

What Missionaries Ought to Know about Sexual Stress

You and Pat have been working together for several months, but during the last three weeks both of you have been spending every available minute on the big project. You have eaten working lunches together and continued working after the others have gone home for the night. You realize that you are beginning to look forward to going to work more than you ever have before, and this morning when you saw Pat, your heart began to race. Certainly you couldn't be falling in love, could you? You are a missionary, so sexual immorality, adultery, homosexual activity, or incest are not possible, are they? Why do you feel this way? What can you do to prevent this from happening? Let's consider some of these questions.

Me?

Could it happen to you, a missionary? Of course, it could. You are human, aren't you? It is a natural human tendency to grow to like people with whom we spend time, so much so that even people taken hostage often grow to like their captors, and the captors grow to like their hostages. It is even more likely that you will like people with whom you are working, and that liking may become sexual attraction. People can gradually "slide" into sexual sin over a period of time. An example of this is found in the case of Amnon and Tamar where Amnon became obsessed with her "in the course of time" (2 Samuel 13).

Although it is rare, it can be "love (lust) at first sight." In this case people can

"fall" into sexual sin rapidly. An example of this is David and Bathsheba. Rather than being out leading his army where he should have been, David stayed in Jerusalem.

Having trouble sleeping, he went for a walk on his roof and noticed a woman bathing. Rather than looking away, he sent someone to find out who she was. Rather than leaving it at knowing who she was, when he found out her husband was out fighting in the army, he had her come over. Then "he slept with her" (2 Samuel 11).

Immorality or adultery?

Could you, a missionary, get pulled into immorality or adultery? Of course you could, and the "slide" into it usually begins in harmless, innocent ways. For example, you are field director, so it is your responsibility to show the attractive new single missionary around. Or, you feel sorry for the new missionaries who have no place to stay, and you invite them to live with you temporarily. Or, while talking with a long-term missionary friend, Chris, you find out that Chris feels neglected at home, so you try to give Chris some extra attention. Before you realize it, the two of you are sharing deep things, and this intimacy leads to increasing time together, and finally adultery.

It happens not only with other missionaries, but with nationals as well. It happens to both men and women. It happens with young and old. If you think you are invulnerable to sexual sin, you are actually the most vulnerable. 1 Corinthians 10:12 describes our vulnerability, but verse 13 promises God's faithfulness in providing a way of escape. Attraction to other people is very likely to happen, and if you do not know what to do, you may well find yourself in a

position like King David, trying to cover up your sexual sin and causing serious problems for your entire family, field, and mission agency.

Homosexual activity?

Could two missionaries begin a homosexual relationship? Yes, they can, and it can happen with either men or women, married or single, young or old. As a result of isolation and loneliness, people living together with same-sex partners may form emotionally dependent relationships. These rather exclusive relationships may become possessive and lead to physical activity with sexual elements. An embrace may become more than just comforting.

This may progress into homosexual activity, so that the people involved have progressed into a sinful relationship. But even if it is stopped before reaching this level, confusion, guilt feelings, and the relationship itself need to be carefully examined.

Incest?

Certainly incest cannot occur, can it? Again, the answer is, "Yes." Incest is still legally defined as sexual intercourse between close relatives, as described in Leviticus 18-20. Because incest is often a "family secret," no one knows how often it occurs, but it apparently occurs most often between an adult male and a younger female relative.

The missionary community often refers to itself as a family, and socially it functions like a family. Children often have many "aunts" and "uncles" on the field to which they feel much closer than any biological relatives back "home." Incest can also involve sexual exploitation of an intimate

involving secrecy and misuse of authority—and that also happens in the "missionary family" (the field or the entire agency). Again this is most likely between an older adult male in a position of authority becoming sexually intimate with a younger female, most often the child of a co-worker or a young single female missionary.

The underlying processes seem to be the same in both. The perpetrator is a person in a position of leadership and power in the "family." The close family is seen as a place of safety and security in a hostile world, but the perpetrator betrays this trust. The victims often blame themselves, thinking that their spiritual leader would not have done such a thing without being provoked. Secrecy follows. The victims may keep it secret, thinking no one will believe them. When others find out, they react with disbelief, then shock, then silence—to protect the victim. They may also want to protect the perpetrator, or protect the image of the mission "family."

