

Enjoying God's Design for Intimacy

*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth...
Proverbs 5:18*

Introduction: Expectations. We all have them, but they are ultimately the double edged sword. Expectation breeds *anticipation*, a growing excitement of what could be in the future that drives us toward that end. But **expectations can kill**. The overinflated balloon can pop when we realize that our well-intentioned but unrealistic and unrealized expectations will not come to pass. What now?

It's likely that all marriages have experienced this, at least in part or in a season or two, particularly in terms of sexual intimacy. We have been bombarded with images, stories, and scenes of what it is perceived to be, and that has both excited and frustrated us in reality. Nothing we have seen can live up to what we experience, since our experiences are always different, intended to be enjoyed by two people alone. **Hebrews 13:4** says that marriage should be held in honor, and that the *marriage bed* should be **undefiled**. This means that part of what is at stake is holiness and glorifying the Lord, knowing that "*God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous*". But the undefiled nature also means that we fight to keep worldly expectations out, comparisons out, and enjoy a relationship designed to build **intimacy together in a unique way that no one else will experience, we don't need to share, and thus will be part of the whole of enjoying the Lord in marriage**.

Why would we deal with this topic? Isn't this a bit of the third rail in the church? These are fair questions, so let me give some qualifications before we begin:

- **The Bible addresses the topic of sex in marriage, so anything in the Bible is given for our understanding, good, and practice** – We will go over several key passages that every married or desiring to be married couples should know and have on speed dial.
- **The World is speaking, so we must as well** – The system around us capitalizes on mankind's sexual desires, markets to it, talks about it, celebrates it, and tries desperately to normalize the immoral nature of it. When the church fails to speak to the issue of sex, we leave a cavernous void of truth that must be filled.
- **Since marriage should be held in honor and the marriage bed stay undefiled, we will be speaking of general principles and appropriately in public** – In other words, we will not get into specifics of practice, but like any Biblical truth and principle, questions and situations should be fleshed out in **conversation** in appropriate ways and people. This is not a taboo topic, and it is awkward precisely because we do not share in order to avoid comparison. Our goal is not to answer everything, but perhaps create opportunities to have questions come up so we can answer them appropriately.
- **Most marriages struggle in this area ---- silently & painfully** – Often when expectations are dashed, we can create bad habits over time, leading to **sexless marriages** or living like roommates instead of the close, open, and connected relationship that was intended. If that is you, there is hope, but it'll take work. Sex in marriage is NEVER disconnected from every other aspect of your marriage. In fact, sex is a great revealer of the health of marriage, since it demands communication, intimacy in the rest of marriage, selflessness, humility, and loving

care. Ultimately, sex in marriage is redeemed through the gospel, which gives us a new goal, new motivation, and new ability to consider others as more valuable than ourselves.

- **We recognize that some have abuse in the past and sinful realities in the present** – Some here today have been abused and never told anyone, or have never truly been free from it, or are still effected by that sinful act against you. Some have had experiences in the past that have tainted your view of sex because its associated with pain, distrust, and selfishness. These all can be redeemed in the gospel, but that does not mean the pain all goes away. So, as we lay out the ideal in Scripture, understand that we are NOT saying that it should be easy for you or without tension. We are simply laying out the ideal so we know what it possible and expected, so we can trust the Lord and His grace to move toward it.

So we want to talk through this important subject, to push through the awkwardness, and hopefully help us see what God intended for it, what barriers hurt it, and how we can move forward in it.

God's Design & Purpose in Sex

Sex is a rare expression of God's beautiful design in creation as it is intended ONLY within the context and confines of marriage, though one is physically able to engage in it outside of marriage. This means sex reveals what we believe about God, His goodness, and whether we trust Him or not. Sex in marriage is designed for our good. Any action or lustful desire for sex outside of marriage is SIN.

1. **Designed as part of WORSHIPPING the LORD as image bearers** – By way of reminder, Genesis 2 saw sex in marriage as a way of reflecting back praise to God's glory. Sex was the ultimate sign of the covenant of marriage, the height of **intimacy and vulnerability in trusting, loving care** between Adam and Eve --- a wife allowing a husband into her body, with the two becoming literally one flesh. The original design was a sexual union that was *unashamed, selfless, and thus glorifying to God*. Sex was not an end in itself, but a picture, reminder, and way to build closeness and intimacy. When sex got stripped away from the intimacy of marriage, it lost not only purpose but actually countered what it was intended to do.
2. **Procreation** – This was the way that God intended for families to proliferate throughout the world as image bearers. Part of getting married is the intention to have children --- which again has been attacked and rebelled against in our culture – sex without kids, either through keeping away or by murder.
3. **Enjoyment** – This is probably NOT talked about enough in church circles. There IS enjoyment to be found, and God is not a prude. Obviously, the way sex has been tainted by culture has lead believers to think wrongly about what it should be ---- wild with music in the background. But let's look at what Scripture says.

