

Missionary Singles Issues: Sexual Fantasy

As Bill was teaching a group of youth about modesty, one of the unmarried young women who had a child opened her blouse and began nursing the baby with her breasts in plain sight. Bill knew that his host country had different standards, but he had not expected this right here in the church, and he could not keep his mind from wandering.

As Mary was walking along the street, a man coming toward her unzipped his pants, turned toward the building and urinated in plain sight. She thought she was prepared for anything, but this sudden frontal nudity made it hard to control her thoughts. Back home the man would be charged with indecent exposure.

While getting some R & R on a “family friendly” beach, a group of single missionaries saw several women in topless swimming suits and couples wearing little and touching each other all over.

Thoughts following such incidents are real and very important issues in the lives of single missionaries. Here are some questions that need answering.

Doesn't everyone think about sex?

Perhaps not all singles daydream about sex, but almost all do. Way back in the 1930s two psychologists asked nearly 200 single college students if they had ever daydreamed about certain topics and if they had recently done so. Sex was near the top of the list, and there was little difference between the men and the women. Among the men, 97% reported having had sexual daydreams, and among the women 96% reported having had them.

Only three or four percent reported not having sexual daydreams in those days before television, the internet, and DVDs were available. Research shows that such fantasy certainly has not decreased since then! There probably are a few people who have little or no interest in sex, but the vast majority of people, including single missionaries, do think about it.

Does it hurt anything?

Several dangers are involved when people engage in sexual fantasy. Here are a few.

- It may be sinful, and this damages a person's relationship with God (more on this later).
- It often leads to unrealistic expectations so that people are disappointed when they marry. Actors appearing in pornography are posing and acting out the director's fantasy, so they do not look or act like “real people.”
- Such fantasy does not lead to long-term relationships with one person but to needing constant new stimuli involving different people. Readers discard or sell their pornographic magazines after a few weeks. That is why such magazines can publish new issues each month—the old ones become boring.

What does the Bible say?

Sexual fantasy is certainly nothing new, but such fantasy by large numbers of single adults is. While elaborating on the commandment against adultery in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his

heart” (Matt. 5:28). Notice that Jesus was talking about adultery, not premarital sex. He was talking about sexual fantasy by married individuals. Remember that people could, and often did, marry as soon as they became sexually mature. Other than children 11 or 12 and under, there were few single people at that time in that culture.

Some people interpret this verse to mean that if they have a passing thought about sex with another person they have committed adultery. However, both Jesus and Paul used the same word describing themselves that is translated “lustfully” here in the Sermon on the Mount.

- At the Last Supper as Jesus spoke to his disciples he said, “I have strongly desired (lusted?) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15).
- Writing to the Romans Paul said that he would not have known what coveting (lusting?) was “if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet (lust?)’” (Romans 7:7).

It is interesting to note that where the law said that, Deuteronomy 5:21 is translated “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land...” Thus lusting is more than a passing glance or thought; it is also translated “strongly desired” or “set your desire on.”

Have things changed since Bible times?

As technology has changed over the years, so has the availability of materials to promote sexual fantasy.

- Millennia ago in Bible times erotic material was available in the forms of drawings, paintings, and carvings. These could be seen only by individuals or relatively small groups

- Centuries ago the invention of the printing press and moveable type made such material available to the masses in the form of books, magazines, posters and billboards.
- Decades ago with the invention of recordings on vinyl and tape such material became available in movies for theaters, tapes for home VCRs, and songs on vinyl disks and cassette tapes.
- In the last few years such material has been digitized and is available on CDs, DVDs, and even directly through the air.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:2) about when they had followed the ways of the “ruler of the kingdom of the air.” People can now listen to the radio, watch TV, and download books from satellites. With wireless access they can access websites and email through the air. With their cell phones they have voice communication, texting, and sexting available, again literally through the air.

With this available literally to anyone, anywhere, at any time, even Christian workers access them. A *Christianity Today* survey found that 36% of USA pastors had a current problem with cyberporn. Several doctoral dissertations have found the percentage of missionaries at least that high, some even higher.

What about dreams while asleep?

Dreams are reported several times in the Bible, many of them at the beginning of Israel's history in the Old Testament and at the beginning of the Christian faith in the New Testament. Some dreams are frightening, others are prophetic, and in still others writers portray God as speaking

through dreams. No dreams are recorded as being sinful in Scripture.

Some individuals feel guilty about the sexual content of their dreams, but there is no Biblical evidence that God considers this sin. Dreams often reflect things people have been thinking about or doing. If a person has been engaging in sexual fantasy or immoral behavior, that may be responsible for the dream; however, the sin is in the lust or immorality, not in the dream.

What can single missionaries do?

One thing single missionaries ought to do is to distinguish between temptation and sin. Everyone experiences temptation, but not everyone must sin. Jesus experienced sexual temptations, but he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). King David experienced sexual temptations, and he did sin (2 Samuel 11:2-3).

Temptation itself is not sin, but yielding to it is sin. Most people know when they have crossed the line between temptation and sin. Unable to sleep and going for a walk, David noticed an attractive woman next door. This was temptation, not sin. The problem was that instead of looking away, David followed up on what he saw by inquiring about the woman. Then it was a slippery slope to adultery and murder.

Another thing people need to do is to make a specific commitment to God relative to sexual temptation and sin and do the following.

- Write it down and place the note in a prominent place like a mirror or computer screen.
- Often review scripture passages on the topic (Leviticus 18-21, 1 Corinthians 5-7), and keep renewing the mind (Ephesians 3, Colossians 4).

- Accept their own vulnerability (1 Corinthians 10:12).
- Take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:15).
- Think on good things (Philippians 4).

A third thing individuals should do is to avoid temptation when possible. Take steps to avoid common things leading to temptation such as those that follow.

- Entertainment: Certain movies, television shows, music, DVDs, CDs, and video games.
- Printed material: Particular books, magazines, newspapers, and catalogs.
- Digital material: Specific websites, chat rooms, You Tube, and other material on-line.
- Public material: Things you may run into in your daily life, such as billboards, posters, newsstands, and checkouts.

A fourth thing people need to do is to have a plan for how to react if their avoidance steps fail. No matter how hard individuals try, exposure to some sexual material will occur. Here are some suggested actions.

- Entertainment: Walk out, turn it off, change the station, throw it away.
- Printed material: Discard it, cancel the subscription, and take name off the mailing list.
- Digital material: Click to close the window, click another program on the tool bar.
- Change route immediately, bounce your eyes away, or close your eyes.

Finally, unmarried missionaries need accountability partners to meet with weekly. Face-to-face meetings are best, but if that is not possible weekly contact via skype is an acceptable alternative. They also need www.covenanteyes.com through which that

accountability partner can hold them responsible for what they do on-line.

One can find good information in *Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church* (2009) by Christine Colon and Bonnie Field (Brazos press, division of Baker).

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