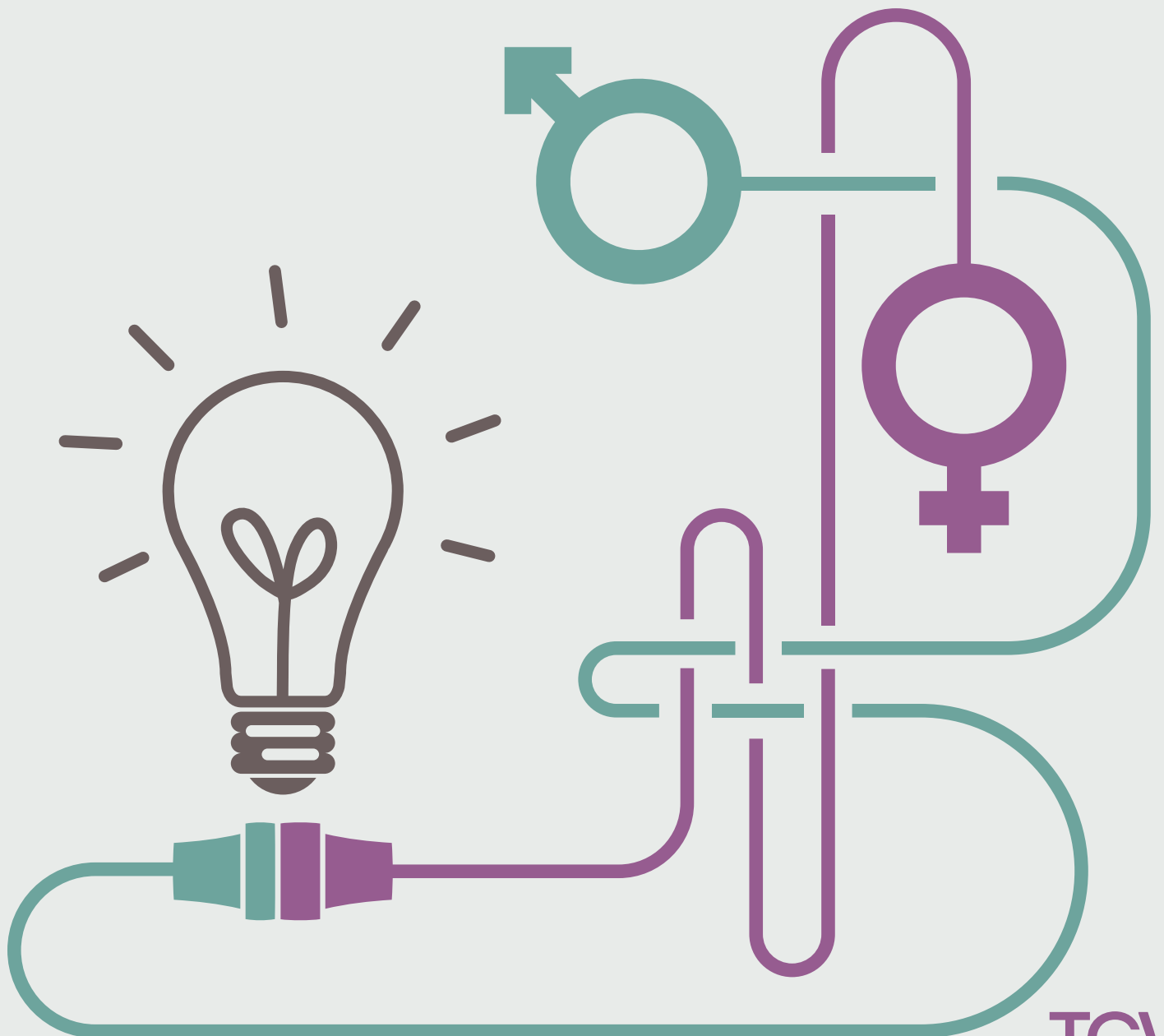


Good Ideas for Great Sex

Quit Singing the Bedroom Blues

FROM TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN



Good Ideas for Great Sex: *Quit Singing the Bedroom Blues*

From *Today's Christian Woman*

Copyright © 2015 Christianity Today

Published by Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

TodaysChristianWoman.com

ChristianityToday.org

All Rights Reserved

Unless otherwise specified, Scripture references are from the Holy Bible New Living Translation®, NLT®. Copyright 1996, 2004, 2007, by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Contributors: Brittany Bergman, Kim Eckert, Ashley Grace Emmert, Shannon Ethridge, Shaunti Feldhahn, Dorothy Littell Greco, Sheila Wray Gregoire, Les & Leslie Parrott, Harry W. Schaumburg, Juli Slattery, Greg and Erin Smalley, Michael Sytsma, Debra Taylor

Compiling Editor: Ashley Grace Emmert

The *Today's Christian Woman* Team

Publisher: Terumi Echols

Editor: Kelli B. Trujillo

Senior Graphic Designer: Jillian Hathaway

Administrative Editor: Natalie Lederhouse

Editorial Coordinator: Joy Beth Smith

Marketing Coordinator: Kristen Cloyd

Production: Diana Prange

Table of Contents

Introduction	4	Chapter 6	29
Chapter 1	6	Can My Marriage Win Over My Past?	
“I Hate Sex!”		<i>After years in an unhealthy sexual relationship, enjoying intimacy in marriage is a daily battle.</i>	
<i>There’s hope for your life between the sheets.</i>		By Brittany Bergman	
Chapter 2	10	Chapter 7	33
Improve Your Sex IQ		Why an Orgasm Is Not the Pinnacle of Sexual Maturity	
<i>7 things you need to know about sex</i>		<i>The intricate connection between your faith and your sex life</i>	
By Debra Taylor and Dr. Michael Sytsma		By Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg	
Chapter 3	17	Chapter 8	37
When He Has the Headache		13 Ways to Boost the Passion in Your Bedroom	
<i>How to navigate diverse sex drives in marriage</i>		<i>How to build a great sex life in your marriage</i>	
By Dorothy Littell Greco		Compiled by Ashley Grace Emmert	
Chapter 4	22	Reflection Questions	42
Are We Sexually Incompatible?		Conclusion	44
<i>No matter how long you’ve been married, it’s not too late for a great sex life.</i>		Contributors	45
By Sheila Wray Gregoire			
Chapter 5	26		
Are Sexual Fantasies Okay?			
<i>Can what’s in your mind help improve your physical experience?</i>			
By Shannon Ethridge			

Introduction

BY ASHLEY GRACE EMMERT

The thing about sex as Christian women is this: Sometimes it seems like no one ever talks about it. Or at least, no one seems to talk honestly about the struggles we can face in this area of life.

Why is that, exactly?

I think it's because no one is sure exactly *how* to talk about it. Many Christian women were told, growing up, that waiting for sex until marriage meant your sex life *in* marriage is going to be all fireworks and orgasms. But what happens when it's not? What happens when your best "together time" is only so-so? Or what about the reality that many couples deal with painful emotions and frustrations related to sexual intimacy?

These are conversations we rarely hear or have, even in the closest of women's small groups. At TCW, we believe it's high time we open it up for discussion. Isolating ourselves in our struggles and dissatisfaction will only give the Enemy room to make us feel like failures. That is clearly *not* God's intention for his good gift of human sexuality.

In *Good Ideas for Great Sex*, we've gathered some of the best new content from *Today's Christian Woman* to help you quit singing the bedroom blues. This resource covers topics like:

- How do you go about improving your sex life without fear of hurting your husband's feelings?
- What if you're never in the mood?
- What if you're often in the mood, but he doesn't seem quite as interested?
- How can sexual struggles affect your spiritual life?
- How can you work through the shame or hurt resulting from sexual experiences, mistakes, and addictions?

We're taking everything into account: your spiritual health, your emotional health, and even your physical health. The insights you'll find on these pages come from experts, counselors, and real women who aren't afraid to tell you that great sex requires work, but it's worth it.

To get the most out of this resource, don't just read it—reflect on it. Use our Reflection Questions on page 42 to dive into Scripture, to pray through your responses, and perhaps even to journal some of your thoughts. Or, for a different approach, read this book together with your spouse and use the Reflection Questions to spark discussion about your relationship.

Remember, a great sexual relationship with your spouse won't ever just "happen." Our hope is these insights will strengthen your marriage as you enjoy God's gift of sexual intimacy. So go ahead, grab some coffee, and settle in for a good read.

Chapter 1

“I Hate Sex!”

There's hope for your life between the sheets.

BY DR. JULI SLATTERY

An adapted version of this TCW article is included in Dr. Juli Slattery's recent book [*25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask About Love, Sex, and Intimacy*](#) (Moody Publishers) along with many more honest insights about sexuality. You can find more insights from Juli via her [Authentic Intimacy blog](#) on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#).

