



Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage (Part V of V)

“Intimacy” (Listening Guide)

Presentation By:

Brad Hambrick, M.Div., Th.M.

Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church

“Intimacy”

Table of Contents

NOTE: Many people have asked how they can get a copy of the full seminar notebook (a.k.a. mentoring guide or study guide) referenced in this presentation. Summit members can pick up a copy of the notebook in the church office. For those outside the Summit family, you can request a PDF copy from Amy LaBarr (alabarr@summitrdu.com), office administrator over counseling.

Introduction:

What Can I Hope to Get from this Seminar?	3
Marriage and Pre-Marital Mentoring Series	4

Chapter 1. What Makes Intimacy Difficult? <i>The Obvious and Not-So-Obvious Things We Rarely Discuss</i>	5
---	---

Evaluation: Appreciating Our Difference

Chapter 2. Appreciating Our Differences <i>An Essential Part of Lasting Romance</i>	10
--	----

Evaluation: Living in THE Love Story

Chapter 3. Living in THE Love Story <i>Experiencing God’s Greatest Message In Life’s Greatest Blessing</i>	16
---	----

Evaluation: Sexual Intimacy in Marriage

Chapter 4. Sex as One of God’s Gifts for Marriage (Part One) <i>Learning to Skillfully and Unashamedly Enjoy Foreplay</i>	23
--	----

Chapter 5. Sex as One of God’s Gifts for Marriage (Part Two) <i>Learning to Skillfully and Unashamedly Enjoy Intercourse</i>	28
---	----

Appendices

A. Marriage Dates from the “Intimacy” Seminar.....	33
B. Common Challenges to a Healthy Sex Life	35
C. Small Group Accountability Questions from the “Intimacy” Seminar	38
D. What Do I Do Now?	39

What Can I Hope to Get From this Seminar?

Whether you are here due to personal need, the needs of others, or for a general interest in the topic, we hope this seminar will benefit you. If we do our job well, parts of this seminar will speak to you personally. There will also be parts that speak to aspects of this subject that are different from your own experience. What follows are **six unavoidable facts** that should help you profit from all of the material you hear (bold faced text taken from Paul Tripp and Tim Lane *How People Change*):

1. Someone in your life had a problem this week. That person may be you. Even if you are here for yourself, chances are you know or will know others who struggle in this area. Because we live in a fallen world and have a sin nature, we can be certain that we will battle with sin and suffering in our lives. Because we love people, we can be certain we will be called on to love and assist others in their battle with sin and suffering.

2. We have everything we need in the Gospel to help that person (2 Peter 1:3). God has given us Himself, the Gospel, the Bible, and the church and promised they are effective for all things that pertain to life and godliness. Our task as Christians is to grow in our understanding of and ability to skillfully apply these resources to our struggles. These resources are the essence and source of “good advice,” and we hope to play a role in your efforts to apply and disseminate this “good advice.” We do not aim to present new material, but new ways of applying the timeless, eternal truths of the Gospel found in Scripture.

3. That person will seek help from friends, family members, or pastors before seeking professionals. Counseling (broadly defined as seeking to offer hope and direction through relationship) happens all the time. We talk with friends over the phone, crying children in their rooms, spouses in the kitchen, fellow church members between services, and have endless conversations with ourselves. We listen to struggles, seek to understand, offer perspective, give advice, and follow up later. This is what the New Testament calls “one-anothering” and something we are all called to do.

4. That person either got no help, bad help, or biblical, gospel-centered help. Not all counseling is good counseling. Not all advice that we receive from a Christian (even a Christian counselor) is Christian advice. Too often we are advised to look within for the answers to our problems or told that we are good enough, strong enough, or smart enough in ourselves to overcome. Hopefully you will see today how the Bible calls us to something (rather Someone) better, bigger, and more effective than these messages.

5. If they did not get meaningful help, they will go elsewhere. When we do not receive good advice (pointing us to enduring life transformation), we keep looking. We need answers to our struggles. This means that as people find unfulfilling answers they will eventually (by God’s grace) come to a Christian for advice. When they eventually come to you, we hope you will be more prepared because of our time together today.

6. Whatever help they received, they will use to help others! We become evangelists for the things that make life better (this is why the Gospel is simply called “Good News”). We quite naturally share the things that we find to be effective. Our prayer for you today is that you will find the material presented effective for your struggles and that you will be so comforted and encouraged by it that it will enable you to be a more passionate and effective ambassador of the Gospel in the midst of “normal” daily conversations.

Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage Mentoring Series

This seminar is one piece of a five part series of seminars designed to facilitate mentoring relationships for married or engaged couples (one-on-one or in a group setting). Our goal in these seminars is to cover the key subjects that often hinder, but could greatly enhance, a couple’s ability to experience all that God intended marriage to be.

We believe that change that lasts happens in relationship. Private change tends to be short-lived change. Living things exposed to light grow. Living things kept in the dark wither. This is why we designed this series to encourage you to give your marriage the light of Christian community by studying these materials with others.

These materials are built upon a central premise – God gave us marriage so that we would know the gospel more clearly and more personally. It is the gospel that gives us joy. Marriage is the meant to be a living picture of the gospel-relationship between God and His bride, the church. For this reason, we have two goals for you as you go through this study:

1. That you would get know and enjoy your spouse in exciting, new, and profoundly deeper ways, so that...
2. ... you would get to know and enjoy God in exciting, new, and profoundly deeper ways.

This series of seminars is arranged around five topics that represent the most common challenges that face a marriage. While the challenges of each area are acknowledged, the tone of these seminars is optimistic. We believe that those things that cause the greatest pain when done wrongly bring the fullest joy when done according to God’s design.

These seminars are both sequential and interdependent. Each seminar is meant to build upon the ones before it and lead into the ones after it. If you are going through these materials for general marital enrichment or pre-marital counseling, it is best to complete them in order. However, if you are looking for guidance in a particular area of need, it is possible to start with the subject of greatest urgency in your marriage.

1. Foundations: Why is marriage hard? Why do so many marriages that begin in sincere love end in divorce? What are the essential things a couple should focus on to have a marriage that flourishes? What is a covenant and why is marriage a covenant? Why do we have a marriage ceremony? What are the roles for a Christian husband and wife? What if I don’t “fit” or like the masculine-feminine stereotypes or don’t have the personality to match a “traditional” husband/wife?

2. Communication: What does a couple talk about over a life time? What if I’m not good with words or listening? How do we maintain friendship when we’re having to keep up with so many logistics? How do we disagree and protect our marriage without losing what’s important to each of us individually? Why do words matter so much and why can they hurt so badly? How do we make things right after they go wrong and not let negative momentum build?

3. Finances: Why are money problems the number one cause of divorce? How do we maintain reasonable expectations for money in a debt-sick culture? How do two people manage their money together when it is hard enough to manage as a single person? Who should administrate the finances and how involved should the other person be? How do we learn self-control and contentment as a couple? How can “budget” become an exciting or, at least, pleasant word?

4. Decision Making: How do we manage our time? How do we navigate situations where we each want good things that cannot both happen? How do we determine God’s will for our personal and marital lives? How do we functionally express the biblical roles of headship and submission? How do we ensure that life’s tough decisions draw us closer to God and each other instead of creating distance? How do we respond when bad things happen to a good marriage or our plans?

5. Intimacy: How do you maintain the “spark” of marriage over a lifetime? How do you continue learning each other without feeling like you know all there is to know? How do we protect our expectations from highly romanticized cultural ideals? How many ways are there to express love and why are they all necessary? How do we enjoy a balance of both intimacy and intercourse? How do we grow as lovers throughout our marriage?

Chapter I

What Makes Intimacy Difficult?

The Obvious and Not-So-Obvious Things We Rarely Discuss

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Understanding and safety precede love and affection
- One of the most important things you can do for your children is love your spouse well.
- Romance is more about intentionality and engagement than grandiosity and epic moments.
- It takes a mature man and woman to enjoy a romantic marriage.

Memorize: I Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV), “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “If I... gain nothing” – We can do everything we typically think of as love and still gain nothing for our marriage.
- “Speak” – Eloquent and affirming words can be a blessing, but if they are detached from love they accomplish little.
- “Understand” – Reading books, attending seminars, or studying male-female differences are not the key to marriage.
- “Faith... remove mountains” – A positive outlook and extravagant serving do not produce a great marriage.
- “Give away all” – Sacrificial gift giving without love does not send the message that you hope it will.
- **Question:** If these actions are not what defines love, then what is? Your marriage depends on the answer.

Presentation Notes

What are we going to talk about in this seminar? Sex... romance... affection... affirming words... weekly date nights... talking about our feelings... vulnerability... What is “intimacy”?

Chances are you won’t create something you can’t define and many couples have a hard time agreeing about what counts as intimacy. “Agreeing to disagree” is definitely not the solution to this dilemma.

For this seminar “intimacy” will be used to capture the full breadth of romantic activities shared by husband and wife; from encouragement, flirting, serving, and handholding to romantic get aways, long love letters, and gourmet sex. This seminar is about maintaining a deep sense of enjoyment for each other.

It is easy to allow the awkwardness of this subject – talking about emotions, affection, and sex – to prevent a couple from enjoying some of marriage’s sweetest fruit. It takes a mature man and woman to flirt tastefully over a lifetime, put their dreams and desires into words consistently, and talk wholesomely about what is sexually enjoyable.

Most of these are conversations you should not be having with anyone else, so it makes sense there would be some awkwardness. Don’t allow the potential clumsiness of speech or action to prevent you from pursuing and enjoying the spouse God has blessed you with.

20 Things that Makes Intimacy Difficult

“It is possible to feel you are ‘madly in love’ with someone, when it is really just an attraction to someone who can meet your needs and address the insecurities and doubts you have about yourself. In that kind of relationship, you will demand and control rather than serve and give (p. 76).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

- I. It takes a lot of energy/endurance to maintain being in love.

2. “Good” intimacy is highly subjective; meaning the definition varies by person.

“Love seduces you in a way that honors you and does not turn you into an object of autoerotic satisfaction (p. 173).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*

“Adults forget how to frolic and tickle and squeal with delight. Lovemaking can include much lighthearted laughter and simple fun. Play may be more necessary than passion sometimes (p. 185).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

3. Sex is hard to talk about and requires communication.
4. Intimacy is childlike.

“It is so easy for me to drift back to believing that I am the center of gravity for all my relationships, including the vertical one I have with God. Nothing squashes rejoicing like that misbelief (p. 211).” William P. Smith in *Loving Well: Even If You Haven't Been*

5. We tend to think most self-centeredly about love.

“When you think about it, you'll notice the way you treat your spouse reflects the way you treat God. The same things that cause distance in your relationship with God calls distance in your relationship with your spouse (p. 3-4).” David Powlison in *Renewing Marital Intimacy*

6. Bad experiences (sin or abuse) can have profound effects on intimacy.
7. Intimacy happens in mundane moments.

“I have never met a parent who could truly understand how much kids affect a sex life until they are into the experience. From the fatigue of early infancy, to the demands of an active toddler, to the interruptions of elementary days, to the late nights of a teenager—parents must deal with the confusing variables the children present to their lovemaking (p. 59).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

8. Demands of child rearing interfere with intimacy.

“Unless your marital relationship is in good condition, sex doesn’t work (p. 235).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

Other Challenges in the Larger Notebook

9. Intimacy cannot be reduced to a set of activities or principles.
10. Men and women have different levels in their cycles of sexual desire.
11. We have different family histories of affection.
12. Marital love is post-sin, post-warts love.
13. Being “in love” and living out love are different.
14. Sex immediately goes from wrong to right in the space of two words.
15. Vocabulary about intimacy can be awkward.
16. Relationally selfish messages pervade our sex saturated culture.
17. We are too busy.
18. Intimacy is risky.
19. Dating sex and married sex are different.
20. Couples often have no plan for intimacy.

