



BIBLICAL STANDARDS

FANTASY BY BETTY CHURCHILL • CHAPTER EXCERPT

Fantasy is a collection of insights from several contributing writers, about all the stuff women talk about and some they don't, but should. Sex, dating, relationships, the "m" word (not marriage, the other one), but, of course, we talk about marriage, too, as well as the beautiful people, the need to be in control and how God, Jesus and the Spirit fit into it all.

Like its male counterpart, Flesh, Fantasy is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics: Masturbation, How Far is Too Far, The Role of Fathers, Confession-Forgiveness, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Cosmetic Surgery, Worship, Singleness, Faith, Homosexuality, Why Wait?, Body/Self Image, and Pornography.

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"I Gave My Word to Stop at Third"

That's the slogan recently sighted on a T-shirt in the greater Austin area. I'm sure that kid made some commitment to abstinence at a church camp or a conference somewhere, and kudos to him. I hope he does stop at third. Similarly, I have a friend who made a vow to never kill anyone. Granted, he's beaten several people to a pulp, but to this day he's never killed anyone. I'm proud of him. He's a man of his word.

So, just because this kid gave his word to stop at third (and what exactly is third base these days?), does that mean all is well and right between him and his Maker? You're all good as long as you don't cross the line?

I like what my friend Will has to say along these lines: "It would be just like behavior modification to miss the point all together." My intent and the goal of this book is not to tell you what you can and cannot do. I am not a legalist. However, what you do and do not do is indicative of where your heart is. That's my real concern. My hope is that by talking about these things, and about God's desire and intent for you, you would want what He wants for you more than you want what your flesh wants. But I know it's hard to change your wants.

If faith is really about an intimate connection with God, then the idea is not to see how close to the line you can get but rather to see how close to God you can get. Closeness with God is not about following rules. It's about feeling comfortable with living life as He intended it. It's about being at ease with Him. It's about your heart toward Him.

There are two ends to this spectrum (as there are to any spectrum). On the one end, we are the bride of Christ and we have a loving submissiveness toward Him because He has loved us, because we trust Him, because we love Him. On the other end, we're God's children. And like most children, we're shortsighted, strong-willed, and don't know what's in our own best interest. As children, we need boundaries and guidelines for our own protection. The hope is that eventually we'll grow up and need

fewer boundaries and guidelines because we've moved from a focus on rule-driven obedience to love-driven desire. But truthfully, few of us are at that point just yet.

NOT MUCH OF A DEBATE

So, in light of our childish nature, we probably should start with the boundaries. There's no getting around the fact that if you're using the Bible as your guidebook, sex before marriage is off-limits. More than thirty times in the New Testament we're admonished to avoid sexual immorality, which we have established includes sex outside marriage, among other things.

In more recent history, however, there has been much debate over what actually qualifies as "sex." Yeah, even our own United States Congress and former president had this debate. Apparently there's a lot that can happen between holding hands and actual intercourse.

Two informal surveys done by Lauren Winner in her research for *Real Sex* show that about 55 percent of the student participants did not consider oral or anal sex to qualify as sex. People, it's called oral sex. How can it *not* be sex?! I do know that, in this particular debate, that's too far. In fact, let's back up the love train quite a bit.

HEY, THAT'S MINE!

You've probably figured out by now that nowhere does the Bible say, "On the first date, thou shalt have a platonic side hug; the second date, hand holding; etc." (Do note that a side hug is a good place to start—see instructions.) So this is where the idea of applying the broader principles comes into play.

The Side Hug

1. To initiate, extend both arms as if making a face-to-face hug. As both parties converge, begin to turn your bodies so they are juxtaposed side by side.
2. Drop your outside arm to your side, and take your inside arm, wrap it around the other person's shoulder and clasp. **WARNING:** Do not at any time wrap your arm around their waist as you may send conflicting signals.
3. Lightly squeeze their shoulder and hold for a duration of 1-2 seconds. Your head should be facing straight ahead to ensure your lips do not come in contact with the other person's ear.

