

MARRIAGE IS A MINISTRY SERIES

PHYSICAL FULFILLMENT

WORKBOOK

VOLUME 4 OF 5

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

Craig Caster



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Physical Fulfillment

Marriage Is a Ministry Series

Volume 4

Craig Caster

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Preface

God created the institution we call marriage, and today it is under severe attack. That statement might sound strange to you, but the most significant adverse effects originate from within the relationship between husband and wife. After a couple marries, each partner begins to tug according to their own needs and desires. As time passes, problems go unsolved, and disappointment, frustration, and anger bring hurt, which results in resentment and revenge. When two people enter into matrimony with such hopes, such good intentions, why do so many marriages fail? Alternatively, why are so many couples settling for unfulfilling relationships?

This book is dedicated to God and to His desire for every couple to experience the blessings He intended in a marriage. When two people unite as husband and wife with no training in God's principles, and often no godly examples from their pasts, they are genuinely ignorant of how to tend to each other. They may bring past hurts and emotional voids that add to the challenge. Through this material God will reveal nonnegotiable truths that must be followed, or the result will be discouragement and disenchantment. In short, much pain.

Statistics indicate that too many marriages between Christians end in divorce. As God's children and heirs of all His promises, why are believers failing? The problem is lack of information, lack of discipleship in biblical principles. Sadly, the church is not currently putting enough effort into this area to turn the tide that is sweeping so many down the path of destruction. Married couples are in great need of biblical teaching, being discipled by others in God's truth. When believers learn what God desires and decide to follow Him as disciples of Christ, they will receive the grace and power to overcome any problem.

God wants to show Himself strong on our behalf and wants us to glorify Him in our marriages. But we must want it too. We know marriage is important to God, yet most Christians after ten years of marriage still feel inadequate to disciple others. Consider a person who had performed a job for ten years. They would likely feel very confident to train someone else. And God is much more concerned about how we tend to our spouses than our vocations.

As you prayerfully complete this series, God will reveal His purpose for you as husband and wife. All information is based exclusively on biblical truth. The workbooks will guide you with Scripture and give you practical illustrations to help you implement the principles you are learning. The series is also intended to be a tool to disciple others. When your eyes become opened by the incredible way God is changing your life, you will see that many others need help too.

Lord God, thank You for revealing Your heart and will to us in Your Word. Please bless those who go through this book. Make the principles clear. Give them humble hearts to forgive those who have hurt them and the desire to ask for forgiveness from those they have hurt. God, be glorified in and through the marriages of those who are willing to follow You. Amen.

Introduction

This workbook is designed to bring you onto the path of discipleship, which means walking in God's principles. When we use words like *walk*, we hope you understand that living under these principles is just as fundamental as learning to walk.

The goals of our workbook are:

1. to show you that God provides principles for marriage,
2. to equip you with tools and applications for applying these principles, and
3. to guide your marriage and family into the forgiveness, healing, and unity that comes through obedience to God.

Family Discipleship Ministries exists to help educate the body of Christ in vital areas. Failure to disciple others is directly related to the failure rate in marriages today. And how do we know this? By what we have seen, experienced, and found in proven statistics today.

The Process

The study is divided into five volumes. Start with volume 1 and continue through each volume in order. Skipping to a volume or section that sparks your interest is tempting but not advised, because each volume and lesson build upon one another. For example, you may want to master the man's or woman's companionship needs, but there are biblical principles that must be learned before you can properly tend to your spouse's needs in a godly way. Work toward completing one lesson each day for five days. Building daily study with consistency is key to spiritual success.

These principles have been tried and proven successful. I have experienced it in my own marriage and through the lives of countless people in counseling and marriage classes. Please understand, this is *not* a "Five Easy Steps to Marriage" manual. Biblical discipleship is challenging work and requires you to surrender to God's will as you change some of your attitudes and behaviors. The process will require commitment, sacrifice, and humility.

Starting Each Day

- View each daily study as time spent with your God, and expect Him to speak to you through His Word.
- Start each day with prayer, asking God to reveal where you need to change and to empower you to apply what you are learning.
- Have a reflective mindset. Do not rush through the material just to say you finished it. Give God time to speak to you, and meditate on what you learn.

Things to Note

- This study is a new priority and will require dedicated time. The lessons are to be done daily. If you miss a day, *do not skip it*, but work to complete all lessons in order.

- Scripture clearly states that marriage is important to God. If you are struggling to complete the lessons, pray about your priorities and other commitments. Enlist the help of an accountability partner for prayer if necessary.
- Remember, your spouse is an essential partner in this effort. Study together or separately, but always discuss what you have learned and prayerfully commit to implement any changes needed.
- Lessons may vary in the amount of information presented. After you complete each one, look ahead to the next lesson to plan your time with God and get the most out of it.
- Space is provided for answering questions and recording your thoughts and prayers. If you have downloaded and printed this workbook, we suggest you put it in a three-ring binder and include additional paper for personal journaling and notes.

DIG DEEPER

This section marks an opportunity to read Scripture and relate it to the subject being presented. You will become more familiar with the Bible, biblical principles of marriage, and what God expects from you as a spouse.

Self-Examination

As you study biblical principles, this section provides time for self-examination, finding areas where personal improvement is needed. Space is provided for listing insights, confessions, and prayers for strength and wisdom to make those changes. One aspect of the discipleship process is personal accountability. If God reveals that you have sinned against your spouse or children, confess your sin to them and ask for forgiveness. Practice this regularly even if it is not noted to do so.

FACT FILE

Boxes like this one provide definitions of words or phrases from the Bible. We have taken great care to use well-known, theologically sound Bible dictionaries and commentaries for clarity, referenced when possible. Many of these definitions appear in *Appendix R: Glossary*.

