

SPARKLE

Reflecting Purity in Today's World

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THE SPARKLE

As I sat in the divided classroom, I had one thought in mind: How the heck do I get out of this? I had a teacher who loved to do activities with the class. She especially enjoyed having classroom discussions on the things no one else wanted to discuss. We tackled tough topics like alcohol, drugs, and drinking and driving... you know, the big guns. Today's topic: For or against sex before marriage? Our activity would spark quite a bit of discussion and controversy among the students. The instructions were simple. "If you believe it's okay to have sex before marriage, step to the left side of the classroom. If you believe in waiting to have sex after you are married, go to the right." Not bad. I'd just walk over to the right, blend in where no one would notice me, and then head back to my seat. For once, despite my previous and current lifestyle, I would take a stand for something I personally had begun learning the hard way. To my amazement, I was nearly alone with only few others as the majority of the entire classroom stepped to the left. What was I thinking?

Then the teacher took it a step further, asking us to defend our stand. Talk about being singled out. No blending in unnoticed here. The students on the other side of the

classroom became furious with us as we tried to defend ourselves. I recall stating, "Having sex before marriage, especially as a teen, leaves you with feelings you are not ready to handle, and the consequences are deep." You see, I was experiencing this lesson firsthand. I thought I had handled my answer with bravery and wisdom. To my dismay, the other side of the room erupted into comments like, "Who are you to tell me what to do? I'm eighteen and that makes me an adult, old enough to make my own choices..." and "We all know the consequences...babies and diseases! Heard that one a hundred times! Blah, blah, blah!" The one that hurt the most was "What do you know? You're not even a virgin!"

The last comment was stinging my heart to its core as the teacher regained control of the class. Who did they think they were to attack me? I knew what I was doing was wrong, and I didn't like where it had led me. I knew the truth! The sad part was, although I wanted out, I could not fix the problem on my own. I did not know where to begin or how to help myself. I felt so empty on the inside and powerless.

Purity...I wanted it! What happened to my vow of waiting for Mr. Right? How did I get into this relationship leaving me powerless and empty on the inside? All of the not-so-great decisions I previously made were almost too heavy to carry anymore. Somewhere along the road of life, I had taken a detour. Deep down inside, I wanted to get my life back on track, but I just didn't know how to get there. My classmates obviously disagreed with my idea, my teacher just listened as we all argued, and my boyfriend...well, he certainly would not approve of the new change. What was this girl to do?

Purity: What Does It Really Mean?

We must first realize purity is more than a casual choice. I believe it's a way of life. I like to think of it as the sparkle inside of me. You might ask, "What is purity anyway?" Most of us think purity is simply not having sex before marriage, which is partly true...but it's so much more than that.

Check out some of the definitions for purity that I found on the Web':

- The condition or quality of being pure; freedom from anything that contaminates, pollutes, etc.
- Freedom from guilt or evil; innocence.
- Physical chastity; virginity. (*Note: Chastity is a really old word for abstinence or having no sexual relations*)

Did you notice what two of these definitions had in common? The word *freedom*. Purity is a lifestyle of freedom. In order to be pure, you have to be *free* of contaminates and pollution. Think about it this way: Diamonds... they are a "girls best friend," right? When you go to the jeweler, you wouldn't pick a diamond that's cloudy-looking or flawed. No, you'd go for one that sparkles the most. You'd look at things like cut and clarity, as well as color and carat weight (size of the diamond). The one with great clarity and color would allow its true beauty to shine through. If the diamond is cut properly, then light can properly reflect through the top and make it come to life, which is what we all love to see... the sparkle. Make the wrong cuts on the diamond, and the flaws distort the diamond's real beauty. It's the same with your picture of purity.

I am a visual person, so I relate to things I can picture in my mind or actually see. Freedom is basically the opposite of slavery. When I think of slavery, I imagine people working hard, possibly chained up, unable to make choices for themselves, or at the mercy of another person. I picture freedom as a butterfly floating where it may in the air, unbound by anything, guided only by the wind. Freedom is like that. It has no restraint. If we are chained to our past experiences or tied to our impurity, we are like the slave. We are held captive, meaning we are unable to move about freely without hesitation. If a slave were suddenly freed after years of captivity, he or she would most likely not know how to make decisions for him or herself. After years or a lifetime of bondage and powerless to make free choices, their bodies may be free to go where they wish, but their minds would be frozen with fear, probably scared to make any decisions. God wants us to be free like the butterfly guided by the wind so we can follow His guiding hand where He leads.