Let's take a look at 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him [defraud]. (NIV)

This passage is pretty self-explanatory.

1. It is God's will (everyone always wants to know God's will—here it is, spelled out) that you don't go anywhere near sex outside marriage.
2. Instead, learn to control your body in a way that honors God, not allowing it to be controlled by your sex drive, like those who don't know God.
3. And in this area, don't break the law (wrong) and don't take what is not yours (defraud).

Any healthy relationship is about considering the needs of others. It's about respecting and valuing the other person. In regard to avoiding sexual immorality, besides the obvious, one way you can think of it is as promising or suggesting

something you're not going to deliver on. In other words, don't be a tease, don't get a guy excited for nothing—okay, just don't get him excited (though I realize we often have little or no control over such things). Not going anywhere near sex, and controlling your body in a way that honors God, means that you do not want to cause a guy or yourself to lust or be sexually aroused or, much less, actually go as far as to take what's not yours, his purity.

One way to keep your actions in check is to think of your boyfriend as another woman's future husband. How would you want another woman to treat your future husband? Imagine yourself at his wedding and being able to look both he and his wife in the eye with no shame or embarrassment, knowing that you have taken nothing from him that now belongs to her.

DRAW THE LINE

The first time I ever heard a "women's talk" at a conference, the woman giving the talk gave an illustration using an egg white to talk about how you know when you're sexually aroused. "Your body begins to produce something like this," she explained as she demonstrated the clear, sticky nature of the egg white. (Insert fingers in ears, close eyes tightly, "La-la-la-la-la.") Needless to say, I have hardly eaten an egg since. The image has

stuck in my head, for better or for worse. Now it's in yours. Apologies.

Where you draw the line is the point at which you are starting something that cannot be fulfilled righteously. In other words, that is the place where you start something that starts you (or him) down the path to an orgasm. The line is where it turns from just being affectionate to being sexual arousal.

A helpful guideline is the “holy kiss principle” (as long as your Bible doesn't translate “holy” as “French”). For infants, children, and adults, physical contact is the primary way we show care, protection, affirmation, encouragement, and love for each other. Think about it. When your friend is miserable and discouraged, you may have nothing to say, but a hug goes a long way. I remember being cold in church and my dad putting his arm around me and then my snuggling in his nook—a genuine Hallmark moment, no doubt. A pat on the back or a slap on the butt says, “Good job” (in different realms, of course). When we think about physical standards for dating, it might be helpful to consider how we related to a brother or sister within our family, expressing affection without its ever being sexual in nature.

There's nothing wrong with physical contact; that's human nature and much of how we communicate. But the goal should be to express affection without causing sexual arousal. Hence the “principle of the holy kiss.” There are affectionate kisses and there are passionate kisses. I trust you can figure out the difference.

As for how much affection, it should be stage appropriate. By that I mean that if your partner's arms are constantly surrounding you, that communicates protection and a degree of ownership of one other. Which is fine for a serious, exclusive relationship but inappropriate if it's not.

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Though I'd like to think I'm pretty spiritually mature, rather like the bride we discussed earlier, I also have to humbly admit that I am still childish in some ways—okay, probably in lots of ways. (For instance, I still find the word *wienie* in reference to a hot dog uncontrollably funny.) In light of that, I need to set up some parameters for my own protection, because, frankly, in the emotion of the moment, I can become like a bratty child and do what I want to do just because I want to do it, dadgummit. I need some boundaries and guidelines to keep me from getting to that place. Here are several questions and answer to consider:

1. At what point does affection turn to sex?

Wherever that point is, that's where I'm going to draw the line. But then I want to take two steps back. I don't even want to go near temptation. I may be able to handle it, but why would I want to tempt myself? It's like buying a chocolate cheesecake, putting it in the fridge, and telling myself I can't have any. Sooner or later, I'm going to have just a sliver (I hate that word). Then one day I'm going to find myself with my face in the fridge, a fork in my mouth, and a chocolate-glazed stupor written all over my face.

