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a resource in:

Marriage

Sexuality in Christian Marriage Part II



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Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

Directions: This handout is designed to be read as a follow-up to Sexuality in Christian Marriage – Part I. Read through the verses and information below, allowing adequate time for discussion about each topic. The material below should not be considered exhaustive; rather, it should serve as a beginning point for you to search the Scripture and to learn more about marriage.

I. INTENT AND PURPOSE.

A. Sexuality is a gift from God.

Marital sexuality is a beautiful gift God has given to us. Unfortunately, the world today often misunderstands, or worse, mocks and ignores God’s design. The purpose of this handout is to provide information to encourage you to live out God’s design for sexuality in your marriage.

B. Appropriateness of terms.

The terms used in this handout are clinical and not “slang.” This is done in order to be clear and accurate in sharing information.

C. Comfort level with the topic.

While you may not be familiar (or comfortable) with the topic of sexuality, please understand that every effort has been made to be clear and direct without being overly explicit.

II. PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

A. Understanding four phases of sexual response.^{1,2}

God designed our bodies and emotions to go through several phases before, during, and after sexual intercourse. Each phase is defined below. The similarities and differences between how males and females experience these phases is reviewed.

Song of Solomon 2:16, “My beloved is mine, and I am his:”

1. Phase One: Desire.

This phase of sexual response refers to *openness to or seeking out* sexual activity. Thinking about sex (anticipation) is a key component of sexual desire. Numerous factors can enhance or block sexual desire. Over time, you can learn about and discuss what your preferences are. Some things to consider are:

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Energy level | Location | Sounds, music |
| Lighting | Interruption free | Soothing scents |
| Clothing | Comfortable temperature | Adequate time |

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

2. Phase Two: Arousal.

a. Building arousal – focusing on sensations.

Arousal refers to the building of pleasurable sexual and physical tension as a result of focusing on and nurturing sexual feelings. Both men and women experience a number of physical changes in their bodies as arousal occurs. Arousal focuses your attention on the senses and on enhancing pleasure.

Start with non-genital caressing, kissing, and cuddling, slowly moving toward genital pleasuring. During this time begin gentle, mutual exploration. Pay attention to the senses you are experiencing in the present moment and let passion build. This is a time to verbally honor and express love to your spouse.

b. Building arousal – foreplay.

Foreplay is a chance for you to show love and honor to your spouse. It is making love. Lack of adequate foreplay is one of the most common reasons for sexual dissatisfaction and/or sexual dysfunction in couples.

c. Be understanding of differences.

Each spouse will have different preferences about what does and does not feel good. What feels good to you may feel uncomfortable to your spouse. Therefore, communication about preferences is very important! The principle of “honoring and preferring” one another means we seek to bless our spouse by learning about, and adjusting to, his/her preferences.

3. Phase Three: Orgasm.

Orgasm is a significant increase and peaking of sexual excitement and arousal. Both men and women experience a significant number of physical changes as they reach climax. Orgasm involves letting go of control and allowing oneself to feel the intensity of the experience. Orgasm is an intersection of the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of our being.

4. Phase Four: Resolution.

The resolution phase is the period after orgasm in which a couple has the opportunity to spend time enjoying and holding each other. Both spouses experience their physical bodies relaxing and decreasing in intensity. Resolution can be deeply personal and affirming and is a time to verbally honor and express love to your spouse. It is not a time to critique your spouse or your sexual relationship.

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

B. Different by design: understanding the uniqueness of male and female sexuality.

Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

1. Male sexual response.
 - a. Males tend to quickly move into the arousal phase (although this will vary with age). They often experience sexual desire as built up physical tension in their bodies.
 - b. Men tend to experience emotional intimacy through sexuality.
 - c. The traditional sexual response cycle model of Desire, Arousal, Orgasm, and Resolution seems to fit male sexuality quite well.
 - d. Some notes to wives about male sexual response may be helpful.
 - i. It is important to understand that men tend to be stimulated visually.
 - ii. Sexual arousal in men is not dependent upon emotional intimacy. However, this doesn't mean that men don't want or need emotional intimacy.
 - iii. You need to be aware of the fact that your husband is bombarded with sexual temptation on a regular basis. Simply being married doesn't stop sexual temptation.
 - e. What husbands say they want from sex.³
 - "Husbands want their wives to understand that their sex drives are strong."
 - "Husbands want reassurance that their sexual desires are not abnormal."
 - "Husbands wish their wives would initiate sex."
 - "Husbands want to be wanted sexually."
 - "Husbands want variety in lovemaking."
 - "Husbands don't want the kids to ruin the couple's sex life."
 - "Husbands often wish their wives would be more open to discussing sex."
 - "Husbands wish their wives understood more about how sexual temptation affects their lives."
2. Female sexual response.
 - a. Female sexual desire is often misunderstood by both men and women. Traditional models of sexual response cycles (Desire, Arousal, Orgasm, Resolution) have not adequately explained female sexuality.
 - b. Orgasm in women must be nurtured. It is not inevitable as it is for most males. Emotional intimacy is key to female sexuality.
 - c. More recent understandings of female sexuality have shed light on why women and men often have differing levels of sexual desire. It appears that a 7-phase sexual response cycle better explains female sexual response.⁴