Conclusion

If you are overwhelmed by these challenges to marital intimacy, you can relax for several reasons. First, if you could relate to many of these challenges, then you can know this material was written for your marriage. Second, God realizes we are incapable of doing what He requires – that doesn’t send Him scrambling. Third, the gospel gives us the example and power to love our spouse like we would be otherwise incapable.

That is why one of the foundational themes for this seminar will be I John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” We don’t begin creating an intimate marriage by listing what we ought to do. Instead, we begin by realizing what we are incapable of doing. That is the beginning of the gospel – realizing we are sinner incapable of pleasing God.

From that realization we accept the grace that God offers. We are amazed at the sacrifice of Christ and this gives us the humility to love well. This humility is needed because your spouse is as incapable of loving well as you are. Unless we allow the gospel to be the foundation of our marriage, your spouse’s failures will begin to be the “reasons” for your failures (and vice versa).

But with this acknowledgement of our mutual need for grace and God’s extravagant provision we can enjoy the journey of seeing each other transformed into the lovers God designed us to be. The abundance of God’s grace to us means that our times of neglect or rudeness need no longer threaten our marriage. We are not living off of one another to meet our needs, but living off of God’s grace with an appreciation for our spouse as one of God’s graces to us.

With that gospel mindset in place you can look at the challenges of this chapter and the skills / concepts of the upcoming chapters without a sense of pressure or fear of failure. You can try, fail, learn, and grow because of the freedom Christ gives you in the gospel. Let that give you the courage to attempt the things that would enable your marriage to flourish.

Evaluation: Appreciating Our Differences

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

1. I am joyfully sacrificial in my love for my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
2. My spouse is joyfully sacrificial in his/her love for me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
3. My spouse gets the best of who I am.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
4. I believe I get the best of who my spouse is.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
5. I resist the temptation to keep score of who has done more for the other.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
6. My spouse resists the temptation to keep score of who has done more for the other.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
7. I compliment all dimensions of my spouse’s character, not just appearance.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
8. My spouse compliments all dimensions of my character.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
9. I know the things that most effectively communicate love to my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
10. My spouse knows the things that most effectively communicate love to me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
11. I look for new ways to express the things that my spouse finds most affirming.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
12. My spouse looks for new ways to express the things that I find most affirming.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
13. I am able to hear and receive the love and affirmation my spouse gives me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
14. My spouse is able to hear and receive the love and affirmation I give him/her.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
15. I am skilled at using words to build up and encourage my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
16. My spouse is skilled at using words to build up and encourage me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
17. I am willing to and regularly look for ways to serve my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
18. My spouse is willing and regularly looks for ways to serve me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
19. My spouse does not cause me feel insecure about my appearance.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
20. My comments or actions do not contribute to insecurity in my spouse about appearance.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
21. I am able to put myself into words and share myself with my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
22. My spouse is able to put him/herself into words and share him/herself with me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
23. I am comfortable with the amount of time my spouse spends on personal interests.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
24. My spouse is comfortable with the amount of time I spend on personal interests.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
25. I am a growing person and feel like I have new things to share with my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
26. My spouse is a growing person and has new things to share with me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
27. When I learn something new my spouse is one of the first people I want to tell.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
28. When my spouse learns something new I am one of the first people he/she tells.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
29. Throughout my day I anticipate the time I will spend with my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
30. Throughout the day my spouse anticipates the time we will spend with each other.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
31. Throughout my day I consider conversations I want to have with my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
32. Throughout his/her day my spouse considers conversations we will have together.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
32. I believe we spend an adequate amount of time together as a couple.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
34. My spouse believes we spend an adequate amount of time together as a couple.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
35. I regularly put intentional time and effort into romancing my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
36. My spouse regularly puts intentional time and effort into romancing me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
37. I frequently look for new and creative ways to romance my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
38. My spouse frequently looks for new and creative ways to romance me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
39. When we are apart I look for ways to let him/her know I’m thinking of him/her.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
40. When we are apart my spouse looks for ways to let me know he/she is thinking of me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
41. I look for spontaneous and unexpected opportunities to show love for my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
42. My spouse looks for unexpected opportunities to show love to me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA

Key to Survey Scoring: For each set of questions tabulate your score using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score, because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

- ...**matches or exceeds the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.
- ...**is less than the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.
- ...**is a negative number**, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-6: (Total: _____ in 6 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**sacrificial love**” aspect of healthy marital intimacy and romance. Love requires us to give ourselves away. No expression of love or romance will be lasting and satisfying without this willingness to be vulnerable, authentic, and sacrificial.

Recommended Resources: *When Sinners Say “I Do”* by Dave Harvey

➤ Questions 7-22: (Total: _____ in 16 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**types of non-sexual love**” in healthy marital intimacy and romance. In order for love to be known it must be expressed. The most sincere affection or devotion that does not express itself cannot bless the one it cherishes. We should strive to express our love in the ways that are more receivable to our spouse and appreciate the way our spouse most naturally expresses love.

Recommended Resources: *Loving Well (Even If You Haven’t Been)* by William P. Smith

➤ Questions 23-42: (Total: _____ in 20 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**time and attention**” aspect of healthy marital intimacy and romance. *Quality* time and interaction is no replacement for *quantity* of time in a marriage. A couple can share time together in many ways, even when they’re apart if they’re intentional. Failing to give regular time to your marriage is like failing to change the oil in your car; whatever gain it provides short term will cost you more long term.

Recommended Resources: See “Appendix B: Creating a Time Budget” in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Decision Making* seminar notebook.

Sometimes within a marriage the problem is not one specific area or issue but an overall imbalance in the effort, skill, thoughtfulness, and awareness being put into the marriage. Below is a list of questions that reveal your perspective on your effort and your spouse’s effort in the marriage. Use the same numerical scoring system as you used above. In this case, the closer your scores are to another, the more mutual (and typically healthy) the marriage.

_____ **My Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for the odd numbered questions.

_____ **Spouse’s Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for the even numbered questions.

Chapter 2

Appreciating Our Differences

An Essential Part of Lasting Romance

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- The greatest joy of love is not the act of loving, but seeing the joy our act of love produces in our beloved.
- Unbalanced nutritional diets lead to bad physical health, as imbalanced romantic diets lead to poor relational health.
- Being a growing person is important for a romantic marriage; stagnant people have stale marriages.
- Serving one another builds trust built around the message, “Your joy is more important than my preferences.”

Memorize: Philippians 1:9-11 (ESV), “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Love may abound” – In this passage Paul is praying through the process by which love grows in a relationship.
- “Knowledge” – Love begins by knowing your spouse. Learning is both evidence of and equipping for love.
- “Discern... approve” – Knowledge enables you to make more choices that “fit” and affirm your spouse.
- “Pure” – Love can be trusted because true love does not compromise righteousness for pleasure.
- “Filled with fruit” – We do not have to worry about running out of love because it is a self-replicating resource.

Presentation Notes

Which system is the right system? What gauge is the right gauge? What metaphor best captures what we’re supposed to be paying attention to? If you have read many books on marriage you know how confusing these questions can be: love languages, pink hearing aids, blue sun glasses, love tanks, love banks, waffles, spaghetti, Mars, Venus, his needs, her needs, love, respect, love dare, seven key questions, seven minute solutions, new marriages by Friday, fourteen secrets, etc... (that’s from a two minute search on “marriage” on a Christian bookstore website).

Is all this language different ways of saying the same thing or do we need to know this many different systems?

“For centuries, thinkers have discerned forms of love. The Greeks had words to distinguish affection (*storge*), friendship (*philos*), erotic love (*eros*), and service (*agape*). There are other ways of breaking down expressions of love into categories. All forms of love are necessary, and none are to be ignored, but all of us find some forms of love to be more emotionally valuable to us. They are a currency that we find particularly precious, a language that delivers the message of love to our hearts with the most power. Some types of love are more thrilling and fulfilling to us when we receive them (p. 153)... In the incarnation, God came to us in a manner that we could grasp. So we, too, must clothe our love in the forms to which our spouse can relate (p. 154).”
Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

Read I Corinthians 14:19-20. This passage is addressing speaking in tongues rather than love languages, but at least two principles are relevant to both. First, the primary purpose of speaking is to be understood. Paul says, “I would rather speak five words with my mind [understandable to others] in order to instruct [encourage, build up] others, than ten thousand words in a tongue (v. 19).” Second, putting our preferences and enjoyment first in our communication with others is an indicator of immaturity (v. 20).

“The 5 Love Languages” by Gary Chapman	“The 3 Foundations of Love” by Tim Keller	“The Four Loves” by C.S. Lewis	15 Expressions of “Loving Well” by William P. Smith	Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Intimacy
1. Physical Touch 2. Words of Affirmation 3. Quality Time 4. Gifts 5. Acts of Service	1. Affection 2. Friendship 3. Service	1. <i>Storge</i> – Affection 2. <i>Phileo</i> – Friendship 3. <i>Eros</i> – Romance 4. <i>Agape</i> – Unconditional Love	1. Responding to a broken world Comforting Sympathy Struggling Forgiving Long-Suffering 2. Building others up Partnering Pursuing Communicating Serving Providing 3. Enjoying heaven on earth Welcoming Humbling Celebrating Peaceful Hospitality	Head Ears – Listening Eyes – Admiring Mouth – Words Heart Emotions Interests Intellect Hands Service Presence Touch <i>“Learn the importance of loving your whole spouse with your whole self.”</i>

Head

Ears: One of the most endearing things one spouse can do for another is to listen well. It could be argued that the ears are the sexiest piece of human anatomy. Husbands, seduce your wife with your ears by attentively listening to her thoughts, fears, and dreams. Wives, draw your husband out by being listening to him talk about the things that interest him.

- How important is listening as a form of romance to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is listening as a form of romance to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at listening? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at listening? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

“Most of the folks I know pursuing romance and intimacy in their marriages are spending time planning, asking questions, investigating what is romantic to their spouses and not assuming they know. As with any artistry, there are far more discarded ideas than masterpieces (p. 167).” Dave Harvey in *When Sinners Say “I Do”*

Eyes: The eyes play into romance in two ways. First, your spouse should be your standard for attractiveness. Your calling as a Christian spouse is to make “in your eyes” the safest and most cherished place your spouse could be. As your spouse ages, attractiveness should mature. Home should be a place where neither of you compete with cultural definitions of beauty, because your home has its own culture.

Second, you should use your attractiveness (seeing yourself through the eyes of your spouse) to bless your spouse. Enjoy the flattery and power your spouse’s admiration gives you. This is not pride; it is a way to encourage your spouse to enjoy you (which is a good, God-honoring thing). When you find your spouse looking at you, smile, allow yourself to blush, flirt, enjoy the moment, talk about how good it feels to be admired, and allow prolonged eye contact to build a sense of connection; using the moment to fuel “spark” in the marriage.

- How important is your spouse’s attractiveness to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is your attractiveness to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- How willing are you at reveling in your spouse’s admiration? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How willing is your spouse to revel in your admiration? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mouth: If a big part of loving is knowing, then verbal sharing is should be large part of marriage. The ability to communicate with words is something that is unique to humans, and, therefore a special part of human relationships. Even when other animals pair up with a single mate for a lifetime, they do not give compliments, review their days, share fears, or dream together – those things are exclusively human.