Now, the line is going to be a little different for everyone, based on their history and nature. But what I've observed in talking with women over the years is that the more sexual history a person has, the quicker she hits the line. I have one friend who has to be careful about holding hands with a guy.

2. Once you know where the line is for you, what are the situations that tempt you to cross that line?

Once I knew a couple who decided they could not cook a meal together—too much heat in the kitchen, both literally and figuratively. For you, there may be some other situations that you know are high risk, causing you to walk right into the arms of temptation. For instance, let's take R-rated movies—it's probably not a good idea to watch

other people having sex ever, but especially not with your boyfriend.

Here's a thought: avoid lying down in close proximity to each other. It may seem harmless when you're lying on the couch watching a movie—maybe, maybe not. (I confess that in college I spent many a night sharing a bed with my “best friend” when I would visit him for the weekend. It was no big deal, really. But then again, he turned out to be gay.)

Or here's another: set a curfew for yourselves. I know, I know—there's nothing more romantic than the staying-up-all-night-talking date. But as your grandmother used to say, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” I hate to agree with your grandmother, but there's some truth in what she says. Late at night, you're tired. You say and do things you will regret in the light of day.

Here's a situation that seems to come up a lot. He's over late. He's tired. Why doesn't he just sleep on the couch? This is where the Ephesians 5 passage comes to mind: “There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality” (verse 3). His car in the driveway in the morning may raise an eyebrow or two. It's not about the rules; it's about protecting your heart, mind, and relationship with the Lord. I am certainly not saying you have to abide by these

guidelines, but they're suggestions to jump-start your thinking.

3. What things are appropriate for you to talk about, and what should you not talk about?

We women want to be known, and we're prone to tell all. Often we say much more than what the guy asked—classic unsolicited TMI (too much information). All for the sake of intimate soul connection. Wait before you share those deep, intimate parts of your life.

I know you're thinking, *But ohmygosh, he so “gets” me.* Please trust me on this. Sometimes when you've had a great moment of verbal intimacy it makes you feel really close to a guy and you want to express that closeness physically. “Danger! Danger, Will Robinson!” (I know that no one under thirty-five got that classic TV allusion, but it was nostalgic for your mother and me.) Anyway, the point is—guard your words.

In a dating relationship there is no need to put all your laundry out there from the get-go. Wait until he pursues knowing you and asks questions (I know that's a rare guy, but give him a chance). Men like a little mystery; it's part of the pursuit. You and all your thoughts and life experience are a gift and a treasure. He needs to prove he's trustworthy for quite a while before you entrust yourself to

him. Such conversations before their time can give a false sense of intimacy and make you think the relationship is further down the road than it really is. Don't give him your heart when he hasn't pursued it or asked for it or proven he's trustworthy to care for it.

There are some things that you do not need to talk about for a long, long time, not until you are in the “serious” dating zone, i.e. your sexual history. Really, there is no need to ever talk details about sex in any context with any man unless you are in premarital counseling or you are talking to your male gynecologist.

Now, here's a personal soapbox (and really, guys need to know this more than we do). *Do not* talk about marriage until there is a ring in his pocket. Now, granted, he may get to that place before you, and then you may need to talk about it. But here's what you need to know: guys really can think hypothetically. They're thinking, *What if we did get married—what would that look like?* He's just trying it on, seeing what it feels like, *hypothetically.* And he should. But he should not be discussing that with you. Ideally, he's discussing it with an older, wiser, godly married man.

Typically, we girls imagine the wedding within a few minutes of introductions, or we at least try on



his last name. Okay, not always; it depends on the time of the month and our current singlehood contentment level. But if there's remote interest, the thought of him in a tux runs across our subconscious at some point. We do not need his verbal wanderings to take our heart there any quicker than we do on our own. So please don't add your own verbal wanderings into the mix.