In Proverbs 5-7, a father is warning his son against the wiles of adultery and the adulteress. Men want to be wanted, desire to be desired, and thus are susceptible to temptation along those lines. So the warning and caution is given the way all of Scripture frames it: **avoid temptation by pursuing something better and MORE satisfying**:

Proverbs 5:15-23:

"Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

- 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?*
- 17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.*
- 18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,*
- 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.*
- 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?*
- 21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths.*
- 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.*
- 23 He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.*

Note some key words and concepts: The sexual experience is to be **enjoyed** between a husband and wife alone, not shared with anyone else, in thought or action. Physical pleasure is seen both as **GOOD** and **RESTRAINING**, where pleasure IS found in the marriage experience and not sought elsewhere. Physical features are to be enjoyed and experienced with **delight**, not shame, guilt, or insecurity. This does not mean it will be easy, but will require both discipline and intention since temptation is real and constant. Sex in a healthy marriage can and should be **refreshing, satisfying, affectionate, enjoyable, and a delight** ---- **NOT a mere duty or box-checking activity**

Song of Solomon

This back and forth between husband and wife, two lovers, shows that sex is only a part of pursuing one another, and that sex is in many ways a culmination of an overall pursuit of each other. The goal of sex is not mere sexual gratification. It is a movement toward emotional and spiritual intimacy. This means it is incumbent on **both husband and wife** to move toward one another, while doing so in an understanding way (1 Pet. 3:7). Men are more visual and physical, while God has designed women to be more emotional while desiring connection that is mental and spiritual, not only physical.

Sos 1:15-16 – “Husband: *Behold you are beautiful, my love; behold you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.* Wife: *Behold, you are beautiful (handsome), my beloved, truly delightful.*”

Sos 3:1-2 – “Wife: *On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but found him not. I will rise now and go to the city...I will seek him whom my soul loves.*”

Sos 4:1-2, 5 – “Husband: *Behold you are beautiful my love, behold you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes...Your two breasts like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that graze among the lilies.*”

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

This is an important passage as Paul unpacks marriage realities in a sinful world. Let's look at some timeless principles:

- **Temptation is real and persistent in the realm of sexual immorality.** This gives no excuses, but only realities. Neglecting the sexual relationship in a marriage opens up unnecessary opportunities for sexual immorality
- **Sex is something we GIVE to our spouse, not take** – Sex is ultimately enjoyable when each partner is SELFLESS, not selfish. Each seeks to love and care for the other, which allows for mutual service. But Paul is also abundantly clear. Sex is **expected in marriage**. If you do not want to have sex regularly, do not get married. The word for "give" here is the word "pay or repay", meaning that marriage is offering what is expected in a covenant relationship.
- **Marriage means we are WILLING to give up authority over our own bodies but give it to our spouse** – This is beautiful when it is in the context of loving, open, communicative, and gentle relationship. This is not a license to be DEMANDING, but also speaks against using sex as a means of control ---- "I won't have sex with you unless you _____" ---- It is a giving of oneself wholly to the other, while we both exercise discipline, either to control ourselves from manipulation or demands.
- **This is one of the clearest passages that deals with frequency** – *How often should a married couple have sex? OFTEN.* The only reason NOT to have sex often is 1) by **agreement** – certain situations in life, medically, or other restraining circumstances. Not unilaterally decided but agreed upon; 2) For a **limited time** – Whatever the situation, it should not linger or become habitual; 3) **While devoting yourselves to prayer** – In other words, there is a time to devote to seeking the Lord and His will, but that should be limited and purposeful

What is at stake? A lack of self-control in this area allows Satan to get a foothold, drive a wedge, and open both partners up for temptation. Fighting temptation is a mutual fight, one that both husband and wife have a responsibility to fight.

So sex is important in marriage. It should be a part of pursuing each other as we grow intimately together. It is intended to be a means of worship, not selfish and physical pursuit alone. It should be combined with an overall pursuit of each other in all aspects of life. It is intended to be regular, consistent, and enjoyable. It is a means of closeness and openness, and a picture of the connection that God desires for us to have together.

But this is not always the experience we have. What are the **roadblocks to this kind of intimate pursuit?**

Roadblocks & Challenges to Sexual Intimacy

1. **Shame** – One of the responses of the Fall in Genesis 3 was to hide from God and cover up from each other. What was once done in openness now would be veiled because of the reality of guilt and shame. Many carry in past sexual experiences into their marriage, and it creates a weight, an anchor, wrapped around them. Because of this, a spouse is not able to be completely

vulnerable, open, and intimate. The good news is that **1 Peter 2:6** says that “*whoever believes in Him (Jesus Christ) will not be put to shame.*” In other words, in the gospel, we can find forgiveness, are declared righteous, and have NEW purity in our lives. So often this is a result of **unconfessed and unrepentant sin.** People don’t want to talk about the past, but that is exactly what needs to happen, especially with a spouse who has already chosen to love you unconditionally.