Why me?

Am I, as a missionary, more susceptible to sexual sin than someone back "home?" You may be because of some of the facts of missionary life. That is why this brochure is titled "sexual stress."

- High stress. Stress and anxiety tend to make many men want sex, but many women want cuddling and rest. When refused, either may think the other does not care. Cultural stress decreases the control of sexual urges, especially in those who had problems at "home."
- Lack of privacy. You may live in a "goldfish bowl" where nearly everything you do is watched and talked about. There may be no locks on the door, and

sound may carry far outside the bedroom, even outside the house.

- Cultural taboos. You may live in a culture where the expectations for husband-wife behavior are quite different from your home country. You may not be able to display any affection in public, even to hold hands.
- More separation. The very nature of your work may mean the spouse has to be gone several nights a week. He or she may be tempted while away, and the partner tempted at home as well.
- Pornography available. Pornography may be more openly promoted on television, at newsstands, etc. than back home. The Internet is a mixed blessing because along with mail and information, you have access to totally uncensored pornography in your own home.
- Need for affection and touch. We all need touch, and you may be basically alone where you are with no one to just put an arm around you in difficult times. You have left your support group behind, and may not have developed a new one.

You need to remember that you are far from home, behind “enemy lines,” and the enemy will use whatever advantage he has.

How can I prevent it?

Although sexual sin occurs among missionaries, it is not unavoidable. Here are some things you can do to make it less likely.

- Acknowledge your vulnerability. Until you do this, you will not be motivated to do anything to prevent it.
- Avoid triggering situations. Know what leads you to sexual temptations. If visual stimuli do, be careful what you see on TV, the computer monitor, etc. (King David

needed to stay off roofs). If it is touch, be careful about physical contact. Once you begin the sexual slide, temptation becomes stronger the further you go.

- Pray. You pray. Ask others to pray. Pray with your spouse and ask your spouse to pray for you. You have a support group back “home,” so ask them to pray.
- Communicate with your spouse and regularly fulfill each other’s sexual needs. Talk regularly and frequently about how you feel about your relationship with each other. As you talk, develop ways to create privacy, such as locking the front door from the outside, and coming in the back door. If you can’t hold hands in public, develop other ways of saying you love each other in public, such as a wink, a raised eyebrow, etc.
- Have an accountability relationship. You also need a support group physically present who will look you in the eye and ask you regularly (weekly, if possible) about the purity of your sexual life. Remember that your capacity for self-deceit is great.
- Make a commitment to God. Read Leviticus 18-20 and 1 Corinthians 5-7. Note that they encourage you to be holy, and the way to be holy is to enjoy sex with your spouse and avoid it with anyone else. Make that commitment.
- Practice the presence of the omnipotent God. You may think that no one knows about what you are downloading from the Internet, but remember that God is there. Not only is he there, but he wants us to be holy and promises to strengthen us (Ephesians 3:16).

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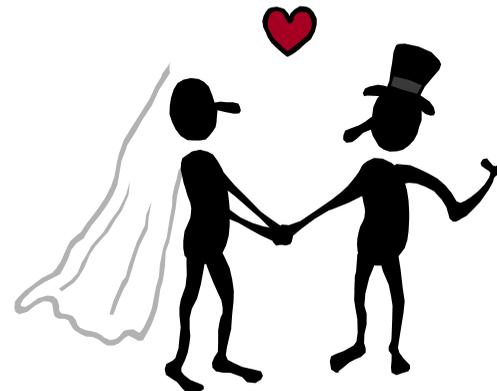
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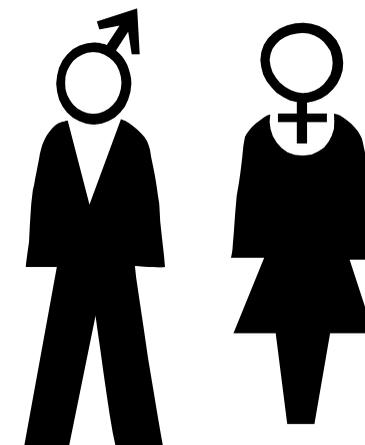
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