

The Spiritual Discipline of Emotional Chastity: Opening to God in Romance, Marriage and Parenting

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Introduction:

I. Let's begin with the Truth, with the Scriptures:

1. We are made for union: a deep relational experience with a spouse (if we choose) and ultimately with God. (Gen. 2:18-24 "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him. . . . For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Eph. 5:31-32 "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.")
2. There was an original design by God for how man and woman were to relate in marriage: Man was to leave father and mother (leave being momied) and cleave to his wife; woman was to be a helper, a helpmeet. Gen 2:18-24. "Then the LORD God said, " . . . I will make him a helper suitable for him. . . . For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."
3. In the Fall and Original Sin, all humans are born 'spiritually dead' with a relational hole that that results in deficit relational and emotional needs (Genesis 2:17, Eph. 2:1).
4. Thus, romance and marriage in the fall tend towards distortion: the temptation of man and woman is to seek their own personal welfare over the other rather than to cleave and help.
5. Though gender relations are still a good thing the Fall (1 Cor. 7; iff), in Christ we are to do this in such a way that results in possessing our own vessels in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, dishonor or lack of holiness (1 Thess. 4:3-5 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;").

II. The Spiritual Discipline of (Physical) Chastity:

"The habit of soul (body and spirit) whereby we constrain our good and natural bodily sexual appetite in order to channel that energy for relational work (with God and others), which is the fountain or source of sexual bliss."

Two kinds of lust:

1. *Purely Sensual (non-relational) Lust:* when the physical desires for sexual stimulation is done outside the dynamics of a relationship, in which the "partner" of sexual satisfaction becomes an object of use.
2. *Relational or Romantic Lust:* when the physical desire for sexual union is merely naturally catching up with the emotional intimacy and union that has already developed prior to a covenant commitment in marriage.

++ If you are in a deep relationship and struggling sexually, the problem is probably not physical but emotional.

III. The Spiritual Discipline of Emotional (Relational) Chastity:

"The habit of soul (body-spirit) whereby we *constrain* our good and natural relational capacity for emotional union with the opposite sex in order to channel that energy (1) for deepening healthy, legitimate relationships (with Christ and others) and (2) for advancing in wisdom in choosing and opening to a mate in God, which are the fountain (source) of future intimacy and union with a mate."

3. *Lust for romance (an emotional relationships with the opposite sex):* The illicit drive or temptation to satisfy our desire for relational and emotional union with a person prior to a covenant commitment in marriage. The lust for romance typically leads to relational or romantic lust in which the physical desire for union typically wants to catch up with the emotional.

How do we grow to possess our own vessel (body and spirit) in holiness and honor given our hunger for union, the hole we may still feel, and the corruption of seeking ourself over other? Six questions emerge that I want to address the rest of our time.

First Question: What is going on in this emotional lust for romance and dating that makes it so difficult to practice emotional chastity?

- ❖ What often goes on in romance and dating: the attempt to fill a *deficit* need or hunger for emotional union with someone of the opposite sex prior to being psychologically, spiritually or circumstantially ready for a covenant commitment in marriage.

A. In general, what is at work in the woman?

In the Fall and in a deficit need, there will be a tendency or temptation to use the man to be fully and deeply known and loved, to be explored, to be cleaved to, to be emotionally penetrated, to be fathomed in order to meet a storehouse of emotional and relational needs before wisdom dictates the time for this and at the expense of her seeking the man's welfare.

Dynamic of Gender relations:

B. In general, what is at work in the man?

In the Fall and in deficit need, there will be a tendency or temptation to use the woman in meeting his needs for zest in emotionally experiencing women, in wanting to find her out, in emotionally explore her.

Dynamic of Gender relations:

Second Question: What dynamics of the heart drive the woman and the man (or teenagers) into this lust for romance?

A. Regarding the Cinderella Complex in some women:

1. There is the all consuming desire in the woman for a man to come and, for the first time in her life, to be rescued from loneliness by being deeply loved and deeply known.
2. However, this normal urge for emotional union has been exacerbated and distorted by a deep pain of unlove or not being deeply known and loved.
3. This need and desire for love is dramatic, exacerbated by a relational hole for God and the pain of rejection so that the hole becomes cavernous and who has become ravenous to be loved and known = "Unloved Woman" Prov. 30:21-23 ¶ "Under three things the earth quakes, And under four, it cannot bear up: Under a slave when he becomes king, And a fool when he is satisfied with food, Under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, And a maidservant when she supplants her mistress."
 - ❖ to be scorned, unloved, rejected, not considered worthy to be known leaves a deep wound, a deep hunger that can't be satiated.
 - ❖ It will feel good in dating ("she needs me, she loves me, she hungers for me, she wants me"), but in marriage it will feel suffocating, it will feel like you are an object to meet her needs, that she is unable to be a helper to you as the Virtuous woman in proverbs 31.