2. **Embarrassment** – I think this comes out of a wrong view of sex. Since the world has high-jacked the experience and has run wild in lust, sometimes the counter has been to view sex as somehow *dirty*, something that happens but should not be talked about, and definitely not enjoyed. Sex in marriage can be a **restored version**, where we do not compare to others we see, but is totally and wholly between two people. That is why any embarrassment of body type or imperfection is loved and received as true beauty in marriage. Attraction to a spouse is holistic, not what the world offers. It is why sex can actually get BETTER over time, since the more comfortable and open we are with each other, the more pleasurable the experience becomes.
3. **Broken Trust** – Sin always stings, and sin against each other stings the worst. Any kind of lust driven infidelity, whether in action or visual stimulus, can break an all-important commodity in marriage: **trust.** Trust is the foundation of vulnerability and intimacy, so however it is broken, it can cause the other to become defensive and less willing to open up. Trust takes time to build and an instant to lose. But the hope we have in marriage is our opportunity for **true, full, and restorative forgiveness.**

Ephesians 4:31-323 “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*”

Whenever there is any sin present in a marriage, it by definition breaks down the relationship ---- both with God and each other. But sin is not the end. In fact, when there is something broken because of sin, the place of restoration is stronger than it was before. *What is required?* Heaps and heaps of grace given to each other, as marriage is one sinner married to another, and we both sin in unique ways. If we are the one who sinned, it is incumbent on us to confess and repent, turning from the sin, and asking for forgiveness. If we are sinned against, it is on us to **forgive rather than hold it against and operate in bitterness, but rather kindness and compassion.** The root word of forgiveness here is the word for “grace”. Grace gives. Grace understands. Grace recognizes our propensity to sin. Grace allows to see our spouse the way God does in Christ. Grace allows a spouse who was wronged at the deepest level to offer forgiveness, knowing that Christ has paid the price for it, has forgiven it, and declared righteous. This is not quick nor easy, but possible and beautiful.

4. **Unresolved Conflict** – The one we love the most tends to be the one we are hurt by and frustrated with the most. When we carry unresolved conflict against each other, our spouse is the last person we want to talk to, let alone be vulnerable physically with!!!! Anger is a result of not addressing issues between each other, and by nature cuts off communication. That is why Paul said this is Ephesians 4:26:

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil

Erin and I made it a rule in our marriage our first year that we would work to resolve conflict before we went to bed, or at least to commit to dealing with it at the earliest possible time. Anger does not go away, but gets suppressed and stuffed down, waiting to erupt at a later time for a lesser infraction. What is often missing in marriages over a year is the ability to sit and talk things out. There is a cost to this, of course, but moving on without resolution creates a layered time bomb that WILL go off. It also wastes so much precious time. It takes **humility and trust in the LORD to stop and make sure we recognize what is going on**. It also means that BOTH spouses must be ready to ask for forgiveness and acknowledge their part in the conflict.

5. **Busyness** – Our lives are exceptionally full at each stage of marriage. Before kids we don't understand how much time we actually have, kids take up all margin, and life runs at a breakneck pace until empty nesting and retirement, but often bad habits have been ground in by then. Time together MUST be a pre-requisite to a healthy marriage. This means we must be **intentional to pursue each other**, to carve out time weekly, monthly, and annually to make sure we are talked up, listened up, and rightly dating each other. We must also make time to have physical and sexual intimacy. The misnomer that it always has to be spontaneous or out of momentary desire does not account for all the other responsibilities in life. Put date nights on the calendar. Put time together physically on a different calendar (that no one can see). Plan a weekend away together. Take walks together.
If we are too busy to pursue each other, we are too busy, and we will leave ourselves open to attack from our enemy and slowly drift toward the roommate status.
6. **Selfishness** – All of marriage thrives when we are selfless with each other. A mark of selflessness is seeking to best in my spouse, thinking of their best and interest rather than our own. This keeps us out of the *quid-pro-quo* conundrum in marriage: *I'll pursue my spouse emotionally so she will have sex with me...I'll withhold sex until he cleans the gutters...I'll buy her flowers and take her on a date so we'll definitely have sex...etc.* Instead, we seek to **love our spouse** in Christ, and do what Philippians 2:3-4 says:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Ask the question: *What would bless my spouse today? How can I move toward them in intimacy?* One of the ways we move toward each other is *ask them what would communicate intimacy to them? Ask them if they feel loved? Pursued? Cared for?*

Conclusion: Sex is important because God created it, and He is no prude. It is to be engaged in, enjoyed, and practiced regularly in marriage. But it also reveals. It is an instrument as part of our pursuit of Christ and each other. We want to counter the consequences of the Fall by not walking in shame, fear, or blame shifting together, but willingly opening up to each other in trust, love, and vulnerability. When I understand what I **deserve in life**, I can take everything else, including sex, with an open hand as a gift of God's grace rather than something I'm owed or demand.

Our hope is that our marriages will reflect the goodness of God in Christ through the gospel, and that would translate to full, delightful, enjoyable, honoring, pure, and worshipful marriages, especially in the area of sexual intimacy.