

# **Intimacy in Marriage**

**Finding Satisfaction with God  
and Each Other**

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Intimacy in Marriage:  
Finding Satisfaction with God and Each Other  
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My beloved is mine, and I am his

– Song of Solomon 2:16



Most weddings are joyous occasions. I have had the privilege of participating in and officiating many of them, and I pray and hope to do many more. One of the aspects I find particularly encouraging about weddings is the anticipation. The intended man and woman find themselves more and more anxious as the wedding day comes. They both anticipate it being the happiest day of their lives. Nothing could be more satisfying than sharing that happiness with those they love and those who love them. Few moments in life are filled with as much anticipatory joy as a wedding.

Marriage itself is also highly anticipated. The marriage that follows the joy-filled wedding ceremony has built in anticipation as well. Because of the books we've read, the movies we've seen, and the fantasies we've dreamed, we anticipate marriage being our stroll into happily-ever-after. And because we have such high expectations, when reality sets in, the let down often becomes unbearable. Anticipation creates expectations. Those expectations are more easily managed and met in the wedding than they are in the marriage.

In a recent MSN survey of divorced couples, nearly 50% of the couples said their divorce was due to unmet expectations. Most marriages run afoul and fail to thrive or survive because expectations are not met. Most of those expectations are based in our assumptions (some consciously, but most sub-consciously) that marriage will be and do for us what only God has promised to be and do. Mainly, we expect marriage to make us happy.

Arguably the most popular pop song in recent times has been *Happy* by Pharrell Williams. The popularity of the song is due to the happiness of the tune, but also because the theme resonates with the innate desire of the human heart. Everyone desires to be happy. Happiness, however is more than a song (a lot more than a song!)

I have often heard people, on the verge of separation or divorce, use the excuse, “I’m not happy. And I know God wants me to be happy and fulfilled.” Admittedly, God does want you to be happy and fulfilled (Jn. 10:10). We are wired for happiness. Our hearts are filled with a desire for satisfaction and contentment. This desire is not wrong. God placed it there. He wants us happy and fulfilled in our marriages. But first he wants us to be happy and fulfilled in him. In fact, the key to happiness in this life is not the right marriage, right job, right pay, right home, right education, or right children. The key to happiness in this life is a right relationship with God. Likewise, happiness in God is the key to happiness in marriage.

## **Satisfaction with God in Marriage**

The difference between a Christian marriage and a non-Christian marriage is that Christian marriage is not for the purpose of making much of marriage or for making much of the two individuals involved. Marriage is not an end. Marriage is a means. Christians are to understand that marriage is a means to making much of Christ.

Contrary to popular romantic notions, you and I were not created for marriage. We were created for God. Yes, God created Adam and Eve with a desire for one another (Gen. 2:24). However, their desire for each other was but a complement to their desire and delight in God. We know this to be true because sin came and wrecked their lives not when they desired something more than each other, but when they desired something more than they desired God, “the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 3:6). Author John Piper reminds us “Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God.”<sup>1</sup> Intimacy and satisfaction in marriage, like all things, begins with being intimate and satisfied in God.

What does satisfaction in God look like? We see it in Psalm 73:25-26 where the Psalmist writes:

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 73 begins with one of the most God-glorifying statements in the Bible. The Psalmist declared in verse one: “Truly God is good to Israel.” There was no doubt in his mind, and he wanted there to be none in the minds of his readers. God is good. This positive assertion is never contradicted by the Scriptures, and in fact is reaffirmed over and over again (Ps. 86:5; 119:68; Mk. 10:18). The Psalmist knows God’s character is not to be called into question. God’s disposition of good is irrefutable.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1995), p. 6.

In other words, the Psalmist wanted to affirm the character of God, while also saying that his situation is different. God is good. “But as for me...”

The conjunction “but” is rarely rightly placed after affirming the goodness of God. It gives the impression of acknowledging God’s goodness, while suggesting that his goodness is absent from your world. “God is good, but my husband...” “God is good, but my wife...” “God is good, but my marriage...”

The Psalmist looked around in his world and declared God to be good, but, as he saw it, God’s goodness was inactive in his world. He looked around at the prosperity of the wicked and was envious of their good fortune. He saw others around him thriving while he struggled. It caused him to be envious of others and wonder whether God was truly as good as he thought.

