



I know how you feel because I was a virgin on my wedding day, but my wife wasn't. As the woman you mentioned, my wife had become a new person. But it was still a painful challenge to live knowing that past. There was the emptiness I felt in my stomach when I thought of her having been so intimately with a stranger that I would never know. I also felt resentment towards the other boys and I never wanted to feel it towards her. Then, I was disappointed to have waited so long to give myself completely to someone and wish that she shared with me the experience of the wedding night as something totally unique. Does that sound familiar? I receive countless e-mails from men and women who, like you, are struggling with the past of their partners. Here I offer you a strategy to overcome the difficulty:

One of the reasons these thoughts keep coming into your mind is because you're probably trying to push them out of your mind without facing them. Sweeping them and hiding them under a rug is going to make them keep bothering you. As I see it, the solution is not to repress these thoughts, but to confront them, deal with them, accepting and elevate them. Every time you have disturbing thoughts, take the following steps:

1. Thank God. It acts against the feelings of bitterness and pain by thanking God for having taken her out of that lifestyle. This is going to help the resentment not affect your relationship. Remember, she didn't cheat on you. She only made some bad decisions and, most likely, she would repent of them. If you're like me, you've also made some mistakes in the past, watching pornography or having done things with other girls. Remember that resentment is an option, not just an emotion. You need to actively reject it and rip it out of the root.

2. Offer. Instead of thinking about her past and being despondent about it, offer those thoughts to God when they begin to fill your mind. Do it like this: when you start thinking about your previous actions and relationships, take that as a reminder to pray for the healing of memories and for the conversion of the men you were dating. Because of the sufferings of Christ, our trials have a redeeming value when we accept them with faith and offer them. You must realize the good that the Lord can do through that. Use your suffering to bring grace to others. This step is very important. Every time the memories appear, I want you to pray for

their healing and for the conversion of them. In other words, let the pain become a prayer.

3. Live Pure. Focus on leading a pure life with her. You may not have always been the man she's going to marry, and if that's the case, you certainly won't want to add any more remorse to those you already have so that she can take you to your future marriage. In order to live a pure life, it is also necessary that you are not watching pornography. This will infect the wound in your relationship and will intensify your insecurities, because it will create thoughts about her past more visual in your imagination.

4. Talk to her. If the relationship is directed toward marriage, don't be afraid to talk to her about the struggle you're having. It is better for these issues to come to the surface before marriage than within marriage. If you do not feel ready for this, you may be able to talk to a priest or other counselor that you respect (without betraying the confidence that she had). In other words, it's best to talk to someone who already knows her past or doesn't know her at all.

However, remember that good relations require open and honest communication. When you express your concerns, make sure you don't blame it on your past, but rather express the fact that you want to work on that problem next to it. Never, ever, use this against her. On the contrary, share your insecurities, fears, or wounds and let her love you. This is going to require a little vulnerability on her side, patience and empathy on yours. If your love is strong and indulgent, you will both be able to overcome this difficulty.

By doing this, don't ask very specific things about the things she did with the guy or the guys. This information is going to do more harm than good. Knowing your partner's previous intimacies often causes feelings of pain, inferiority, or resentment towards them. Talking from your fight will help protect your heart from the poison of lack of forgiveness. But take it easy with it, do not drag it forever, as this can create a resentment on your part towards you. I heard once a young man came in tears to P. Pio because his girlfriend had finished the relationship with him. The saint slapped him and said, "Be a man!" As hard as it sounds, that was just what that boy needed.

It's perfectly reasonable that you feel hurt by your past. This is natural. It's not a sign that you haven't forgiven her. It's a sign that you have a human heart. Forgiving someone is not the same as numbness. It's about stopping having something against that person. It's a decision. Over time the wounds heal, but it is not under your control not to feel a certain way. Let's hope she's patient with you while you're working on this. As a note of encouragement, I have realized that in time everything improves, and that, in our case, marriage has been very healing. For example, even though the woman your with has experienced sexual activity in the past, marital intimacy is going to be unique to her, because she has never experienced the gift of pure intimacy as God wants it, like Sacramento.

If you see that the problem is not improving, but is causing resentment among you, seek help from a marriage counselor, priest, or parent to talk to. Marriage is

one of the most important decisions you will have to make, and you need to surround yourself with wise counselors. The woman you're with shouldn't live with the cloud of her past floating over her forever. Your job is to help get that out of there.

5. Reflects God's love for her. A man in your situation once wrote me telling how he felt a little "ripped off" by his girlfriend's past. I can understand why you felt that, but we have to remember that we are not saving ourselves to receive but to give. Authentic love is simply giving and not looking for something in return. If you become her husband, you will not receive the gift of her virginity, but you will receive something better: the one where she is fully herself. It would be a shame to lose the gift of a person in the search for the gift of virginity. In fact, I know of a couple that was about to commit but ended up breaking the relationship because the boy could not accept the girl's past. It was tragic, because I couldn't see that by not accepting her past, was losing a beautiful future.

Just see how God loves us unconditionally and how we are instead so petty. In fact, the Bible often talks about how Israel "having fornicated" and forgotten his first love, which was God, was forgiven by God for his sins over and over and loved in spite of his past. I'm not comparing your girlfriend with a prostitute (or you with God), I'm just saying that if you decide to accept her past you would be loving it the way God loves. She will need to love you unconditionally also to you, if you expect to have a lasting marriage. We all have our own imperfections. God has no grudge against her, and neither should you.

Remember that your girlfriend's unconditional acceptance makes you more man in her eyes than anything else you can do for her. She may be asking herself, "Am I worthy of love? Am I not invaluable? Am I worthy to be loved?" You play a very important role in your healing, by dying yourself out of love for her. Believe it or not, this wound you feel now has been given by God to heal your own soul. It will help you to resemble Christ, to purify your love, and even to strengthen your future marriage if you continue to respond to the grace of God to carry this cross. Both play an important role in healing the other, and you can't lose sight of that.

Mother Teresa said that for love to be true, it must hurt, we must empty ourselves. Therefore, I encourage you to look at the crucifix, which is the ultimate sign of love. Only through him did Christ come to the joy of the resurrection. Pope John Paul II also said that when it comes to relationships:

"We love the complete person with all his virtues and flaws, and, to some extent, regardless of his virtues and despite his shortcomings. The strength of such a love emerges more clearly when the beloved person staggers, when their weaknesses and even sins come to light. Who truly loves does not withdraw his love, but loves more, loves with full awareness of the shortcomings and mistakes of the other, and without approving any of them in the slightest". (Karol Wojtyla, Love and Responsibility)

For me, peace came with acceptance. It is then that we realize that forgiveness is

not a feeling, but a decision. Of course, the pain is not going to disappear overnight. For me, thoughts and sorrows have come and gone. But every time they arise, I stop and pray for the healing of her, and for the conversion of the men with whom she was. I know that when we unleash the power of redeeming suffering, God can use it for great good.

In short, the most important thing to do is to have a heart thankful for the woman you have become, and to be patient with yourself and with her when these emotions are awakened within you. Use them as a reminder to pray for your healing, decide to keep your relationship pure, and show him the love of God. Do these things, and in your time, God will heal the wounds in her and even you. In the meantime, don't be afraid of these thoughts that persecute you, now they will never diminish. With the passage of time, you will feel a lot of peace while your love grows in depth.

Translated by Fabiola Espinoza