I hate sex,” Shelly told me. “It makes me angry to hear you even suggest that I’m supposed to be enjoying it. I’ve been married 23 years and have never enjoyed it. Frankly, I do it because I’m supposed to.”

I hear from women like Shelly quite often. They feel ripped off, like they’ve been cheated out of something they’re supposed to enjoy. The message that sex is a gift from God almost sounds *insulting*. Instead, they view sex as the gift they must continually, and begrudgingly, give to their husband.

To some degree, many years of my marriage could be described by that same sentiment. I didn’t hate sex, but I certainly dreaded it. I resented the fact that my husband’s pleasure had to come at the expense of my pain. But as a woman who longed to be a godly wife, I determined before the Lord that I would meet my husband’s needs. While God was probably pleased with that attitude, it certainly didn’t represent the true healing he wanted to do in my heart and in my marriage.

On this journey, God has taught me—and is still teaching me!—what true sexual intimacy can be. Every woman’s story is different, so I’m not offering a simplistic

formula that will guarantee a miracle in your bedroom. But I do believe God is able to bring healing into every woman's heart.

Address the Obstacles

It's important to start out by addressing some common barriers that prevent women from enjoying sex. While some men want to have sex every three hours and others may want to do so once a week, almost universally men find sex pleasurable. This is not true for most women. Female sexuality is far more complicated, and obstacles to sexual pleasure typically fall in three categories: physical, relational, and emotional.

Physical

Sexual response is complicated. It involves many functions of the body, including the endocrine, circulatory, skeletal, muscular, and reproductive systems. That means a lot can go wrong. For example, an underactive thyroid can destroy sexual desire and response. An imbalance of hormones will do the same. Medications like antidepressants and even decongestants can impact sexual function.

Physical obstacles to sexual pleasure may also be difficult to diagnose, partly because physical pain can have a psychological root. Women who experience vaginismus (pain during intercourse) have a learned fear response to intercourse, causing the vaginal muscles to tighten. Even your OBGYN may not be able to explain why sex always hurts or why it started hurting after you had your second baby.

I recommend going beyond a simple doctor's visit. Search for the right doctor, midwife, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner who understands sexual functions and disorders. Search until you get answers—you never know what you may find. (After years of sexual pain, one woman I know discovered that her acne cream interfered with her sexual response.)

Relational

You can have a great marriage and still have a rotten sex life, but the quality of your marriage is still the foundation for sexual intimacy. Ask yourself a few important questions to determine the current health of your marriage: Do you trust your spouse in the bedroom? Is he sensitive to your needs? Do you communicate with each other about sex? Are there secrets, bitterness, or unresolved tensions between you?

Sara hated sex. Over the 11 years of their marriage, it was a demand her husband, Jake, made several times a week. He never asked if she would like to have sex; he as-

sumed it was his God-given right as a married man. Sex made Sara feel like an object. She wondered if Jake even cared that it was her body he was being intimate with.

Joyce and Ben had different barriers. For one, during their 19 years of marriage, Ben had dabbled off and on with porn. Second, Ben confessed to a one-night stand on a business trip, but the repercussions were never dealt with. Instead, the matter was quickly swept under the rug as if it never happened. This left Joyce feeling like a part of her heart was dead. She consented to share her body with Ben but kept her heart closed to intimacy.

Sexuality represents some of our greatest vulnerabilities. In the daily routine of marriage, we often don't stop to consider how we've been wounded in marriage, or why we don't trust the man who sleeps besides us every night. But until these issues are surfaced and addressed, physical pleasure and freedom is unlikely to be a reality.

Emotional

This topic would be hard to adequately cover in a book, let alone part of an article! Of all the barriers to sexual enjoyment, I believe the most common are emotional—and emotions run deep.

Some women have a history of pain that has paired sex with extremely negative and painful emotions. For them, sex equals shame. It equals guilt. It's shrouded in sin. It's made them feel exploited. For women with emotional barriers like these, the issues don't disappear on their wedding day. Putting on a ring and saying vows in a church doesn't erase those messages.

The emotional trauma connected to sexual brokenness is often so deep that you may not even be aware of it. In fact, many women don't remember the details of childhood sexual abuse until they reach adulthood. They simply carry a vague sense that "something isn't right."

Other women have no history of sexual trauma or guilt from past mistakes, but they still can't seem to enjoy sex. I've met women who saved themselves for marriage, dreaming of the ecstasy that sex promises. But no matter how hard they try, they simply don't feel free to enjoy sex. The idea of trying something new brings panic and waves of disgust.

Expose the Lies

Healing from physical, relational, and emotional barriers takes work and effort, starting with a commitment to identify and address those barriers. But part of working through these barriers is breaking down a few commonly held lies. These are

the lies that keep women from pursuing healing. They're the lies that make women assume, "This is as good as it's going to get." If you're tired of disappointment in the bedroom, your journey toward healing may mean overcoming these lies.

• **Lie #1: God created sex primarily for a man's pleasure.** Because women believe this lie, they build sexual intimacy around a man's needs, having sex when and how he wants it. After years or decades of marriage, you may never have considered that your needs matter too! It is worth exploring how sex can be satisfying for you. It is worth pursuing counseling to work through the pain of the past. Don't settle!

• **Lie #2: It's not right for a godly woman to be sexual.** No one says this lie out loud, but a lot of women live by it. Sexual excitement is automatically linked with sexual immorality. Other women "punish" themselves for past sexual mistakes by not enjoying the sexual aspect of their marriage. They've bought the lie that to be sexual means to be sinful.

Take a Step Toward Healing

Because sex is such a private area of struggle, many women don't know where to go for help. They simply settle for frustration in this area of life. We live in a day and age when help is readily available for all kinds of issues—even sexual ones. Yet, reaching out to a counselor or even buying a book on the topic is frightening. If there's sexual trauma in your past, or events in your life marred by shame, the thought of talking through this pain may seem unbearable.

Would you be willing to take one small step? That might be calling a counselor, simply praying with your husband about your sex life, or studying Scripture. Linda Dillow and I wrote a Bible study called *[Passion Pursuit](#)* to help women identify the lies they believe, and to embrace God's truth about sexuality. Through this study, we've seen women set free. Women have started enjoying sex even after decades of miserable sex lives.

As obvious as it sounds, nothing in your life will change if you change nothing in your life. Just like your kitchen won't magically clean itself, your sexual struggles and wounds won't simply disappear one day. So go ahead: Address the lies. Break down the obstacles. No one can promise you that your sex drive will go from zero to 60 in 90 days. We live in a fallen world filled with disappointment and brokenness. But God is in the business of healing and redeeming our pain. Don't give up hope.

This article was originally published on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#) in 2015. All rights reserved.

Chapter 2

Improve Your Sex IQ

7 things you need to know about sex

BY DEBRA TAYLOR AND DR. MICHAEL SYTSMA

Sex seem like it's the same old thing? Does it feel frustrating at times? What you don't know about sex can hurt you and your spouse! In our many years counseling couples, researching sexuality, and training other Christian therapists, we've discovered human sexuality continues to develop and reveal new information. Here are seven “biggies” about sex that most couples don't know.

1. Initiating Sex Isn't the Only Way to Express Sexual Desire

Although 80 percent of couples report that the husband wants sex more often than his wife, this may be a skewed number, partly because of the way we define sexual desire. Most of us typically think of sexual desire as a hunger for sex—often with sexual thoughts or fantasies—that prompts us to initiate sex.

It turns out, however, that most women experience a receptive type of sexual desire. Twenty years of research confirms that for many women desire is “triggered” by thoughts and emotions arising during sexual excitement, not before.

So when a husband becomes frustrated because he wants his wife to pursue him sexually and he believes that she has no interest in sex because she doesn't do that, he's actually not giving her enough credit! Most women will respond positively to sexual advances—they just don't initiate them because that's not the way they were designed.

Since our culture defines sexual desire as that initiating/seeking behavior, we don't identify a woman's receptivity as desire. But men and women (usually) respond to different types of sexual stimuli and approach their sexuality differently.

This is a key area of misunderstanding between husbands and wives. Many women have commented to us, "I enjoy sex once we're 10 to 15 minutes into foreplay, and I think, *Wow! We should do this more often!* But during the week I hardly ever think about it. I wish I felt more sexual than I do because I enjoy the closeness it brings."

Most of us assume our partner should act like we do. By recognizing that most men are proactive with sex and most women are reactive, and then by accepting and respecting those differences, we can allow a woman's type of sexual desire to "count."