This is often the case even in marriage. When our satisfaction is not in God, we look around at the situations of others and wonder why their seemingly prosperous life could not be ours. Like the Psalmists we often look around to other marriages and wonder why that can’t be our marriage. We look at other families and wonder why that can’t be our family. Yet, such a perspective rarely leads to anything but discontentment and dissatisfaction with God and my spouse. In other words, we are looking for happiness from marriage rather than from God in marriage.

## Marriage as an Idol

Before we get married, we look to marriage to complete us. After we get married, we look to marriage to content us. More than we are willing to admit, marriage easily becomes an idol.

What is an idol? An idol is anything or anyone we can't be content without. It serves as a God alternative, a counterfeit God.<sup>2</sup> It is "anything you seek to give you what only God can give." For too many of us, marriage has become an idol.

How do we make marriage an idol? We make it an idol when we expect marriage to do for us what only God can do. We expect marriage to give us what only God has promised to give. We expect marriage to make us happy. We expect marriage to finally content us. We expect marriage to complete us. We expect marriage to make life "happily-ever-after." The reason many Christians are so unhappy in marriage is because their idol has disappointed them. Marriage has not met their expectations. What do we do with idols that don't meet our expectations? We discard them. We destroy them and find others.

False views of love and marriage abound in our hearts and mind. This is because many spend more time in fantasy than we do in reality. Movies like *Best Man's Holiday* and TV shows like *Sex in the City*, *Scandal* and all the many *Housewives* dramas continue to give

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Dutton, 2009), p. xvii.

us erroneous and false views of love, sex, and marriage. One of the reasons people struggle with satisfaction, contentment, and intimacy in marriage is because they have filled their hearts and minds with Hollywood's versions of sex and love rather than God's word.

Even more, the movie and music industry today make a mockery of marriage and fidelity. Movies playfully depict adultery. Music glorifies sexual promiscuity. Yet in the real world, adultery and sexual promiscuity are not funny. Such activity ruins people's lives. It scars families for life. But this is what idols do. They offer power and immediate satisfaction, only to extract double the pain and disappointment for what they offered.

We live broken lives in a broken world. Consequently, sinners only have sinners to marry. Thus, we can expect there to be conflict and disappointment. Yet, those conflicts and disappointments in marriage won't be the end of the world if we are focused on that which is greater than marriage. We don't look to marriage to content and satisfy us. We must look to Him who has promised us satisfaction and contentment with Him in our marriage.

So what do we do? If we can't look to marriage to complete us, where do we look? If we can't look to marriage to content us, where do we look? The Bible is clear. We look to Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:2).

## **Christ the Idol-Breaker**

The enthroning of Christ in our lives is the dethroning of everything else, including marriage. When Christ enthrones himself in our lives, he busies himself with breaking the idols of our lives.

It begins with seeking and desiring Christ first and foremost. Jesus taught his disciples, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mt. 6:33). We have been sold a bag of lies. Seeking love and marriage are not the highest priorities for satisfaction in relationships. It is seeking God and his kingdom. Jesus reminds us that seeking pleasure first in God reveals the pleasure in everything else, including marriage. Marriage is good and blessed, and it should be pleasurable and honorable (Pr. 5:19; 18:22; Heb. 13:4). However, this is only true when it is enjoyed as the fruit of a good, blessed, satisfying, and honorable relationship with God. Contrary to misconceptions, God is not a killjoy. He is a pleasure-granting God. “In his presence there is fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11), including the pleasure of satisfaction and contentment in marriage. He only desires that we know that these God-glorifying, soul-satisfying pleasures are at his right hand and nowhere else.

Again, Psalm 73 teaches us to look to Jesus, to desire Jesus above all (73:25). Therefore, I should want my wife to sing every morning, “Jesus, you’re the center

of my joy.” My wife should want me to say everyday, “There is no one on earth I desire more than Jesus.” My natural instinct may want me to be the primary object of my wife’s desire. The problem with that is that sooner or later I am going to disappoint her. By God’s grace, I may make for a good husband, but I make for a terrible god. I pray she would desire Christ above all else. I must be convinced that if she loves Christ first and best, she will be what Christ desires her to be – a good and faithful wife to me, and I likewise a husband to her.

