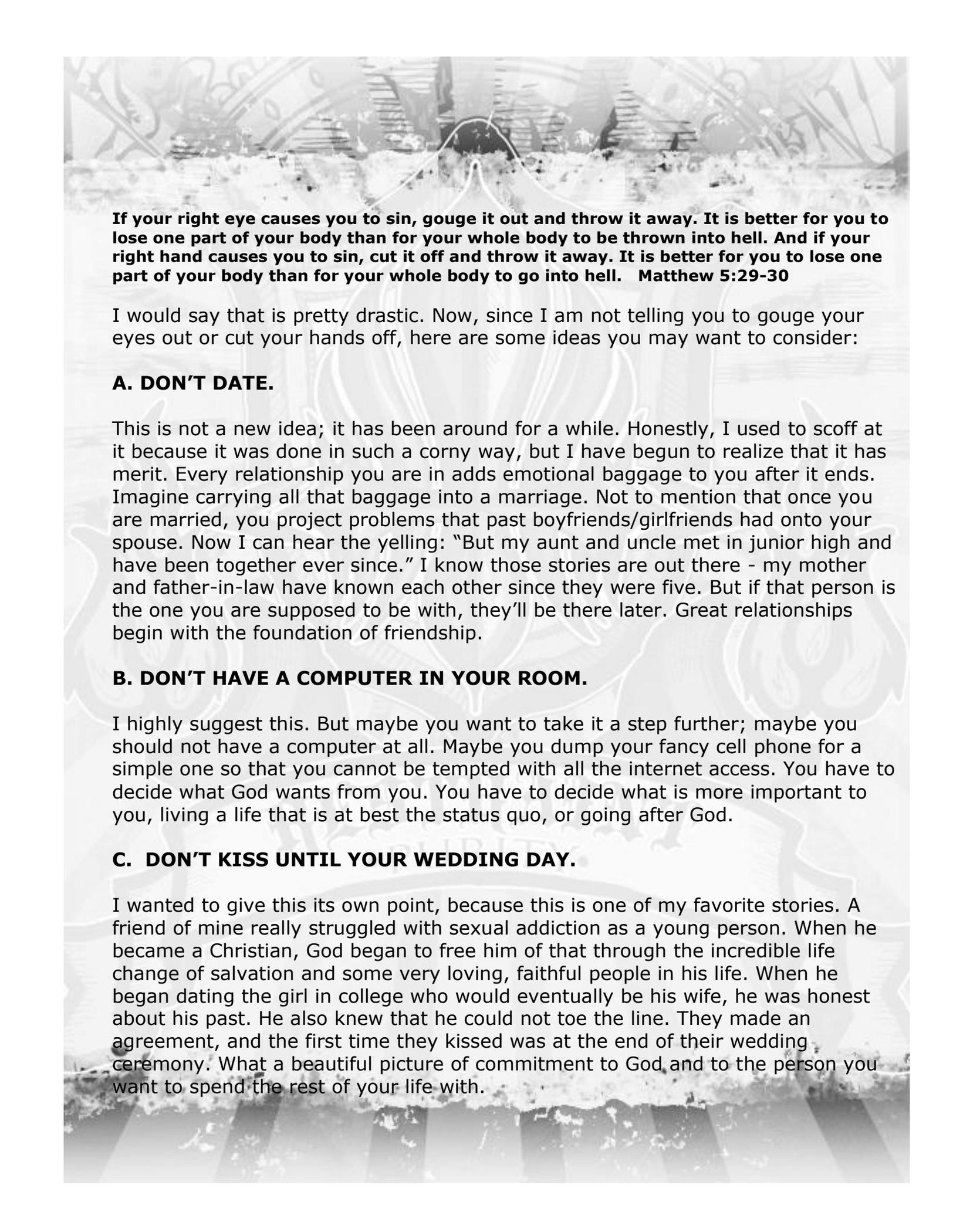
2. PURITY CONTINUES WITH ACCOUNTABILITY.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

If you have a struggle, share that with someone and allow that person to pray for you. Yes, this may be awkward at first, but it is such a powerful experience. If you haven't fallen and want to keep it that way, share that with someone and pray for each other. God didn't design us to do this journey of life alone.