ACTION PLAN

After you study the biblical principles, this section challenges you to take action and apply what you have learned in your marriage. To be true disciples we must understand that God not only desires that we grow in knowledge, but He also requires that we live it out.

Appendix Resources

Please take advantage of the appendices at the end of the workbook. They are there for your growth, and we refer to them throughout the workbook. Before you begin this wonderful journey, please fill out *Appendix A: Commitment Letter* (volume 1).

Leader's Guide

A leader's guide is available at FDM.world under Free Ministry Downloads. All materials on our website focus on discipleship and are provided free of charge.

Lesson 1

The Gift of Sex

God created this planet we call earth, complete with all its inhabitants. Within His amazing creation, God's most precious possession is mankind. To prove this, He inserted Himself into the human race, in Jesus Christ, to redeem us from sin so we could live eternally with Him. In Psalm 139:14, the Bible says humans are "fearfully and wonderfully made," which encompasses every detail of what God intended for us. One of His most significant blessings is the ability to experience pleasure, and a very significant aspect of that is sexual pleasure.

If God created sex for our pleasure, why is this a topic of such controversy and even the source of great evil? God does not make mistakes, so the problem must lie with mankind and its lack of understanding or misuse of sex.

We usually close our chapters with a prayer, but due to the complexities of this subject, let's open this time with prayer:

Father, thank You for the gift of sex. Thank You for creating our bodies to experience such intense pleasure. Please teach us the meaning of the sexual experience as You have designed it. And please forgive us, Lord, for the times and ways we have allowed the world's viewpoint to influence us, when we changed sexual pleasure into something You never intended it to be. God, I pray that You would change our hearts, bringing love and conviction, and give us the desire and the will to change our attitudes and behavior. Help us to see sex as a gift from You and use it according to Your design. Use the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom, and change us as we seek to glorify You in all we say and do. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

The Bible is clear on God's design for sex. For our purposes, we have organized the information into three specific lines of thought. We must meditate on this material repeatedly and constantly until we can view sex in the context of God's intentions.

Biblical Principle 1: Sex and One Flesh

God's first purpose for the sexual union is to bind a man and woman together, body and soul.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her?
(1 Corinthians 6:16)

We can see from Genesis that God intended sex to take place within marriage. The verse in Corinthians shows a misuse of this union, yet notice that the result is still becoming one, the two become one flesh. The world is far away from God's concept today and reaching further still into violating His will for the sexual relationship.

One biblical dictionary says the following:

[One flesh] involves the unity of the whole person: purpose, physical, and life—a unity whereby the two become a new, God-designed, balanced life. They counterbalance each other's strengths and weaknesses. Sexually, the two become "one flesh" physically as reflected in their offspring. God's ideal exclusiveness of the "one flesh" relationship disallows any other relationship: homosexuality, polygamy, adultery, premarital sex, concubines, incest, bestiality, cultic prostitution.¹

We would also disallow *personal* sexual pleasure. We should embrace God's design with all our hearts. He made marriage to be one flesh between man and woman.

Biblical Principle 2: Sex and Procreation

The sexual union is designed to produce children, or increase population, which is called procreation.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
(Genesis 1:27-28)

Although failing to produce children within a marriage is not a sin, God designed mankind to populate the planet. Scripture says the hairs on our heads are numbered (Luke 12:7), showing that each person is born with the foreknowledge of God and each is precious to Him. He is personally interested in the birth, life, and salvation of every individual.

"Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). This theme recurs throughout Genesis in association with divine blessing and serves as the basis of the biblical view that raising faithful children is a part of God's creation plan for mankind. God's creation plan is that the whole earth should be populated by those who know Him and who serve wisely as His vice-regents or representatives to subdue it and have dominion.²

Our society has gone well beyond God's plan with alternative lifestyles that include procuring and rearing children without the benefit of marriage.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God says about having children.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;

They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?"

So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."
(Genesis 33:5)

Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.
(Deuteronomy 28:4)

Biblical Principle 3: Sex and Pleasure

Sexual activity within marriage is acceptable for sheer pleasure or recreation.

The following passage is very clear that a husband is to be satisfied sexually only with his wife. As you read, meditate on the specific words and phrases used.

Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
As a loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.
(Proverbs 5:18-19)

The words *satisfy* and *enraptured* (or *intoxicated* in ESV) indicate a fulfilling and fruitful sex life, a union of great pleasure. We all understand that sex is desirable and intoxicating, but it can quickly turn from a blessing to a guilty pleasure.

Some people are sex addicts. With the introduction of the internet, pornography has reached new dimensions of

FACT FILE

Satisfy—*Rawah* (Hebrew). A verb meaning to give water, to drench; to drink one's fill. It refers to giving someone a drink literally and figuratively (Psalms 36:8; 65:10). It means to drink all that one wants, to satisfy (Proverbs 5:19; 7:18).³

Enraptured—*Sagah* (Hebrew). A verb used by Isaiah to suggest swerving, meandering, or reeling in drunkenness (Isaiah 28:7). At times, it could define intoxication, not only from wine or beer but also from love (Proverbs 5:19-20).⁴

distribution and perversion. This is what happens when God's gifts to mankind are not used according to His plan and expressed guidelines. But keep your guard up, and do not let the abuses of this world in the area of sex poison your personal belief or attitude toward it. It is God's intention that a husband and wife be intoxicated with each other.

One author uses this text in Proverbs to instruct men on keeping the sexual relationship pure and focused.

