

10 SURPRISING TIPS FOR LOVE THE CULTURE WON'T TELL YOU

We have a deep need for a love that will fill us to the brim. But for as much as we hear about love in movies, songs, and TV shows, there's a lot of confusion about how to satisfy that longing within us. Could it be that we're missing something?

Pop culture tells us love is mostly about feeling good, but true love is about wanting the absolute best for the person we love. Jesus wants the absolute best for us, and he asks us to follow his example of self-sacrificial love so we can live in union with him forever. Jesus showed us what real love looks like when he died for us on the Cross. He is the only one who can fill our hearts, and when we grow in love—becoming more like him—we become more fully the people we were created to be.

Part of this growth includes living out the virtue (a habit of doing good) of chastity. While practicing chastity does require saying "no" to some things, it is actually a much bigger and better "yes" to love and the life God has planned for us.

For example, sex is good—it's sacred, and holy, and awesome. It's meant to express the permanent, loving commitment a husband and wife have made through marriage vows; and within marriage, spouses are able to freely give themselves to each other, totally and completely, secure in the knowledge that they have already committed themselves to each other for life. Our bodies were created for true love—nothing less—so sex should be treated with respect and reserved for marriage, the only place where it can be everything it was created to be.

Chastity also includes much more than just waiting until marriage to have sex. Learning how to live chastely means learning how to love others well, whether we're single, married, or consecrated religious. It means loving the way we're created to love—respecting our sexuality and living it out as we're meant to.

Guys and girls reflect God in different ways—not just in physical differences, but because we're both body and soul, in other ways, too. Respecting and living out our sexuality means that we're called to discover how to love all people and develop healthy relationships (not just romantic ones) in the unique way God created us, as male or female. And because we are both body and soul, chastity affects not only what we do or don't do, but also what we say, think, watch, listen to, read, and much more.

So, how do we do this?

1. COMMIT: Step one is to make the decision to do our best. Sign a card, wear a ring, or simply tell a friend. Making the choice to live chastely is the best way to start growing in this virtue.

2. PRAY: Talk to God and the saints about your desires and struggles. The Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse, are great saints to talk to, as well as St. Michael the Archangel, who is very helpful in moments of temptation. Since chastity is a virtue, and grace is needed to live virtuously, pray for help in understanding this virtue and living it.

3. TALK: Have people in your life who will hold you accountable—trusted family, friends, people at church, etc.—and ask them to check on you regularly to support you in your resolve. It helps a lot to have people supporting us as we walk the path of holiness.

4. LEARN: Search Catholic websites for more info (for example, www.chastityproject.com*); pick up the *Catechism*; read a book about chastity. Also, make it a point to develop self-awareness. Pay attention to what your particular struggles and temptations are. Knowledge is power, and the better our understanding of ourselves and of chastity, the easier it will be for us to love more truly.

5. DRESS: Dressing modestly doesn't mean covering ourselves up out of shame or because we think our bodies are bad. It's *because* we have immeasurable, God-given dignity that we should keep private what is sacred and not meant to be revealed. When we dress modestly, we actually let more of who we really are be seen. Too much and not enough, all at the same time—am I right? Dressing modestly doesn't mean dressing in a potato sack; it means dressing purposefully.

6. PREPARE: It's important to make sure we can articulate our reasons for choosing to live this way and to share these reasons with friends, family, and especially the people we date. We also need to have a plan for handling temptation because it *will* likely come, and it's a lot easier to make the right decision in the moment if we've already made that decision before we're actually in the moment.

7. PRACTICE: In addition to planning how we're going to handle temptation, we also need to build up some "muscle strength" so we're able to make the right decision if and when temptation comes. Practicing self-discipline and self-sacrifice in other ways will build strength, which will help us love others as Christ calls us to do.

8. PLAN: Don't put yourself in a situation with someone else where you might be tempted to go too far (backseats, basements, bedrooms, long periods of time alone in private places, etc.). Have blockers and accountability software on your electronics, if necessary. Check the content of a movie before you watch it, and avoid what is out-of-line. Don't let yourself be caught by surprise, and if you are caught off-guard, have the courage to stop.

9. TURN OFF: Pay careful attention to the media you consume. Turn off songs with disrespectful lyrics; don't watch scenes in which movie or TV characters have sex outside of marriage; don't watch a woman in her underwear try to sell you a cheeseburger. Don't let these ideas simply flood your mind—call them out. Just because "sex sells" doesn't mean you have to buy it.

10. CONFESS: When we mess up, it's important to go to Confession—not just for forgiveness from past mistakes, but for the grace and the will to be stronger in the future. This applies not just to the area of chastity, but to our whole lives. The grace of the sacrament is real, and it's available for us whenever we need it. And we don't need to be afraid—Confession is confidential, and priests are there to help us.

Choosing to live chastely is choosing to grow in love. It's not easy, but we know what true, authentic love looks like. It looks like the man on the Cross. This deep, pure love that motivated Jesus to offer his life for ours, is the love that will answer the longing in our hearts, if we let it. And how can we let it? For starters, by asking Jesus to enter and transform our hearts, and by following his example of self-sacrificial love—for his sake, for the sake of those around us, and for our own sake.

Regardless of whether we've made past mistakes, what matters now is how we choose to live our lives going forward. That means that whatever our past, we can choose love—real love—starting today and for the rest of our lives. So, let's get started!

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