3. PURITY IS ACCOMPLISHED WITH SOMETHING DRASTIC.

Especially with the way that our purity is under attack in our present culture, we must do something drastic - but we should not be surprised. Whenever Christ called people to follow Him, He called them to sacrifice, to take up their cross and follow him. That hasn't changed in 2000 years, no matter how much we would like it to. This rings even truer with sin.



If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. Matthew 5:29-30

I would say that is pretty drastic. Now, since I am not telling you to gouge your eyes out or cut your hands off, here are some ideas you may want to consider:

A. DON'T DATE.

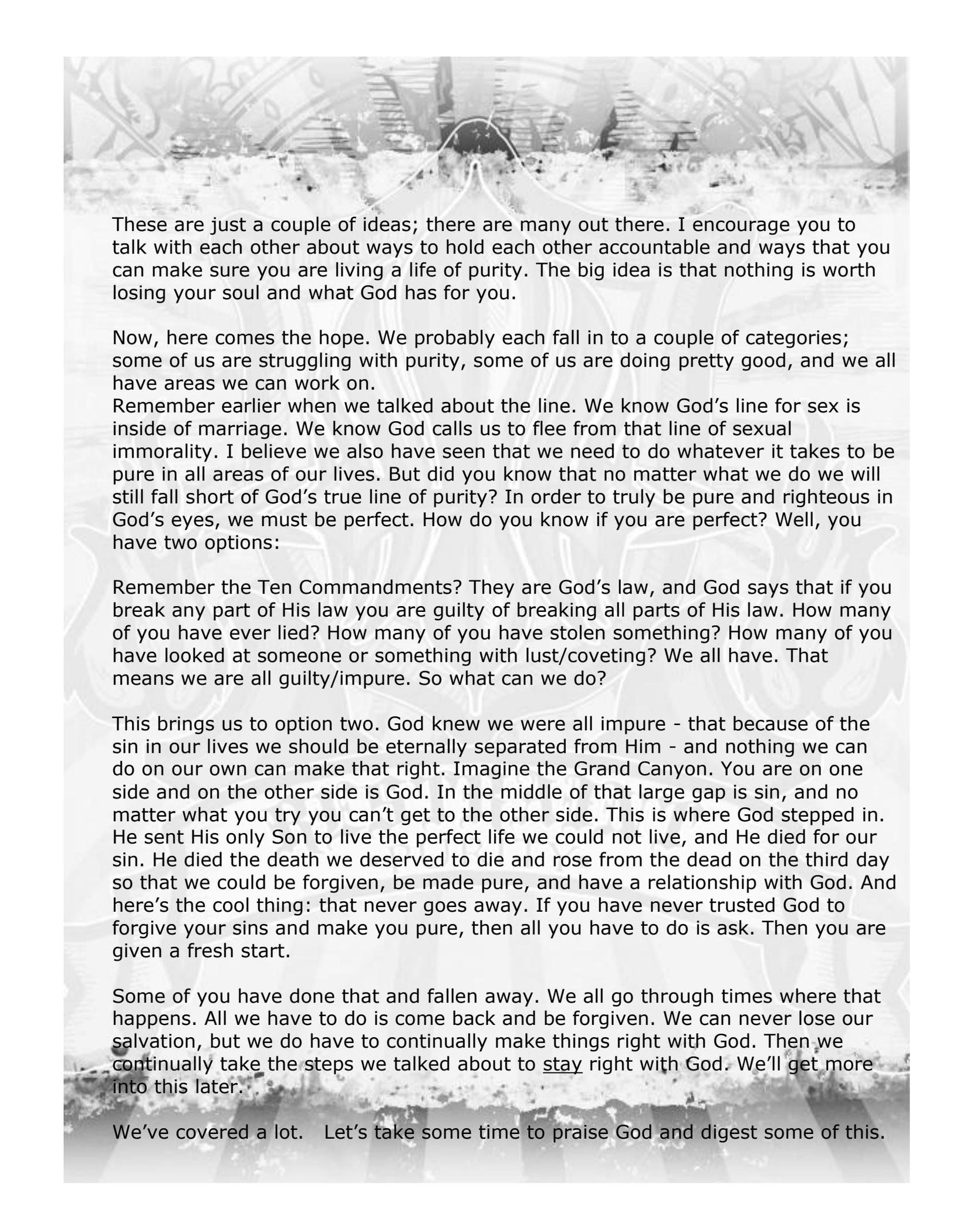
This is not a new idea; it has been around for a while. Honestly, I used to scoff at it because it was done in such a corny way, but I have begun to realize that it has merit. Every relationship you are in adds emotional baggage to you after it ends. Imagine carrying all that baggage into a marriage. Not to mention that once you are married, you project problems that past boyfriends/girlfriends had onto your spouse. Now I can hear the yelling: "But my aunt and uncle met in junior high and have been together ever since." I know those stories are out there - my mother and father-in-law have known each other since they were five. But if that person is the one you are supposed to be with, they'll be there later. Great relationships begin with the foundation of friendship.