Words of Encouragement

Words of Endearment

Read Revelation 2:17. Did you know that when you get to Heaven God will give you a pet name that is exclusively used by Him towards you? That name will be sentimentally unique to the journey you shared with God in this life. Allow this to remind you of the importance of words of endearment in any relationship. If God can be “silly” enough to use a pet name to express his unique love for you, you (who are slightly less dignified than God) can do the same for your spouse.

- How important are words of encouragement and affection to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important are these kinds of words to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled/willing are you with words of encouragement/affection? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled/willing is your spouse with these kinds of words? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Heart

In our modern vocabulary, “heart” is a purely sentimental term when it is used in reference to marriage. But in the Bible, “heart” is the word used to denote the center of our thoughts, emotions, will, desires, ambitions, allegiances, and everything else the little-voice-in-our-head does. As you think about loving your spouse with your heart, review these passages to give you a more complete picture of what this would entail – Psalm 4:7, 143:4; Proverbs 4:23, 23:7, 25:20; Mark 12:30; Luke 6:45; Romans 2:15, 6:17; 2 Corinthians 9:7; and Ephesians 3:17.

“You may think, *I just don't love my spouse any more.* He [God] has a different way of looking at your disappointment. God says, “You're discovering for the first time you don't know how to love. You enjoyed affection and romance but love is hard and hard-won. Romance is a wonderful gift, but love endures through the hard times; it endures when the heat comes (p. 6-7).”
David Powlison in *Renewing Marital Intimacy*

Emotions: Part of sharing your entire person with your spouse is sharing your emotions. Knowing how something moves you, motivates, discourages, offends, confuses, or marvels you is part of knowing you. Withholding this information impedes your spouse’s ability to love you.

To some people emotions feel unsafe; to “be emotional” carries a volatile or distant connotation to them. Or, they may just prefer the predictability of logic to the uncertainty of emotion. Learning to enjoy emotional connection will be a process for them, but it is important enough that it is a journey that should be embraced.

To other people emotions feel sacred; to question someone’s emotions is an “irreverent” chief offense. For these individuals, they will need to de-throne their emotions. Emotions were meant to serve and enrich life; not vice versa. In taming their emotions, these individuals will actually enjoy their emotions more.

- How important is sharing emotions to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is sharing emotions to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at sharing emotions? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at sharing emotions? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Intellect: Being a growing person is important for a romantic marriage; stagnant people have stale marriages. Learn and share what you’re learning; think and share what you’re thinking; ask questions and search for the answers together; dream

and explore the possibilities together. Being intellectually engaged in each other’s lives is a great way to romantically connect (on the negative side, this is why so many affairs start at work).

Being a growing person doesn’t just make you more interesting to your spouse, it also makes your spouse more interesting to you. As you are intellectually stimulated you gain new perspectives and find new things to share with your spouse. This draws out new conversations – conversations you get more from because you’re putting more into it.

- How important is being a growing person to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is being a growing person to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at continual learning? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at continual learning? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Interest: Words are a way we explore our world; reading a book, listening to a lecture, or asking questions. When we show interest in the world of our spouse we are loving them through “Words of Discovery” (a word play on the more common phrase “words of encouragement”).

Interest is an expression of love because it says, “If it happened to you, then it’s significant to me.” Actually, the less significant an event is, the more our interest expresses love because it is clear that what captures our attention is our spouse not the event.

Read Matthew 10:29-30. Often this passage is used to display God’s omniscience (i.e., that God knows everything). However, in light of this discussion, notice God’s love. God’s knowledge – attention to every detail of our life – reveals His interest in everything about us. God is not trying to win a trivia game by knowing the details of our lives. Instead, He is displaying His love for His children and Creation.

- How important is interest as a form of romance to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is interest as a form of romance to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled/willing are you at showing interest in your spouse’s life? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled/willing is your spouse to show interest in your life? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Hands

“Love never demands from your spouse spiritually what God has already given you in Christ (p. 197).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*

Service: Service may be the clearest manifestation of the frequently emphasized truth, “Love is a verb.” Oddly, we can love someone through service without words, touch, or even being close enough to them to be seen. In that sense, service may be the most versatile expression of love. Service can even transform an activity that is highly unpleasant and turn it into something romantic.

Nothing protects a marriage from a sense of competition (i.e., “whose getting the better end of the deal”) more than mutual service. A couple who serves one another regularly will have many fewer arguments where they cannot reach a mutually satisfying compromise. Serving one another builds an atmosphere of trust built on the clear message, “Your joy is more important than my preferences.” Couples can navigate many differences when that kind of trust is present.

- How important is serving as a form of romance to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is serving as a form of romance to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at serving? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at serving? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Presence: Proximity is romantic during good times (which should be obvious, but often neglected) and bad times (which is less obvious, but probably even more impactful). There is something special to a child when a parent attends their ballgame or performance. Which is odd; from the stands to the field/stage there is usually no opportunity for interaction. But simply “being there” is endearing, provides a sense of security, and builds relationship. The same is true in marriage.

- How important is presence as a form of romance to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is presence as a form of romance to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at being present? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at being present? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Touch: A discussion of erotic touch and sex as an expression of love will be reserved for chapters four and five. But the power of non-erogenous touch (i.e., holding hands, cuddling, massaging sore muscles, kisses that don’t “lead anywhere,” etc…) should not be ignored.

These are not the JV of romantic touch that are forgotten when, with marriage, a couple is “promoted” to varsity touching.

- How important is touch as a form of romance to you? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How important is touch as a form of romance to your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing are you at using touch to love your spouse? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- How skilled and willing is your spouse at using touch? | 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Misuses of Our Differences

What should a wise couple do with what they learn about their differences? Love one another.

What should a wise couple be on guard against so that their differences do not become points of division? This is an equally important question. The most damaging lies are exaggerated truths, because we can feel justified about our misapplications. Below we explore five uses of marital differences that are counter-productive.

1. “This Is Just Who I Am”
2. “Your Neglect Justifies My Sin”
3. “I Should Only Have to Do What Is Natural”
4. “Why Do You Hate Me?”
5. “We Need to Balance Each Other Out”

“[People] are attracted to those they honor and are repulsed by those they disrespect (p. 140).” Bryan Chappell in *Each for the Other*

Conclusion

You should be excited. If this chapter feels like a “chore,” then you either missed the point or are highly apathetic about blessings God wants give to and through you in marriage. Even if you discovered that there are important changes you need to make, the changes should be enjoyable. Unlike the changes required in the budgeting seminar, which required delayed gratification, this material is fun from the start.

Your next question should not be, “How do I do all of this? How do I enact nine new ways of loving my spouse?” Instead, start with two questions:

- Which of these ways of loving would be most natural to incorporate into my current lifestyle?
- Which of these ways of loving would be most appreciated by my spouse?

With those questions, you give yourself two objectives that come with strong motivational qualities: question one (ease of implementation) and question two (high degree of impact). These motivators, which are much more enduring than guilt or duty, will help ensure your efforts lead to a lifestyle instead of a fading few weeks of good intentions.

In the next chapter we will examine how to ensure that the kind of things we listed in this chapter do not degenerate into a mere to-do list; a form of fear-driven marital legalism. But instead, we will provide the framework to help you see any marital enriching activity that you do as an expression of the largest love story of all time – the gospel.

Evaluation: Living in THE Love Story

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. I can enjoy being selfless with the things I enjoy most. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 2. My spouse can enjoy being selfless with the things he/she enjoys most. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 3. I put as much thought and energy into my spouse’s dreams as I do my own. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 4. My spouse puts as much thought and energy into my dreams as their own. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 5. I live as if sacrificing for my marriage is an opportunity instead of a burden. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 6. My spouse lives as if sacrificing for our marriage is an opportunity instead of a burden. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 7. I am able to turn to my spouse for comfort and support during hard times. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 8. My spouse turns to me for comfort and support during hard times. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 9. I see Christ in even the small ways my spouse loves and serves me. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 10. My spouse sees Christ in even the small ways I love and serve them. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 11. I encourage my spouse to express their gifts as much as meet my needs. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 13. My spouse encourages me to express my gifts as much as meet their needs. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 14. I do not struggle with jealousy towards people or activities in my spouse’s life. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 15. My spouse does not struggle with jealousy towards people or activities in my life. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 16. We have a growing sense of unity and common identity in our marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 17. My spouse and I agree on what it means to be faithful to one another in marriage. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 18. Our marriage is energized by our opportunities to do ministry together. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 19. We take time to reflect on God’s goodness to us as a couple. | CD SD NS SA CA |
| 20. Our marriage is a major catalyst in our personal relationships with God. | CD SD NS SA CA |

Key to Survey Scoring: For each set of questions tabulate your score using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score, because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

- ...matches or exceeds the total number of questions, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.
- ...is less than the total number of questions, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.
- ...is a negative number, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-20: (Total: _____ in 20 questions)

This set of questions examines evidences of “centering romance in the gospel narrative.” We tend to be most self-centered and selfish with the things bring us the most joy; this includes the romantic aspects of marriage. Only centering our martial affection on the gospel can protect the joy of romance from our sinful tendencies.

Recommended Resources: *What Did You Expect?* by Paul Tripp (Commitments 5 and 6); *Preparing for Marriage* by Dennis Rainey (Part 2) *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim Keller (Chapters 1-4)

Chapter 3

Living in THE Love Story

Experiencing God’s Greatest Message In Life’s Greatest Blessing

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Encouraging your spouse will change you more than it blesses your spouse.
- We tend to be most selfish with the things bring us the most joy; this includes the romantic aspects of marriage.
- “We replicate what we celebrate.” Be on the lookout for the fruit of the Spirit in your family.
- Neither a powerful romance nor a great sex life can exist outside a story captivating enough to contain them.

Memorize: Philippians 3:1 and 7 (ESV), “Finally, brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not trouble to me and is safe for you... But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Rejoice in the Lord” – When you say “This is good” does “good” mean “has some Godly or heavenly quality?”
- “Same things” – If we’re repetitive about what annoys us (we are), let us be more repetitive about God’s blessings.
- “Not trouble to me” – Paul cultivated a character that enjoyed rehearsing God’s blessings, so should we.
- “Safe for you” – There is great soul and marital safety in contextualizing our struggles within God’s blessings.
- “Gain... loss” – This perspective changes how we think about the “things that are really important.”

Presentation Notes

What is the love story mold into which you want your marriage to grow? Cinderella, Pretty Woman, Snow White, Titanic, Gone with the Wind, It’s a Wonderful Life, Sleepless in Seattle, Grease, Jerry Maguire, Dirty Dancing, etc...? Whether the plot line comes from Hollywood cinema or not, we all have an ideal “narrative” we want our marriage to follow.

As one friend of my wife pointed out, “All chic-flicks are about the same thing. The guy does everything the girl wants to win the girl’s love and attention. She gets to be a god.” The same could be said of the pornographic films to which many men are becoming addicted, “The girl does everything the guy wants to win his love and attention. He gets to be a god.”

This is the really dangerous parts about our ideal love stories (even more than sexual lust); we are a god in the story—the story centers on us. Everyone else, including God, is a supporting actor in our story. This tendency doesn’t go away when we get married. In fact, for many people, it only gets worse as we try to make our “forever relationship” into the “happily ever after” we’ve been creating with each book we read and movie we watch. This was the human tendency before modern media, but the multi-billion dollar, idealized story-telling industry greatly exacerbates the tendency.

Roots of a Non-Gospel Narrative

“It is vital to understand that the biblical story is the only story that can make sense out of the story of your life and your marriage (p. 208).” Paul Tripp in *What Did You Expect?*

What does the Bible call these non-gospel sound bites of our lives? Grumbling. Often we think of grumbling as it were merely ruminating on something negative. If that were the case, then God would expect us to always be positive and we would have to remain naïve or silent about real problems or challenges that exist.