Upon leaving the classroom that day, I felt powerless because I was chained to the past decisions I had made, presently frozen in fear, and unsure of how to make healthy decisions for my future. I was a slave. I had no clue what the Bible had to say about purity. In fact, I had not even read an entire chapter of the Bible at that point in my life. I believe the reason we tend to struggle in the area of purity is that we have not learned what God's Word says about it. God has me on His mind constantly through my own royal legacy (my life). The same holds true for you. God requires obedience and faith from all of us—obedience in daily living to follow His desires, and faith to believe that He has our best interests in mind. If

we don't know what the truth is, then we are powerless to live it out, which leads me to the next crucial point in order to fully understand purity: There is a difference between God's view of purity and the world's view.

Godly Purity in Today's World

Sex is everywhere. Just look around. We are surrounded by the world's version of purity. Almost every place you go (online or in person) or whatever channel you select on the TV, this counterfeit edition is in your face. Sometimes it's difficult to tell the difference. Here are a couple of things to consider when deciding if it's God's version or the world's version:

The world says purity can be whatever you decide.

The world has taken *pure* right out of *purity*. It has tried its best to separate purity from God and dilute (water down) its meaning into just another word. There are countless phony versions of purity, leaving so many people confused, stranded, and downright injured.

God says purity is a way of life that saturates every part of who you are.

I want you to grasp that purity is worship to Jesus. It isn't just another word. It affects how you think, what environments you choose to be a part of, and what you speak. It changes your perspective on everything and allows you to see clearly. Look at the lives of those around you that God has transformed. Look at the stories of the great men and women in the Bible whose lives were radically changed. Stories like Ruth, Rahab, David, Paul, Moses, Esther, Mary, the woman caught in adultery, and the list goes on—countless accounts of transformed

hearts. They all have the same story of God's great love reaching into their lives and making them pure and beautiful. Be pure God's way!

Ask It: What if everyone defined purity as God does?

The world says sex is just what you do to fit in or be considered normal.

According to the world, you should try out sexuality before you get married so that you can make sure you find just the right person. They say everyone's doing it. What do they think they are shopping for? Shoes? I don't know about you, but none of that sounds right to me. Besides, when you are shopping, you eventually have to decide on a pair of shoes in the end. All that shopping makes me tired and leaves me confused and empty.

God says you don't need to fit in to be normal. God's version of purity is more than just refraining from sex. It is His way of protecting you from diseases, a bad reputation, and, even worse, slavery (remember purity is about freedom). God created purity in the beginning and never intended for it to change. Evidently, in the early days, someone thought they would *improve* what God started, and it's been a mess ever since. Purity is all about guarding your heart and being holy before God. It doesn't mean you are perfect. The world says it's okay to experience pleasure at any cost, but God calls us to have self-control (Galatians 5:23 (NLT)).

Ask It: What if the world embraced purity to be cool and normal? Would it make our decision to be pure for God any less difficult?

Sparks Fly

I'll tell you a little secret of mine: *I love jewelry!* Unfortunately, my budget just cannot afford my taste. You know, there's something about the sparkle of a diamond that catches the attention of every girl's eye. When held in the light, it puts on a show like no other. Just like a diamond, we must be pure on the inside to reflect the light from within us to the world around us.

Throughout the coming chapters, I want to present purity from a new perspective. I believe it's all about perspective. You and I can view purity as something that holds us back, or we can view purity as the ignition in our lives. I believe we were all made to sparkle like diamonds, catching the attention of those around us. My question is this: What are you reflecting? What sparks fly from your life into the lives of those around you?

We're about to take a journey through God's Word to see some of what He has to say about this topic. I don't want you to miss one thing, so buckle up! It's going to be a wild ride. I hope you're along for the adventure.

Check It:

In the *Check It* sections, you will be given questions to think about and/or journal about. It is my hope that you'll really think about how this book relates to your own life. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers! It's a journey, not just meaningless busy work. I can't wait to see where we end up together.

- Either below or in your journal, take some time to write about what you would like to learn about purity. What would you like to learn as you read through these pages and about your relationship with God?

Store It:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity,
but of power, love, and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:7 NLT



People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

—Elizabeth Kubler Ross