2. Breastfeeding Has a Direct Link to Sexual Frequency

Lowered sex drive is extremely common after childbirth, and even throughout the first year, particularly in breastfeeding women. Many couples don't realize the impact childbirth and

What Sex Can Do for You!

- Wards off heart attacks. Frequent sexual intercourse (twice or more per week) lowers your chance of a fatal heart attack.
- Lowers heart disease. DHEA, released with orgasm, can reduce the risk of heart disease. And testosterone reduces harm to the coronary muscles if a heart attack does occur.
- Helps husbands live longer. Two or more orgasms a week help men live longer and healthier.
- Improves your sleep. Orgasm causes a surge in oxytocin and endorphins that help people sleep.
- Makes you look younger. In a study of 3,500 European and American women and men, one of the strongest correlates of youthful appearance was an active sex life (three or more times a week).
- Increases fertility and regulates menstruation. Regular intimate sexual activity with a partner promotes fertility by regulating menstrual patterns.
- Decreases pain from menstrual cramps, arthritis, and headaches. It increases levels of endorphins and corticosteroids, raising pain thresholds.
- Reduces stress.

breastfeeding can have on their sex life. Prolactin, the hormone that enables women to make breast milk, also lowers sexual drive (though scientists still can't tell us why). Breastfeeding women frequently feel tired, overwhelmed, and—in their own words—“like a cow” during the early months of breastfeeding. Yet their husband's sex drive hasn't lessened.

Combine this with what's going on in the husband at this point. For many husbands, their wife's attention is now shifted from him to the baby. Her decreased desire to touch, cuddle, or have sex may prompt increased pressure from him, which is typically counterproductive. The result is an increasing gap between what he wants and what she wants.

Many couples, whether breastfeeding or bottle feeding, aren't prepared for the multiple changes each baby, especially the first, adds to their relationship. They believe they'll zip through those first four to six weeks and then—poof!—resume their sexual relationship without a hitch. These unrealistic expectations can lead to a great deal of disappointment, frustration, and conflict.

Libido doesn't usually “jump back” to pre-pregnancy levels until several months after a mom quits breastfeeding—sometimes as long as one year after stopping. If couples realize this is common, they can better talk through the timing of stopping, the pros and cons of breastfeeding and bottle feeding, and the adjustments required to adapt as a couple through this time.

Do a Couple-Bonding Activity: Make Love!

The surge in oxytocin at orgasm stimulates feelings of affection, intimacy, and closeness with your spouse. Consistent mutual sexual pleasure increases bonding within your relationship.

You may be more “normal” in your frequency than you realize. “Normal” couples vary widely in how often they have sex. The most common frequency for having sex is once a week. You were expecting 2.5 times a week, weren't you? Actually, that's the second most common frequency, while the third is once a month.

3. Most Women Need Clitoral Stimulation to Reach Orgasm

More than 60 percent of women must have direct clitoral stimulation in order to climax. In fact, believing a woman should achieve orgasm through intercourse alone is like expecting a man to reach orgasm by only stroking his testicles. Don't ignore the facts of anatomy. A woman's clitoris is similar to the head (glans) of the man's penis. Often the clitoris isn't stimulated by intercourse. If the head of the

penis wasn't involved in intercourse, he wouldn't reach orgasm quickly either!

That doesn't mean that a guy reaching immediately for his wife's clitoris to "rev her up" is a good idea. Women come in all shapes and sizes—physically, emotionally, and particularly, sexually—so the only safe way to approach her clitoris is to find out what she wants and likes. A rare woman might be okay with "starting" quickly for her clitoris; most will be offended or turned off. Like the penis, the clitoris engorges with blood during arousal. Touching before she's aroused can be unpleasant, or even painful.

Women differ greatly in how they enjoy having their clitoris stimulated, and the types of stimulation can vary during the different stages of lovemaking. It's helpful (and can be fun) for a wife to show her husband how she wants to be stroked by placing her hand over his and actually putting pressure on his fingers to demonstrate where she likes to be touched, how lightly or firmly, and how slowly or quickly she likes the movements to be.

4. There's a Fine Line Between Turn-Ons and Turn-Offs

The best sex is when a mate knows the difference between turn-ons and turn-offs. We call these "brakes and accelerators." Your sexuality is like driving a car. You can't go real far, real fast, or without damage if you're driving with your foot on the brake. Sexual brakes are those things that hinder your arousal or enjoyment of sex. Some common examples are making love when you're exhausted, feeling criticized by your partner, or trying to be sexually intimate when your in-laws are staying in the bedroom next door.

Sexual accelerators are those things that lead to greater interest and arousal. Some might be feeling rested and relaxed, compliments and affirmations about each other's character and/or body, or daydreaming about positive sexual experiences with your spouse.

Some of the biggest problems come when one spouse thinks he's accelerating, while his mate is feeling the brakes. An example would be "risky" sexual behaviors—having sex in the back seat of a car when you could be "caught," for instance. Other examples would be engaging in a sexual act that makes your partner feel inhibited and uncomfortable.

5. Every Couple Will Face a Sexual Problem at Some Point

Some estimates say 80 percent of couples will experience a sexual problem significant enough that they would benefit from sex therapy. Depression, grief, stress, medications, illness, exhaustion, pregnancy and childbirth, parenting, spiritual

issues, trauma, hormones, diet, lack of exercise (or overdoing strenuous exercise), injury—so many things affect our sexuality! Add to that the reality that all marriages will experience conflict. Since sexual intimacy is one of the first arenas marital conflict harms, it's safe to say all couples will have to problem-solve their sex life at some point.

Sexual problems or “trials”—whether large or small—can be resolved. Although they may not be resolved the way you want them to be, they don't need to have an ongoing cost to your health and marriage. One of the most common results of resolved sexual problems is an improved marriage. While some sexual problems may seem entrenched, don't give up.

6. Genitals Are Not the Only Organ Responsible for Sexual Pleasure

God designed our bodies to be wonderfully responsive to sexual pleasure. There are thousands of specialized nerve endings in the penis and clitoris. Females have several large nerve pathways from their genitals, meaning even more variety, and possibly intensity, in their genital pleasuring. But while God designed our genitals to feel good, he didn't stop there.

The second pathway responsible for sexual pleasure is within the brain. Most people can become aroused when fantasizing or thinking sexual thoughts. While the majority need some touch, it's possible for some people to experience an orgasm just from intense sexual fantasy. Many experts have said that for great sex, the organ between our ears is more important than the organ between our legs. The meaning we give to sex, the attitude we have toward our spouse, the feelings we have about our marriage, all contribute or hinder good feelings and experiences with sex.

Here's an example: Susan has been thinking about her husband, Jim, throughout her busy day. She mulls over his good qualities—his kindness to the kids, offering to stop by the store to pick up things she forgot, filling in for her this past Sunday in an obligation at church. She realizes they've both been busy and it's been longer than usual since they last made love. She begins to think how she could facilitate them being together tonight.

But what will happen if Jim comes home tonight, after a particularly disappointing day at work, and snaps at her for some minor, stupid thing, then storms off to the garage? Probably not sex.

Or she could overlook his bad mood, override her own irritation, continue to think about his many positive qualities, how closeness is created when they share

sexually, and still suggest they make love this evening. Her attitude can directly affect their relationship, both outside and inside the bedroom. Why? Because the most important sex organ is the brain.

The reverse of this is also true. If he just focuses on the first pathway (by groping her breasts) and ignores the second pathway (attending to her heart and emotions) she may be working with less than half the sexual stimulation she needs.

But God didn't even stop there! He designed all of our skin to be erotic. Individuals who have nerve damage that cuts off genital sensation can sometimes still experience orgasm from touch to new erotic zones on their skin.

Sexual pleasure in marriage is so important to God, he created multiple pathways to ensure it can happen—from how we think about sex, our spouse, and our relationship, to how we touch each other beyond our genitals. Truly great sexual lovers take time to engage all three of these pathways.

7. Sex Is a Gift, Not a Right.

God gave sex as a great gift to married couples. He designed it to teach us about him and his relationship with us. The metaphor of sexual sharing is a picture of presenting ourselves completely and giving all of who we are to another; it is also a picture of receiving someone completely into ourselves.

There are clear physical and relational benefits to consistent sex. Greater cardiac health, increased pain management, menstrual regularity, lower depression, lower anxiety, increased marital satisfaction, and greater sense of well-being are all associated with sexual activity, sexual satisfaction, and orgasm. God encourages married couples to drink deeply and enjoy sexual pleasure with each other. But those spiritual and scientific reasons are not to be used as arguments or weapons against our spouse. Our sexuality is still a gift that we are regularly to give to, and receive from, each other.

