

# Satan's Strategy to Destroy Your Marriage Before it Begins

by Garrett Kell

Tim and Jess had only been married for eight months, but the honeymoon was most certainly over. The sweet conversations that once marked their relationship had been replaced with constant bickering. Their laughter had dulled and their distance had grown. Their sexual intimacy had almost ceased.

What had gone wrong? How had Satan slipped into this young couple's marriage? As we unpacked some of their history, I discovered that he hadn't sabotaged them on their honeymoon or in the early months of figuring out married life. Instead, he'd begun his work before they even made it to the altar. You see, though Tim and Jess are Christians, their dating and engagement was marked with sexual impurity.

The early days of their relationship had been fine, but over time, they made consistent compromises that developed into a deeper pattern of sexual sin. When they'd sin, they confessed to each other and made oaths to not let it happen again. But it did. Because of the shame, they never truly let anyone else in on what was happening, and in hindsight they admitted that their courtship had been a big cover-up of deceit.

Unfortunately, Tim and Jess's story is all too familiar. Many unmarried Christian couples struggle with sexual sin. And this should be no surprise, we have an enemy who is set against us and set against our impending marriage (1 Pet. 5:8). This enemy hates God and he hates marriage because marriage itself is a portrayal of the gospel (Eph. 5:32). Satan wants to do whatever he can to undermine marriage.

One of Satan's most effective strategies to corrupt the gospel portraying union of marriage is to attack couples before they say "I do" through sexual sin. What follows are several of Satan's most common ploys to attacking marriages before they begin. (Eph. 6:11; 1 Pet. 5:8)

## **1. Satan wants us to make a pattern of obeying our desires instead of God's direction.**

God's ways are good, but Satan wants us to believe they are not. This has been his plan from the first call to compromise in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-6). His end goal is for us to develop a consistent pattern of resisting the Spirit and following our sinful desires once we get into marriage. He wants us to learn to resist service and to pursue selfishness.

If we learn to do what we want to do when we want to do it before we get married, we'll carry that pattern into the days that follow our wedding. This is deadly because service and sacrifice is essential to a healthy, Christ-honoring marriage. Love in marriage is shown by a thousand daily decisions to do the dishes when you don't want to or change a diaper when you don't want to or watch a movie instead of a basketball game. If your relationship before marriage is characterized by giving into urges of the immediate desire, you'll most certainly struggle when you get into the nitty-gritty of married life.

## **2. Satan wants us to underestimate how susceptible we are to temptation.**

Satan wants us to think that we won't take our sin to the next level. He wants us to think that we're stronger than we really are. He wants to make us think that we'll never go "that far." This is a powerful trick because it plays upon our well-intended desire to honor God and our pride at the same time. Trust me, you're weaker than you think you are. You can go where you think you won't go. Sin is like an undercurrent in the ocean, if you play in it, you will be overpowered and carried away into certain destruction.

One of the ways Satan works this angle is to tempt you to think that purity is a line rather than a posture of the heart. He wants you to think that purity before God is not kissing or not taking off clothes or not having oral sex or not "going all the way." He wants you to think that if you don't cross a certain line, you're "staying pure." The problem with this kind of thinking is that Jesus says if we lust in our heart, we've sinned and are condemned before God (Matt. 5:27-30).

Purity is much more about the posture of our heart than about the position of our body. The age old question of “how far is too far” may be revealing a desire to get as close to sin as possible rather than a desire to “flee” as God calls us to (1 Cor. 6:18). So I ask you, what’s the posture of your heart? Are you seeking to find ways to flee from lust or getting as close as you can? Be careful to not underestimate your vulnerability, or as Paul said, “let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

### **3. Satan wants couples to weaken their trust for each other.**

When we compromise sexually we’re showing the other person that we’re willing to use and abuse them to get what makes you happy. Every time we push the boundaries with our fiancée or lead each other into sin we are communicating, even though we don’t mean to, “you can’t trust me because I’m willing to use you and disregard you to get what I want.”

And even worse than that, we show that we care more about our desires than about what God wants from us. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says “this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.” And verse eight says, “whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.” So when you sin sexually against each other before marriage you are saying, “You can’t trust me because I’m willing to sacrifice both of our relationships with God to do what I want.”

This is certainly one of the most deadly of all his strategies and the one I suspect hurt Tim and Jess the most. They didn’t trust each other. They never really did. So much of their dating relationship was wrapped up in the cycle of sin, shame, start-over that they never developed a deep mature battle-tested trust for each other.

It is important to point out however that when we resist sexual sin, God blesses a relationship with the exact opposite effect. Every time we say “no” to sexual sin and turn to prayer and tell each other that we value them and their walk with God too much to go one step further, God uses that to strengthen trust between couples. My wife regularly tells dating couples that one of the reasons she trusts me is because I literally ran from

compromising situations before we were married. We weren't perfect in our courtship, but the Lord used that season to build trust in each other.

#### 4. Satan wants to deceive you with the forbidden fruit of lust.

There is a world of difference between pre-marital sex and sex within marriage. One of the reasons for this is that in pre-marital sex the forbidden fruit of lust portrays sex as something that it isn't always in marriage. Most normally, pre-marital sexual activity is like gas on fire. The passion is high, the feelings are intense, and the drive to go further is fueled by the fact that you know you shouldn't (Rom. 7:8).

Sex in marriage is different. There's still passion and there's still intense feelings and emotions—but sex in marriage is based primarily on the hot coals of trust, devotion, and sacrifice (1 Cor. 7:1-5). Couples who built their sexual expectations on the passion that the forbidden fruit provided are often disappointed and confused about why sex is so different in marriage.

Now, to be candid, my wife and I laughed at this idea when our pre-marital counselor told us. We were sure that we were gonna be the exception to the rule. But the reality is, that almost six years and three children later, he was right. Couples like us can have a strong sex life, but it is fueled by deeper characteristics than fleeting passion. Satan wants couples to get used to running on the caffeine and sugar of lust rather than mature love of service and sacrifice.

A few concluding thoughts...

1. ***Wait in Faith.*** The Christian posture is always one of waiting. We wait for Christ's return. We wait for an eternity with him. And people who aren't married wait for the blessings of marriage. Say no to sin's promises by faith in God's promises. Renew your mind with God's Word and keep waiting in faith.
2. ***Dude, you've gotta lead.*** While both people in the relationship are responsible before God, the man in the relationship must set the pace for purity. Too often our ladies are forced to draw lines

and say no. That's just wrong and cowardly. It's the dude's responsibility to care for his future wife by leading her toward Jesus and away from sin—and not into the darkness and pain of evil. If he sets the wrong pattern here, he'll be digging out for years afterward—and may never regain the ground he loses apart from God's grace.

3. *Involve others every step of the way.* Don't allow your relationship to remain unexamined by other godly Christians. Both of you should have a godly couple or faithful friends who keep you accountable. Encourage them to ask you tough questions and always give honest answers. God uses transparency to give spiritual strength.
4. *If you sin, go to the gospel.* The Apostle John said "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the righteous One" (1 John 2:1-2). If you sin, flee to the cross. Flee to the empty tomb. Look to Christ, confess your sin deeply, and repent. God blesses this kind of posture (Prov. 28:13).

Sexual sin doesn't need to be dagger in the heart of your courting relationship, engagement or marriage. God is a merciful God who delights in restoring what sin seeks to destroy (Joel 2:25-2). He will not however bless on-going disobedience and presumption upon his mercy. If you have fallen into sexual sin, today is the day to plead for mercy and turn from it to Christ in faith. May God give us mercy to pursue purity for his glory, for our good and for the good of our children and the church.