

On Staying Chaste

First, let us consider that virtue grows in good soil, like a plant. And this soil maybe understood by an active pursuit of what is good, true and beautiful. This advice is not individual spiritual direction, since particular needs might be different for different persons.

1. Lead a rich life of prayer. Use the Sacrament of Penance frequently; receive frequent and worthy Holy Communion. Pray in the morning, day, evening and night, and do not neglect the Rosary. After real prayer, you will not feel like pursuing impurity.
2. Commit yourself to good exercise. Christ commanded us to behold the lilies of the field. To fill the eyes, ears, nose, and the faculties of touch with His creation is very wise. I defy one to spend a good day hiking in the mountains or the foothills, or even the high plains, and be willing to embrace uncleanness.
3. Keep good company. At the heart of good company (eating bread with another), is good conversation. There is a whole world of good things to talk about! You cannot have a good conversation with a brother or sister in the Faith, and want to be impure.
4. Listen to good music. What makes for good music? Regarding chastity, it is that music which moves your soul to what is noble and pure. No music in the world can do this as well as Gregorian chant. We should be singing all day long, like St. Paul said. Down from Chant is polyphony, then classical music, then various kinds of folk music. Get a good CD of Chant, and get the music and sing along with it. It will drive out the inclination to impurity.
5. Look at good art. There are good books, films, paintings, illustrations in books, plays, dances, and many other things, that when looked at or engaged in, move the soul to real joy, and rest in God. Spend an hour looking at the paintings of Matthias Gruenewald for example, and you will flee impurity.
6. Be modest. What a safeguard this is to chastity! Every effort to embrace modesty in dress, speech, gesture, comportment and what you look at, will water and nourish the virtue of chastity.

Secondly, know what should be avoided. The simple answer is that the vices of impurity grow on a soil of selfishness and idleness. This soil may be understood as:

1. A lack of prayer. If you want to be impure, then try to pray as little as possible.
2. A lack of exercise. If you want to be unclean, remain on the couch, eat plenty of junk food, and have no contact with the real things God made.
3. Keep bad company. If you want to be unchaste, then engage in conversation about impure things. Brag about your exploits, and make sure to tell or listen to dirty jokes, and spend a good deal of time talking about the faults of others. Since the ears make tapes which the mind plays later, the memory of salacious conversation will poison your chastity.
4. Listen to bad music. Plenty of rock, rap, and country are ideal for moving the soul away from the cross. Anything with a pounding, repetitive beat will do.
5. Look at bad art. If you want to be impure, spend time watching television, or surfing the Internet, or reading junk like *People* magazine. Since the eyes take pictures which the mind develops later, those impure images will poison your chastity well after you permitted yourself to gaze upon them.
6. Be immodest. If you want to be unclean, then embrace the latest fashions and display as much of your body as possible. The tighter the clothes the more immodest you can be.

Those are the basics of what needs to be done and avoided in order to acquire the virtue of

chastity. But more is needed. One can do all the above and still not achieve the virtue. Mortification is needed. At the heart of all impurity is the disordered love of self. Mortification is like a direct attack on selfishness. Here are some basics of mortification:

1. Fasting. If you want to be pure, take seriously the precepts of the Church, and embrace fasting and abstinence from meat, on the days prescribed by the Church. Fasting is an excellent tactical maneuver against selfishness.
2. Almsgiving. Deprive yourself of that latest CD of junk music, or those pack of twinkies, or that jumbo slurpee, or that six pack of beer, and replace your self-indulgence with giving to the poor, and you will have pulled out some weeds of impurity from the garden of your soul.
3. Manual labor. For children, this is doing the chores around the house in good cheer. For adults, it's the same, starting with your own house, but occasionally adding some work for your relatives, neighbor, or parish.

But sometimes even more is needed to fulfill the 6th Commandment, which St. Thomas More called the "difficult commandment."

This is the field in which the saints excelled, by disciplining the flesh. Like the runner who is determined to win the race, and who is not afraid to train hard even to the point of pushing his body to the limit, so those who are determined to abandon selfishness must push themselves hard, to win chastity, that pearl of great price. That is why they fasted to the point of pain, or deprived themselves of warmth, and slept on boards without a pillow, or wrapped a tight chain around their waists, or wore a horsehair vest next to their skin under fine clothes. But one should never do these unless they are quite advanced in the spiritual life. The trouble with these can be a lack of charity.

But there is a good penance which will not interfere with charity. And that is to get up in the morning. Virtue has a momentum, and so does sin. So if the first act we do in the day is to hit the snooze button on the alarm clock, then our first act is one of self-indulgence. If on the other hand, our first act is to turn off the alarm, make the sign of the Cross, and get out of bed for the Morning Offering, then we have begun the journey of the day with an act of self-sacrifice. The choice of self-indulgence and self-sacrifice will present itself many times in a single day. But if we have started the day with self-giving, then when the next choice of being selfish or self-giving presents itself, then it will be easier to choose virtue.