4. What are you going to wear? Always an important question. Last week I was watching *How Do I Look?* on the Style network, and there was a pitiful situation with a girl who by her ex-boyfriend's description "dressed like a tramp." She pleadingly explained to him that she dressed that way for him. She thought that if other guys thought she was hot, that would make her more attractive to him. He replied that it embarrassed him and it felt disrespectful.

Now, that's a good guy. That's the kind of guy you need to be looking for. In fact, as of the end of the show, he's available.

Along the lines of "not defrauding your brother" and determining some guidelines, this should be an area to consider. You really should think about how you dress all the time, but especially in light of your boyfriend. Certainly you should look your best for him; that communicates value and respect.

But you want to take his breath away, not force him to have to look away. Don't make him work to focus above the shoulders. I know that's hard to do with fashion these days. It's hard to find a pair of pants and a shirt that actually meet in the middle. But here's a general rule based on the previous principle of not causing sexual arousal: if he shouldn't touch you there, then don't show it to him, i.e. your upper thighs, lower back, belly button, cleavage (or where cleavage should be, in some cases). ... You get the idea. Another principle is to not wear anything that will make him wonder if you're wearing a bra or not. He's got no business playing guessing games about your lingerie. Granted, for some guys, all of this might mean you have to wear Uggs, cargos, and a ski jacket year-round. But you can work out a compromise, I'm sure.

I'm sure there are other key questions to ask, but these four are a good starting point.

WHO'S GOT THE CHUTZPAH?

Ideally, you're dating a guy who has the maturity and chutzpah to bring up the topic of boundaries himself. But if that's not the case, then I say you need to throw it out there yourself in a gracious, sisterly love kind of way.

My friend dated just such a guy (one lacking in chutzpah). For several days, she was waiting for

the appropriate moment to raise the issue, and as it turned out, there was no such moment. So there they were, intertwined on the sofa at 2:00 a.m., watching *Titanic* in the dark. He's pretty sure the third-base coach is waving him home. That's when my friend—oblivious to the third-base coach—said what she'd been thinking about the whole time when Rose and Jack were freezing their bums off somewhere in the Atlantic: "You know, I really want this to be a relationship that honors God, and I want to respect you. Is that a high value for you? What do you think that looks like when it comes to our 'physical relationship'?" (BTW, I don't recommend the use of the finger-quote gesture here.)

"Huh?" (tripping over third base and falling flat on his face—and heeeee iiiiiiss outta here). "Okay ..."

(You should probably know that they had already crossed the line a few times, but since they hadn't drawn the lines to begin with, they were just now figuring these things out.)

"I've already put some thought into this for myself," my friend said, "and I've decided that this whole thing has really thrown a hitch in my relationship with God." (Note: she meant to say, "Thrown a wrench," but one of the funny things about my



friend is that she often mixes metaphors.) “After we’re together I feel like it’s days before I can face Him, and I end up making all sorts of promises that I know I’m not going to keep. In a sort of weird and twisted way, it feels like I’m choosing you over Him.”

“So ... I could see that ... now that you mention it ...” (Translation: *Oh man, I’m such a loser. She’s thinking about God, and I’m trying to figure out if this means there’s no more lip gravy to be had tonight ... or ever.*)

“So, I guess what I’m saying is that we need to step way back and sort all this out. Like, maybe we should keep the physical stuff to a minimum until we figure out what God wants this to look like.”

“Yeah, sure. I mean I’ve sort of been thinking the same things.” (Note: who knows if this is true or not? But it was a valiant effort to save face.)

So that’s what they did. They took some time to pray and talk to friends about how far is too far. My friend started by thinking through the situations that start her engine, so to speak. Here’s her short list (shared with permission):

1. Pretty much anything involving tongue(s).
2. Lying down together in the name of “snuggling”—includes all recliners as well as sofas and most certainly beds. However, the “sit and snuggle” is acceptable—in folding or ladder-back chairs.
3. Sharing a blanket is always risky.
4. When he wears those running shorts without a shirt ...
5. His hands being anywhere south of shoulders and north of the knees, even if they’re just resting there, with the exception of his putting his arm around the back. And especially if they’re under the clothing.
6. Massages, except for feet. (My personal rule—no one touches my feet, and I don’t touch theirs—blick!)
7. That thing he does.