No one can deny the excitement of physical attraction. Proverbs calls on the man to channel that excitement toward his wife. He should appreciate her beauty as if she were a graceful deer and be satisfied with her body and her love. He should love her "alone" (verse 17) and always. . . . So God intends a man to be exhilarated with the affection of his own wife, not some other man's wife.⁵

God designed sex for these three reasons, and it is clear in Scripture that any sexual pleasure derived outside of marriage is sin and becomes perverted. When we use God's gifts for sin, then we experience painful consequences instead of blessings. Today, the influence of sin has become so strong in this area that even those who intend to use it only within marriage are sometimes lured into sinful practices and twisted perspectives.

Self-Examination

Write the three purposes below.

Purpose 1: _____

Purpose 2: _____

Purpose 3: _____

Considering these three purposes, describe how this information has changed your current perspective toward sex.

Lesson 2

Common Unbiblical Perspectives

Many have been influenced by worldly ideas, selfish expectations, or Satan, all leading us to view sex in a wrong way. Satan has done a tremendous work here by introducing his lies and confusion. Any gift God has given, Satan wants to ruin. He uses every avenue of communication, including magazines, media, news, TV, internet, and others to pervert this beautiful gift that was designed for us in marriage into something sick, twisted, or even wrong.

Scripture says that until we are free in Jesus Christ, we are actually slaves to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:6–7). Beginning in Genesis 3:4–5, we see Satan tempting humans to doubt God’s goodness, insinuating that God wants to deprive us of something. We know what that has brought into creation.

Let’s consider some of the unbiblical perspectives we may have regarding sex and identify the sources.

Unbiblical Perspective 1: A Worldly Perspective

Do not let the worldly evil surrounding sex affect your perspective. The negative or sinful influences perverting sex are around us all the time. We must keep God’s perspective and guard our minds with His Word on this subject.

To the pure all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscious are defiled. (Titus 1:15)

From the beginning, false teachers have been distorting God’s Word. We should not be surprised by what the world has done to sinfully defile the things He has created for our pleasure and our good.

FACT FILE

Defile—Miano (Greek). To stain with color as the staining of glass, to tinge, pollute, defile.⁶

But we have hope. We have God’s promise from His Word that the victory over sin has been won by Jesus Christ (Romans 6:6–7). We must hide the Word of God in our hearts and stay accountable and in fellowship with other believers in the body of Christ.

The Bible refers to our temptations as “warfare,” and we need to use all the weapons God has provided for us. He always provides a way of escape. Follow Him, and look for it.

Some may have a tendency to view sex negatively, as crude. This seems to occur more often among women. Reasons can be the poor sexual example of a parent with that attitude, perhaps an unhappy mother, or that the subject was considered improper and not discussed. Women are more often victims of rape and sexual abuse and more inclined to give sex for approval or love, only to be discarded by a guy as passing entertainment. This is why we must be aware of God’s design for sex, and marriage, and remember that sex itself is pure and positive.

The world even offers temptations to bring into marriage. Every couple needs to develop their own private means for enjoying each other sexually through communication and experimentation. However, this absolutely should not include the perversions offered by the world. If pornography is perversion, when is it not perversion? *Never*. Never embrace worldly evil. Shun it as unnecessary and unwanted, and then you will be free to pursue your own creativity leading to true pleasure and satisfaction that can exist only between husband and wife.

If you find yourself acting from a worldly perspective in regard to sex, confess it to God and your spouse, and then pray, asking for a new perspective according to God's Word. You will both be assaulted continually by negative influences from the world. You will see TV commercials with sexual content, which can offend the ladies and charge up the men. Those attitudes can be brought into the bedroom like a hangover. These influences are real, and they are assaulting us. This is a real battle, so figure out how to fight off the negative attitudes, and look to God for help because He does not want you missing out on His gifts.

Self-Examination 1

Identify any negative influences that have affected your perspective in this area.

If you identified negative influences, have you applied the biblical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation? For further study, complete *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness*.

DIG DEEPER

Identify what happens when we follow the world and when we follow God.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

Unbiblical Perspective 2: Condemned for Past Sins

We must not let our sexual past rule our future or resign us to condemnation. With God, there is forgiveness and new life. Let's face it, most of us did not have the most spiritual introduction to sex. We live in a world that seduces men to look at porn and indulge in self-sexual pleasure. Our kids are being told that masturbation and extramarital sex is cool, and they can talk about it with their friends. Women and young girls are now "liberated" from sexual repression and encouraged to pursue pornography, masturbation, and sex with toys, and they are told that men are unnecessary. This is what the world is teaching about sex. If you have participated in these activities, confess and repent, follow after biblical truth, and pursue behavior based on biblical principles and new attitudes.

Some men say they think about sex hundreds of times a day. If you are looking at porn and masturbating continuously, you are going to be obsessed with sex. Many men have used pornography for sexual pleasure, helping them compensate for difficulties of life, lack of approval from a non-affirming or unloving father, issues with an unloving or dominating mother, or even for marriage problems.

If you indulged in porn before marriage, do not infect your wife with this poison. How many drops of poison would you put in a clean glass of water before you wouldn't drink it? Work to leave this in the past, and walk forward into a new life that God says is a beautiful and pure gift from Him, expecting satisfaction and blessings.

If you had sex before marriage, it has affected your intimacy after marriage. For men, it produces insensitivity and selfishness. For women, it increases the struggle to trust and yield to your husband's leadership. A woman's body is not a sampler plate for a man's pleasure prior to marriage. Women have been tricked into considering this as a compliment, inciting men to lust or play the field as portrayed in the movies. But it bears no positive payoff in real life.

You planned to be married, decided to begin your sexual relationship, and made it through the wedding. But in a few years, your sex life started to fail because marriage does not fix the consequences of your sin. God forgives. And if you haven't asked your spouse to forgive you for what you did before your marriage, you need to do that.