Worldly pleasures come and go. Like the stock market, they are up one day and down the next. This is true even of the pleasure of being married. This is why marriage is not an end. It is a means. The end is Christ – happiness, pleasure, and joy in Him. My marriage works best when I am happy in Jesus, when I choose joy in Him. It really boils down to the choices we make.

## **Choose Happiness**

Believe it or not, happiness is a choice. It is interesting that when God called his people out of Egypt in the Old Testament and began to form them into a nation under his care, he set before them two ways to live. He declared,

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Dt. 30:19).

He set before them life and death, blessing and cursing. He then commanded them to choose life, choose blessing. Life is a choice. Consequently, so too are blessing and happiness.

Everyday our lives are filled with choices: what we listen to, read, and watch, who we talk to, what we talk about, where we go, and how long we stay. Most of these decisions are not life and death, but then again they are. We choose what we let in our lives and how it affects our minds, hearts, and spirit. We choose the people we associate with on a regular basis. We choose how long we linger in front of the television or video screen. We choose whom we befriend on Facebook and what we write on Twitter. All of these choices and more affect the happiness quotient in our lives and thus in our marriage. It behooves us to choose wisely. Happiness demands we choose Christ. Life is found when we choose according to God's Word.

Finding satisfaction with God in marriage begins with choosing to understand a few key principles.

**1. God is not just Father, He is Father-in-Law.**

Remember, if your spouse is a Christian, you are married to a child of God. And just as well as you would desire someone to treat your son or daughter, even more should you desire to treat God's son or daughter. In fact, the Bible calls husbands and wives heirs together in the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). When you realize that you are not just husband and wife, but you are sisters and

brothers in Christ, it should change the way you care for each other. You know that your spouse's Father does not take lightly the mistreatment of his child. Author Gary Thomas explains:

So when I realized I am married to God's daughter – and that you, women, are married to God's sons – everything about how I view marriage changed overnight. It was no longer about just me and one other person; it was very much a relationship with a passionately interested third partner. We have been encouraged to contemplate the Fatherhood of God, a wonderful and true doctrine. But if you want to change your marriage, extend this analogy and spend some time thinking about God as Father-in-Law. Because he is!<sup>3</sup>

**2. A more fruitful marriage is me being a more faithful Christian.** Deepen your relationship to Christ and your relationship with your spouse will be rewarded. Issues in marriage are almost always directly linked to time spent meditating and chewing on the Word of God. Colossians 3:16-24 gives us our perspective:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly....  
And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus....  
Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh to them.... Whatever you do,

work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

When the Word of God is allowed to “dwell in you richly or with abundance” the result will be doing “everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Wives submit to their husbands because the Word of God is dwelling in them richly. Husbands love their wives and are kind to them, serving them as unto the Lord because the Word of God is dwelling in them richly. When we see that our marriages are platforms for service to Christ, we will begin to see a change in our marriage and experience the joy God intends for us. Remind yourself that the path to a better marriage is you being a better, more faithful Christian in whom the Word of Christ is dwelling abundantly. Faithful and fruitful Christians make for faithful and fruitful spouses. You can choose to be one.

**3. Remember that seasons change; Jesus does not.** The test of love is not how it looks in the spring. The true test is how it holds up in the stresses of winter. Being raised in the northern parts of Michigan, I experienced my share of tough winters. In places like Michigan you learn that the true character of a house is not how it holds up to the mild and balmy springtime. The true measure is how it holds up against the harsh winds, rising snowdrifts, and bitter cold of the winter. Unlike Atlanta, when I lived in Michigan we truly experienced the changing of the seasons.

Like all aspects of life, our marriages go through seasons. It is not always springtime in our relationships. The flowers are not always blooming and the birds are not always singing. Winter comes. No marriage stays on an all-time high. The true test of our love for our spouses is how we roll with them when the storms of life come. Marriage can be up and it can be down, but as Ambassador reminds us:

You need to know how to roll with seasons /  
Ask Job, sometimes you go low without the  
reasons / You can be up, you can be down. You  
can be up, you can be down. Everything is for  
a season, seasons go round / keep looking up to  
Jesus when it goes down – up and down. <sup>4</sup>

We can look to Jesus because, unlike the weather, Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8). The seasons of life may change but he doesn't. He is our Lord and our God and he does not change (Mal. 3:6). Therefore we can find our satisfaction and contentment in him. We can be happy in marriage because we first and foremost seek to be happy in Jesus.