Any time a spouse takes the position that sex is a right, something at the heart of sex begins to wither. Perhaps because sex is to be life-giving, life-uniting, a decision, a desire, a gift, a picture, a lesson, a trust-walk—when instead we demand, pout, withhold, withdraw, fume, scream, berate, or begrudgingly surrender—it is the antithesis of what God created it to be. And something between spouses dies.

A couple cannot have a great sex life if the husband demands sex. Nor can it be great if a wife believes she has to have sex with her husband out of obligation. A great sex life grows only when both discipline themselves to give to each other. God's greatest blessings are offered and received freely. When you freely give yourself to your spouse, and freely receive your spouse into yourself, you nurture your

marriage as God celebrates and affirms: “Oh, lover and beloved, eat and drink! Yes, drink deeply of your love!” (Song of Solomon 5:1).

This article was originally published through Marriage Partnership, part of Today’s Christian Woman, in 2008. All rights reserved.

Chapter 3

When He Has the Headache

How to navigate diverse sex drives in marriage

BY DOROTHY LITTELL GRECO

did not relish the possibility that I was the only Christian woman who had a stronger sex drive than my husband, but for the first decade of our marriage, that's exactly how I felt. When I shared my dilemma with close friends, I typically got blank stares. One friend facetiously asked, "You mean you actually like sex?" Indeed, I do.

Our culture complicates and contributes to this predicament by idolizing sex and trying to convince men that they won't make it through the week unless they are sexually active. According to my husband, "As an American male, if you aren't thinking about, talking about, or having sex on a daily basis, it's easy to get the message that there's something wrong with you." (My husband is not the only man who refuses this worldly mindset, but he does seem to be in the minority.) Sadly, this skewed message often infiltrates the church.

As Christian women, what we most often hear from the pulpit or at conferences is essentially, "Women, we all understand that you aren't as interested in sex as your husband, but try to be a good wife and give him what he wants." This

perspective does not resonate with my experience and feels both reductionist and demeaning. I would often come away from these events thinking, *If God made me a sexual being, why am I getting the message that there's something wrong with me if I enjoy sex?*

A Shameful Secret

The reality that I am interested in sex more frequently than my husband has caused some tension in our 23-year marriage. Though we do a fair amount of public speaking on taboo subjects, this one has not gotten much airtime because, to be completely honest, we have both felt some degree of shame.

Overcoming shame connected to our sexuality is a big deal. For some mysterious reason, shame is attached to our gender. (Remember how Adam and Eve covered their genitalia in the Garden?) My husband felt the shame of not living up to the culture's—as well as his wife's—expectations. I often experienced his “no” as a personal rejection, as if I was undesirable.

Before we could make progress on this issue, we had to acknowledge these feelings of inadequacy and shame. Additionally, he needed assurance of my committed love and respect, and he needed to know that I was not judging him. I needed to know that he found me attractive and desirable, particularly when he was not interested in being intimate.

During our years of pastoring, we've counseled enough couples to know that we actually aren't alone in battling shame. People feel ashamed for a multitude of reasons, including lack of bonding with parents, abandonment, abuse, sustained teasing, or bullying. For some individuals, a diminished libido might be connected to any of these issues (as is the case for my husband who was molested as a teenager).

Pursuing Honest, Courageous Communication

Discussing core issues such as those connected to our sexuality requires an added level of gentleness, compassion, and intentionality. Honest communication and a commitment to working through these issues help us to avoid turning our bedrooms into a battleground.

When it's obvious that something subterranean is going on in our marriage, my husband and I bookmark it and commit to talk it through during the coming week. We have learned the hard way that difficult conversations are better off happening during a walk on Saturday morning rather than when we're about to be intimate. Such intentionality keeps us moving forward because marital issues don't magically

resolve without sustained effort, regardless of how much we wish they would.

In terms of communication, there is a delicate balance we need to achieve as we work through this. Though my husband and I committed early on to not deceive each other, I have learned that sometimes “a sensible person keeps quiet” (Proverbs 11:12). After having multiple defining conversations, he does not necessarily need to hear me express my frustration when he’s not interested. This requires a tremendous amount of self-control, and I’ll admit that I often fail. We have also learned to give each other a “soft no.” (Yes, there have been times and even seasons when I’m the one declining!) When one of us wants to be intimate, if the other one is not game, we offer some form of physical connection (perhaps a hug or kiss), and suggest an alternate time.

Sex isn’t simply about the plumbing; struggles couples face in this area may have nothing to do with physiological causes. What’s happening in the bedroom is a reflection of our entire relationship. We’ve sat with many couples who are in the midst of processing sexual issues when they realize that they have deep pockets of bitterness toward one another. While it’s understandable that frustration may build up as we deal with long-term issues, bitterness, anger, and withholding forgiveness are not conducive to a vibrant intimate life. Check in with each other on a regular basis, asking simple questions such as “Are we in a good place?” or “Is there anything I’ve done that has bothered or hurt you recently?”

The Year That Almost Broke Us

Despite all of our communication and intentionality, year 10 of our marriage was extraordinarily difficult. The stress of young children, multiple jobs, and a health crisis I faced left us both feeling stretched and weary. In times like this, sex can actually mitigate some of the conflict and tension—unless your sex life is a point of conflict and tension, in which case things can get very complicated.

In the midst of a tearful conversation one evening, I admitted that I felt like

Struggling?

Though this is a tender and somewhat embarrassing topic to discuss with others, if you and your spouse aren’t able to enjoy sex on a somewhat regular basis (a minimum of once a month), consider seeking help via a marriage or sex therapist. Because we are seldom objective on this issue, working with a skilled third party can make a huge difference.

giving up and simply resigning to the reality that this issue might never be resolved. He insisted that I not give up because my sustained desire provided an impetus for him to grow. Make no mistake, holding out hope is a vulnerable and sometimes painful option, but God can—and will—sustain you.

The processing that we did that year yielded a good harvest: empathy. I don't have emotional barriers to sex but I do have physical ones (exhaustion and fibromyalgia pain). It's the reverse for my husband. He's committed to being emotionally present when we are intimate, which I deeply appreciate. The residual shame connected to his molestation as a teenager compounded by his long, demanding work days can sometimes feel like an insurmountable hurdle. By seeking to understand each other more deeply and by asking God to fill us with what we needed, we have been able to replace accusations with mercy, and despair with hope.

Learn How to Fight the Actual Enemy, Not Each Other

As you work through these sensitive issues, it helps to remember that we are in the midst of a fierce battle. Because a sacred marriage reveals the image of God, the Enemy of our souls deeply opposes it and endeavors to turn us against each other. In order for our marriages to continue growing, we must commit to staying on the same team and fighting against our actual enemy—rather than each other.

Some nights when I've longed for sexual intimacy but we've not been able to connect, I can sense the accuser tempting me to think the worst about my husband, tempting me toward cynicism, or tempting me to get my needs met elsewhere. Though I feel vulnerable in these moments, I have learned to exercise the authority given to me by Christ and push back against the darkness. Practically speaking, this might mean reading Scripture, singing worship songs, confessing my ugly thoughts to a friend the next day, or purposefully demonstrating my love and commitment to my husband. It's a choice to fight for a good marriage.

Remember the Big Picture

As with any relational conflict, this issue offers us the opportunity to become more like Christ: to learn how to love, sacrifice, and extend mercy and grace. Marriage provides a sacred context for this transformation to take place. I'm not advocating that we should try to shut down our sexuality in the hope of eliminating tension, or that we should over-spiritualize our problems. But we do need to remain mindful that culture indoctrinates us with the unhealthy and unhelpful expectations that marriage must satisfy all of our needs, particularly our sexual ones. While there is a level of truth to this (for example, our friends cannot fill our sexual needs), expecting or demanding that our spouse satisfy our every need is idolatry, not love.

As I look back over the last 23 years of marriage, I can see that we have made slow and steady progress on this issue. I have come to a place of peace about our differences and no longer try to coerce my husband to be like me. We have created many venues for connecting on deep levels. When we do have sex, we are both completely free to enjoy each other and receive the moment as a God-given gift. Even if I might still prefer to have sex more often than we do, I am choosing to be thankful for him and for what we do have.

This article was originally published on TodaysChristianWoman.com in 2014. All rights reserved.

Chapter 4

Are We Sexually Incompatible?

No matter how long you've been married, it's not too late for a great sex life.

BY SHEILA WRAY GREGOIRE

started counting down to my wedding far too early: 429 more days, 428 more days . . . you get the picture.

But it wasn't the wedding I was anticipating. It was the wedding night.

Unfortunately my experience didn't live up to my expectations. Sex was painful, awkward, and embarrassing. For several years it was the main source of conflict in our marriage, leading us both to believe of one another, "You don't really love me!"