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

- i. Emotional intimacy: Emotional closeness, bonding, commitment, communication, respect, mutuality, tenderness and tolerance of each other's imperfections is the "motor" that drives the whole cycle.
 - ii. Sexual neutrality: Most of the time, women do not begin the sexual response cycle with spontaneous sexual desire and arousal. Rather, the emotional intimacy of the relationship provides a platform for them to be receptive to sexual stimuli. Unfortunately, the media and popular culture portray female sexuality in the exact opposite manner and lead many women to believe that something is wrong with them.
 - iii. Openness to physical arousal: Once the woman has decided to either seek out or be receptive/open to sexual stimuli, the amount and type of emotional and physical stimulation she receives is key.
 - iv. Increasing physical arousal: As the woman opens herself to giving and receiving sexual stimulation, she becomes more able to enjoy and focus on the sexual experience.
 - v. Sexual desire and physical arousal: As the arousal increases, so does her conscious awareness of her sexual desire. Note within this model, arousal (steps iii and iv) precedes desire (step v.). Sexual arousal and desire within a healthy, emotional intimate marriage leads the woman to emotional and physical satisfaction.
 - vi. Release: At this stage the woman experiences orgasm and/or emotional and physical satisfaction.
 - vii. Connection: This stage allows time for deepening of the relational bond between the husband and wife and strengthens emotional intimacy.
- d. Some notes to husbands about female sexual response.
- i. Most men underestimate how important emotional intimacy and communication are to their wife's sexual response.
 - ii. *1 Peter 3:7, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."* Dwelling with your wife according to knowledge means, over time, you will learn to understand your wife's needs and accommodate them.
 - iii. Remember, for your wife, foreplay isn't an option; it is essential! Slowing down the "rush" to intercourse will help you become a better lover and increase your sexual satisfaction as a couple.
- e. What women say they want from sex.⁵
- "Women want to be physically close."
 - "Women want time for talking."
 - "Women want romance, not just sex."
 - "Women want to be able to say, 'not now.'"
 - "Women want to be appreciated for more than sex."

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

- “Women want to please their husbands.”
 - “Women want to spend time with their husbands and view sex as a process rather than seeing it as a goal.”
- f. Important notes about female orgasm.
- i. Approximately 1/3 of women report they have little to no difficulty reaching orgasm. Between 26-58% of women report some type of occasional “difficulty” with reaching orgasm.^{6,7} Approximately 9-10% of women report never having an orgasm.⁸
 - ii. The majority of women (between 59-70%) report they cannot reach orgasm through sexual intercourse alone.^{9,10} That is, stimulation of the clitoris is also needed to bring them to orgasm. This highlights the importance of husbands knowing the location of the wife’s clitoris.

C. Enhancing marital sexuality.

1. Communicate clearly about initiating sex.

Your spouse **cannot** read your mind. If you are not clear in sharing your thoughts, feelings, and intents about being sexual, **expect** to be misunderstood. If you think your spouse is making gestures that might be sexual in nature, thoughtfully find out about it. Don’t assume.

2. Give and receive.

Learn about what your spouse enjoys sexually and focus on doing that. As *1 Corinthians 7:3* says, “*Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.*” Over time, it is often helpful for couples to alternate giving and receiving pleasure to the other. That is, take turns initiating and directing your sexual experience.

3. Set aside time for non-sexual touching.

Couples need regular times of hugging, cuddling, and kissing that **do not** lead to sexual intercourse. Often one spouse violates this principle (often the husband) by making any touch a starting point for sex. This can lead the other spouse to be hesitant to initiate non-sexual touch. Early on, agree together about whether or not you will proceed to sexual intercourse.

4. Attend to hygiene.

Both husbands and wives need to make sure they pay attention to their personal hygiene when preparing for sex. Bad breath, body odor, etc. can be hindrances to your spouse.