~~ACTION PLAN~~

Have you asked God and each other forgiveness for what you did sexually with others or even together before you were married? If not, take some time and do that now.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what God says about your new relationship with Him and how to perceive things now that you are "in Christ."

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Unbiblical Perspective 3: Trapped by Tragedy

Many men and women have sexual abuse in their past. You *can* be delivered. Do not choose to live with this hurt. More children suffer sexual abuse than we realize. If this is in your past, do not try to cope by stuffing it, which will not work. If you do not apply the biblical antidotes of forgiveness and healing, then the hurt or bitterness will poison this wonderful gift God has for you today. Be sure to take care of your past in a biblical way. Do not let another person's sin against you to infect and ruin your attitude and ability to enjoy this beautiful gift of intimacy and pleasure that God has provided.

Sexual perversion is anything outside of God's will and guidelines. If you were forced into a sexual act against your will, there will be long-term damage if you do not confront this hurt and ask for God's help. Biblical counseling, talking to a pastor, and spending time meditating in Scripture through reading and prayer will be your weapons.

If you have been affected in this area and know God is speaking to you right now, stop and go through the forgiveness material. Use *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* to help you through the process of applying forgiveness to the person or persons who have wounded you.

Pray this prayer:

God, I'm forgiving _____ for what they did and asking You to heal me from the memory and the pain. I do not want evil from the past to ruin Your gift to me. I pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Unbiblical Perspective 4: Therapy by Revenge

There is no denying that marriage can bring out the worst in any of us. So how do you deal with the reality that your partner has hurt you or is hurting you? How are you doing with stuffing the hurt, making excuses, or fighting back? The answer may surprise you. Do not overlook or excuse the offenses that you have committed against each other. If you have participated in perverted or unwanted sexual acts, criticized your spouse's body or sexual performance, or denied each other sexual pleasure for revenge, then your relationship is suffering and these hurts are poisoning your sex life. This behavior stems from selfishness. Even if done in ignorance, it may be tainting the very relationship God has designed to make you fulfilled and happy.

Don't make the mistake that your problems are due to boredom or lack of creativity. Many couples have been encouraged by former therapists to turn to porn when sex lost its excitement. But that always turns into disaster. Either one partner is offended and hurt, or both are led down the wrong path. Most likely, the sexual cooling is due to underlying hurts and offenses that have not been properly cleared up.

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

One commentator brings clarity to this Scripture and the importance of purity in the marriage bed.

The first statement, "Marriage should be honored by all," places special focus on the word translated "honored" by its fronted position in the clause. The word itself means to highly esteem and respect. This general statement about honoring marriage is followed by a more narrowed focus on the sanctity of the sexual relationship in marriage: "and the marriage bed kept pure." This phrase refers to sexual intercourse within marriage, meaning husbands and wives should remain sexually faithful to one another and to their marriage vows. The Greek adjective translated "pure" conveys the meaning "undefiled," "unpolluted," "untainted." It is in the emphatic position in its clause.⁷

As you can see this puts special emphasis on purity in the marriage bed. We can't turn to the world and the way the world is using sex, bring it into our relationship as husband and wife, and expect God to bless it. If you have a hardened heart toward your mate due to past hurts, pornography is not the key to softening it. Yes, porn will stimulate you. That's the way we're made, but that is part of our sinful nature. The beginning of healing is not found in the bedroom, but in the heart. Go to God in confession and repentance, and then to each other in love, and be honest about the real problems.

Bitterness and revenge makes sex unfulfilling. They often narrow the attitude toward what is acceptable and fun in the marriage bed. Once offenses are cleared to bring new attitudes, the door is open for pleasurable activities that may have been unwanted or felt "wrong." Some of those attitudes that slipped in may have been associated with worldly lust, which is not necessarily true. One partner might feel that using lubricants, hands, or different positions to experience sexual pleasure is wrong because they heard or saw it displayed by the world in a wrong way. Remember what God said is good, *is good*, no matter what the world says or does.

If you need help to determine the strongholds that are holding you back from God's best for your marriage, complete *Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks*.

Unbiblical Perspective 5: Wrong-Way Sex

When a husband or wife turn sex into an idol, this is a major problem. Creating idols always leads to degradation and destruction. In some Christian couples, one or both have turned sex into an idol, which led them into swapping or other sinful practices. Hopefully these couples are able to recognize this as sin and turn away from it. Any idol in our lives will be in competition with God.

God says we cannot let anything possess us or become obsessed with it. Many men and women are allowing this sexual desire for pleasure to become an idol, thinking about it many times a day. Some men cannot look at a woman walking on the street without having a sexual thought. But how does that affect your relationship with your wife? Are you comparing her body, her looks, to that of other women, *younger* women? This is sin.

DIG DEEPER

Paul wrote biblical principles about *not* letting things rule our lives. Identify what those things are and how you should act upon them.

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Corinthians 6:12)

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. (1 Corinthians 10:23)

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

Life is a battle for control over us and our choices. Submit to God and His Word. The warnings in these Scriptures tell us that when something has control of us, other than God, it becomes an idol, an obsession, and will drive a wedge between us and God.

Sexual pleasure can be used for manipulation, either by giving or withholding it. There is nothing wrong with makeup sex, but using sex as a way to say "I'm sorry" or to avoid a touchy issue is wrong. You need to take responsibility and apologize for what you said or did. *Then* make love. But don't use sex in the wrong way. Or if one spouse is withholding sex to get even, this is manipulation and using sex in the wrong way. Problems can affect sexual response, but communication is called for, and a solution must be pursued that does not involve using sex as a weapon.

Self-Examination 2

If this is something you have been doing, write a prayer asking God to forgive you and set a time to ask your spouse to forgive you also.