Instead, grumbling is thinking about life in sound bites that reinforce a non-gospel narrative. With this definition we see that grumbling can take many forms.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grumbling Proper • Critical Spirit • Worry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insecurity • Depression • Avoidance |
|--|---|

Keeping the Gospel as Your Grand Narrative

Too often, at this point, a marriage talk becomes hyper-positive. We become afraid of acknowledging things that need to change or mentioning things that are annoying for fear of being “negative.” If that is the result of this chapter, then this material is not sustainable and would require us to be less honest than the Bible.

So we ask the question, “What is the alternative to grumbling?” We’ll summarize our answer with the word “encouragement.” But if our approach to grumbling was more robust than expected, our approach to encouragement must also be expanded.

What is it then that grumbling and encouragement have in common that allow them to be opposites – *they are both forms of mental (intrapersonal) and verbal (interpersonal) rehearsal which replay the parts of our life we deem most significant.*

“The way I live out my relationships with people is one of the clearest indicators of how healthy my relationship with the Lord is (p. xxi)... Encouragement is far more important than we often realize. It’s an attitude that focuses more on the reality of what Christians are becoming than on where they are presently failing (p. 125).” William P. Smith in *Loving Well: Even If You Haven’t Been*

I. Encouragement Teaches

A pre-requisite to encouragement is looking for things to affirm. This means encouragement blesses you before it blesses your spouse. In order to encourage, you must discipline yourself to look for those things that are good, true honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent (Phil 4:8) in your spouse.

Encouragement teaches you like a child learning his colors. The child lived in a world of color long before she could name any of them. Learning didn’t add to the child’s quantity of known information; rather it provided the child the opportunity to share what he was already experiencing.

We live surrounded by the goodness of God. Naming that goodness, particularly when you see it in your spouse, in spoken words does not add to the quantity of God’s blessing in our lives; rather it is the opportunity for us to draw the attention of our spouse to the goodness of God they display so both our enjoyments are energized.

This is how encouragement teaches you to keep the gospel as the grand narrative of your life; not be adding theological content to your memory, but by continually drawing your attention to the reminders God’s blessings. Even with all these personal benefits God also uses your encouragement to keep the gospel as the grand narrative of your spouse’s life.

2. Encouragement Motivates

The same principle that holds true between encouragement and teaching also holds true for encouragement and motivation—the act of encouraging motivates me before it motivates my spouse. Training myself to notice the goodness of God around me doesn’t just improve the positive-negative balance in my memory; it increases my motivation for doing the things God has called me to do.

I am no longer able to feel as if God just wants things *from me for* other people (eventually demoralizing); instead I begin to realize how much God has already done *for me* through the way He is active in those around me (perpetually motivating). This perspective is essential for sustaining the effort necessary to nurture a lifelong romantic marriage. Otherwise, ant of us would succumb to thinking we are giving more than we are getting, even from God.

In order to maximize the teaching and motivating impact of encouragement, two focal points of encouragement are recommended.

First, look for opportunities to encourage the full and balanced character of Christ in your spouse.

Second, encourage your spouse for those qualities and interactions that are unique to your marriage.

“Take careful note, men, that these complements are not merely physical (p. 64).” C. J. Mahaney in *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God*

3. Encouragement Reinforces a Narrative

During neutral or good times it should now be clear how to reinforce the gospel narrative through our words and thoughts. We give God the credit for the good things in our lives and we train ourselves to notice and give weight to His blessings even in the midst of mundane events.

What remains to be done in this chapter is to demonstrate how the gospel narrative is able to allow us to be honest about each other’s disappointments and failures while not detracting from an ever increasing closeness within a marriage. Let’s examine each of the four major themes of the gospel in order to see how they can still generate an encouraging story when the topic to be addressed is unpleasant.

1. **Creation:** We realize we only have the standard and expectation of “good” because God is good and He made our world (including marriage and our spouse) to be good. If life were random or built purely on a “survival of the fittest” evolution, then the expectation that life would be “good” would be irrational.

Allow your points of failure or disappointment to be a reminder that it is a blessing that we have a good God who created us to be good people and live in a good world.

2. **Fall:** But the preceding paragraphs are not always true. This is where many of us get appalled and draw back from relationships because of the fear of being hurt or insecurity of being found out.

For Christians the presence of sin should be expected, not a surprise. We do not believe that people are good, and there must be a reason people do selfish things. It is when we are surprised at sin that increases our sense of being threatened.

The absence of shock gives you the opportunity to respond to sin differently. The gospel allows us to grieve the presence and be hurt by the impact of sin without feeling like the narrative has turned tragic. It also reminds us that the presence of sin is not the final scene in our story; it’s only the second of four.

3. **Redemption:** We see a greater goodness of God in His redemptive work than we do in any other aspect of creation or history. Christians believe that broken things restored by God can have a greater glory than something that has never been broken.

That begs the question of Romans 6:1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” and is met with the answer of Romans 6:2, “By no means!” That would revel in the brokenness instead of celebrating redemption.

Relationships, especially marriage, afford us the opportunity to do more than witness God’s work of redemption; we also get to participate in it.

4. **Glorification:** If the story stopped with perpetual redemption it would eventually become dissatisfying. Being forgiven is wonderful; the thought of inevitably needing to be forgiven is discouraging.

Forgiveness can be powerfully romantic (hence the adage “fight hard and make up hard”), but the expectation you’ll unescapably be hurt in a way that requires forgiveness becomes a turn-off.

The gospel does not leave us in the hamster wheel of redemption. We will enter eternal rest (Hebrews 4:3-9). God will not exhaust us with a good thing we cannot sustain..

Do these four points tell you how to respond when sin or disappointment affect your marriage? No. Not if you want a script to read to yourself or your spouse for every potential unpleasant circumstance the two of you will face. We can begin to see the question is not realistic.

Do these four points alert you to when your thought life is going off-script with the gospel narrative for your marriage? Yes. When you can discern when you are leaving the gospel narrative you can reach out for help before the new-false narrative becomes entrenched. The earlier you can root out a false-narrative the easier it is to resist.

Conclusion

Loving well is not a theological labyrinth. Hopefully after reading this chapter you can see that cultivating a romantic marriage requires knowing two of the most basic tenants of the Christian faith.

1. **The Character of God** – We must believe that God is good and wants good things for us. This belief compels us to look for good things in the world around us, including our spouse, and to give God credit for the good things we find. Knowing that God is the source of everything good protects us from looking for His gifts to satisfy our hearts in the way that only He can.
2. **The Simple Truths of the Gospel** – We need to understand how the themes of creation, fall, redemption, and glorification make sense of our life better than any other faith system. The rise and fall of pleasant and unpleasant experiences in our life and marriage must be navigated in light of these themes in order for us to enjoy relationships with people who are in process of being redeemed (that is everyone in our lives).

Think of the “ideal love story” you identified at the beginning of this chapter. What would happen if you watched that movie daily for a month or lived it day-in-day-out for a decade? It would lose its appeal. It would no longer be new. Only the gospel can make and keep the promise to be “new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23). If the activities we do to bless our marriages are going to be satisfying for a lifetime, they need to be rooted in a story that big.

Evaluation: Sexual Intimacy in Marriage

Note: Each major section of the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage series will have a brief evaluation tool to help you assess your marital strengths and weaknesses. Complete the evaluation before reading the material, then review the assessment again after completing each section to learn the accuracy of your initial self-assessment.

Instructions: Read the following descriptive statements. Consider how well they describe your experience or perspective on your marriage. If you are engaged, consider how well they describe your courtship experience or your beliefs about what you think your coming marriage should be. Mark the answer that best fits how you respond:

(CD) Completely Disagree, (SD) Somewhat Disagree, (NS) Not Sure, (SA) Somewhat Agree, or (CA) Completely Agree

***** Note:** For couples taking this evaluation as part of their pre-marital preparation, parts of this evaluation will be difficult to answer. It fine to skip questions you are unable to answer. Those questions will likely represent important conversations for you and your fiancé to have leading into your honeymoon.

1. I believe that sex is a good gift from God made for our enjoyment.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
2. My spouse believes that sex is a good gift from God made for our enjoyment.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
3. We believe that an enjoyable married sex life is one way we experience God's goodness.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
4. My family had a healthy and positive view of sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
5. My spouse's family had a healthy and positive view of sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
6. I want to have a healthy sex life that blesses our marriage.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
7. Sex is not so important to me that it creates fear or pressure for my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
8. Sex is not so important to my spouse that I feel pressure or intimidated.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
9. Sex is not unimportant to me to a degree it disappoints or offends my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
10. Sex is not unimportant to my spouse to a degree is disappoints or offends me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
11. My spouse and I agree on the difference between sex and intimacy / closeness.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
12. My spouse and I agree on the balance we want between sex and intimacy / closeness.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
13. I feel attractive and appealing to my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
14. My spouse feels attractive and appealing to me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
15. I am comfortable being nude in front of my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
16. My spouse is comfortable being nude in front of me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
17. We are balanced in who requests and initiates sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
18. I request sex in a way that is tactful and appealing to my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
19. My spouse requests sex in a way that is tactful and appealing to me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
20. The language I use to describe sex is wholesome and non-offensive to my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
21. The language my spouse uses to describe sex is wholesome and non-offensive to me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
22. My spouse and I can talk about what we enjoy and want from our sexual relationship.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
23. My spouse and I can talk about our fears or insecurities related to sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
24. My spouse and I can talk about the effects of age on our bodies and sexual desire.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
25. We agree on the frequency with which we have sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
26. We manage our schedule and work load to protect time for romance and sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
27. Sex does not feel like a duty or routine that robs us of its full satisfaction.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
28. I am satisfied with the quality of sex in our marriage.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
29. My spouse is satisfied with the quality of sex in our marriage.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
30. I feel like I can meet my spouse's sexual expectations and desires.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
31. My spouse feels like he/she can meet my sexual expectations and desires.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
32. I am unselfish during sex and seek to find greater pleasure in my spouse's enjoyment.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
33. My spouse is unselfish during sex and seeks to find greater pleasure in my enjoyment.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
34. We intentionally plan for variety in the way we foreplay before sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
35. We will both be assertive during sex to take the lead in pleasuring our spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
37. We will both be assertive during sex to affirm the things that are enjoyable.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
38. We will both be assertive during sex to let our spouse know what would be enjoyable.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
39. We take time after sex to enjoy each other during the afterglow.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA

40. In the days after we talk about our sexual encounter to affirm and flirt with each other.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
41. I do not use sex as a tool to get things I want or punish my spouse.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
42. My spouse does not use sex as a tool to get things he/she wants or to punish me.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
43. Guilt over past sexual experiences does not interfere with my ability to enjoy sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
44. Guilt over past sexual experiences does not interfere with my spouse’s ability to enjoy sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
45. Trauma related to past sexual experience doesn’t impede my ability to enjoy sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
46. Trauma related to past sexual experience doesn’t impede my spouse’s ability to enjoy sex.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
47. My spouse does not ask things of me during sex that make me feel uncomfortable.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
48. I do not ask my spouse to do things during sex that makes him/her feel uncomfortable.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
49. If sex were uncomfortable or difficult we would seek medical or counseling help.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA
50. Same sex attractions do not interfere with our ability to enjoy our marriage relationship.	CD	SD	NS	SA	CA

Key to Survey Scoring: For each set of questions tabulate your score using the following numerical values. The scoring is weighted with the “neutral” NS answer being a negative score, because if you have not defined or pursued important aspects of your marriage relationship it will negatively impact the marriage.