I'm glad our marriage didn't stay in that rut, and now I'm often the one to suggest that we "get it on." But most couples, at some point or another, feel like they're sexually incompatible.

The truth is that the whole concept of sexual incompatibility is flawed because it implies that our sexuality is something unchangeable. It implies that a woman, by herself, is a static sexual being, and a man, by himself, is a static sexual being, and that the two may not match.

That's simply not true.

God designed sex to be relational and dynamic. If you and your husband are struggling, it's not because you're incompatible—you just have things you need to work out. And our God is in the changing and reconciling business!

God Uses Our Struggles

At the beginning of our marriage, my husband and I had several sexual issues. We had an information deficit: Neither of us knew how to make sex feel good for me. I had physical issues since I suffered from vaginismus, a condition that makes the vaginal muscles tense up so that sex becomes painful. In our frustration, neither of us was acting in a Christlike manner. Our main aim was to get our own needs met. And I had some trust issues due to brokenness and hurt in my life that were making everything worse.

We started by tackling the sin issues—by deciding to start loving each other first. I tried to have sex more often; Keith started giving more massages and more romantic gestures. As he did that, my trust in him grew and the brokenness diminished. And as we became more comfortable with each other, my body literally relaxed and we figured out how to make it work.

Do you have issues you need to work through like Keith and I did? Here are four main categories that encompass most sexual problems, and here are some strategies for overcoming them.

1. Information Issues

Most couples don't experience honeymoon fireworks. In a survey of 2,000 women that I conducted for my book *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex*, I found that couples who had been married 16 to 24 years had the best sex because they'd had years to get comfortable with one another. When it comes to orgasm, 20 percent of the women in my survey still struggle to reach climax. Sex rarely works like clockwork right off the bat for anyone. It's easy to mistakenly think that you're "frigid" because you can't reach orgasm, or maybe that you "just don't like sex." But it's far more likely that you just haven't figured it out yet.

What to do: Be deliberate about listening to your body and telling your husband what you like. Many women hold back because they're ashamed that they take so long to become aroused, so they don't ask for what they really need (foreplay). Or they don't like the way their husband touches them but are embarrassed to say anything. Buy some Christian books to help you make sex pleasurable in a healthy way, and talk through those embarrassing things.

And keep learning! One woman wrote to me, saying that intercourse had lost

sensation for her after delivering several children. When she learned how to do Kegel exercises and to use new positions that worked better for her and her husband, sex became fun again.

2. Health Issues

Though sex isn't entirely physical, if the physical part doesn't work, sex won't work. Whether it's erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, low libido, arousal difficulties, or pain during intercourse, sex often is the physical embodiment of Murphy's Law: Whatever can go wrong will eventually go wrong.

What to do: Talk to a physician. Male sexual dysfunction can sometimes be a warning sign of something far more serious, like heart disease. Other sexual problems have medical cures too. Testosterone supplements can help men with low libido. Menopause support can help women keep their sexual function and enjoyment up.

One woman wrote to me saying that they had been struggling with her husband's low sex drive for all ten years of their marriage. When he went for a physical, his testosterone levels barely registered. After just a few treatments, she said he's a different person.

3. Sin Issues

Likely the most difficult sexual hurdle to overcome, though, is selfishness. Our culture has made sex purely physical, and pornography, erotica, and sex-toy shops embody that culture. We don't make love; we use each other.

If boys (or girls) start watching porn as teenagers, their sexual arousal becomes paired with an image rather than with a person. Over time, this rewires their brains so that they require pornography or fantasy to perform. That's why Italian researchers have found that porn is now the leading cause of erectile dysfunction.

Porn use may be the sin we most frequently associate with sex, but we may also be guilty of others. For example, if one spouse withholds sex from the other, that person is denying something his or her spouse desperately needs. On the flipside, when someone pressures his or her spouse for sex when their situation makes the demands unreasonable (such as when physical conditions make sex painful) or when the demands *themselves* are unreasonable (like doing something degrading), then sex is not about intimacy; it's about putting one's own desires first.

What to do: Pray and ask God to reveal your own part in this conflict. When sin is in play, it's rarely one-sided. A man may be drawn to porn while his wife may be refusing sex. Or she may be reading erotica while he withholds sex.

What is your part in the conflict? Confess your own sin. Then confront your

spouse about his role. If your spouse doesn't see it as a problem, you may need to bring in a third party, as [Matthew 18:15–17](#) instructs. With sexual addictions, especially, healing rarely comes without accountability. True repentance is always accompanied by humility and confession. If a spouse says, "I'll never do it again," but refuses to get help, that repentance may not be genuine.

4. Brokenness Issues

Because our sexuality is so closely linked to our identity and feelings of self-worth, wounds we've experienced can have an exaggerated impact on our sexuality. Those who have been abused often struggle with the idea of sex being an intimate, positive experience. If you grew up in a family where sex was never talked about and often portrayed as shameful, then embracing your sexuality can be far more complicated.

What to do: Open up with your spouse about why you are struggling. Work on the spiritual side of your marriage, praying for each other's wholeness. When you grow together spiritually, you're often drawn together sexually too, which takes away some of the shame. Marriage itself can be a healing balm for many of our early hurts.

For deep issues of brokenness, please seek a counselor. There is nothing wrong with having issues; there is only something wrong with refusing to work on your issues and saying, "This is the way I am." God's will for us is wholeness: forgetting what lies behind and focusing, instead, on what lies ahead ([Philippians 3:13](#)). If you don't address your own past issues, you will cross a line from just brokenness into selfishness and sin.

Chasing After God . . . Together

All of us have issues, but these issues can also be a catalyst for Jesus to do amazing things in your life—to take you outside of your comfort zone and to help you become more vulnerable, more loving, and more generous. Our sexual issues can actually be used by God to help us grow more Christlike.

Sexual hurdles don't mean that your sex life and your marriage are destined for failure. See them instead as opportunities to chase after God's promises together; he created it to be a wonderful, intimate experience for both of you. You just need some work to get there!

This article, originally titled "Did You Have a Disappointing Wedding Night?" was published on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#) in 2015. All rights reserved.

Chapter 5

Are Sexual Fantasies Okay?

Can what's in your mind improve your physical experience?

BY SHANNON ETHRIDGE

With the phenomenon of the *New York Times* bestselling book *50 Shades of Grey*, lots of women are wondering what the big deal is with fantasy. Is it a friend or enemy to marriage?

Let me tell you about two people I know. I met Mary through my life coaching practice. She almost divorced after 30 years of marriage. She explained, “I hadn’t been physical with my husband because I felt like it was detrimental to my spiritual walk with God. That may sound crazy, but I just couldn’t be intimate with him without having racy thoughts run through my brain that made me feel guilty afterward. I thought surely God would never approve of my mental activities.”

But then Mary sought counseling prior to signing the divorce papers. Her therapist asked, “If God designed your brain in such a way that you can become aroused simply by entertaining certain thoughts, could that be a *blessing* instead of a *burden*?” Rather than lose her marriage, Mary decided to lose her guilt instead. Her newfound freedom to enjoy the way her sexual brain works transformed their

relationship. That was 22 years ago, and today their sex life is richly rewarding—even after 52 years of marriage!

Now meet Kayla. She and her husband, Josh, hadn't had sex in almost a year. They'd chalked it up to being too busy with three preschoolers to have any energy left for sex at the end of the day. Yet both admitted they'd moved in separate directions when it came to personal gratification: Josh toward pornography, and Kayla toward romance novels. Their sexual imaginations were indeed running wild, but not with thoughts about each other.

Isn't it interesting how in one case sexual fantasies enhanced a marriage, yet in another case they wreaked havoc? Here are a few lessons:

First, we are created by God as sexual beings, and arousal definitely begins in the brain. We simply can't reach climax while mentally drafting our grocery list or even reciting our favorite Scripture passages. We must allow our brain to venture into sexy territory in order to experience orgasm—something God designed the human body to experience.

Second, those raised in Christian homes were often sent messages (overtly or covertly) that sex (including healthy sexual fantasy between you and your spouse) was anything but holy, pure, or natural. As a result, we may experience guilt, shame, and inhibition, as Mary once did. These negative emotions aren't beneficial to our sexual health, nor the health of our marriage.

Third, we must recognize that our unhealthy fantasies (especially about other people or deviant sexual acts) *aren't* a roadmap toward future fulfillment. They're more often a roadmap of our rocky past. Since it's humanly impossible to experience overwhelming pain and overwhelming pleasure in the exact same moment, what does our brain do with negative emotions? It compartmentalizes our pain, fear, and anxiety long enough to experience the euphoric pleasure God intended. In fact, unhealthy sexual fantasies are simply the brain's way of trying to heal itself from past pain or emotional trauma. So if you find the nature of your fantasies troubling, a counselor can help identify the reasons why your brain may be wandering in that direction. Such discoveries can be healing!