B. Regarding the Man: the Peter Pan Syndrome

1. If boys stay enmeshed with their mother in "mommy love," and never have a deep relationship with the father so as to identify with him and manliness, and not grow in responsibility for his actions and for the welfare of another, then they may come to think, as a little boy in a man's body, that he can have life on his terms, that he can have women on his terms without taking responsibility for the relationship.
2. This is the Peter Pan Personality ("I won't grow up") = the desire on the man's part to experience all the pleasures and fruits of intimacy without taking responsibility for the relationship.
3. Peter Pan in real life is a tragedy, for it is the man wanting life on his terms, particularly wanting to escape his responsibilities. Proverbs 31:1-9 ¶ "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him. What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his trouble no more. Open your mouth for the dumb, For the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy."
Truth is, we all are a bit of a Peter Pan and Cinderella in the Fall = matter of degrees.

2. In the case of the man: if he gives himself to pornography, sexual license with women, to flirting, to practicing uncommitted romance, to wanting to emotionally explore (multiple) women in order to be exhilarated with romance outside of commitment, then there are going to be problems, *for you are potentially training your spirit in unfaithfulness, in uncommitted romance.*

D. Fourth Influence: “Dating” as an exercise or training of our spirit in unfaithfulness: *Spiritual Vice (Problem) of Dating:*

1. The practice of uncommitted romance, which experiences the fruit of gender relations without the corresponding virtue of taking gender-appropriate responsibility for the relationship.
2. It is an exercise and habituation of our capacity for union (our spirit) without the proper boundaries of caring for the welfare of another, which is more of a habituation in the psychological realities involved in divorce and adultery than marriage.
3. Thus, uncommitted romantic relations in dating is more a “practice in unfaithfulness,” than in being faithful in the relationship, training in being intimate with a person to whom one is not committed or responsible or ready to be so.

This does not mean that there is no way to “date” that is appropriate; there may be fine ways to enjoy the other gender that does not take it to face-to-face pairing off that leads to these problems.

E. Fifth Influence: The culture around us revels in total exploration and experience of the other gender before marital commitment – with devastating results.

Fifth Question: What can be done to counteract this lust for romance that ultimately leads to relational lust?

A. General Advice: do not “date” or “pair off” do not go “face to face” until you have determined the following:

1. that you are ready to marry, [in your own hear, your parents, friends]
2. that the other person is ready to marry, [hear advice]
3. that you are reasonably convinced that this is a good potential for marriage;
4. that the circumstance are such that it seems to be a wise and ready time for marriage.
5. When all seems ready, then begin to spend more face-to-face time – no policy, just reasonable, wise, enjoy and practice seeking the other’s welfare. And still exercise emotional chastity in order to protect oneself and the other if you are not to be marital partners and to save some of this exploring if you do marry.

Why? Because you don’t want to get in a place where you are exercising your spirit in unfaithfulness, practicing romance without commitment and responsibility. Don’t get into a romantic situation where it wants to lead to physical union or marriage and neither of you are ready, or it leads to break up where part of you feels lost to that other person who is gone.

6. How to know if you are ready: Prov. 24:27 ¶ “Prepare your work outside, And make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house.” = So Practical.

The point: You need to determine “marital readiness” before you are in a relationship, not in one, for will not be able to determine this with a clear disinterest & judgment.

B. Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Emotional Chastity:

1. Specific ways to practice emotional chastity for the woman:

- (1) See your self as a natural resource to be protected, prized, not just give away
- (2) Your dad or heavenly Father needs to help carve out this space, a place in your deep that is only for the one who is willing to commit themselves to you.
- (3) Commit yourself to not tempt the man to know you deeply without some inclination to possible marriage.
- (4) Commit your self to be a emotional virgin:
- (5) Beware of the Peter Pan, who looks like an adult but is in fact “little boy” who wants to fill himself with you, but not so he can be responsible for you, to seek your welfare but so that he can feel alive

and then go on and do what he pleases. Does he want all of you without taking responsibility for the relationship? “Am I dating a Peter Pan?” Can he take a “NO.” “Am I a Cinderella who can’t say ‘No.’” You must learn to say “NO.”

(6) If you have already given out part of yourself to the other:

(7) If you are married:

2. Specific ways to practice emotional chastity for the man:

(1) If you are tempted to be one of these emotional pollinators, if there is a desire to explore the woman without price, to cleave to the woman without commitment, realize you are being a thief. Let this go.

(2) Rather, commit self to protecting her secret for the one she will marry

(3) Avoid the vice of curiosity:

(4) Beware of tempting the woman to be found out.