CD	–	Negative 3 points	SA	–	Positive 1 points
SD	–	Negative 2 points	CA	–	Positive 2 points
NS	–	Negative 1 point			

If your total score...

- ...**matches or exceeds the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage is an area of strength.
- ...**is less than the total number of questions**, then this area of marriage could use attention or refinement.
- ...**is a negative number**, then this area of marriage should be given immediate and concentrated attention.

➤ Questions 1-12: (Total: _____ in 12 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**belief and values related to sex**” present in a gospel-centered marriage. Sex is good. Sex is a gift from God given to married couples to enjoy and strengthen the bond their covenant. Married couples should feel emotional freedom to enjoy sex with each other.

Recommended Resources: *Preparing for Marriage* (Chapter 8) edited by Dennis Rainey; *The Meaning of Marriage* (Chapter 8) by Tim Keller; *Intimate Issues* (Part 1) by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus

➤ Questions 12-24: (Total: _____ in 12 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**comfort with our bodies and vocabulary**” present in a gospel-centered marriage. The gospel is the essence of being fully known and fully loved by the One who ultimately matters; the Christian life begins with a very awkward conversation with God about personal things hard to talk about (i.e., our sin). By parallel, sex is the next most tangible expression of being fully known and fully loved; marriage involves talking about things that can be awkward, like sex. The gospel gives us the freedom to have these conversations without shame or embarrassment; more than that, we can share these moments with confidence and joy.

Recommended Resources: *The Celebration of Sex* (Section One) by Doug Rosenau; *Intimate Issues* (Part 3) by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus

➤ Questions 25-40: (Total: _____ in 16 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**frequency and quality of sex**” present in a gospel-centered marriage. Marriage was not made for sex, but sex was made for marriage. This is the same principle Jesus taught when he said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:37).” The implication is that people should not be legalists about rest, but they should rest. Similarly, Christian couples should not be counting and ranking their sexual experiences, but they should be having sex and enjoying it.

Recommended Resources: *The Celebration of Sex* (Sections Two and Three) by Doug Rosenau; *Intimate Issues* (Part 3) by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus

- Questions 41-50: (Total: _____ in 10 questions)

This set of questions examines the “**red flags related to sex**” that would damage or undermine a gospel-centered marriage. The nature of these red flags vary significantly, but if they are present, it is recommended that a couple voluntarily seek the appropriate assistance rather than allow these struggles to devolve into a crisis that forces the couple to seek outside assistance when they are less receptive and the situation is complicated.

Recommended Resources: *The Celebration of Sex* (Sections Four, Five, and Six) by Doug Rosenau; *Intimate Issues* (Part 2) by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus

Sometimes within a marriage the problem is not one specific area or issue but an overall imbalance in the effort, skill, thoughtfulness, and awareness being put into the marriage. Below is a list of questions that reveal your perspective on your effort and your spouse’s effort in the marriage. Use the same numerical scoring system as you used above. In this case, the closer your scores are to another, the more mutual (and typically healthy) the marriage.

_____ **My Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score questions 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 15, 18, 20, 32, and 41.

_____ **Spouse’s Score** – Using the same scoring system as above add together the score for questions 2, 5, 8, 10, 16, 19, 21, 33, and 42.

Chapter 4

Sex as One of God’s Gifts for Marriage (Part One)

Learning to Skillfully and Unashamedly Enjoy Foreplay

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- Sex is a celebration more than recreation
- Your sex life will never be better than your overall marital health
- The brain (imagination), skin (touch), and ears (listening) are the sexiest parts of our body.
- The purpose of this chapter is to heighten the God-intended bonding effect of sex by accentuating every aspect of the spouse and marriage you are celebrating in sex.

Memorize: Proverbs 5:18-19 (ESV), “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.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Rejoice” – The Bible does not want us to be embarrassed about enjoying sex; God wants you to enjoy His gift.
- “Of your youth” – This history you share together should add to the enjoyment of each other in sex.
- “Lovely... graceful” – A wife may not be a ballerina, but God calls you to see and speak of her with these qualities.
- “Breasts” – The Bible is not bashful about the delight a husband and wife should take in each other’s bodies.
- “Intoxicated always” – The sensual delight you take in each other should not be restricted to your young bodies.

Presentation Notes

How do you feel as we get ready to talk about sex? Nervous, excited, guilty, awkward, self-conscious, aroused, or tired of me asking question and ready to get the conversation started?

Surprising to many people, the first step towards a great sex life is the ability to talk about sex. Sex is a “team sport” and communication is essential to anything involving the synchronization of two people’s bodily movements (not to mention schedules and emotions).

For many couples the most beneficial thing they will gain from this chapter and the next will be a conversation guide.

“Another mark of this community should be free and open discussion about how the Bible’s perspective on sex plays out in life and relationships. The more often singles and married Christians reflect on the Biblical teaching about this, the more support singles will feel for abiding by it (p. 228).” Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage*

What are the three sexiest, most stimulating organs of the human body?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

“The task you face is not getting rid of all of your expectations, but basing them realistically on biblical principles.... It may seem like strange advice, but the quality of your sex life may depend on turning off the television, picking a good fight, becoming independent of your parents, setting up a budget, or taking regular vacations (p. xi).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

Sex Begins with Priorities

Sex begins (and too often ends) when a couple intentionally arranges their life to make sure there is time and energy to enjoy one another.

“Passion begins with priorities, not genitals (p. 222).” Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus in *Intimate Issues*

- When do my spouse and I have the most energy and focus to enjoy each other sexually?
- What stressors do we need to manage most faithfully to protect our sexual interest and vitality?
- What lifestyle habits are most important to each of us feeling like a sexy, desirable person?

Here are several pointers that are important for couples wanting to make sex a priority:

- Have realistic expectations for what you can accomplish in your 168 hour week and with your monthly income.
- Protect time together; not just date nights but at least two evenings a week when you’re “just at home.”
- Examine the rhythm of your week and month to determine when the “optimal times” for intimacy are.
- Be willing to say “no” to other people in your life in order to say “yes” to your spouse.
- If you have children, enforce a bed time that allows you to have marriage time in the evening.

Sex Requires an Environment

First, a couple should consider the *physical environment* in which they make love.

- Privacy
- Cleanliness
- Comfort
- Ambiance

Second, a couple should consider the emotional environment in which they make love.

- Conflict
- Areas of Neglect
- Insecurities
- Personal Challenges

Third, a couple should consider the *relational environment* in which they make love.

- Regular Times of Closeness
- Date Nights
 - Both spouses prioritize and protect these times on their schedule.
 - Frequent enough neither spouse wonders “When will our next date be?”
 - Balanced in who plans the date and whose preferences are the focal point of each date.
 - Not a burden to the family budget; don’t stress yourselves with something intended to be romantic.
 - Focused on each other more than the activity or event; talk more than you eat, watch, or do.
 - Cover your city with pleasant memories of your marriage to encourage as you do anything else.
- Romantic Surprises
- Enrichment Trips

Sex Should Involve Anticipation

“Getting there is half the fun” may or may not represent your experience with family vacations, but it should represent your mindset towards sex. Chances are you and your spouse will not even be in the same room, maybe building, as you implement the “technique” of anticipation.

Too often couples expect physical stimulation (aggravated nerve endings) to produce what can only be achieved through healthy imagination (sensual thoughts of your spouse mixed with things you admire-appreciate about them).

First, anticipation should be a tool you use to enhance your own sexual experience. It is not selfish to enjoy sex.

- Start by asking yourself the question, “What would put me in the best physical and emotional place to enjoy sex?”
- Make decisions about your schedule (i.e., taking nap if possible or moving a stressful task) that allows you to have more physical energy on a day when you anticipate being intimate.
- Give your spouse a clear hint of your intentions for them later and allow yourself to be flattered by their anticipation of you throughout the day.
- Wear something that makes you feel sensual throughout the day. It doesn’t have to be visible to anyone else, but you know and that’s the point.

- Replay compliments you’ve received from your spouse or reread letters / texts from your spouse that express their love and appreciation for you.
- Overall, learn to enjoy (i.e., be stimulated by) the ability God has exclusively given to you to bless your spouse through the physical-emotional-visual experience of your romance and sensuality.

Second, anticipation should also be a tool you use to enhance the sexual experience of your spouse. It is not conceited to revel in and capitalize upon your spouse’s desire for you.

- Start by remembering that sex is not just about physical stimulation; it is about feeling wanted.
- Ask your spouse, “What are the best ways for me to leave you ‘simmering’ all day so that when we make love you experience all the fireworks I want for you?” This question alone builds anticipation.
- Initiate a conversation about your favorite sexual experiences as a married couple. You review every other area of your marital history, why not this one?
- If you have a day when you normally have sex, then say something like “I know it’s only Tuesday, but I’m looking forward to Wednesday already.” This prevents regular from becoming routine.
- If you know there is something that makes sex exciting for your spouse (i.e., articles of clothing, cologne or perfume, location in the house, etc...) invite your spouse to pick that out at the beginning of the day; know they won’t be able to get it off their mind all day.
- Flirt with each other in a crowd (i.e., discreet but suggestive wink or whispered invitation for later) when both of you are powerless to act on the offer. The “unfairness” of the rest of the errand or party will generate anticipation with will make “later” more enthusiastic.

“In the busyness of life, lovers forget to make eye contact when they’re talking—or for that matter, when they are making love. The eyes express so much: acceptance, excitement, a longing to understand, and sexual desire (p. 122)... Every mate who wants to be a passionate lover must practice the discipline of growing up and becoming a confident person (p. 180)... There is nothing sexier than men or women who are comfortable in their own skin and can confidently launch into new adventures in wild and unique ways (p. 181).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

Sex Calls for Us to Focus

Take a moment to consider your favorite hobbies. Are any of them as much fun when you’re distracted? No. Unless your hobby is multi-tasking we want to be able to focus on the things we enjoy. The same is true for sex.

- The previous points on anticipation can help.
- Understanding that God’s grace gives you the moral freedom to interrupt “being productive” to “play” with your spouse can be important for many task-driven spouses.
- Manage your schedule and finances well so that you do not live in crisis.
- Do not keep work-related tools (i.e., computer, smart phone, etc...) in your bedroom.
- Consistently make eye contact with your spouse during foreplay and intercourse. This helps with focus, but is also romantic as you connect with your partner.
- Take time to talk, cuddle, and affirm one another afterwards so that sex does not feel like a task being completed so you can move on to the next thing.

Sex Includes Non-Touch Bonding

Don’t read this material as a long to-do list before sex. We’re not talking about how to “add” more romantic activities into your already busy life; we’re showing you how to incorporate romance into the life you’re already living.

Neglecting this process generates a ho-hum sex life in many marriages. The convenience of sex in marriage (i.e., we just go up to the bedroom) often results in skipping to stage nine.

“In order for romance to deepen, you must touch the heart and mind of your wife before you touch her body (p. 28).” C. J. Mahaney in *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God*

1. Eye to Body
2. Eye to Eye

What are the three sexiest things you can wear? These are universal answers regardless of your gender, body type, or your spouse’s attractiveness preferences (give your best guess before you look at the answers below).