Lesson 3

A Gift, Not a Weapon

Our past hurts and ignorance before we were married, and even the mistakes we make after we are married, can taint this gift of sex. This lesson will help you examine your heart and confess those thoughts and attitudes that may be hindering you in this area.

DIG DEEPER

Describe what your attitude should be concerning your sexual relationship with your spouse.

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. (1 Corinthians 7:3-4)

Lower Sex Drive

Some men don't want to have sex with their wives because of the horrible things that come out of their wife's mouths. If a man is given little affirmation or is criticized and bad-mouthed, his wife will discover that her desires to have sex will be met by him with little or no desire to oblige. When the husband wants nothing to do with his wife, the wife is often upset.

Women, one of our sexual organs as men is our ears, what we hear coming out of your mouth. If it's undermining and not affirming, our sex drive is affected.

Self-Examination

Wife, if this has brought conviction to you, write a prayer of confession. Plan a time to confess and ask forgiveness from your husband.

Wife, have you been using sex as a tool for selfish purposes or manipulation? To clarify this, answer the following questions:

1. Is sex used to ask for forgiveness from your husband for overspending?
__ Yes __ No
2. Is sex used after saying or doing something to him that is unloving or non-affirming?
__ Yes __ No
3. Is sex used before you ask him for something he would normally say no to?
__ Yes __ No

Yes, most husbands appreciate sex from their wives under any circumstances, but these practices by a wife, treating the gift of sex wrongfully, will eventually start poisoning the physical relationship.

The evidence that God has blessed us with the gift of sex is with us every day, for better or worse. Blessing or curse depends on whether we see it God's way or view it from the perspective of the world. God is allowing Satan to masquerade as the prince of this world, to be free to tempt mankind to sin. But God promises a way to escape every temptation that is common to man (1 Corinthians 10:13). God tells us that we are in this world, but not of this world (Romans 12:2), that we are pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11), here to be His ambassadors to glorify Him in everything (2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

We are not here to satisfy our selfish will and desires. We have a future to consider. We are eternal beings, destined to live elsewhere after we die, either in heaven or hell.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

Replacing the Giver with the Gift

God's Word says we cannot serve two masters. We must deny one and surrender to the other.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. (Matthew 6:24)

Consider these questions for self-examination:

1. Is sex your last thought when you go to bed or your first thought in the morning?
__ Yes __ No
2. Do you daydream about it throughout the day? __ Yes __ No
3. Do you spend money secretly on it? __ Yes __ No
4. Do you risk your career and marriage pursuing it? __ Yes __ No
5. Is it a subject that causes most fights in your marriage? __ Yes __ No

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have turned sex into an idol. You must confess this sin to the Lord. When you take something given to you by a God who is jealous for your affection and you make it more important than Him, expect consequences. But don't expect a fruitful and fulfilling sex life with your spouse. It won't happen.

You may remember when the Nintendo Game Boy first came out. Teenagers *had* to have it. When my sons were young teens, they said they had to have one. So we finally bought one for Christmas, and my sons were overjoyed and completely fascinated with it. They fought for time with it, tried to skip their chores, and neglected their schoolwork. Then they began begging for new games and complaining that their friends had more. Suddenly this wonderful gift that they wanted so much now possessed them. Often when we would ask them to do something fun with us, they would say they just wanted to sit and play Nintendo.

Their actions revealed that they loved the game instead of loving the givers. They were idolizing the game. I had to step in and create boundaries so they didn't let the toy control them. In the same way we can do this toward God with His gifts, like sex. We can take His gift and replace Him with it. We can give excessive time and attention to thinking about it and doing it, and then it controls us. Then we wouldn't be enjoying sex or God because it is all about our selfish pleasure.

Working toward Change

As you examine yourself, the first step is to be totally honest about how you are sinning in this area. Ask God to reveal where you have misused His gift of sex and how that has affected your marriage. Next, you need to confess any sin and disobedience, and then ask for forgiveness from God and your spouse. Until you confess, nothing will change. Finally, you need to be willing to change your behavior, to start over with a new perspective.

God says we need to confess our sins and be willing to start over. Let's consider the problem of long-term indulgence in pornography. Breaking the sinful habit of porn and establishing a healthy sexual relationship is a process. As a sex partner, pornography involves no adjustment, no rejection, no reality, and is a situation where you are in full control. It's all fantasy.

Men, sex with a *real* woman requires conforming to her desires and needs, which is the opposite of selfishness controlled by fantasy. Breaking bad habits and working with a wife to regain true intimacy during sex takes some time. Some men have said if they knew how hard this would be, they would have never given in to porn. There is no warning label on magazines, movies, or TV shows that reads, "This will consume and poison your mind, control you, and make you feel separated from God, spouse, and children."

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

"Be anxious for nothing" means don't obsess over your problem, but trust God for healing, willingly and patiently working toward a solution. If the sexual relationship has not been right in your marriage, God is telling you to stop worrying and be thankful for His gift of sexual pleasure.

Start praying and asking for His blessing over your relationship with your spouse. Don't just wait for change, but be actively changing your behavior and attitude according to His Word.

Ladies, do you have sex mostly for your husband's pleasure? Maybe you are shy about telling him what pleases you or he has trouble receiving instruction. Maybe you have harbored bitterness and anger toward him for disappointments or offenses he has brought into the marriage. If your attitude is negative or tainted, and you are just living in it, then you are living in sin. By indulging nonstop in bitter thoughts, you are just as sinful as a man who is allowing porn to fill his mind. You must be willing to ask God to change your heart.