Satisfaction and contentment with God in marriage leads to satisfaction and contentment with each other in marriage.

## **Satisfaction with Each Other in Marriage**

Unfortunately, many of us were introduced to sex in shameful and hurtful ways. For too many of us, our earliest experiences were from movies, books, music, pornography, promiscuity, abuse, and other dishonorable sources. My earliest memory of sex is my father forcing himself on my mother at a moment when she wanted nothing to do with intimacy. Yet he would not stop. Many of us can tell similar tales of aberrant and destructive experiences, leaving us with warped, shameful, and even hurtful notions of what sex is.

Consequently, much of what we learned about sex we learned from the streets, our peers, or even worse, trial and error. Little did we know the lasting affects such ignorance and misbehavior would have on us. Nor did we realize at the time the baggage and burden that would be brought upon us even as we became Christians and got married.

Learning unhealthy and unbiblical norms of sex and sexuality has consequences. In fact, usually two extremes occur as a result and impact our ability to be satisfied and contented in marriage. One, you become overly sexualized and you think sex must happen if you get within ten feet of your spouse. Sex becomes an almost uncontrollable drive, rather than an instrument of God's glory. Your spouse begins to feel like a sex object rather than your beloved spouse.

Or, secondly you become overly sensitive to your sexual misbehavior and it keeps you from behaving rightly in marriage. Your past sexual sins hold you in bondage. Unable to extricate yourself, you find yourself unable to enjoy the gift of sex rightly. Sex then becomes merely tolerable, but rarely preferable and enjoyable.

Still, for some of us there was no deviant or promiscuous behavior. However, sex was a topic we heard about but never was allowed to discuss. Thus, even today it is hard to talk about it. It was a forbidden subject before marriage, and it remains a forbidden subject still.

God desires for us to be happy in our marriages. A huge aspect of that happiness is a healthy and satisfying sex life. Finding satisfaction in God leads us to finding satisfaction in each other. For most people, that includes sexual intimacy. I want to share with three ideas for healthy sex within the bounds of marriage. First, we need to understand God's glorious design for sex. Then, we need to understand the importance of having an active sex life. And finally, we'll share some principles on having good sex.

Now while I don't write as an expert on sex (though my wife might beg to differ!), these are just a few pastoral reflections with over 20 years of marital wisdom thrown in.

## On God's Glorious Design for Sex

Sex, like everything, was given and ordained by God for his glory and our good. Consequently, when you are thinking rightly about God and pursuing him and his kingdom, your desires for your spouse will be rightly ordered. Even though, like everything, sex has been stained and perverted by sin, the end for which it was given has not changed. From the very beginning God ordained sexual union between a husband and wife for his glory. The glory of God is that a husband and a wife would experience the understanding and subsequent joy of sexual union. Biblically speaking, there are at least four means for understanding God's purpose in giving and our joy in experiencing faithful marital sexual union:<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Consummation of Marriage

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) The oneness and unity in marriage is best expressed physically through sex. A man and a woman are united in sex like nothing else they experience together. They not only behold each other's nakedness, but they embrace each other and physically become one, even as they spiritually are one. Thus, it is most appropriate that one of the first acts performed after the wedding ceremony is consummating or sealing that union with the uniquely uniting activity of sexual intercourse. God expects a husband and wife to be

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5 Denny Burk, “*What is the Meaning of Sex?*” (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013), Kindle edition. Burk borrows these four biblical purposes from Dennis P. Hollinger and his book, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*. 19

“one flesh” and has given the gift of sex to visibly and experientially demonstrate that oneness.