“To be sexy is to be aware of your body as an instrument of playfulness and delight, to be able to communicate this awareness to your husband and give him the gift of your body for pleasure, delight, variety, and playfulness. We’re going to tell you a secret. It’s better to be sensuous than to have a perfect ‘10’ body. (p. 59)... One of the quickest and best ways to feel good about your body is to have a rewarding sexual relationship with your husband. Good sexual experiences breed high levels of body satisfaction (p. 64).” Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus in *Intimate Issues*

3. Voice to Voice

“Making love needs to be based on an intimate marital partnership. Without the playful, loving companionship, sex becomes another buzz or rush that loses its perspective and has increasingly diminishing returns (p. 8)... You cannot work at creating better lovemaking; you and your mate have to play at it (p. 13)... Sexy lovers take the time to develop the sensual, romantic part of their minds and personalities (p. 18)... Sex is perhaps 80 percent fantasy (imagination in mind) and about 20 percent friction. Granted, pleasuring erogenous zones (friction) is fun, but what truly creates the excitement is your mind (p. 74).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

Sex Moves on to Mild Touch Bonding

We are now beginning our descent into to more sensual forms of romantic engagement. In becoming an excellent lover, it is helpful to understand the three levels of erogenous zones that exist on the human body.

- **Level III – The Entire Body:** Our bodies are covered with skin which has nerve endings that can be used to produce arousal when lovingly touched by a person we trust.
- **Level II – Traditional Foreplay Regions:** These include inner thigh, breast, abdomen, small of the back, neck, face, and mouth. These are areas for spouses to explore and stimulate as they seek to bring their partner to an optimal level of anticipation before beginning with intercourse.
- **Level I – Genitals and Nipples:** Stimulating these areas too early in the buildup of arousal will impede the intensity and duration of pleasure possible during intercourse. Instead, a mature lover will build a momentum of desire before beginning the touches that will culminate their sexual encounter.

In the remainder of this chapter we will discuss the use of Level III touch and some Level II touch. In chapter five we will complete instruction on Level II touch and also address Level I touching. But now we will examine stages four through eight of Rosenau’s pair bonding model.

4. Hand to Hand
5. Arm to Shoulder
6. Arm to Waist
7. Mouth to Mouth:
8. Hand to Head

Conclusion

Read the Song of Solomon. Too often we read the Bible only to find what we already know. That is one of the reasons we avoid books like the Song of Solomon. It doesn’t resonate with what we expect to find when we read the Bible. We are not used to the Bible being sexually explicit. In this case, I would like to invite you to read the entire book of the Song of Solomon (only eight chapters; about five pages) for two reasons:

1. To discover the biblical basis for the material in this chapter.
2. To reinforce the idea that God does want Christians to think about these things.

Portion of this Chapter	References in Song of Solomon	Ways You Want to Grow
Three Sexiest Parts of Our Body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain • Skin • Ears 		
Sex Begins with Priorities		
Sex Requires an Environment		
Sex Should Involve Anticipation		
Sex Calls for Focus		
Sex Includes Non-Touch Bonding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye to Body • Eye to Eye <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Smile, Eye Contact, Confidence • Voice to Voice 		
Sex Moves on to Mild Touch Bonding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand to Hand • Arm to Shoulder • Arm to Waist • Mouth to Mouth • Hand to Head 		

Chapter 5

Sex as One of God’s Gifts for Marriage (Part Two)

Learning to Skillfully and Unashamedly Enjoy Intercourse

Plumb Lines: These are the “sticky” statements that capture the core messages of this chapter.

- When you think of sex, think of serving.
- Marriage was not made for sex, but sex was made for marriage.
- Sex is not sin; neither is it salvation.
- Sex should be a gift you give each other not a tax you exact from one another.

Memorize: I Corinthians 7:3-5 (ESV), “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” As you memorize this passage reflect upon these key points:

- “Give” – If we are going to have a biblical view of sex, we must focus on giving more than getting pleasure.
- “Not have authority” – This clause in no way validates abuse; but highlights that spouses “belong to one another.”
- “Do not deprive” – Sex is a gift that only you can give your spouse. Your neglect in this area would be absolute.
- “Limited time” – The Bible does not speak to how often a couple should have sex beyond this – frequently.
- “Tempt you” – The temptations that exist because of neglecting sex are greater in number than “just lust.”

Presentation Notes

You may be wondering, “Is there really anything else we need to know? Let us go and do our thing already.” Which brings up an important point, you can be so intentional that sex becomes mechanical and loses its passion.

Do not fall into the pattern of thinking that you need a “Masters in Sexology” in order to enjoy a satisfying sex life.

“If you feel confused when it comes to sex, you are not alone (p. 3)... A woman responds to accumulated touches in many parts of her body until she reaches the desire to be ‘filled up’ while a man quickly responds to direct touch of his genitals and feels a need to ‘empty out’ (p. 37).” Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus in *Intimate Issues*

Challenges and Opportunities of Initiating Sex

For many married couples initiating sex can be an awkward moment that leads to conflict or hurt feelings.

1. Use Mutually Honoring Language or Actions
2. Be Clear
3. Invite Don’t Demand
4. Have Realistic Expectations
5. Be Balanced as a Couple

How do we respond if our spouse declines our invitation? How would we lovingly decline our spouse’s invitation? How do we protect these moments from becoming part of a negative cycle in our marriage? If my body belongs to my spouse (I Cor. 7:3-5), is it ever permissible for me to decline my spouse’s invitation to sex?

- Only decline for important reasons.
- Resist interpreting a decline as rejection.
- Pair a decline with an affirmation.
- Pair a decline with another time.
- If you are declining frequently, initiate frequently.

“Sex in marriage is best compared to a thermometer, not a thermostat. It is the physical expression of what is true of a couple on the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual levels. It is not a thermostat that, if turned up, will warm up your relationship (p. 218).” Dennis Rainey (editor) in *Preparing for Marriage*

“If you want powerful techniques and easy answers, you may be disappointed in this book. God's plans often involve time, effort, and difficult changes... You'll discover that sex is more about an exciting process and way of life that it is a simple acquisition of techniques. In God's design, sexual fulfillment and intimate marriage can never be separated (p. ix).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

The Physical and Emotional Process of Arousal's Momentum

In this section we will explore what is happening at the various stages of arousal (excitement, plateau, climax, and resolution) and what we can do at each of these stages to (1) enhance our spouse's experience, (2) enhance our own experience, and, thereby, (3) allow sex to bless our marriage as fully as God intended.

There are several models for how the process of arousal gains moments through intercourse, but one of the leading models is the four phase model of Masters and Johnson.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. The Excitement Phase | 3. The Orgasm Phase |
| 2. The Plateau Phase | 4. The Resolution Phase |

The Excitement Phase

Chapter four was all about keeping the excitement phase exciting. When marriage makes sex permissible and you get accustomed to seeing each other naked, developing excitement may require more intentionality than it did during courtship. That is not an indictment on the quality of the marriage, but reality that comes with availability and familiarity.

On this early phase, one more subject should be addressed. How much time should be given to the excitement and plateau phases of sex? Should sex always be an “elaborate production”? Are “quickies” sexual junk food or a healthy form of variety? Is it okay to sometimes have sex out of compassion for our spouse more than our personal passion?

In order to engage these questions, we will look at several “types of sex” in marriage.

- **Normal Sex** – This category does not make the list; not because it doesn't exist, but because it's a category with a strong tendency towards “ho-hum” sex.
 - Don't always begin sex by taking your own clothes off. Allow your spouse to do this as part of foreplay.
 - Don't always begin sex by getting in bed. Allow foreplay to begin standing on another piece of furniture.
 - Don't always have sex in the same room. You can go to the bedroom, but start almost anywhere.
 - Don't always have sex at the same time of day. Morning and afternoon are as fun as evening.
- **Quickie Sex** – Duration is not the only, or often even the best, measure of quality. Finding a brief moment that is ripe for sex, making eye contact with a smile, and seizing it can be great fun. In some especially busy seasons of life a couple may show great care for one another (see nurturing sex below) by these quick encounters to stave off frustration or loneliness. However, if the “season” become extended, then a couple needs to re-examine their schedule and priorities.
- **Duty Sex** – This category also does not make the list, because it takes a gift and devolves it into a job. When “should” and “have to” become the verbal prefix to sex, then either a couple is turning play time into a responsibility or there is a larger problem that needs to be addressed; interpersonally through communication, relationally with a counselor, or physically with a physician.
- **Nurturing Sex** – The alternative to duty sex is nurturing sex. It is not an obligation to fulfill, but a way to care for your spouse even if, at that moment, sex is not personally desired by you.

- **Passion Sex** – While nurturing sex is engaged out of compassion, there should also be times when sex is engaged out of passion and overwhelming desire for your spouse
- **Fun Sex** – There are also times when sex is just fun. If the choices are between watching a movie, engaging a hobby, going shopping, or sex, then sex should frequently win out simply because “it’s more fun.”
- **Celebration Sex** – This is a gift only you can give and a celebration that only the two of you can share. It is fitting to celebrate special occasions in a way that is exclusive to the two of you.
- **Gourmet Sex** – Candles, fruit, music, bed and breakfast, full body massage with scented oils, etc... There ought to be times that you put enough forethought into sex that it is.

The Plateau Phase

Read Acts 20:35. The words of Jesus in this passage are the best sex advice ever written. When you can take greater joy in your spouse’s arousal than you do your own, then you have the character to sustain a stellar sex life over a lifetime.

“Study your mate’s responses to know what is most enjoyable. No book can give you that information. Women, even more than men, vary about what feels good—even the strokes and rhythms that are most pleasurable. Be a lifelong student of your partner’s body and reactions (p. 15).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

There are two sides to the building passion that exists in sex.

- **Assertive Desire** – This is flirting, wooing, pursuing, teasing, kissing, touching, stimulating, and praising your spouse. Both spouses should engage in these assertive activities; with the assertive-receptive roles alternating even within the same sexual encounter.
- **Receptive Desire** – How you respond to your spouse’s assertive desires is profoundly important. A flat response kills the momentum. Smiling, squeezing, moaning, being amused, giving your full attention, verbalizing what you like, and asking for more are all ways to show that your spouse’s efforts are having their intended effect.

With these two responses in mind, let’s consider the final four pair-bonding phases.

9. **Hand to Body:** The couple is now exploring each other’s Level II erogenous zones.

“Too many couples are guilty of sabotaging their erogenous zones and sexual enjoyment with ignorance, anxiety, and sheer effort. Intimate marital companions have usually never developed their sexual awareness to include even half of the erogenous zones on their bodies, and they often short-circuit their sexual reflexes (p. 24).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

10. **Mouth to Breast:** This seems awkward to talk about in Christian material, but the Bible celebrates what can make many of us blush (Prov. 5:18-19).

11. **Hand to Genital**

12. **Genital to Genital**

As we wrap up the twelve phase pair-bonding material, remember the key to an enjoyable sex life is to enjoy all the phases of bonding. You will not take all twelve steps every time you’re intimate, but you should be intentionally enjoying and thinking creatively about how to bless your spouse with each form of bonding.

The Orgasm Phase

“Orgasms are such beautiful metaphors of uninhibited worship and giving up control to Christ. You are allowing your bodies and souls to soar with surrender. Apexes cannot be reached without letting go, which is built on a series of individual choices. I will trust you; I will choose to feel; I will choose to give up control in front of and to my mate (p. 48).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

While orgasm is the physical culmination of sex and pleasure peak of sex, it would be inaccurate to say that orgasm is the reason we have sex

However, if either the husband or wife struggles to experience orgasm on a regular basis, then it is advisable to work to remedy the situation.

1. Openly discuss the struggle without a sense of shame or failure.
2. Consult Appendix B in this seminar.
3. Visit a physician to rule out any medical or physiological problems that may be contributing to your difficulty.
4. Meet with a Christian sex therapist.