Just as fire can be both useful and dangerous, so go our sexual fantasies. Therefore, we must learn to channel our sexual thoughts in a direction that draws us *toward* our spouses, not away from them.

Entertaining fantasies of an extramarital partner; comparing our spouse to a real or imaginary person and thinking of all the ways he doesn't measure up; becoming disillusioned with real life because our fantasy life is so much more exciting—these are examples of how fantasy can harm rather than help.

However, savoring thoughts of some of your best sexual moments together; imagining how you may initiate sex next time; becoming more spontaneous and generous in the marriage bed—these thoughts can certainly keep the home fires burning!

This article was originally published on TodaysChristianWoman.com in 2012. All rights reserved.

Chapter 6

Can My Marriage Win Over My Past?

After years in an unhealthy sexual relationship, enjoying intimacy in marriage is a daily battle.

BY BRITTANY BERGMAN

There will be dry spells, perhaps sooner than you think.”
“Some days sex will be more like a chore than a joy. Do it anyway.
Even when it doesn’t feel like magic, it is building intimacy.”
“Sex is messy and awkward. Don’t expect it to be great on your honeymoon. Be ready to laugh off the weird stuff and have fun with it.”

Such were the well-intentioned words of advice from my closest girlfriends at my bachelorette party. But there were things I was still unprepared for—things my friends couldn’t tell me.

What happens when your sexual baggage is larger than a carry-on? What happens when sex in marriage feels too much like the time when sex was coercion?

Haunted by My Past

In college, I was in a three-year, on-again-off-again relationship with Mitchell (not his real name). Though we both professed to be Christians, a few months into our relationship he began pressuring me to have sex—and I gave in. His subtle

coercion gradually became barely disguised demands for sex, and soon I equated sex with both physical pain and “love.” He desired sex anytime, anywhere, and he made me believe that it was the only real way I could communicate my love to him.

Every time I “loved” him that way, I felt filthy and violated; he would fall asleep or walk out of the room, and I would sob silently, hoping there was more to sex than this but doubting that it could be true. I spent many years after that relationship as a single woman, and slowly but faithfully, the Lord healed my broken pieces.

When I eventually started dating my now-husband, Dan, we committed to waiting for marriage. However, a few months after our wedding, I realized I wasn’t fully free from my past. Despite the knowledge that I was forgiven by both Christ and Dan, I said yes to sex only as often as necessary to keep my guilt at bay. I found myself feeling ashamed at my inability to enjoy my husband, berating myself for not being the kind of wife I thought he deserved.

My body and my heart felt disconnected. I longed to desire sex, but I didn’t. I longed to want to please Dan, but I didn’t. And if I didn’t desire sex when Dan asked for it, Mitchell’s voice would creep into my thoughts, invading what should have been a private, holy moment: *He’s only asking because he needs to gratify himself. You have to show him love, even if you don’t want to. This is the only way you can make him feel like a man. Push through the pain.*

My husband has never made me feel this way; he has never tried to guilt or persuade me into sex. I trust that Dan initiates sex for good reasons: to connect with me, to give and receive love, and to increase intimacy. But the wounds from my past were still haunting me.

Seeking Healing, Moment by Moment

I know there are many women who love sex and have high sex drives, and let me just say, I think that’s wonderful. I hope to be among your number someday, and I hope the same for the other women who struggle as I do. But for those of us who have been burned in the past or who just don’t enjoy sex, what are we to do with these feelings (or lack thereof)?

Sex should be entered into with love, affection, and desire—not merely out of obligation. But how, then, should we understand the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:3–5?

The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body

to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer.

While there is a clear sense of obligation to each other in this passage, it isn't saying one needs to have sex anytime his or her spouse desires it. Instead, this passage makes it clear that we need to continually work on our hearts so that we're soft toward the desires of our mate—and toward our own desires as well.

This is not an easy road to walk, and I still struggle with the pain, sometimes daily. But I'm slowly healing. Here are a few things I've learned in the process:

1. It's okay to say no and suggest alternative acts of intimacy. Some days, we just can't shake the pain of the past. Other times, the headache is real. We get sick. We have tough days at work. We start our periods and feel decidedly unsexy.

I hope that someday sex with Dan will be a release and a refuge when I'm struggling in other areas of life. For now, it's not. I've learned to say no when I need to, and I look for other ways to grow love and intimacy. In these moments, cuddling close, exchanging back massages, or going for a hand-in-hand walk can build your marriage and allow room for healing.

2. Communicate your pain to your spouse. You don't need to (nor should you) tell your husband every detail about your past—but you should share the general facts. Though I've withheld many gritty details, I've shared with Dan the weight of my scars, the feelings that sex can conjure up for me, and the debilitating pain that I sometimes just can't put aside.

Because I've been honest with him, he can better understand what is going on in my heart when I say no, and it creates space for me to keep healing, and it creates a way for us to move forward together. Consider wisely which parts of your story you need to share—which emotions and scars you need to show your husband to help him better understand what sex feels like for you in those dark moments.

3. Seek help for underling sexual issues, especially sexual abuse. If you're a victim of sexual abuse, what happened to you is serious, and there's no shame in seeking professional therapy or marriage counseling. God can heal any situation, and he often brings that freedom through the help of trained professionals. Continually give your struggles over to the Lord, asking for healing, strength, and patience.

4. Consider your purpose for sex. I'm still learning that sex is about

more than just satisfying physical desires. I know in my mind that sex creates intimacy, that it continually cements the holy bond between a husband and wife, and that it can be enjoyable and fun. When I see the purpose of sex as to satisfy Dan and pacify my own guilt, it's an act that, at best, feels like going through the motions. But when I consider that a home is built brick by brick, one choice at a time, and I apply that reasoning to our intimacy, it presents a new purpose for sex.

You and your spouse may want to consider setting goals for your sex life, whether that's by finding new ways to love each other in the bedroom or by trying to turn toward each other when you're stressed. Open up to the possibility of greater fulfillment and connection with your spouse.

5. Choose your marriage over your pain. When my husband initiates sex and I feel inclined to say no because of the pain of my past, denying Dan hands the victory over to my ex-boyfriend, and to the Enemy. Then the barrier between me and my husband becomes thicker and darker.

In the moments when I can step outside of my pain, I choose my marriage over my past. Dan didn't commit those sins against me; he shouldn't have to pay the price for them. And I'm forgiven and redeemed for my part in my past. I don't have to keep paying the price either.

When I choose intimacy with my husband (even if it feels like I'm still fighting an uphill battle), our marriage wins. Wives, I'm not saying that you need to say yes to sex all the time. But when you choose intimacy in your weariest moments, you choose to strengthen your marriage for the long-term. Strong marriages are built not on grand, sweeping actions but through a series of small, everyday choices. I want to build a foundation for intimacy, so I try to say yes as often as I can.

Celebrate the Victories

When you injure part of your body, a ligament or a muscle, you sometimes need physical therapy to repair it. If you move too quickly, you run the risk of re-injury, but you can't regain your range of motion or build your strength back up if you don't push through some pain to get stronger. It's much the same with intimacy.

Rely on the Holy Spirit to help you discern how much is too much and share that openly with your spouse. Figure out what it takes for you to get into a positive emotional space and truly enjoy sex. Celebrate each victory even if it seems small because victories point toward the possibility of what's to come: long-term healing and a thriving, enjoyable sex life.

This article was originally published on TodaysChristianWoman.com in 2015. All rights reserved.

Chapter 7

Why an Orgasm Is Not the Pinnacle of Sexual Maturity

The intricate connection between your faith and your sex life

BY DR. HARRY W. SCHAUMBURG

Put a man and a woman together, and the odds are that immaturity and selfishness will overflow even while they attempt to create a meaningful relationship. The common explanation for relational problems is their families of origin, but the root of the problem is actually more serious to overcome: two sinners coming together. From arranged marriages to traditional dating to online dating to cohabitation, all the methods of matching can't avoid this inherent problem. Marrying in the will of God doesn't change that reality either. The honeymoon always ends. However, I believe that working to develop both spiritual and sexual maturity can help a couple glorify God and avoid serious relational problems.

There is a consistent dynamic I've noticed while counseling thousands of Christian couples from across America in our weeklong intensive counseling program. It looks like this: The wife feels a loss of sexual interest in her husband while she also considers herself to be more spiritually mature than him, while her husband has more interest in sex with her, but he considers himself to be more

spiritually immature. In this common scenario, both husband and wife are missing something. If two sinners are going to struggle well in developing a God-glorifying relationship, they must both strive to be spiritually and sexually mature. To be spiritually mature you must be sexually mature; to be sexually mature you must be spiritually mature.