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

5. Extend lovemaking.

Couples often over-focus on genital sexuality to the exclusion of other expressions of sexuality including kissing, hugging, caressing, massaging, talking, etc. Research is clear that couples who extend their lovemaking have higher rates of sexual satisfaction and significantly higher rates of consistency in female orgasm.¹¹

6. Maintain passion in marriage.

Having special times together alone (regular dates and getaways) allows you to build the emotional intimacy that is foundational to your sexual relationship. The intensity of sexual intercourse cannot, in and of itself, sustain the spiritual and emotional connection couples desire, long-term, in their marriages. Romance and time spent focusing on your relationship is one of the most important keys to lasting sexual passion in marriage.

7. Vary your routine, and respect the feelings of your spouse.

Over time couples need to vary their sexual routine. Variations in type and length of foreplay and sexual intercourse are most common. When mutually deciding upon any sexual activity, ask “Is this Godly, respectful, and will it promote oneness with my spouse?” Neither spouse should feel coerced, manipulated, or forced into any type of sexual activity or feel guilty because of it.

D. Common issues.

1. Reduce performance anxiety.

Performance anxiety is one of the most common sources of sexual problems. It results from negative self-talk (e.g., “Oh, no. Is my spouse going to think I am doing this right?”). Spouses are often completely unaware of each other’s self-talk. Performance is overrated and skewed by the media and culture of today. Remember, sex is about pleasure, not performance. Satisfaction with sexuality is less about “achieving” orgasm than it is about enjoying the journey and “arriving” there. Relax, be yourself, and enjoy the moment. Also, you do not have to have orgasms at the same time in order to have high sexual satisfaction in your marriage. If it happens, it happens; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t.

2. Ensure adequate lubrication.

The amount of natural lubrication a woman has will vary widely over time. Inadequate lubrication is a common issue and can be a painful problem. K-Y Jelly is a soluble, water-based lubricant which works effectively and is available at any drug store or pharmacy. Do not use petroleum-based lubricants.

3. Make time.

Often, couples expect their sexual relationship to be “spontaneous.” However, with busy schedules, children, etc., couples can find connecting difficult. Prioritize (but be flexible) and plan time (but don’t be rigid) for your sex life.¹² Try to deal with distractions and mentally anticipate being sexually intimate.

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

4. Deal with negative attitudes toward sexuality in marriage.
 - a. If your sexual life is within God's boundaries, you do not need to feel guilt, shame, or embarrassment associated with sexuality (*Genesis 2:25; Hebrews 13:4*).
 - b. If you find you have some lingering negative attitudes toward sexuality in marriage, repeating the following affirmations can be helpful in assisting you in shifting your thinking.¹³
 - “The negative things I learned about my body and sexual feelings as a child no longer apply to me as a married adult.”
 - “There is nothing sinful or unnatural about sex. I can rejoice in my body and its sexual feelings. They are a gift from God.”
 - “God created lovemaking and orgasms for my enjoyment.”
 - “God designed sexuality to be a beautiful expression of my love for my spouse. I do not have to feel guilty and shameful about living out God's design for my marriage.”

5. Get your expectations in line with reality.

Each spouse needs to accept and adjust to his or her spouse's sexual comfort zone. Note that not all orgasms are “off the charts.” Focus, instead, on deepening the quality of your sexual relationship. Do not allow yourself to wish your spouse was like someone else.

6. Deal with letdowns due to inaccurate expectations.

Many couples experience disappointment in their sexual lives because of inaccurate expectations. Forgive yourself and each other and move on! You don't have to repeat the mistakes of the past. Rather, you can learn about sexuality together (read, get counseling, etc.).

7. Deal with differences in sex drives.

- a. This is probably the most common sexual issue affecting married couples. Adapting and adjusting to sex drive differences is the key. Good communication and attention to the marital relationship allows couples to work through this issue and find acceptable options.
- b. Differences in male and female sexual response cycles can lead to mismatches in sexual timing. Husbands generally have higher sex drives than wives; however, in some couples this pattern is reversed.
- c. Couples need to remember that many times, wives will not necessarily feel intense sexual desire at the beginning of lovemaking.
- d. Husbands, remember that applying guilt and pressure will not help your wife to feel more sexual desire. Conversely, showing her affection, respect, and honor will generally increase her sex drive.

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

8. Deal with the effects of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse experiences can significantly affect one's ability to enjoy Godly, healthy sexuality. If you have experienced sexual abuse, professional Christian counseling is highly recommended to help you work through the abuse and its relationship to marital sexuality. Be encouraged. These issues can be overcome!

