

Chastity

IN AN UNCHASTE WORLD

Church magazines met with a group of young adults from various parts of the world to discuss the challenges and blessings of remaining chaste in a world that does not value—and even mocks—chastity. We found their open, honest, and heartfelt discussion uplifting and inspiring and hope that you might also discover in their comments something to help you value the sacredness of marriage and physical intimacy.

With so many people justifying immoral behavior, what gospel truths help you remain sexually pure?

Martin Isaksen, Norway: It says in the scriptures to be chaste. That's good enough for me.

Lizzie Jenkins, California, USA: Chastity is a commitment. You live it. It's a way of life.

Liz West, England: Understanding who I am, understanding that there is more to life than right now and just this one night helps me a lot. The plan of salvation—even though when I was a teenager I couldn't have explained it specifically—is very helpful. The concept of eternal marriage is wonderful! When people understand this commitment, they realize how incredible it is that God has put us here in families and has given us

commandments so that we will not only be safe but so that we will be happy. As I live these principles and share them with my friends, saying, "I'm not going to drink" or "I'm not going to go to this party" or "I'm not going to do this," they respect me. Eventually they actually stick up for me. Understanding that I have worth as a child of God and that Heavenly Father knows who I am and actually cares about me is a great strength.

Anna (Anya) Vlasova, Russia: It helps me a lot when I think about being part of a heavenly family. I love and respect God and don't want Him to feel ashamed of the choices I make.

Kaylie Whittemore, Florida, USA: I definitely think understanding the sanctity of families has given me a strong resolve to live the law

of chastity. Another thing is realizing that when we break commandments, there are negative consequences I don't want to experience.

Falande (Fae) Thomas, Haiti: I have really thought about how people say, "Why wait when you could have everything now?" But I've wondered about how long that kind of happiness would last. I'd rather live the law of chastity and, at the end of the day, have peace.

Hippolyte (Hip) Kouadio, Ivory Coast: One of the things that helps me a lot is the family proclamation: "We . . . declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife."¹

The other thing that helps is how the Brethren explain chastity to us. They warn us how immorality starts and teach that when we abuse the body, we abuse the soul. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that the Savior paid a price for us to one day have a resurrected body. The way we can be grateful for the price He paid is to keep our bodies clean.²

Liz: I remember a very specific



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conversation I had with someone when I was about 15. We talked about how I don’t believe in intimacy before marriage, and I remember her saying, “Yeah, but what if it just happens? What if one night, you just . . . ?” But I knew that I had a choice. Nothing just “happens.”

It’s incredible to me that Heavenly Father has given us agency and commandments to liberate us and that Satan does everything he can to bind or restrict us. The times my friend was talking about when something could “happen” were at parties where people had been drinking and were paired off. So I don’t put myself in those situations. The choice shouldn’t be made at the end when you say yes or no. Choice is made before, when you ask yourself, “Do I go to the party?”

Lots of people, if they don’t think things through ahead of time and don’t think of consequences, will do whatever they want in the moment. But if you say, “I want this as my end result; therefore I’m going to make these choices,” then you’ll avoid a lot of trouble.

You mentioned agency and commandments. But do covenants—baptismal covenants or temple covenants—help you live your standards?

Fae: I think about my life before I was baptized and how much more sense life makes now that I’ve made covenants. It’s amazing how we can be forgiven because of the Atonement. When I remember my

covenants, I think about how I can repent, become better, and keep moving forward.

Anya: Especially at the temple you see an eternal perspective. The temple helps you think about your eternity and not just about today, so you make wiser choices.

Lizzie: A lot of times we believe that intimacy is bad, but it’s not. It just has to be sanctioned by the right authority, at the right time, and with the right person. That’s what covenants are about. You’re making commitments. You’re saying, “I’m really ready for this step in my life.” Covenants help me because I know I’m doing things in the order that I’m supposed to. And I know if I do what Heavenly Father wants, I’ll be happier.

Jonathan Tomasini, France: I wouldn’t be true to myself and I wouldn’t be true to God if I broke my covenants. Marriage covenants help me see that I want to be able to offer to my wife someone who has self-control, has prepared himself to be a good husband, and has kept himself pure.

There are a lot of arguments in the world—many of them seem persuasive and complex—about why the law of chastity is outdated. What arguments have you heard, and how have you responded to those who challenge your standards?

Lizzie: My senior year of high school, I remember a teacher giving us some “advice.” She had married right out of high school, and it ended



THE STANDARD AND THE KEY

“The standard remains abstinence before marriage and total fidelity in marriage. However out of step we may seem, however much the standards are belittled, however much others yield, we will not yield, we cannot yield. . . .

“You had conferred upon you the gift of the Holy Ghost. There will be whisperings of approval or warning when you have decisions to make. The Holy Ghost can guide you away from evil and bring you back if you have wandered and lost your path. Never forget that you are sons and daughters of God. Satan cannot forever imprison you. You always hold the key of repentance to unlock the prison door.”