She didn’t exactly want to say all this to her boyfriend, at least not in those specific terms, lest he be tempted by such dangerous and powerful knowledge. So the question became “What boundaries would keep us from situations where these are likely to happen?” She wanted to keep it simple and make it not seem like she was writing a policy manual for their relationship. Here are some things she came up with:

1. Occasional affectionate kisses are allowed (not quite ready to give up kissing altogether, but try the affectionate/not sexual thing).
2. If no one else is in the house—no friends, roommates, etc.—then sit in separate chairs when watching a movie or hanging out.
3. Hands stay on the outside of clothes and only on the back, above the shoulders, and below the knees.
4. Honesty—speak up when you hit the line.

He did the same, I think, and they actually talked it over. Without getting unnecessarily graphic, they simply talked about how they could help each other stay connected to God in the area of physical purity. These conversations are awkward, but as I told her, “If you can’t make it through some hard conversations, I’d say there is trouble down the road for your relationship.”

So, hopefully, you can have a good discussion with your boyfriend and come up with some clear parameters for physical boundaries and perhaps broader guidelines as well. I’m not a stickler for rules (I see them as mere guidelines), but I do respect the spirit of the law. Don’t put yourself in tempting situations or situations that would cause other people to wonder about your standards. Stay above reproach.



PROTECT AND PROVIDE

I realize you might not be motivated by Scripture alone to follow these guidelines, and you're thinking how unnatural it is to wait for marriage. Some would even argue that there are detrimental consequences if you don't find release for all those hormones. But I have to say that's a lie our culture has perpetuated—"It's unhealthy to not express your sexuality." As my pastor says, I don't think you've ever read a story about someone who died of internal hormonal combustion or from an explosion of organs due to lack of use. It's just not true. (Of course, sex within marriage does have its risks. I have a friend who busted his wife's nose during a little afternoon rendezvous.)

So, what are the consequences of crossing the line in this area? What is it that God is trying to protect us from and provide for us?

1. *Provide respect and trust for each other.* If the relationship does lead to marriage, there can be a freedom from fear and insecurity. If he can stop or say no to me while we're dating, then I know he can say no to others when we're married.

2. *Protect from flashbacks.* My friends who were sexually active before they were married tell me that one of the most painful things they have faced is telling their husband about the other men.

Basically, in their own words, "It's as though they're all right there in bed with us." Almost all say that flashbacks have been a struggle in their thought life, even in their dreams and when they're having sex with their husbands. They must deal with guilt, and both they and their husbands must carry the weight of comparison.

3. *Provide self-control.* This is what the passage in 1 Thessalonians talks about—learning to control your body and desires. If you can learn to say no when you're not married, it will help you when you are married to say yes when you don't necessarily want to. You're controlling your body rather than allowing your body to control you.

4. *Protect from future problems.* There is actually a medical consequence from repeatedly stopping yourself once you've started down that road toward an orgasm. It can lead to problems later on when you are married and you have the freedom to continue but have trained your body to stop. It has got to be frustrating to finally have the freedom and yet be unable to proceed, not to mention its being heartbreaking for your spouse.

5. *Protect from pregnancy outside marriage.* Sure, there's protection. It works most of the time. My friend with seven kids would tell you it doesn't work all the time.

6. *Protect from sexually transmitted diseases.*

In the past thirty years STDs have reached epidemic proportions. Tons of statistics on this are available, and you can find detailed and unsettling information on several Web sites—some with pictures included as an added bonus. After surveying several myself, I discovered that they all seem to agree that every year between 12 and 15 million people contract a viral STD. If you are not in a relationship where both parties are monogamous, your chances are about one in five that you could contract a disease. The consequences range from the personal pain of the disease, to cancers, to birth defects for children. Condoms are not foolproof. In many situations they are totally ineffective.