9. Deal with issues proactively.
 - a. Learn more about marital sexuality and solutions to common sexual problems (e.g., premature ejaculation, difficulty achieving orgasm, very low/absent sexual desire, erectile dysfunction, etc.).
 - b. Read a high quality book on sexuality together and talk about it (see recommended resources).
 - c. Don't be afraid to talk to your physician about sexual concerns. Get a complete physical. Note that the side effects of some medications affect sexual performance.
 - d. Don't be afraid to seek counsel from your elder.
 - e. Don't be afraid to seek professional Christian counseling for a sexual issue.

III. COUPLE QUESTIONS.

A. Questions and issues for you to discuss.

1. How comfortable are you with talking about God's design for sexuality in marriage? Can I do anything to make it easier for you?
2. How did you learn about sex? Where or from whom did you learn about sex?
3. When you were growing up, did your parents talk to you about sex? What attitudes did you learn from them about sex?
4. Was affection (hugging, kissing, saying "I love you") openly expressed between your parents and shown to you and your siblings? How would you like to see us express love and affection in our marriage?
5. Do you view men and women as having different perspectives on sexuality? How do you think gender differences will affect our sexual relationship in marriage?
6. Do you have any fears about sexuality in marriage? About yourself? About me?
7. How do you view the idea of having time for non-sexual touching that does not lead to being sexual?
8. Have you had any negative sexual experiences (e.g., sexual abuse) that may affect our sexual relationship as a married couple? What steps do we need to take to work through these issues together?

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

9. How will we decide when to have sex? Who will initiate? How will we handle it if one of us wants to have sex and the other doesn't?
10. Would you be willing to read a book on sexuality in Christian marriage with me? See below for recommended resources.
11. When we have questions about sexuality, where should we seek out this information and/or counsel (e.g., elder, ACCFS, physician, book, etc.) so that we can live out God's design for sexuality in our marriage?

B. Recommended resources.

The following books have been used with couples in the church for many years. They can be ordered online (www.accounseling.org) or by calling Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services (877-370-9988).

Wheat, E. and Wheat, G. *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1997.

Gardner, Tim Alan. *Sacred Sex: A Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2002.

C. Common changes in marital sexuality with age.

There are a number of physical and biological changes that occur as we age. Such changes lead to differences in how we approach lovemaking.

1. Accept that hormone levels for both men and women drop over time and this results in several noticeable changes.
 - a. Our bodies physically change and lose tone.
 - i. Don't be critical of your spouse's physical changes nor your own.
 - b. Change in hormone levels may affect desire for physical intimacy.
 - c. Varying hormone levels may affect ability to engage sexually.
 - i. For women it may affect lubrication and result in discomfort.
 - ii. For men it may affect ability to become physically aroused.
2. **Show respect and honor to both partners.**
 - a. Accept that one partner may have a strong desire to continue being intimate.
 - b. Respect that there may be greater differences in the way you and your spouse approach lovemaking.
 - c. Women should respect that sex may still be a very important part of your husband's identity and his need for pleasure may remain high in spite of decreased physical response.
 - i. You will need to be supportive and encouraging of his masculinity if he is less able to engage in sex as he would desire.
 - ii. There may be more need for thoughtful foreplay.

Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part II

- d. Men should respect that sex may be less pleasurable and maybe less comfortable for their wives.
3. Ways to respond.
 - a. Find additional ways to be physically intimate that are mutually satisfactory.
 - b. Consider a medical consult to determine if there are health conditions that interfere with desire or ability and that may be treatable.
 - c. Be open with each other about ways to be helpful and respectful in love making.

References

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

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 2. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th ed.* (Washington, DC: Author, 2000).
 3. Archibald Hart, *The Sexual Man* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 69-84.
 4. Rosemary Basson, "Women's Sexual Desire – Disordered or Misunderstood?" *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 28, (2002): 17-28.
 5. Archibald Hart, Catherine Hart-Weber, and Deborah Taylor, *Secrets of Eve: Understanding the Mystery of Female Sexuality* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 41-56.
 6. *Ibid.*, 94.
 7. Julia Heiman, "Evaluating Sexual Dysfunctions," *Primary Care of Women*, (1995): 127.
 8. Hart, *Secrets of Eve*, 94.
 9. Clifford Penner and Joyce Penner, *Restoring the Pleasure: Complete Step-by-Step Programs to Help Couples Overcome the Most Common Sexual Barriers* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 254.
 10. Hart, *Secrets of Eve*, 104.
 11. *Ibid.*, 96-100.
 12. Margie Sims, "Strategic Sex," *Marriage Partnership*, Fall, 2002.
 13. D.E. Rosenau, *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of Married Sexual Pleasure*, Revised and Updated (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 205-206.