



Imagine this (it's pure fiction): It's never happened in real life, so I doubt you'll be able to identify with this scenario, just imagine it...

Your parents are running errands, so you know you'll have the house all to yourself for a few hours. Your girlfriend is on her way to your house where no one will be there to bother you. You're both involved in your parish ministry. You both know God, your faith and the doctrines and teachings of the Catholic faith. You also like each other a lot! Hormones are raging. You haven't had time to yourselves in a while. **There's been no time for intimacy, peace or time to calmly be together with no one around.** Almost like a spiritual retreat but with your girlfriend.

How can you still be Catholic without dying in the battle? How do you continue loving your girlfriend while living out your faith? How can we sync what's in our head and heart with what's in our physical desires?

I'll tell you how I did it:

Together with, Natalie, my wife, we dated for close to 10 years. The first four years were before our encounter with Christ. A year after that, we participated in different communities in our parishes, living out our conversions both together and individually. We then dated with Christ as our center for five more years. We've now been married for three and a half years and have a child together.

We know first hand how intense sexual tension can be when you're together with the person you love the most, the person you're attracted to, and the one who gives you butterflies. The idea isn't to sweep these emotions under the rug and pretend

nothing is happening; the point of all this is to treat this as a reality through our Catholic faith. This is why we must fight this battle with the necessary armor, and later help those whom we minister to.

I honestly think these tips helped us; however, it's not a recipe or method, it's simply our testimony and it may help you, too. Most of all, I hope you can add more tips and ways to help others to successfully survive these situations. Your witness to commitment, faithfulness and chastity can be the best story ever written that someone can read. Take heart!

1. What are you looking for? What have you found?

Young woman leading man

Are you looking for affection, company, understanding, acceptance, support or love?

To express this, you caress, hug, kiss, use loving words and affectionate gestures. What do you find on the other side? **What happens to the other person when you kiss them, caress them or tell them you love them?** I'll put it exactly the same way someone once explained it to me: if you're looking for tenderness, affection, and support, but you find uncontrollable passion, raging hormones, roaming hands then you're looking in the wrong place or you're pretending to look for one thing when you're really looking for something else. **Be honest with yourself and ask what you're looking for and pay attention to what you find. Be honest with yourself, with your significant other and, above all, with God.**

2. Don't do anything you'd be ashamed of

Young couple at home watching a movie with popcorn

During a chat about dating to a group of teens, I was asked, "How far is too far?" I obviously laughed. Neither the Bible nor the Catechism of the Catholic Church has a map of the human body showing limits of how far is too far. Because of this, the answer is a bit relative. I was able to figure it out in my personal way: by not allowing anything that would embarrass me (note: this only works as long as your attitude isn't shameless or one of not caring).

Let me give you an example: You're in the living room with your parents and siblings,

hugging your girlfriend while both of you sit on the sofa. How do you hug her? How do you kiss her? Where do you touch her? How do you spend time with her? That which you do with her at that moment, in front of people in your inner circle is what you should use as your limit for when you're both alone. So, what's the difference? If you can do this in front of those you love and those who love you, you can do it in private. If you can only do something in private but it embarrasses you to do it in public, it's a sign that something isn't right. Remember you are still not married, you have yet to consecrate your love to one another, and you're learning to love and know each other through your relationship.

3. Inviting God into your relationship is a good idea

Wedding Ring and heart shaped shadow over a book

Pray together! If you're capable of inviting God into your relationship and you're able to live out your faith it will be a lot easier to be successful when faced with temptations. Even if your girlfriend disagrees, it'll be hard to ignore this suggestion. Go on... be brave! Inviting God into your relationship isn't a hobby that will distract you while you're alone together. It's a way in which all three of you (God, your girlfriend, and you) will make an excellent and successful team.

As a personal testimony, I truly believe that in the years I was dating my wife, I was able to get to know her heart in an intimate way. **Praying, serving God, and spending time together opening up their souls to one another enriches people more than tearing off each others clothes. The time you both spend together with God is an investment, not a waste of time.** I challenge you to see intimacy in a different light, a new category if you will. Don't confuse it with an opportunity for sexual intimacy. God created us in a comprehensive way and our affectionate relationships should be developed far beyond the sexual. Be patient, there will be time for sexual intimacy.

Also, remember that inviting **God into your relationship doesn't mean falling into a legalistic attitude where you have to be constantly worried about whether you crossed a line or didn't cross the line, whether you fell or didn't. Many times does nothing but suffocate the relationship.** Focus more on how much God wants you to truly experience love and love others. Learn to perceive his presence in your relationship and ask him to teach you to love as he does.

4. You're both responsible

Lovers riding bicycle together holding hands

I'm sure you know how to make the butterflies her stomach flutter; you know what clothes fit you well and what they think you look good in; and you know what spots are sensitive to your touch. Don't make this more difficult for her than it needs to be. Help each other and keep each other from falling into temptation! It's also a good idea talk about these things from time to time. Ask her how she is doing, make sure she she's feels comfortable, understood, listened to, free, etc. Ask her what helps and what doesn't. What makes her feel comfortable and what doesn't. The goal for living a chaste and loving relationship isn't a one-person challenge, it requires a lot of dialogue and mutual listening.

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

5. Run! Run for your life!

Little barefoot girl and boy running across the beach

It's a bit naïve to think you will come out unharmed from an evening or night without a little back up from parent, siblings or friends, especially if your willpower is fragile like mine.

Going into a fight against temptation is usually a bad idea and the probability of winning this fight is slim. Your best option is to avoid temptation. If it's necessary, run... run for your life! You're better off being prudent than putting yourself in a complicated situation.

“but in the end it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder.” (Proverbs 23:32)

“So turn from youthful desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord* with purity of heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

These five tips are something that I had to learn and live out. Honestly, even when my intentions to live these out and make them a type of compass were sincere, many times it was hard to follow through. God is aware that we will fail from time to time, so it's important to understand that falling into temptation is a reality.

How do you pick yourself up after you've fallen into temptation, look your girlfriend in the eyes, and, above all, start over and try again so your life can serve as a testimony for someone else? Stay tuned for another article. In the meantime, send me your comments and ideas on what it takes to start over after you've fallen into temptation.