Ask God to give you *His* heart and perspective toward this gift of sex that is for you and your spouse. If you ask Him for anything in accordance to His Word, He will do it.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Seeing Yourselves as One

God tells us to bring everything to Him. In this case, you come to God as $1 + 1 = 1$, or one flesh. Philippians 4 says to do everything "by prayer and supplication" (verse 6). Try praying with your spouse: *God, please fix our sex life.* When you pray, you are including God in the solution to your problem. Praying together makes all sense because God sees you as "one flesh," and you actually are *one* in this area of sexual pleasure as a married couple.

Your prayer could be something like this.

God, heal our minds, and heal our sexual relationship. Lord, make it right and purify our hearts and minds toward this wonderful gift. Help us to understand how to subject it to Your perfect time and rhythm and method, not our own selfishness. Amen.

Philippians 4 also says, "Guard your hearts and minds" (verse 7). You must guard your minds from those things that would cause each of you, or either of you, to fall into the same old patterns. Memorize Job 31:1, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" This principle can apply to a man or woman. "Taking those thoughts captive" (2 Corinthians 10:5) means anything that comes to mind tainting the gift of sex, be it selfishness, lust, or negative thoughts.

Staying pure and positive requires that we guard ourselves from evil influences. These will work to break the "oneness" between marriage partners. An *influence* is whatever makes you view sex in the wrong way, including porn, websites, books, romance novels, television, movies, social media, and even a negative view of your own body. Everything has to go. We can invite so much into our lives to poison God's wonderful gift. We can literally program our brains with sinful information. Garbage in, garbage out. Little wonder that when we are consuming this junk, our sexual oneness suffers.

DIG DEEPER

The word *heart* in Scripture refers to your mind, will, and emotions. Identify what these verses tell us about the heart. What is our responsibility, and what is the result of obedience?

Guard your heart above all else,
For it is the source of life. (Proverbs 4:23 HCSB)

Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Meditate on this Scripture. How can living by these words bring unity into your marriage? How can you use this instruction to “guard” your mind? Are you violating God’s will for your thoughts?

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Sinful Thoughts

Are you living in a mindset of bitter, angry thoughts? This is sin. If you find yourself desiring, imagining, meditating on a sexual relationship with someone other than your spouse, what are you doing? God calls it adultery (Matthew 5:28). It’s sin.

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27–28)

Some men confess that when they are making love, they are picturing women other than their spouse. Do you think a wife doesn’t feel that something isn’t quite right during sex? They are not

making love. These men are pleasuring themselves selfishly with no concern for their wives. This is sin and must stop. It's wrong, evil, and poison.

We are told to meditate upon purity, which means meditate on sex in the way God intended it, for man and wife. As a husband, learn to enjoy your wife's pleasure and open up to sharing with her instead of some picture in your mind. Be turned on because she is turned on. Learn what she likes and dislikes, what she enjoys rather than some selfish desire of your own.

We need to take our thoughts captive and begin to cooperate with the Spirit of God and each other. Satan is always working to deceive us and taint the gifts of God, taking what is good and trying to turn it for evil.

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

DIG DEEPER

Concerning this subject, identify what these Scriptures tell us to do and why.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4)

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. (Titus 1:15-16)

Lesson 4

Enjoying Each Other

As we age our bodies are not what they used to be. The ladies are especially challenged in this area, competing with lots of advertising about what beauty should look like. Some may begin to feel negative about their physical appearance and withdraw from their husbands due to embarrassment. A wife might not want him to see her body in the nude, afraid he has that image of how she looked years ago.

Ladies, this can affect your willingness to see your body as a source of pleasure for your husband. You must fight these thoughts and not allow demonic or worldly influences to poison your self-image. The heart of the sexual experience for a husband and wife is connection, and no amount of aging can change that. Learn how to adapt and adjust to changes that come with age. Being creative is part of bringing joy to each other and demonstrating the strength of your love and devotion.

Men and women need to be actively casting down every thought that comes in their brains about negative body image, whether it is about beauty, age, or physical abilities. There is a war going on for control of our thoughts—God’s truth versus Satan’s lies. And our spouses can’t reach into our brains and make us cooperate with the Spirit of God. We must fight for God’s best and not let Satan poison what God has created to be beautiful.

We have spent time covering the problems, the sins, and the sources of trouble. Now we turn our thoughts to the positive aspects of sexual pleasure and experience.

The Positive Side of the Gift of Sex

When studying a book in the Old Testament called Song of Solomon, it’s amazing how many times people say, “I cannot believe this is in the Bible.” Within these chapters, we learn a lot about both men and women. Our focus is from chapter 7, which describes the mutuality of sexual pleasure, physical intimacy, and even some aspects of the human sexual anatomy.

One author who has written a commentary on this book says the following.

We follow the oldest attested method of interpretation—the normal approach. We will take the Song at face value and see how it applies to us today. Some writers seem hesitant to believe sex was intended by God for any purpose other than procreation. Therefore, they refused to accept a normal interpretation of the book. God, they say, would never allow a book about sex (even in marriage) in the canon of Scripture. So the normal meaning of the song was covered up (“It’s a metaphor”), slid over (“Well, it doesn’t really mean that”) and allegorized (“It’s a picture of God and His people”). The book is full of metaphors and other symbols, but was never to be an allegory. Instead, it is simply a picture of idealized married love as God intended it.⁸

Please note: The interpretation we use to explain these verses is considered the “plain version,” sometimes referred to as the “literal approach.” We are not excluding the “Christological” view, which also applies to these verses.

As you read through these Scriptures, notice descriptions of the body and the passion and excitement of a sexual relationship.

