

# Coworkers and Sex



**A**NGELO WENT BACK TO HIS CUBICLE TROUBLED by the discussion in the lunch room between two of his coworkers. Annie, Roger and Angelo had joined the telemarketing firm about the same time and quickly struck up a friendship. Angelo and Annie were single; Roger was married. Happily married.

Or so it seemed until today.

Angelo couldn't put his finger on it, but there was something different about Annie and Roger's conversation, electricity that wasn't there before. While all three workers identified themselves as Christians, Annie was new to her faith.

Replaying the conversation in his head, Angelo tried to remember what made him uncomfortable about the discussion. He wondered, too, if he should mention it to

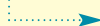
either of them. Most troubling in his mind was the way Roger was talking about his wife. He'd never heard him complain about her before, but now the stream of complaints was long. "My wife doesn't..."; "I wish Alice saw things like you do, Annie." And more.

"Maybe they've just been fighting," Angelo thought to himself. But the next day, the discussion went pretty much the same, with Annie offering sympathy to Roger.

Angelo decided to speak to Roger first. Why?

What's wrong with the nature of Roger and Annie's conversation?

If you're Angelo, how would you handle the situation?



## Scripture Passages

I Corinthians 6:18

I Thessalonians 4:3

Matthew 5:27-30

Romans 3:10; Romans 3:23

Romans 7:14-25

Romans 8:1-11

## In Depth

No discussion of steadfast character would be complete without dealing with physical attraction, sexual temptation and sin. Here are important realities in addressing sexual temptations on the job.

- The sexual temptations we face are not unique. They are faced by many others; in fact, they are faced by most others. (See I Corinthians 10:13) This passage offers comfort as it helps us realize we're not the only ones fighting this sin, and that others most assuredly have faced and overcome it. We can, too. It also assures us we're not alone in overcoming it. God will make a way, but we must be willing to take the way He makes available to us.
- The most common forms of job-related sexual temptation are lust and pornography.
- The natural intimacy that emerges when workers engage in a project or shared objective creates a fertile environment for sexually inappropriate behavior.
- We need to recognize sexual temptation is much different for each gender, especially in terms of vulnerabilities.
- We must be prepared in advance to address the sexual temptations we encounter at work.
- We also must be prepared to address the results of those who yield to sexual temptation. For example, we must be prepared to resist the advances of coworkers.
- We're to flee temptation, not see how close we can get to it without yielding. Flee means just that, run away from the temptation. Most people fail because they choose to face a temptation rather than flee from it. Only face the temptations you cannot flee.

The subject of sexual temptation at work is so huge it could consume a series of studies on its own. However, since the objective of these five studies is to move us from a place where we think ethics depends on circumstance to a place where our lives are governed by what God expects from us, we'll focus this study on identifying weak points in our defenses against sexual sin on the job.

The many ways Christians strive to resist sexual temptation fall into at least three broad categories:

1. Avoiding situations where temptation occurs, or fleeing them when possible.
2. Creating accountability systems that enlist others in helping to resist temptation.
3. Exercising willpower.

Let's examine these three areas.

Avoiding situations where temptation occurs is useful—advisable, in fact—when we've identified temptations we find difficult to resist. However, by itself avoidance can't be our only defense. Why not?

In addition to your answers above, consider these workplace realities:

- Most workplaces wouldn't—and couldn't—segregate men and women.
- Taking gender issues into account when assigning teams and travel plans invites discrimination, making such strategies objectionable to most employers.
- The excitement of teamwork invites intimacy even as it remains a natural part of successful work environments.
- With the increase in same-sex liaisons' acceptability, temptation is no longer merely a gender issue.

That said, the following Scripture passages do offer support for avoidance as at least one tool in our toolbox: I Corinthians 6:18 and I Thessalonians 4:3. Jesus says it in even starker terms in Matthew 5:27-30.

What are some practical ways to “flee sexual temptation” in the following circumstances:

- Viewing pornography on company computers
  
- You're asked to travel on business with a coworker you find sexually attractive
  
- A coworker makes an advance
  
- Company sales material makes use of sexually attractive men and women to promote/sell its products
  
- Your supervisor begins making inappropriate comments

However, no amount of planning will completely shield us from circumstances that offer temptation, so avoidance and flight cannot be our only strategy.

A second major category of defense in this area of our character has been the growth of accountability partnerships. This can be a useful strategy, and it has been an integral part of addiction and recovery groups for years. It can be as simple as forming groups where we ask each other probing questions about our moral purity, or as sophisticated as partnered monitoring of the websites we view on our computers.

Scripture is full of passages which support the idea of strengthening each other in helping each other resist temptation and in encouraging each other when we falter. But there are pitfalls to this strategy.

React to the following statements:

1. For married Christians, their spouses should be their primary accountability partner.
2. Accountability groups are not for keeping secrets from our spouses; they are for helping us process how best to communicate openly and honestly with our spouses when we struggle with a particular sin or temptation.
3. Accountability groups must be segregated by gender, even when the temptation or addiction is not sex-related.
4. Accountability groups are only as good as the willpower of the individual members of the partnership; and they are only useful when all group members are committed to complete honesty.

The third and final broad category for resisting sexual temptation is something we call “exercising willpower.” It doesn’t work. If you struggle with sexual temptation or sexual sin, trying harder not to yield is the poorest advice anyone can offer.

In fact, all of the broad strategies described above falter in the face of these two realities:

- Our default is to rebel against God. (Romans 3:10; Romans 3:23)
- Because our default is to rebel against God, we are not able to overcome our slavery to sin on our own. (Romans 7:14-25)

What that means is trying harder isn’t the secret to overcoming temptation. Cultivating a close relationship with God (made possible because when He looks at us He sees the robe of Christ’s righteousness wrapped around us instead of the filthy rags of our sin) is the key to freeing ourselves from slavery to sin.

It is not avoidance, though avoidance is wise; it is not accountability, though accountability is useful; it is not depending on willpower, because that’s totally useless—it is rather about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and therefore having access to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that signals triumph over temptation and sin. (Romans 8:1-11)

## *Common Sense and Eternal Principles*

- One warning sign intimacy has become dangerous is when we express to others dissatisfaction about our spouses. “My wife doesn’t...” is a good indicator we’re in trouble.
- God views all sexual impropriety as sin. This includes any sexual relations outside of marriage; lust, pornography, etc.
- Human activity to counter sexual temptation is useful, but will ultimately fail in weaker moments. Overcoming sexual temptation requires the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- Spouses must be our primary accountability partners.
- Men and women not married to each other should not be accountability partners, even when the addiction, temptation, affliction is not sexual in nature.
- God takes sexual sin seriously, including private lust and pornography.
- Just being a Christian is not enough. Christians are as prone to sexual temptation as non-Christians.
- We do not have to remain slaves to our compulsions, temptations and sins. The Holy Spirit can work in us to alter our desires.