7. *Protect from a loss of intimacy with God.* Like any sin you're not willing to let go of or turn from, premarital sex affects your connection with God. It becomes easier and easier to walk away from Him, and your sin begins to affect every area of your life.

TIRED BUT TRUE STORY

Claire was date-raped in high school and became pregnant as a result. On the counsel of her liberal pastor, she got an abortion. After that, she figured, what the heck—she's already had sex, so why not? She slept with anyone and everyone. In college she became a Christ follower and decided to

give up sex. It was a struggle, and one night she gave in and slept with a guy she met at a party. It was just one night (actually, less than that—just a few hours), but she got herpes. There’s no cure for herpes. Now she’s married. She and her husband are facing infertility, as a result of either the abortion or the herpes. Even if she did get pregnant, she wouldn’t deliver vaginally, for risk of blindness for the baby.

This is the part where I know it sounds like sex ed class. You’ve heard a hundred stories like Claire’s, all intended to scare you into abstinence (or at least into using a condom). I confess that’s my agenda too—the abstinence thing. I did not make up Claire’s story, and I do hope it scares the somethin’ out of you. The reason you’ve heard it so often is that it happens more often than anyone ever talks about or discusses publicly. It’s not really information people share in casual party conversation. (“So, I just found out I’ve got a wretched case of genital warts. What’s up with you?”) You never see that story line on the WB. And the tired but real question still applies: Is it worth the long-term risk for a few moments of pleasure and a brief moment of feeling wanted? I’m sure you know Claire’s answer to that.

GROWING UP

As I said in the beginning, I am not about rules. The rules are just a means to an end. Sexual purity is not about being good and staying within the lines. It’s about being at home with God when it comes to your sexuality. There’s nothing hidden or shameful about it. You’re honest with Him about your struggles and trusting Him to give you wisdom and power to make choices that honor and please Him. A pure dating relationship is one in which a couple honors and respects each other, one that draws each of them to God rather than pushes them away.

I think a key principle of pursuing holiness in any area is to not spend energy and effort focusing on the limits and boundaries, trying desperately not to cross the line, but rather to focus on the positive—the freedoms you have within the parameters. Spend your time and energy on truth and on doing the right things. For example, some friends of mine who do premarital counseling encourage engaged couples, when expressing affection, to focus their minds on how much they love the other person, how much they respect the other, trust him or her. Think about how much you want to honor your boyfriend. If that’s where your mind is, then it will be hard for you to put your hands where they shouldn’t be or cross the line in other ways. Spend time praying together and talking about your

relationships with God. It’s hard to follow that up with a mug session.

BECOMING HIS BRIDE

I know that some of the things I’ve said may seem extreme or ultra-conservative, but I can make a long list of women I’ve known over the years who were well on their way to falling in love with Jesus when “Mr. Right (now)” came into their lives, and they were quick to jilt the Savior in favor of a “savior” with skin on him. Some came to realize their misplaced expectations, but not all of them have figured that out, and these have settled for less than what could be. On the other hand, I’ve seen friends who are now married make wise choices and reap the benefits in their married lives and their spiritual lives. I want that for myself and for you.

Falling in love with Jesus as your first love, experiencing the fullness and delight of being His bride, is going to give you the convictions to live freely, to not worry about the boundaries as much as your relationship with Him. As you begin to build that relationship and learn His heart, developing some guidelines is going to keep you on the path of pursuing Him. He, more than anyone else, wants you to experience sexual purity so that you can reap the benefit in your own life as well as honor God and bring Him glory.



Biblical Proverb:
“Women should dress modestly, with decency and propriety.”

Grandma’s Proverb:
“If you’re not serving it for dinner, don’t put it on the menu.”