B. DON'T HAVE A COMPUTER IN YOUR ROOM.

I highly suggest this. But maybe you want to take it a step further; maybe you should not have a computer at all. Maybe you dump your fancy cell phone for a simple one so that you cannot be tempted with all the internet access. You have to decide what God wants from you. You have to decide what is more important to you, living a life that is at best the status quo, or going after God.

C. DON'T KISS UNTIL YOUR WEDDING DAY.

I wanted to give this its own point, because this is one of my favorite stories. A friend of mine really struggled with sexual addiction as a young person. When he became a Christian, God began to free him of that through the incredible life change of salvation and some very loving, faithful people in his life. When he began dating the girl in college who would eventually be his wife, he was honest about his past. He also knew that he could not toe the line. They made an agreement, and the first time they kissed was at the end of their wedding ceremony. What a beautiful picture of commitment to God and to the person you want to spend the rest of your life with.



These are just a couple of ideas; there are many out there. I encourage you to talk with each other about ways to hold each other accountable and ways that you can make sure you are living a life of purity. The big idea is that nothing is worth losing your soul and what God has for you.

Now, here comes the hope. We probably each fall in to a couple of categories; some of us are struggling with purity, some of us are doing pretty good, and we all have areas we can work on.

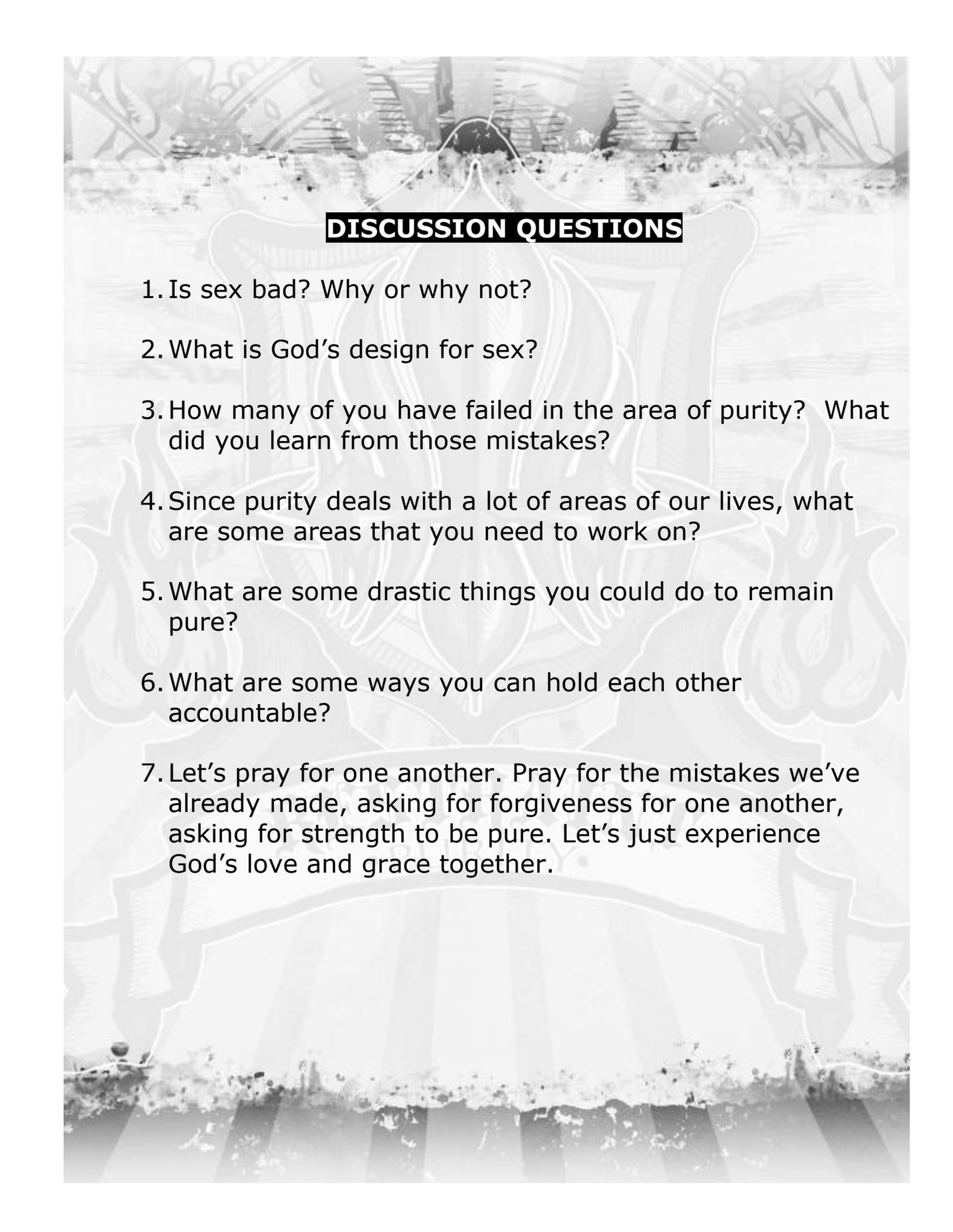
Remember earlier when we talked about the line. We know God's line for sex is inside of marriage. We know God calls us to flee from that line of sexual immorality. I believe we also have seen that we need to do whatever it takes to be pure in all areas of our lives. But did you know that no matter what we do we will still fall short of God's true line of purity? In order to truly be pure and righteous in God's eyes, we must be perfect. How do you know if you are perfect? Well, you have two options:

Remember the Ten Commandments? They are God's law, and God says that if you break any part of His law you are guilty of breaking all parts of His law. How many of you have ever lied? How many of you have stolen something? How many of you have looked at someone or something with lust/coveting? We all have. That means we are all guilty/impure. So what can we do?

This brings us to option two. God knew we were all impure - that because of the sin in our lives we should be eternally separated from Him - and nothing we can do on our own can make that right. Imagine the Grand Canyon. You are on one side and on the other side is God. In the middle of that large gap is sin, and no matter what you try you can't get to the other side. This is where God stepped in. He sent His only Son to live the perfect life we could not live, and He died for our sin. He died the death we deserved to die and rose from the dead on the third day so that we could be forgiven, be made pure, and have a relationship with God. And here's the cool thing: that never goes away. If you have never trusted God to forgive your sins and make you pure, then all you have to do is ask. Then you are given a fresh start.

Some of you have done that and fallen away. We all go through times where that happens. All we have to do is come back and be forgiven. We can never lose our salvation, but we do have to continually make things right with God. Then we continually take the steps we talked about to stay right with God. We'll get more into this later.

We've covered a lot. Let's take some time to praise God and digest some of this.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is sex bad? Why or why not?
2. What is God's design for sex?
3. How many of you have failed in the area of purity? What did you learn from those mistakes?
4. Since purity deals with a lot of areas of our lives, what are some areas that you need to work on?
5. What are some drastic things you could do to remain pure?
6. What are some ways you can hold each other accountable?
7. Let's pray for one another. Pray for the mistakes we've already made, asking for forgiveness for one another, asking for strength to be pure. Let's just experience God's love and grace together.