## **2. Procreation**

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...” (Gen. 1:28). The sexual relationship between a husband and wife is not meant to be a one time or momentary experience. If the point of sex was merely the consummation of marriage then we might be lead to think “one and done.” However, God also designed sex as a means for the propagation of humanity. Sex is the means through which God desires us to have children. Therefore, in commanding Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, he was commanding them to have sexual relations with each other. In fact, children are called the “fruit of the womb” (Ps. 127:3). As such, they are the God honoring harvest of seeds sown in sexual intimacy.

Procreation continues to be one of the primary reasons the Bible gives for sexual intercourse. While not all couples can have children due to physical and biological constraints, having children is still a good and godly consequence of the sexual union.

## **3. Expressing Love**

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine” (Song 1:2). Sex is communication. When you have sex with your spouse, you are communicating a need and desire for them. Sex communicates with the body what we say with our mouths, namely “I love you and want to be with you.”

Carolyn Mahaney is correct when she writes: “Marital sex is the pinnacle of human bonding. It is the highest form of the communication of love – a language that expresses love without words.”<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Pleasure

The Bible does not mince words when it comes to enjoying intimacy with your spouse. “Rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breast fill you at all time with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (Pr. 5:18-19). Sex is intended to be pleasurable. The proper experiencing of sexual relationship reveals this to be unquestionably true. God did not have to design sex as indescribably pleasurable. Yet he did, and thus to glorify him in it is not only to engage it as he has prescribed, but also to enjoy it as he has designed. In addressing women, Carolyn Mahaney again writes:

Think about how God created your body. Have you ever stopped to consider why He made the clitoris? It has only one function – to receive and transmit sexual pleasure. God easily could have eliminated this otherwise unnecessary part of our anatomy. But He didn’t. He gave us this little organ for no other reason than for sexual enjoyment.<sup>7</sup>

Sex was given to Adam and Eve for the purposes of making much of God. Sin did not change that purpose. It has perverted the use of sex and has led to abuse, but

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6 C.J. Mahaney, *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p. 111.

7 Mahaney, *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God*, p. 110.

it did not change the purpose of God. God has ordained sexual intimacy as an integral part of marital happiness. It is not the all-important part that some make it out to be, but it is an important part that has significant impact.

## **On Having an Active Sex Life**

Like any aspect to marriage, sexual health takes effort. Our lives are busy. Stresses are a regular part of it. It is easy to neglect the business of sexual intimacy, but you do so at the detriment of your relationship. A sustained, fruitful, and mutually satisfying sex life does not just happen. It has to be cultivated. Here are two things to consider in cultivating a good sex life: spontaneity and planning.

### **Spontaneity**

Yes, sex should be spontaneous. You should have times when the unexpected grips you and suddenly the passion of the moment overtakes you. Let it happen. Pray for it to happen. Be unpredictable. If sex for you is normally a bedtime activity, find an opportunity to do it during the day. If you are normally in the bedroom, look for opportunities to exchange sexual pleasures in places other than the bedroom. If you are the one who is less aggressive, less likely to initiate sexual intimacy, surprise your spouse by being intimate when he or she is least expecting it. When a sudden sexual urge hits you, don't fight it or suppress it. Express it! Be willing to interrupt getting dressed for church on Sunday morning with a

quickie in the bathroom or shower. A healthy sex life is one that is not always predictable. Passion is not always planned. In fact, unplanned passion can be some of the sweetest.

## **Planned**

Planned times of intimacy can be just as pleasing. In fact, there are certain times when both of you should plan on being sexually engaged. I call these times the “R”s You Ready for Making Love?

### *Reunion*

Whenever you have been apart for a few days, and have slept in separate beds, there should be the anticipation of intimacy when you return. Know that it is coming. Look forward to it. Plan it. Send messages and exchanges phone calls reminding each other of the anticipation. When I have to be away from home for an extended time, I love getting texts from my wife informing me that she can't wait to feel my body nestled up close to hers again. She echoes what the bride in Song of Solomon said in anticipation of her love, “My beloved put his hand to the lath, and my heart was thrilled within me” (Song 5:4).

### *Recreation*

If you go on vacation and are going to spend time in a hotel or cabin, someplace of privacy apart from the confines of your own home, then why not anticipate sexual intimacy and activity? Vacations (however brief) are made for you to rest and reconnect. Intentionally

work in a time for intercourse into your time away. Special perfumes, colognes, and new nightgowns (or no gowns at all) usually do the trick.