Redefining Maturity

Few couples realize that sexual maturity is more than sexual purity or a pleasurable orgasmic experience. Spiritual maturity is also more than being involved in ministries or having a spiritual “mountain top” experience. When we try to mature spiritually, we tend to fix our thoughts on ourselves and our own goodness and in the process, we lose sight of the whole meaning of spiritual maturity. Likewise, when we try to find sexual satisfaction for ourselves, we fix our thoughts on ourselves and our own fulfillment and end up missing the real meaning of sexual maturity.

To build spiritual and sexual maturity, we must start with God’s purpose rather than our own. God’s purpose is “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name” (Romans 1:5, *ESV*; see also 16:26). That purpose continues beyond conversion to bring about transformed lives that are more and more consistently obedient to his will. So as we journey on we are “filled with the knowledge of his will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him” (Colossians 1:9, 10, *ESV*). In this process of transformation, it is important to remember that what we do with our sexual organs is as important as what we do spiritually with our hearts and our minds. We are not just spiritual beings; we are physical beings as well.

Your Body, God’s Purpose

The believer’s body has a specific purpose, both spiritually and sexually. First, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:13, *ESV*). Paul continues by telling us what the body is for. Interestingly, he doesn’t say directly that the body is for sexual purity. Instead, the body should remain sexually pure because it has a defined purpose: “for the Lord.” This is the reason that the body isn’t for selfish sexual gratification: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (verse 15, *ESV*). Spiritually speaking, the believer’s body is in a profound union with Christ now. This is the purpose for which we have a body. We are joined with the Lord, whether we’re single or married.

Waiting for marriage isn't the primary reason for maintaining sexual purity; we are severely restricted from joining our bodies sexually with just anyone because we are already in union with Christ. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (verses 19–20, *ESV*). Neither a man nor a woman has authority over his or her own body before marriage. Understanding who has authority leads toward spiritual and sexual maturity and to "glorifying God with your body" (verse 20, *ESV*). To establish real spiritual and sexual maturity in marriage, the critical question to consider is this: Who has authority over my body?

Sex (For the Glory of God)

Before marriage, sexual immaturity in the form of impurity is an expression of selfishness. Maturity, on the other hand, is all about maintaining sexual purity.

In the context of marriage, sexual immaturity is an issue of selfishness in one of two ways: A man may continue to take without fully giving himself, leaving his spouse to feel like a sexual object. Or a woman may withhold what is not really hers to keep. Spiritual and sexual maturity in marriage is all about relationship and sex for the glory of God. To me, this means a mutually gratifying relationship and sexual intimacy in a life-long marriage.

Paul continues his instructions to the Corinthians by focusing on sexual equality, saying, "Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal [sexual] rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. . . . Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Corinthians 7:2–5, *ESV*).

We mature in a marriage when we pursue the will of God both spiritually and sexually. The pattern for marriage in striving for spiritual and sexual maturity is to live not only under a mutual moral obligation of faithfulness, but also under a mutual moral obligation for both the husband and the wife to give their bodies to each other in willing anticipation of sexual relations over their entire lifetime together. The spiritually and sexually immature do not understand this marital obligation, and for this reason abstinence in marriage can become a dangerous habit. But those who are spiritually and sexually mature will not want to abstain from sexual relations in marriage (unless, as Paul noted, it's for limited time and only by mutual consent for a godly purpose).

In equality, God grants your spouse authority over your body, and you have authority over his body. Therefore, just as in singleness, neither a married man nor married woman has authority over his or her own body. Ultimately, a man and woman's unconditional love and willingness to give themselves to each other

sexually reveals their love for Christ. Their lifelong covenant and the one-flesh, sexual union that has been formed between them has *everything* to do with their relationship to Jesus.

This article was originally published on TodaysChristianWoman.com in 2014. All rights reserved.

Chapter 8

13 Ways to Boost the Passion in Your Bedroom

How to build a great sex life in your marriage

COMPILED BY ASHLEY GRACE EMMERT

Let's face it—most of us could probably stand to have a little more passion in our marriages. That's why we asked eight Christian marriage experts to give us their best advice for heating things up and restoring the connection you desire. Sexual intimacy is God's gift to build your marital bond; these insights will equip you to strengthen that critical part of your relationship. Our hope is that you'll be so encouraged, so motivated, and so energized by these perspectives on sex that tonight, you'll decide to turn off the TV and instead invest in building the passionate relationship you long for.

1. Connectedness Is Key

At its best, physical intimacy is born out of a deep connectedness and relational intimacy. For some couples, their greatest need might be time or rest to create that space for one another. For others, disconnection is the norm, so they need to spend

more time moving toward one another. As a matter of fact, learning to move toward each other in life will make moving toward each other in bed more fulfilling, more real.

—*Dr. Kim Eckert*

2. Think About It

On a practical note, sex begins in the mind. Many women's minds are consumed with the eight million responsibilities they have to accomplish that day, and thoughts about sexual intimacy don't rise to the top. But if you want better sex, you have to think about sex. Not as a task to check off, but as a gift to anticipate and savor.

—*Dr. Kim Eckert*

3. Explain What You Want

Start with this bottom line in getting your sexual needs met: Assume that your partner doesn't know how to satisfy you. It doesn't matter how long you've been married, beginning with this premise will help you set the stage for developing this habit by asking for what you would like. That's the key and research bears it out. In one survey, 88 percent of the women who reported always discussing their sexual feelings with their spouses described their sex lives as good or very good. In contrast, only 30 percent of the women who reported never discussing sex with their partners described their sex lives as good or very good. What makes each of you happy is not necessarily the same thing. Your needs, in fact, may be dramatically different. So, do not make the mistake of assuming your partner knows how to meet your sexual needs if you don't talk to each other about it. This is rule number one for firing up passion in the bedroom.

—*Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott*

4. Sync Your Calendars

This sounds so cold. So unromantic. So pedantic. But make no mistake, a fulfilling sex life for almost every busy couple depends on it. So at least once a month, schedule a specific time when the two of you can enjoy a leisurely time of passionate sex. We know this sounds artificial. We can hear you groaning right now. But don't make the mistake of thinking this advice is for "other couples." Every busy couple can benefit from scheduling intimacy. You can have spontaneous sex anytime you are so inclined, but this once-a-month "meeting" is key to firing up passion in the bedroom.

—*Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott*

5. Do Shared Activities

Did you know that passion and intimacy plummet when a spouse begins to associate his or her partner primarily with dirty clothes thoughtlessly dropped on the floor, barked out orders, crying, and nagging? No surprise, right? But so many couples ignore this fact. He plays golf with his buddies. She attends her book club with her friends. They both may keep plenty active, but these activities are too often segregated. And when that's the case, couples miss out on a weekly habit that will buoy their marriage more than they ever imagined. Shared activity is one of the supreme gifts of married life, and it is an insurance policy against the fading of passion and intimacy.

—Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

6. Be Humble

We don't often think of humility as an aphrodisiac, but the greatest lovers are those who are unselfish, forgiving, and merciful. Couples get stuck because they can only see what they need, they fear, or they resent. There will be issues to work through in every sexual relationship, and humility helps you overcome them.

—Dr. Juli Slattery

7. Know that God Said It Was Good

Know that God blesses sexual intimacy. I've met so many women who are squeamish about sex. They have learned somewhere along the way that sexuality is shameful and that "good girls" shouldn't want or enjoy it (at least not too much!). When a woman understands that God created sex to be exciting, adventurous, and pleasurable, and knows that she is not condemned for past mistakes, she is free to experience great sex in marriage.

—Dr. Juli Slattery

8. Be a Safe Place

We love the sex advice given to us early on in our marriage: "Do it often, in a way you both enjoy." The foundation of great sex is emotional safety. Put significant time into building a marriage that feels like the safest place on earth—a relationship where you feel safe physically, intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally.

—Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley

9. Understand Your Spouse

Wives, understand that your husband uses sex in order to connect emotionally. When you respond or initiate sex it makes him feel respected, appreciated, and valued. Thus, see his request for sex as a request for connection and intimacy. Men are like a “microwave oven” when it comes to sex—he is instantly turned on.

Husbands, understand that your wife needs to be engaged emotionally before she will respond sexually. She needs to be emotionally pursued, romanced, loved, and cherished. Thus, see her request to connect first by talking and sharing as “foreplay.” Women are like “crockpots” when it comes to sex—she needs time to warm up.

—Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley

10. Know Each Other

A vibrant sexual relationship requires great communication. We need to be willing to share our deepest sexual feelings, fears, wants, and desires.

The Hebrew word for “sexual intercourse” is the phrase “to know.” Become a student of your spouse in every way, especially sexually. Ask each other about what turns you on and what turns you off. Make it a point to stay current about your partner’s needs, as they aren’t static.

—Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley

11. Remember Together

Reminisce about your sexual relationship. Ask questions about your first sexual experience together, the best place you’ve made love, your best kiss, the most spontaneous night, the most romantic time, and so on. Talk about what you’ve enjoyed and what made these experiences exciting. Keep your discussion focused on the positive recollections.

—Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley

12. Learn What You Both Need

The most important thing I’ve seen in the research of men and women that increases closeness and physical intimacy in marriage is having your eyes opened to what you probably don’t “get” about what the opposite sex needs in this area. This changes everything! Women should know that for most men (more than 90 percent), physical intimacy is not primarily a physical need; it’s an emotional need. He wants to feel that you desire him. When you do, it gives him a sense of

confidence and well-being in every other area of his life. So instead of “doing your duty,” get engaged physically, and even initiate once in a while. It will transform the emotional climate of your marriage!

And men, you should know that if your wife is like most women (82 percent) she probably isn't thinking about sex during the day, so you need to approach her differently. You need to give her time to anticipate before you enter the bedroom. For example, flirting during the day (“Hmmm . . . after dinner with Brad and Jeannie, maybe you and I can have dessert at home”) will get you a very different response than asking if she's in the mood when she's exhausted and getting in bed with the anticipation of sleep.

—*Shaunti Feldhahn*

13. Stop Overthinking It

How often have you done this: You're lying in bed, feeling guilty, wondering, Is he expecting something tonight? And then your brain goes into overdrive. *Do I feel like it? I don't know. Is he due? How many days has it been, anyway? If we start right this moment, how many hours of sleep will I still get?* The silly thing is that if you had started in the beginning, you'd be asleep by now! We women often forget that our sex drives are primarily in our brains.

Unlike for our husbands, arousal usually comes after you start making love, not before. But instead of jumping in, we tend to overanalyze things. Tonight, silence all those thoughts running through your head, and just decide, *I am going to feel good, and I am going to feel close to my husband!* If you're mentally excited, your body tends to follow. So stop thinking so much, and start doing!

—*Sheila Wray Gregoire*

This article was originally published on TodaysChristianWoman.com in 2015. All rights reserved.

Reflection Questions

How have these insights challenged you? How is God inviting you into a more healthy and hopeful understanding of your sexuality? What might God be inviting you to put into practice in order to strengthen your marriage? Grab your Bible and spend some time thinking through these questions. If you'd like, use a journal to record your thoughts.

Option: Talk It Through

If you've read this book with your spouse, use these questions to spark honest discussion.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your degree of satisfaction with your sex life? Why?
- How do you imagine your spouse might answer the same question? Why?
- In the context of real life (not an idealized, alternate reality!), how would you

describe what you consider to be a healthy sex life for a Christian couple? What practices, attitudes, words, and feelings do you think best reflect what God desires for a Christian couple in your stage of marriage?

- Read **Genesis 2:15–25**. What do you think it means for a husband and wife to be “united into one” (Genesis 2:24) or “one flesh” (NIV)? How is this to be expressed sexually? Emotionally? Spiritually? In our thoughts and choices? In decision-making?
- Does it surprise you to learn that 80 percent of couples face a serious sexual challenge at some point in their marriage (see Chapter 2)? Why or why not?
- When have you felt frustrated that your husband doesn’t “get” you—what turns you on, the pace you’d want for your sexual encounters, and so on?
- How could maintaining a higher awareness and acceptance of your own sexual preferences enrich your sex life? How might you communicate those preferences in a positive way?
- What difference could a greater commitment to being sexually expressive make in your emotional and spiritual closeness?
- What excuses, roadblocks, or other factors are getting in the way of you and your husband enjoying a more satisfying sex life? Which are internal (emotions, thoughts, and so on) and which are external (time, commitments, children, and so on)?
- Studies reveal that a large majority of women experience difficulty with their sexual arousal and satisfaction at some point in their life. Does it help to know that many others privately struggle with similar issues?
- How have difficulties in achieving sexual satisfaction affected your perspective on your sexual relationship with your husband? On your sense of self?
- Some of our inhibitions about self-discovery, learning what feels good, and forming a more sexually-oriented mindset may stem from a Christian upbringing, a sense of modesty, or insecurity. How could a confident biblical understanding of the truth that God is *pleased* by your healthy sexuality help you overcome some of these barriers?
- Read **Hebrews 13:4** in your Bible, then consider this paraphrase from *The Message*: “Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband.” How can you hold your relationship in higher esteem? What special treatment or honor can you give your relationship—including your sex life—to demonstrate how highly you honor and treasure your marriage?
- How can you more proactively choose a positive, hopeful, and committed attitude toward the health of your sex life with your husband? What changes in your actions, mind-set, demeanor, emotions, or spiritual life might you need to make to help this happen?

Conclusion

Regardless of where you are on your sexual journey in marriage, we hope this book was able to ease your mind and pass on some important information. Whether you're healing from past pains or simply working on bringing your whole heart into the bedroom, it's never too late for things to get better.

Remember: God created sex specifically for marriage, so if you're married and you're trying to figure out your sex life, you've got an advantage over any unrealistic, steamy sex scene between singles that you've ever watched in a movie. You are enjoying God's gifts when you improve your sex life—not just for your husband, but for you too! And most importantly, for your marriage.

Just like you'll never do marriage perfectly, you know you'll never do sex perfectly—but God has created us to enjoy our spouses. Fight for that joy—and have fun in the process!

Contributors

Chapter 1

Dr. Juli Slattery is a clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and broadcast media professional. She's the president and co-founder of [Authentic Intimacy](#) and the host of [Java With Juli](#) on Moody Radio. Juli's newest book is *25 Questions You're Afraid to Ask About Love, Sex, and Intimacy* and she blogs with TCW at TodaysChristianWoman.com/Juli-Slattery.

Chapter 2

Debra Taylor, MFT, is co-author of *Secrets of Eve*. Michael Sytsma, PhD, is an ordained minister and founder of [Building Intimate Marriages](#). Both are certified Christian sex therapists and co-founders of [Sexual Wholeness, Inc.](#)

Chapter 3

Dorothy Littell Greco works as a photographer, writer, speaker, and pastor. Her passion is helping other believers pursue holiness and reconciliation. You can find more of Dorothy's work on her website (DorothyGreco.com) or by following her on Twitter at [@DorothyGreco](#) and [Facebook](#).

Chapter 4

Sheila Wray Gregoire is the author of eight books, including *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex* and *31 Days to Great Sex*. She blogs at ToLoveHonorAndVacuum.com.

Chapter 5

Shannon Ethridge, MA, is an AACC-certified life coach and author of the bestselling *Every Woman's Battle* and *The Fantasy Fallacy: Exposing the Deeper Meaning Behind Sexual Thoughts*. You can learn more about Shannon at www.ShannonEthridge.com.

Chapter 6

Brittany Bergman is an assistant copyeditor at Tyndale House Publishers as well as a freelance writer and regular contributor for TCW. You can connect with her on Twitter at [@BrittanyBergs](#) or read more at her blog TheNestedNomad.com.

Chapter 7

Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg is the founder of [Stone Gate Resources](#), a counseling ministry specializing in the treatment of adultery, pornography, and all forms of sexual sin. He's written several books including *Undefiled: Redemption from Sexual Sin*, *Restoration for Broken Relationships*.

Chapter 8

Dr. Kim Eckert is the author of *Things Your Mother Never Told You: A Woman's Guide to Sexuality* and you can find out more about Kim at [DrKimEckert.com](#).

Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott are the co-authors of *Crazy Good Sex and Making Happy: The Art and Science of a Happy Marriage*. Learn more about the Parrotts at [LesAndLeslie.com](#).

Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley are co-authors of the *Little Book of Great Dates* and *The Wholehearted Wife: 10 Keys to a More Loving Relationship*. You can find out more at [SmalleyMarriage.com](#).

Shaunti Feldhahn is the author of *The Good News About Marriage* and *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*. Learn more about Shaunti via [Shaunti.com](#).

Dr. Juli Slattery and Sheila Wray Gregoire, noted above, also contributed ideas included in this chapter.

Ashley Grace Emmert served as compiling editor for this resource. Ashley is a writer, editor, and TCW regular contributor. You can find her at [AshleyGraceEmmert.Blogspot.com](#) or on Twitter at [@ashgemmert](#).