Orgasm may be the most “selfish” part of sex. The word “selfish” is put in quotes, because it not truly selfish (i.e., putting yourself before your spouse). But orgasm is an experience to which you must give yourself fully; otherwise it is like trying to ride a waterslide with your feet pressed against the side walls.

In orgasm you are focusing on your own pleasure, thereby affirming your spouse’s efforts, to such a degree that you are free to allow the transition from sympathetic (aroused responses) to parasympathetic (relaxed responses) nervous system that occurs as orgasm occurs. Don’t let the biology intimidate you; this just means that orgasm is an involuntary response where your body quickly transitions from intense pleasure to intense relaxation. The rapid journey between intensity in these two satisfying experiences accounts for the unique joy found in orgasm.

“Anxiety, anger, boredom, and resentment trigger the sympathetic nervous system reactions and are great saboteurs of having stimulating times making love (p. 23).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

The Resolution Phase

There is still one more aspect to sex before a couple goes back to day-to-day life

The resolution phase is a time to experience and articulate one of the primary purposes of sex – covenant renewal.

Sex provides a regularly opportunity to declare, “I belong you to in a way that I belong to no one else and that brings me great joy.” The moments after sex can be a very significant time to affirm this reality.

- Verbalize messages like those found in the paragraph above.
- Continue to cuddle and touch so it is clear you were making love to a person more than enjoying an experience.
- Be able to laugh about anything awkward that happened (kids knocking on the door, muscle cramps, or awkward noises), so that it is clear that sex is a relaxed celebration rather than a tense performance.
- Reinforce compliments you give your spouse at other times in order to allow the closeness of the moment to further cement them in their memory and emotions.

Remembering the Real Meaning of Sex

The intent of chapters four and five has been to be highly “practical;” maybe to a point that was uncomfortable for some readers who feel like being sensual is somehow dirty or worldly. It is unfortunate that sex has become so associated with its distortion that it can be hard to examine God’s gift with a clean conscience.

“Would you believe Scripture talks more about the pleasure of sex than it does about ‘being fruitful’ and ‘being one’? God devoted an entire book of the Bible, the song of Solomon, to the subject of sexual pleasure in marriage (p. 8).” Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus in *Intimate Issues*

Read Psalm 63:1-8. As a way to conclude this seminar, read the intimate language God gives us to understand our relationships with Him. While it would be inaccurate to construe this language with sexual connotations, it is so powerfully intimate that it is hard to miss the parallels to the intimacy of husband and wife which is intended to be the clearest earthly representation of Christ’s relationship with the church (Eph. 5:32). As you read, allow what you have learned in all five chapters of this seminar to speak not only to your relationship with your spouse, but also your relationship with God.

Psalm 63:1-8 (ESV)	Psalm 63:1-8 Brief Commentary
1. O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.	1. Notice the yearning David has for God which could not be satisfied in any other relationship. All the water around him seemed dry compared to God.
2. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.	2. David was invited to gaze on God in the privacy of His personal dwelling and found His attributes mesmerizing.
3. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.	3. The satisfaction that David experienced in God’s love spilled out in words of praise.
4. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.	4. Words of praise moved to the works of his hands as David sought ways to express his love over a lifetime.
5. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,	5. Other pleasures could only serve as metaphors for the greater satisfaction David took in his relationship with God.
6. when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;	6. Daydreaming of God was not a discipline but a reflex of love that caused him to ponder the things of God.
7. for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.	7. Acknowledging how God nurtured and supported him was David’s joy and strength, not a sign of weakness.
8. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.	8. David fully and publicly relied upon God.

Appendix A

Dates from the Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage “Intimacy” Seminar

You will remember what you rehearse. You will rehearse what you enjoy. Marriage is meant to be enjoyed but requires rehearsing (i.e., remembering) the things that are most important. For this reason, each seminar in this series will provide a collection of dates that are designed to allow couples to review what they’ve learned. Two things you should note:

1. Each date can be taken multiple times. You and your spouse will change over time. Because you change, the same date, with the same person becomes a new experience. Marriage resists becoming stale when we enjoy anticipating and learning what God is doing in our spouse’s life and marriage next.
2. Create the habit of reinforcing key marriage lessons with playfulness and romance. Learn from the content and pattern of these dates. Pick a section of this seminar that was useful to your marriage and create a date that allows you to review those truths in an enjoyable way.

Head, Heart, and Hands Date

Preparation: Review chapter two of this seminar using the 1-10 scales to discern how you are doing at loving your whole spouse with your whole person. As you review these assessments prepare yourself to answer two sets of questions.

1. In what way is your spouse excelling at loving you? What blessings from your spouse have gone unnamed and unpraised in the recent weeks and months?
2. In what area would it be most beneficial for you to grow in how you love your spouse? What ideas do you have for the practical expression of this growth?

Activity: What you do on this date, so long as it allows for conversation, is less important than the order of the conversations. Be sure to spend a significant portion of time on the first set of questions. If your date involves two parts (i.e., a meal and a walk), devote the first half of the date to these questions.

When you discuss the second set of questions you should have two objectives: (a) to demonstrate you’ve given time and energy in this brainstorming, and (b) to invite your spouse to contribute those things he/she would find most meaningful.

Ending: It is easy for these discussions to end idealistically; our ideas and intentions being larger than circumstances allow. The result would be a romantic date followed by a disappointing week. When this happens couples learn not to engage these kinds of conversations. To prevent this dynamic, conclude your date by discussing where the changes you want to make fit most naturally within the rhythm of your marriage.

Follow Up: In the days and weeks after this date focus your attention on saying “thank you” for your spouse’s efforts; both those you identified in the first set of questions and those your spouse wants to grow in from the second set of questions. Enthusiasm and appreciation for our spouse’s love and service are two of the best ways to cultivate a marital culture where romance and intimacy are present.

Goal for Date: To help you see that having a romantic marriage does not always mean doing more; often it simply means appreciating what each other is already doing. To provide an opportunity for the two of you to assess and discuss what would be most meaningful at enhancing the romantic culture of your marriage.

Grand Love-Story Date

Preparation: Reflect on one question from each of these three gospel-narrative themes.

- Creation – What is good about your marriage? When do you most clearly see the character of God in your spouse? How and when is your home a place of rest and refuge for you?

- Fall – What are the recent sins that have damaged your marriage? What are the recent forms of suffering that have challenged your marriage? When have the two of you been on the “same team” against sin and suffering (i.e., emotionally and practically agreed about the needed response)?
- Redemption – How has your spouse been gracious in spite of these hardships? How has God been faithful in light of these hardships? What opportunities for redemption has your marriage not taken advantage of?

Activity: This date will likely have a high-low-high feel. The activities you plan and their setting should account for this. The middle part of the date should allow for more privacy and not be in a celebratory setting. You might organize these conversations around the courses of your meal (appetizer-creation, fall-entrée, redemption-desert) or with activities. Regardless, the point is to trace the gospel in recent challenges of your marriage.

Ending: Pray together, thanking God that the gospel will one day have its full effect and make these strivings irrelevant. Thank God that, until Heaven, He has given us the gospel as a sufficient remedy for sin and suffering, and as the only thing powerful enough to protect marital unity in the midst of these experiences. Pray with expectancy of the final theme of the gospel-narrative: glorification.

Follow Up: Allow this extended date-conversation to give you “eyes to see” the themes of the gospel in the day-to-day events of your marriage. Allow the conversation to change the sound bites of your passing comments and thoughts. See God’s creative fingerprint in every good thing about your marriage. Contextualize the challenges of sin and suffering in light of God’s power and presence. Look for how God wants to respond redemptively to your challenges. When you see these things, speak them as a way to encourage each other.

Goal for Date: To radically change the way you see marital challenges by providing you with basic gospel categories in which to understand the events of life. To instill the conversational habit of articulating these themes as you face challenges.

Sexy Date

Preparation: Remember your favorite sexual experiences with your spouse. Think about them for your own enjoyment (this is savoring the gift of sex in marriage) and to be able to articulate what was special or stimulating about these experiences. Affirm your spouse as a lover as you talk about these experiences on the date.

Activity: Plan the evening around things that are sensually stimulating for you and your spouse: what you wear, food or setting of the meal, get a massage to relax, go try on clothes and model them for each other (whether you buy them or not), go for a walk at sunset, walking back through the events of your engagement (or comparable event), etc... Allow the evening to be about building a healthy sexual energy for both of you.

Ending: Go home early or rent a hotel room for the night. Allow this to be an evening of “gourmet sex” where you take time to affirm another and the marriage afterwards.

Follow Up: Talk about the evening together and smile big when you do. Make flirty allusions to the sexual experiences that your spouse found most satisfying.

Goal for Date: To demonstrate that it can be wholesome and non-selfish to set aside time to enjoy each other sexually. To allow sex to be a safe, on-limits topic of conversation and exploration between the two of you.

Appendix B

Common Challenges to a Healthy Sex Life

This seminar has been designed to counter the leading cause of sexual difficulty in marriage – a poor education about how sex works; either physically and relationally. Hopefully at this point you have a clearer understanding of the marital environment and physical process necessary to cultivate a satisfying sex life.

But sexual education alone will not guarantee a satisfying sex life; even the effective implementation of a good sexual education cannot make this guarantee. There are factors outside of being an informed and skilled lover than contribute to a satisfying sex life. In this appendix we will divide those factors into two categories:

1. **Sin Variables** – Factors that interfere with a satisfying sex life for which you bear personal responsibility. In this category we will provide initial guidance and recommendations for guilt over past sexual behavior, the effects of pornography on marital sex, and adultery.
2. **Suffering Variables** -- Factors that interfere with a satisfying sex life for which you do not bear personal responsibility. In this category we will provide initial guidance and recommendations for the effects of having been sexually abused, the experience of pain during sex, infertility, and impotence.

Sin Variables

The transition of sex from forbidden to frequent can be difficult for many couples. This difficulty can be compounded when one individual or the couple has participated in pre-marital sex; creating an association between sex and guilt (“I’ve done something wrong”) or sex and defiance (“Nobody is going to tell me what I can’t do.”).

These associations often make it harder to enjoy marital sex. In effect, when these associations are present pre-marital sex felt like an adventure (i.e., a trip into the forbidden) and marital sex feels like a trip to the grocery (i.e., an expected, normal routine of life). Here are some suggestions if you believe past sexual behavior is diminishing your present marital sex life.

- Be honest and talk about it. Silence always echoes and multiplies any sense of guilt or shame we experience. If your spouse brings this concern to you, do not dismiss it with, “But sex is okay now.” Instead, hear your spouse and walk with them towards the experience of forgiveness.
- If your past sin was with your spouse, then confess to one another and seek God’s forgiveness together. Allow this to start or reinforce the pattern that the two of you will openly talk about your struggles and take them to God.
- Realize God forgives and restores. God wants you to have a satisfying sex life. God has no desire for you to experience a life of guilt, awkwardness, and inhibition about His gift to your marriage. You are not being a “good Christian” by punishing your past sin with present guilt. Christ died for you to be free from that.
- If guilt and a sense of emotional restriction continues talk to a pastor or counselor. You must be more committed to knowing God’s freedom than you are living in your guilt. As you speak with a pastor or counselor, they may put God’s forgiveness into a better perspective, they may counter the lies you tell yourself in a new way, or their warmth towards you may simply be a more tangible example of God’s disposition towards you.

A common struggle for many spouses (not just husbands) is pornography and masturbation. These activities have many negative effects on a marriage: promoting selfish sex, generating the fantasy of an ideal and all-knowing lover, portraying sex for purposes other than covenant-bonding, robbing your sexual vitality from times with your spouse, and many more.