How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince’s daughter!
The curves of your thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a skillful workman.
Your navel is a rounded goblet;
It lacks no blended beverage.
Your waist is a heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
Your neck is like an ivory tower,
Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon
By the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
Which looks toward Damascus.
Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel,
And the hair of your head is like purple;
A king is held captive by your tresses.
How fair and how pleasant you are,
O love, with your delights!
This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts like its clusters.
I said, “I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of its branches.”
Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
The fragrance of your breath like apples,
And the roof of your mouth like the best wine. (Song of Solomon 7:1–9)

Verse 1 begins, “How beautiful,” with Solomon, the husband, talking to his wife. “How beautiful are your feet in sandals.” We don’t quite get that one, but praise the Lord. Notice the sexual organ used here is a man’s eyes.

Do you see his point in the first four verses about how wonderful she is? Men, have you even come close to appreciating your wife like this guy does? He is really involved with all the things about her that he finds beautiful, and God is saying we need to be able to delight in our wives. Wives, are you willing to let your husband gaze upon you like this?

Then verses 6–9 show him going beyond appreciating her beauty, and he starts really enjoying her physically.

A well-known commentary says the following.

The comparison of the beloved's navel to a rounded goblet of wine would be grotesque if taken as a visual comparison. The lover meant that her body was as desirable and as intoxicating as wine (cf. 4:10). Likewise the comparison of her waist to a mound of wheat would be absurd if interpreted visually. Wheat was one of the main food sources in ancient Palestine (Deuteronomy 32:14; 2 Samuel 4:6; 17:28). Thus his wife was both his "food" (wheat) and "drink" (wine) in the sense that her physical expressions of love nourished and satisfied him.⁹

As we continue in the chapter, Solomon's wife responds to his appreciation.

The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved,
 Moving gently the lips of sleepers.
 I am my beloved's,
 And his desire is toward me. (Song of Solomon 7:9–10)

Let's consider what Solomon is feeling: her feet, curving thighs, navel, waist, breasts, neck, eyes, nose, and hair. And then he begins to experience her body, her breasts, and the roof of her mouth.

Visual Aspect of Sex

This is sexual pleasure. A woman's body is beautiful, and it brings great pleasure. When God made women, He knew what he was doing, and to a man, there is nothing more desirable on earth than a woman's body. A woman can see the beauty in another woman's body, not in a sexual way, but she knows God made something special when he created a woman.

Men, there are a lot of female bodies around, but we need to see our sexual relationship only in the context of a wife. Solomon teaches us something important about sexual arousal for men, that one of man's main sexual organs is his eyes. Wife, if you are withholding this aspect of sexual pleasure from your husband, confess it and allow this practice to come into your relationship.

Physical Touching and Sex

Scripture also says that Solomon *touched* her body. Using our hands is a good way to stimulate mutual pleasure. Solomon is moving his hands all over his wife's body. The phrase, "Your navel as a rounded goblet; it lacks no blended beverage" (verse 2), is referring to the use of his mouth. And then Solomon refers to holding her breasts. There is something wonderful about holding breasts that brings great sexual pleasure to a man and a woman. They are truly beautiful and wonderful. God put this admiration, desire, and the ability to experience pleasure within us.

Personal Hygiene and Sex

Her "breath like apples" (verse 8) is a quick reminder about personal hygiene. This goes for men and women. Let's be aware of our appeal, of our cleanliness, and other turnoffs like coffee breath or whatever breaks the mood. Take a shower, or better yet, do it together. The harlots put perfume all over themselves, even on the bed, so a wonderful fragrance was associated with the sexual experience (Proverbs 7:16–17).

Did you get that, husband and wives? It's all wonderful and straight from God's Word to us for the purpose of bringing sexual pleasure to each other.

The Woman Speaks

Solomon's wife says, "Moving gently the lips of sleepers" (verse 9). The key word here is *gently*, which indicates "softly, tenderly, not rough or hastily, but with patience and gentleness," not recklessly or selfishly being concerned only for your own satisfaction or pleasure.

Some wives say all they have is intercourse. He has sex and is done. He reaches his orgasm and rolls over. One wife said she's only ever had two orgasms and is not satisfied in this area. How could this be?

Whatever your history, your hurts and wounds, God can heal you. Husbands, you need to be attentive and gentle. Wives, you need tell him what you enjoy. Maybe you need to put some oil on your husband's hand and show him how to please you. Most husbands will willingly serve a woman who is in love with them.

Communication and Sex

Good sex requires communication and *open* discussion. Enjoying sex as a gift from God is no more controversial than enjoying good food together. Do you see it that way?

Wife, do you like tea? If your husband is making you a cup of tea, would you want it the way you like it or the way he likes it? Would you be upset and hold him responsible for not making it right if you never told him how you like it? Could you still show him how much sugar you like, how much cream? Would you have a problem telling him which cup you like best?

Yes, tea is easier to talk about than sex, but sex is so much more important. Learn to care about what pleases your spouse, especially in the area of sexual pleasure. And learn about what does *not* please, because to persist there is selfish and will hurt your relationship.

One couple was a real inspiration in this area. These two people, in their mid-fifties, were the giddiest, most joyful couple, and they had a fulfilling sex life. They both had prior marriages that failed before they were Christians. When they met, they made a commitment to God and each other not to make the same mistakes they did with premarital sex or using sex after marriage for selfish reasons. They had confronted the problems and decided that their sex life was going to be fulfilling. And they were having better sex than most people in their twenties. That's the plan.

Below is a list of resources that can help you take some practical steps if you feel you are stuck and do not know what to do next or to help you explore this area in more depth. This is not a complete list, and we are not condoning or rejecting everything presented in these resources. It is a sampling of Christian authors who have written material to help you on this journey.