### *Reconciliation*

God has wonderfully placed within our marital relationship the best reboot button ever – sex. We all have our disagreements and disruptions. Two sinners living in close proximity to each other are going to eventually rub each other the wrong way. Ok, it happens. Yet, don't allow it to fester. Deal with it. Confess it. Bring others in (if necessary) to resolve it. Learn to forgive each other. And then show that forgiveness has taken root in consummating your union once again. Passionate fighting can lead to passionate lovemaking. Use them both for your good and the glory of God.

Intimacy is important and it requires sincerity. In today's world it is possible to give the public impression of love, and yet privately show little to no affection. Facebook and Twitter are filled with Romeos and Juliets whose intimacy and romance go no further than a post or a tweet. Don't be a Facebook lover and not love her face to face. Don't love him on Twitter and not love him between the sheets. I am amazed at how many people post and tweet how much they love their husband or wife, and yet when they are together there is little to no real intimacy going on. It's fine to tell the world how much you love him. However, to do so in a public space and then not to show him the same intimacy in private or not to pleasure her when you're alone is hypocritical.

Real love does not happen on your home page. It happens when you are home actively seeking to honor God and enjoy of the pleasures of intimacy with one another.

## **On Having Good Sex**

God gave the gift of sex and as such it is good. Not only is it a good thing, the experience of it should be good as well. Sex is designed to be mutually satisfying. Yet many struggle to experience the satisfaction that they know they should have.

Obviously there is the possibility of physical and biological medical issues. The lack of a sex drive due to male or female impotence, the depreciation of the libido, or pain and discomfort during sexual intercourse are serious issues and should be looked into by your physician. There may be emotional and even psychological barriers due to past experiences, hurts, and/or abuse. All these issues need to be taken into consideration when dealing with this sensitive and potentially explosive topic.

Unfortunately, many of us don't want to talk about it. However, this is unfair to our spouses and family. A lack of sexual desire could be a sign of other, more serious issues. Rather than having your spouse think it is a lack of desire to be with him or her, you should assure him or her that is not the case.

With that being said, if things are as they should be, and there are no major health concerns, here are some truths to consider for having a good and glorious sex life within marriage.

## **See Sex as a Gift from God**

God smiles on sexual intimacy within marriage, because sex is a gift designed by God to be enjoyed within the blessed confines of God's prescription for it. Don't use it selfishly. It is not a weapon against bad behavior or a reward for good. Many women hold sex over the head of their husband and grant it or deny it according to her whim. This does not honor God. Sex with your spouse is not just a gift you give each other, but it is a gift given to you by God. Cherish it and honor God with it. As someone has said, sex should be "hot and holy." Remember, the Bible says, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love" (Pr. 5:18-19).

To this end, be careful not to sin in seeking to enjoy God's gift. Many people find it exciting and in some instances believe it necessary to use pornography as a stimulant for sexual intimacy in marriage. Pornography is a perversion of God's gift, no matter how pleasing it may appear to be. It demeans women, corrupts men, and dishonors God. The gift of sex is one of those gifts from God that should be experienced and not observed.

Paul Miller, in *A Praying Life*, makes the point:

Sexual love in marriage is beautiful; sexual love observed is pornography. The act of observing changes sexual intimacy. Something just disappears when you try to capture or observe them. <sup>8</sup>

God did not give sex to us to satisfy our base, voyeuristic longings. God gave us the gift of sexual intimacy to be experienced within the blessed confines of a mutually encouraging, God-pleasing marriage (Heb. 13:4).

## **Know your Spouse's Body and How it Works**

Sex is better when you engage it according to knowledge. Certain parts of our anatomy are designed for the purpose of sexual stimulation. Know what those are. One couple that we counseled had been married for over a year and was having trouble with intimacy. The wife finally admitted that she had not experienced an orgasm since they were married. It was devastating to her husband. For a full year he thought she was enjoying their sexual relationship just as he was. It was not until she admitted she was not that they began to enjoy a healthy, fruitful sex life.