Another struggle that impacts many marriages is adultery; having an emotional bond with a member of the opposite sex that is greater than the one you share with your spouse, or any sexual activity that exists with someone other than your spouse. If either pornography or adultery has impacted your marriage, here are some suggestions.

- Be honest. You will never be more pure or feel more loved than you are honest with your spouse. Beyond the sexual offense, the lying and deceit may be more damaging to the marriage. It allows you to believe, “If my spouse knew, he/she wouldn’t love me,” which fuels your fantasy escape and sabotages your marital efforts.

- Do not try to deal with this alone. Shame causes most couples to deal with sexual sin alone. This is a mistake. Seek out a pastor or counselor to help you walk through the needed marital restoration.
- “False Love: Overcoming Sexual Sin from Pornography to Adultery” (www.bradhambrick.com/falselove) is a seminar designed to walk you through how the gospel guides you to freedom from sexual sin. It is a study that can be done in conjunction with a pastor, counselor, mentor, or accountability group.
- “True Betrayal: Overcoming the Betrayal of Your Spouse’s Sexual Sin” (www.bradhambrick.com/truebetrayal) is a seminar designed to walk you through the process of recovering from the impact of your spouse’s sexual sin. It is also a study that can be done in conjunction with a pastor, counselor, mentor, or accountability group.
- For additional guidance on how these forms of sexual sin impact a marital sex life and what recovery looks like, chapters 26-29 of Doug Rosenau’s book *The Celebration of Sex* are recommended.

Suffering Variables

Sin is not the only thing that disrupts a satisfying marital sex life. There are also many ways suffering impacts a couple’s sex life. This means that you do not necessarily need to repent if sex is not what you hoped it would be.

The lack of a good sex education and the (often) presence of a bad sex education is part of this suffering. We live in a day when there is more mis-information about sex than accurate information. Parents and churches frequently do not prepare people to enjoy the gift of sex as God intended. This seminar is an attempt to alleviate that form of suffering.

Another unfortunately common form of suffering is the experience of sexual abuse (one in four women; one in six men). When sex has been a weapon used to violate you it can be hard to experience sex as a gift meant to bless you. If you have experienced sexual abuse, then here are several suggestions.

- Realize this was not your fault and the shame you may feel is not yours to own. Likely you have been silenced, blamed, and shamed so this may be hard to accept. But it is true.
- Share your experience with your spouse. You may choose to watch or read some of the resource below first, but an important part of you being “fully known and fully loved” in your marriage is the assurance that your spouse does not love you any less because of what happened to you.
- Do not try to deal with this alone. Sexual abuse is a complex experience. Some of the emotional dynamics may change when you get married, when you have kids, when your kids have their first sleep over, etc... Developing a relationship with an experienced counselor to guide you through these experiences is important.
- “Hope and Restoration After Sexual Abuse” (www.bradhambrick.com/sexualabuse) is a seminar designed to overview many of the common experiences of sexual abuse. If you have not told anyone of your experience it can be a safe first step towards feeling understood so you can feel safer to talk to someone about your experience. It is also a good resource for your spouse to watch in order to understand how to best love and support you in light of your experience of abuse.
- *On the Threshold of Hope* by Diane Langberg is an excellent book on recovering from the effects of sexual abuse.
- Chapter 24 of *The Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau discusses how to navigate many of the challenges couples face in their sex life while one of them is processing their experience of sexual abuse.

A third way suffering can affect sex is through pain. When sex is painful it means something is wrong; not with you morally but physically. Pain is the alarm system of the body like guilt is the alarm system of the soul. When you’re hurting go to the doctor, like you go to God when you feel guilty. There is no reason for you to feel shame. Allow God to care for you through the expertise of a OBGYN or other relevant physician.

“Painful sex does not get better by ignoring it or trying to play through it. Often, it further traumatizes and creates more sexual difficulties (p. 285).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

- In addition to seeking assistance from the relevant medical professionals, chapters 22 and 23 of *The Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau are recommended for additional guidance.

A fourth experience of suffering that changes the experience of sex is infertility. Most couples do not think about the possibility of having children every time they have sex. But when a couple struggles to conceive, then they do begin think about it each time they have sex. What is not happening (i.e., conceiving a child) begins to overshadow what is happening (i.e., celebrating their marital love).

- Chapter 25 of *The Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau provides excellent material on (a) the common misconceptions and hurtful advice given to couples experiencing infertility, (b) how to walk through the medical testing, (c) considering medical and adopting options, and (d) how to protect your marriage on this journey.
- “Taking the Journey of Grief with Hope” (www.bradhambrick.com/griefseminar) is a seminar designed to help individuals process their experiences of grief; not just the traditional grief of losing a loved one to death, but also less commonly considered griefs such as miscarriage and infertility.

A fifth experience of suffering that impacts sex is impotence. This is a highly common struggle, especially in its episodic form, which has a tendency to become chronic when men fixate on it.

“All men will struggle with getting or maintaining an erection at some point. Fatigue, alcohol, medications, and performance anxiety are common causes. The key is not to panic because that would just compound the problem (p. 36)... The surest way to become psychologically impotent is to worry about erections rather than enjoying the moment (p. 249).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

Medication has allowed for significant alleviation of erectile dysfunction.

“Remember that Viagra restores the capacity for an erection, not libido... The impotence pill reminds us again that a healthy marriage and intimate lovemaking are about connection and not penetration. It's not about the penis, but about the person and the ability to relate intimately (p. 254).” Doug Rosenau in *A Celebration of Sex*

If impotence or erectile dysfunction is impacting your marital sex life, consider the following suggestions:

- Do not mistake “good sex” with the ability to sustain an erection or ejaculate. This sense of failure will inhibit your sexual ability to a degree much greater than whatever physical challenge you may be facing and rob your marriage of a continued sense of romantic closeness.
- Grow in your understanding of the complexity of impotence. Chapters 20 and 21 of *The Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau offer excellent guidance on this subject.
- Seek medical advisement. It is important to identify or rule out contributions from low testosterone levels, blood pressure, prostate difficulties, or glandular malfunctions (especially the thyroid).
- Seek counseling from a reputable Christian sex therapist. Once medical causes are ruled out, the emotional relational aspects of arousal and climax are the remaining variable. Performance anxiety about sex is the leading cause of psychological impotence. A trained and experienced counselor can help you understand and overcome the effects of anxiety and insecurity upon your sexual performance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this appendix was not to answer all of your questions about sexual difficulties, but to give you guidance on what next steps you can take to overcome whatever challenges are interfering with a satisfying marital sex life.

The main piece of advice is, “Don’t struggle alone.” Too many couples either (a) continue to do the same things over and over again hoping for a different result, or (b) give up and do nothing; both of these options result in sex being a subject that hinders your marriage rather than contributing to its flourishing.

Hopefully from the larger seminar and this appendix you have received two things to enable to reach out for help more effectively.

1. A vocabulary and example of what it means to more freely and openly talk about sex.
2. Direction on specific resources (seminars or books) or helping professionals (counselors or doctors) who are most appropriate to help you with the given struggle you are facing.

Appendix C

Small Group Accountability Questions From the “Intimacy” Seminar

How do small marital problems become big marital problems? There are two primary ways: (1) they get ignored, and (2) they are dealt with alone. Ask yourself these questions about any case of divorce or chronic marital unhappiness you know:

If that couple had addressed their struggle early on with the love and perspective of fellow Christians, how different would their life be now? How many generations would be blessed? How much pain and suffering would have been alleviated? How much sin and destruction would have been averted?

The condition of Christian marriage is a church problem. When the church does not fulfill the one another commands of the New Testament, every marriage in that church suffers (even the good ones). Excellent, crisis-based pastoral counseling (no matter how effective) will not have near the impact as small groups regularly asking one another simple, fundamental questions about “Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage.”

For this reason, every seminar in this series will contain a series of accountability questions to be used in the small group life of our church. It is suggested that at least once per month any small group with married couples divide men and women for the prayer time and ask one of the questions below.

Chapter 1

- Which of the “20 Challenges” are present in your marriage?
- How have you allowed these challenges to develop into unhealthy habits or expectations?
- Which of these challenges have you most successfully navigated recently?

Chapter 2

- How well are you doing at loving your spouse with your head, heart, and hands?
- Which of these is most important to your spouse and how are you seeking to grow in that area?
- Which of these is easiest for you to neglect and when are you most prone to neglect it?

Chapter 3

- What is the “love story” by which you judge your marriage and expect it to fit that narrative?
- What form does your dissatisfaction take when your marriage does not conform to your “love story”?
- How do you use encouragement to teach, motivate, and reinforce the true gospel love story in your marriage?

Chapter 4

- Do you and your spouse intentionally reserve time and energy for intimacy?
- Do you and your spouse cultivate a relational climate where romance and intimacy are natural?
- Do you and your spouse build anticipation for one another where sex is the climax of healthily sensual marriage?

Chapter 5

- Do you and your spouse have clear, mutually agreeable ways to initiate intimacy?
- Do you and your spouse use sex to indirectly communicate about grievances or avoid conflict?
- Are you and your spouse increasingly selfless with the things that bring you pleasure, including sex?

Rebuttal: Wow! That seems really personal for a small group discussion.

Response One: It is not more personal than a divorce is public. And, it is not more personal than the Bible calls for us to be transparent about our sin.

Response Two: Once you have done this for three months and seen the benefits to your marriages, you will laugh at the defensive rebuttal. Accountability is only scary like swimming lessons are scary for a child. Putting your face in the water is only intimidating until you do it. Then you realize a whole new world of freedom and fun awaits.

Appendix D

What Do I Do Now?

A plumb line of the Summit counseling ministry is, “We don’t do events; we create resources.” That means you should be asking yourself, “What can or should I do with this information now?”

We have created a series of brief videos that answer that what-now question from several different perspectives. Each of these can be found at:

www.bradhambrick.com/whatnow
www.bradhambrick.com/gcmintimacy

Personal Study or Small Group

Question: I’ve been to several of the Summit counseling seminars and notice there appears to be a couple of different kinds. You frequently recommend studying them as a small group or with a friend. That seems like a great idea, but since I haven’t done that before I’m not quite sure how to start something like that. Do you mind giving me guidance?

Pursue Personal Counseling

Question: After attending this seminar I realized I would like to pursue counseling to help me grow in this area. It sounded like there are several different options available. Would you mind explaining to me what those are and how I could connect with the one that best serves me need?

Leveraging My Workplace

Question: I’ve heard rumors that I’m supposed to be able to use the Summit counseling seminars to leverage my workplace for gospel influence. My first impression is that it sounds awkward and intrusive; like I’m telling people they’ve “got issues” or “need help.” But I’m also worried about putting up Christian material that might be offensive to some people who visit my workplace. But I would at least like to hear what you’ve got to say. How would this work?

As a Professional Counselor

Question: I’m a licensed counselor (LPC) and came across the Summit counseling seminars. I’m excited to see the church addressing these kinds of subjects, and I’m curious how you might see someone in my position (or a LCSW or LMFT) using the materials. I can see recommending them to my clients who are open to an overtly Christian aspect to their counseling, but it seems like there could be more uses than just counseling homework. Could you share your thoughts on how those in private practice might use these resources?

Our goal in Summit counseling is to (1) equip the church to care for one another and our community with excellence; (2) provide quality counseling services that allow our people to get involved in the lives of others with confidence – knowing additional, experienced care is available to come alongside them if needed; and (3) create ways for our members and other Christians in our community to leverage their workplace and careers for greater gospel impact in their spheres of influence.

We hope this seminar and these videos give you a vision for how this can happen and stirs a passion in you to be a part of God’s work of redeeming and restoring hurting individuals and families.