President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Standard of Truth Has Been Erected,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 26.

badly, so she basically told us that “there are a lot of fish in the sea.” She meant that there are a lot of things for us to try, a lot of candidates to try out. I remember being shocked that my teacher would say that. Since that time I have thought that, yes, there are a lot of people, but I don’t want a lot of people!

Jonathan: Someone I know said that when she is in a relationship, she wants to see if she is sexually compatible with that person. She gave the example of dating a guy she liked, and after they were intimate, she didn’t feel they were compatible and the relationship didn’t work out. She used that experience to make her argument, and it seemed pretty persuasive. Ultimately, I explained to her that I believe you can get to know each other really well in other ways, and if you do so and build trust while living the law of chastity, there will be greater compatibility when you get married.

Anya: The most common argument I always hear is that when two people love each other, it’s OK; intimacy is just an expression of love.

Martin: Something that comes to my mind when I hear the excuse “We love each other” is a quote from President Spencer W. Kimball. He says that too often lust sneaks in the door when people think they’re in love.³ That’s the case for many people when they are intimate before marriage: it’s lust even though they think they love each other. If they really did love each other, they’d respect each other more,

support each other, and understand that there’s a time for intimacy. And, to me, intimacy before marriage shows that you’re not really going to support each other as much as you think you will. Because if you’re not able to help each other in living your standards now, then how are you going to support each other later?

Kaylie: Some people who don’t believe in God feel that the Bible and the law of chastity are out of date. I had some friends in high school who were basically atheist or agnostic—and I had one friend who didn’t really believe in the teachings of her religion. She just lived according to what she wanted, what she felt was right for her. Physical intimacy, from her point of view, is self-gratifying, and anything that would restrict that gratification is undesirable.

I think my friend was surprised that I believed in the Bible and God’s commandments, but I tried to help her understand that I don’t view the commandments as restrictions; I live them because they make me happier. Although we disagreed, she respected me, and we remained great friends.

Liz: All of these arguments have responses in basic gospel principles. When you believe that there is a God, when you believe that there is a greater plan, when you believe that there is accountability, when you believe that there is someone who loves you and cares about you, and when you believe that you have

intrinsic worth because you are a child of God—then you're much more likely to consider yourself worthwhile and respect your body. When people don't know or believe these principles, they look to other people and places to see what they're worth.

What influences or examples have helped you commit to live the law of chastity?

Hip: I had a roommate who was engaged. One day we were talking about his upcoming marriage, and someone asked, "What are the commitments you two think will help you stay strong?" His answer was, "Not keeping the law of chastity could destroy our relationship. So we decided that we wouldn't do anything

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we would not feel comfortable doing in front of the bishop or our parents." That still has an influence on me.

Jonathan: Now that I'm a young adult, it's easier to listen to the prophets and ponder about the things Church leaders say. Before that though, I think a lot of responsibility rests with our parents and families. The Church can provide information and a lot of great things, but the examples of my family really helped me realize that the gospel is a good thing and that it makes us happy.

Liz: When I was growing up, the closest Church member my age lived an hour and a half away, so there were no other members at school. But something I really appreciated was that even though there was just me, my leaders always came to Mutual; they always came to seminary; they always came to teach my lesson—every single time. They never said, "Well, we've got just one student so we're not going to have class today." I'm sure I learned a lot, but what I really remember is that my leaders were consistent. And because of them, I had opportunities to feel the Spirit.

I think we can never fully appreciate the gift of the Holy Ghost. Even though I had my parents and my family and my leaders, when I was at school I was by myself. But the Spirit was with me. So whatever keeps the Spirit in someone's life will be a great influence in helping that person keep the law of chastity.

Lizzie: One of my biggest influences was gaining a testimony for myself. If you are not rooted strongly in the gospel, it's really easy to take a different path. But if you start with making sure you have a strong gospel foundation, everything else will follow.

Hip: When you want to be physically strong, you work out, and when you work out, you get results. If we apply that in a spiritual way, we have to work out spiritually. There are many things we have to do for a spiritual workout, such as reading the scriptures and doing everything we can to have the Spirit. We also have to set righteous goals and work toward those goals. But to reach those goals, we cannot go it alone. We have to have the Lord with us. From Him we get the strength and the Spirit to overcome our challenges. Then we can follow President Thomas S. Monson's plea:

"Do not let your passions destroy your dreams. Withstand temptation.

"Remember the words from the Book of Mormon: 'Wickedness never was happiness.'"⁴ ■

NOTES

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments," in *Brigham Young University 1987–88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (1988), 77–79.
3. "At the hour of sin, pure love is pushed out of one door while lust sneaks in the other. Affection has then been replaced with desire of the flesh and uncontrolled passion. Accepted has been the doctrine which the devil is so eager to establish, that illicit sex relations are justified" (*Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball [1982], 279).
4. Thomas S. Monson, "Be Thou an Example," *Ensign*, May 2005, 113.