(5) Beware of being lured into the woman who has no boundaries.

(6) If you have already or are presently failed to practice emotional chastity:

(7) If you are married:

3. General Thoughts:

(1) If you are not committed to marriage, don’t act like it.

(2) Beware of seeking out the private moment.

(3) Respect the other’s boundaries.

(4) Be open to knowing the other while allowing for some mystery.

(5) Practice saying “No” to oneself and the other.

(6) Let most forms of sexual touching (kissing, fondling) be for marriage.

(7) Be open to making a decision to begin a more serious relationship with a partner you think this is the one (mutually) without full disclosure.

(8) In general, wait for the deep emotional relating until you are ready to marry and the other is ready to marry and wisdom dictates that this may be the time to explore this together.

Wisdom Retreat:

C. Advice to Parents:

i. In the case of parenting daughters:

(i) Parents and especially fathers, love your daughter in such a way to give her a deep sense that she is precious.

(ii) Parents, not only love but *know* your daughter. Let her have the experience of what it is to be loved in being known – for here the young girl/woman discovers how good it is to be appropriately loved in her deep by someone who truly cares for her welfare, not just to get something. Here will be a deep experience that she can take into other relationships, to wait to be loved by one responsible like Daddy – rather than having a deep desire to be known for who she is and can’t wait to leave home to be really known and loved.

(iii) Parents and fathers, when your daughter begins to talk about crushes, enter joyfully into this discussion. Do not repress this; beware of projecting your romance and sexual history onto your daughters. If you (particularly the father) repress the conversation because you are embarrassed or don’t want her to think about this yet, then she is going to get the idea (in her deep) that boyfriend-crushes issues are “dirty,” or wrong, and this will become a secret part of her life, and she will think “my parents can’t handle this discussion.” Then her guy-issues will not become parent issues anymore but her private issues. And when you will want to talk about it, when you want to discuss this when she is in the middle of a romance, she is unlikely to take you into her confidence when in fact she needs you most. = big problem.

2. In the case of parenting sons:

- (i) Mothers, beware of enmeshed relation with your son that results from using them to take away your loneliness.
- (ii) Mothers, do not sabotage the relationship between your son and your husband in order to keep the son for your self.
- (iii) Mothers, allow your sons to grow up in such a way so they are not dependent on “mommy love” and want life on their terms as a your adult.
- (iv) Fathers, don’t give over all the parenting of the son to the mother. Be a man, step up, bond deeply with your son.
- (v) Parents and fathers, when your son begins to talk about sexuality and crushes, enter joyfully into this discussion. Do not repress this; beware of **projecting** your romance and sexual history onto your sons. If you (particularly the father) repress the conversation because you are embarrassed or don’t want him to think about this yet, then he is going to get the idea that “My parents can’t handle this discussion” (“secret” or “dirty”). This will become his private issue and not a parent-issue. When you will want to discuss this later when he is in the middle of romance, you will probably not be taken into his confidence. = problem.

D. Thoughts for those already married:

1. For the Cinderella: Proverbs 31:11-12: “The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil All the days of her life.”
2. For the Peter Pan: Gen 2:24 “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”
3. For both, allow yourself to be filled with one another -- to drink from your own cistern.

Sixth Question: What is the risk of moving headlong into deep emotional relationships before you are ready for marriage? What will happen if you do not practice emotional chastity but act upon one’s lust for romance and romantic lust?

1. The physical will want to catch up with the emotional
2. You will develop intimacy with someone that may not be the good person for you, but intimacy feels so good that it can cloud the vision and wisdom.
3. You will develop intimacy with someone possibly before you are ready to marry.
4. If you do not marry the person that you are experiencing deeply in romance, then you are exercising your capacity for union in unfaithfulness.
5. If you cannot maintain healthy relationship with boundaries now, with mutual respect, with self control, with allowing the other’s needs to be taken into consideration, these vices will come right into the marriage.
6. If you taste all the emotional goods now, then the bad that you will discover in marriage will seem to outweigh the good.
7. If you have a deep relationship in dating and break up, you will feel that part of your self is over there with the other person.
8. You will carry the guilt and the “person” into other relations.
9. Overall it affects a future marriage regarding the temptation to use one another.

Conclusion:

BY practicing emotional chastity: waiting for romance, waiting for when it is right, we can increase the odds *in training ourselves in God* to being a faithful partner, opening to God in this, to give yourself fully to a mate.

WE live in a fallen world, born in original sin: we all need grace and forgiveness. We do the best we can and we go on. We cannot lose, if we just open to God now in need, his strength, for he is able to bring about good from our ashes. But when possible, we want to be as wise as possible in this wonderful experience of romance to union with another person.