Never assume your spouse is pleased. Never assume that what you think is stimulating and pleasing actually is. Observe reactions. Find out what stimulates your spouse and what does not. Men, do not take your wife's

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Miller, *A Praying Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2009), p. 127.

pleasure for granted. The Bible says, “Live with your wife in an understanding way...” (1Pet. 3:7). Your sexual pleasure will be rewarded according to your knowledge.

No one wants to keep having sex while not being appreciated. Arguably the most important verse for sexual fulfillment and satisfaction in the Bible is Matt. 7:12 “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...” Do you enjoy your spouse’s attention during sexual intimacy? Make sure you are giving the same personal attention you desire. The pleasure you desire to receive must first be the pleasure you desire to give. This often involves communication, particularly during sexual intimacy. Verbally expressing yourself and seeking to understand your spouse’s body during sex communicates interest and care. If you don’t ask, you may never know.

## **Aim to Please**

The most rewarding part about sex should be the pleasure it brings your spouse. This is important for the men who, for the most part, achieve sexual satisfaction more easily and quickly (sometimes too quick!) than women. Therefore, we have the tendency to assume our wives enjoyed it as much as we did. Not always. Therefore, make it your aim to pleasure your spouse.

This pleasing each other often involves creativity. In fact, I would encourage as much creativity as the two of you enjoy and brings glory to God.

Sex does not need to be boring in order to please God. Within the confines of the privacy of your intimacy, many things are open to you so long as both agree and find it pleasing. Our bodies are designed in many pleasurable ways and thus mutual stimulation in a variety of ways and positions are open to you. Don't fear experimentation! If each of you comes to the marriage bed with the pleasure and encouragement of the other in mind, each should find satisfaction. Remember what the Bible says explicitly about this: "Awake, north wind! Rise up, south wind! Blow on my garden and spread its fragrance all around. Come into your garden, my love; taste its finest fruits" (Song 4:16).

As an example, a woman recently revealed to me that when she and her husband were 25 years old, he chased her around the house. Now they are 50 and she has to chase him. Praise God the chase continues! My wife and I have been married for over 21 years. I am pleased to say that after 21 years of marriage and sexual intimacy my wife and I still enjoy reminding each other how good and satisfying sex was the night before.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to remember sex in marriage is not just a physical experience. It is a spiritual experience as well. And just as it has physical benefits and pleasures, so also it spiritually benefits and pleasures. The sexual relationship forms a bond that nothing else can. As God

promises in Genesis 2:24, and echoes in 1Cor. 6:16: “The two become one flesh.” God designed sex to create oneness. The oneness we have with Christ is reflected in marriage by the oneness we have with each other. It is what makes marriage a marriage and reflects the design of God. Consequently, it must be cherished, nourished, and regularly attended to. Barbara Rainey sums it up well. In reflecting upon her marriage to her husband Dennis, she writes Barbara Rainey sums it up well:

Our coming together sexually was a key part of what has kept our relationship a marriage—not merely friendship, a roommate living arrangement. Sexual intimacy with my husband gives both of us the comfort of being known and accepted on a deep level that is unlike other human relationships. Safety and security are the result when we experience being “naked and not ashamed” as did Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter two.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, remember that sex is a means, not an end. This is the error and disconnect of sex outside of marriage. It is out of the will of God because pre-marital or extra-marital sex is an end and not a means. God intends sex for our pleasure, but even more for his glory. And when used rightly it is both enjoyed and glorious. The end is the two of you in union with each other and in communion with God. Each sexual action should be bringing you closer and closer, and thus in greater

appreciation for God and his goodness. This is why that when sex slows down (and eventually it will) or when sex ends (and one way or another it will), your relationship will continue to grow and endure because the end, not the means, for which sex was given, namely the glory of God, was cherished most. And that never ends (Ps. 104:31).



## **About the Author**

Anthony J. Carter is the lead pastor of East Point Church in East Point, GA. He is the author and/or editor of several books including *On Being Black and Reformed*, *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African-Americans into Reformed Christianity*, and *Blood Work: How the Blood of Christ Accomplishes our Salvation*. Besides his duties as a pastor, he is the husband of Adriane and the father of Anthony Jr., Rachel, Sarah, Siera, and Ana. They live in the Atlanta area where he enjoys studying, golf, and chillin' with the family.

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