Books for Couples

What the Bible says about Love, Marriage, and Sex by David Jeremiah
Solomon on Sex by Joseph C. Dillow

Intimacy Ignited: Conversations Couple to Couple: Fire Up Your Sex Life with the Song of Solomon by
Dr. Joseph and Linda Dillow and Dr. Peter and Lorraine Pintus
The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment by Clifford and Joyce Penner
Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage by Ed Wheat MD
and Gaye Wheat
Sex and the Supremacy of Christ by John Piper and Justin Taylor

For Women

No More Headaches: Enjoying Sex & Intimacy in Marriage by Dr. Juli Slattery

Lesson 5

A Great Sex Life

On an average, how often does a woman participate sexually with her husband when she does not desire to have an orgasm? *Often*. It is common for a woman to please her husband even though she does not experience or desire to have an orgasm. A woman's drive to experience frequent orgasms is usually not as strong as a man's. Her desire peaks monthly during ovulation. So husbands can benefit from this Scripture.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

God is telling us to put others above ourselves, to be more concerned about them. This love is not occupied with self-interest, at the expense of another. This attitude results in a good, mutually satisfying sex life.

Women have many areas on the body good for sexual arousal, but there also are many women who have a difficult time reaching orgasm through intercourse. And many men, because of their sexual anatomy and ignorance, have it in their brains that intercourse is the definition of the sexual experience. Why limit yourself? If your wife doesn't find sexual pleasure from intercourse, are you willing to adapt and add to having sexual pleasure other ways?

Communication Is a Must

Be willing to learn, adapt, and cooperate to establish the frequency, creativity, and communication that results in a relaxed and satisfying physical relationship. Aspects open for discussion include style, frequency, technique, verbal expressions of pleasure, and more. That means you may need to step up your game to keep the other person satisfied. For example, if a couple decides that once or twice a week is the goal, then it should be a mutual decision and both should work at maintaining that rhythm. Sometimes esteeming each other will require sacrifice.

Men, you can reach orgasm without intercourse. Some couples use oils or lotions. At this suggestion, occasionally men have said, "My wife is not a prostitute." This is not a biblical response. Why compare her to a whore for using lotion to reach sexual climax? Worldly influences can pervert sex and make us sheepish about experimenting with pleasure.

If you need information on sexual pleasure without intercourse, there are counselors and books to help. At first, communication may seem awkward, but it gets easier with practice. Avoid complaining or criticizing, but stick to positive instruction and comments like, "Honey, can we slow down a little," or "I'm just not with it right now, but I want to please you, so let's just concentrate on you this time, okay?"

Our Differences

Many details can affect a woman's mood for sex. The man may only need to see some skin, use some lotion, and participate. For most women, it's not that way. Throw in some kids, a job, physical exhaustion, menstrual cycle, financial struggles, and some marriage challenges, and it just sounds like more work to get into the mood. Men may think they've got to get her aroused to prove their manhood or think they don't excite her anymore. But forcing your wife to experience a climax will only frustrate her and produce a negative attitude about sex. A good wife can participate sexually with her husband when not desiring to reach an orgasm and still consider it a pleasure. Men, we are responsible to dwell with our wives in understanding (1 Peter 3:7).

The desire for sex generally comes to men more frequently than women. This is not selfishness, just the way a man is wired. However, as a couple discusses frequency, it is not about him saying, "Since I desire sex every day, this is what I deserve from you," or her saying, "I only want it once a month, so that is how we will plan." Many couples bounce from his needs to hers, both feeling tense most of the time. Instead, come together and establish an acceptable rhythm, even if it's been years of frustration. It is important to agree on frequency for coming together sexually. And, sure, there will be times when someone has to adapt, but that's love.

Experiment Together

Communicate about everything involved. As you begin to experiment, coming together physically using your mouths, fingers, hands, and eyes, your goal is to discover what is pleasing to both. A good wife and sex partner will speak up and tell her husband if he is doing something that is uncomfortable, and the husband needs to listen and adjust.

Some couples are embarrassed to think about what is acceptable to each. Is *everything* okay? Anal sex okay? It's important to discuss this before saying "I do." The wife may not like this or that, or she may not know what she likes. Most young people have been told by their parents to abstain instead of how to succeed at sex. Couples must talk about the boundaries, about guarding their hearts and minds, and about the importance of giving input to each other (Proverbs 4:23). They must protect their sexual relationship from Satan, who will do what he can to poison it.

Meeting Her Needs

Song of Solomon says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (7:10). Gentlemen, we have learned much about what a woman needs to feel safe. She needs to be nurtured and cherished, shown that you love her and that she is your first priority after God. If you do not believe all this, and do not do your best to apply it consistently, then do not expect great success in getting your wife's cooperation. Solomon's wife is telling the world that her husband considers her a precious gift from God and that he makes her feel important and desirable.

Does your wife know that your desire is for her, that you have learned what she needs and are working to meet her companionship needs? Is she so blessed that she wants to respond to your needs too? ___ Yes ___ No

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (Ephesians 5:25)

A Woman's Initiative

Song of Solomon reveals something very important for the ladies to consider when Solomon's wife says, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field, let us lodge in the villages" (7:11). She describes how she wants to give herself over to him. This is about initiating sex in a relationship. Do you know who mostly initiates sex in your marriage? Sure, you do. If yours is like most, your man is expressing sexual desire for you and getting a yes, no, maybe, later, tomorrow, or whatever else.

Ladies, when you picture Solomon's wife saying this to him, and when she goes on to talk about the vineyard and all the ways she's going to bless him, try to imagine her facial expression, attitude, and body posture. She was not saying, "You want sex tonight? Let's get this over with."

When was the last time you dolled yourself up and approached your man in a way that let him know he is your lover and you are going to rock his world? Do you know how that blesses a husband?

Ladies do not have to become the constant initiators, but occasionally do an attitude check. Agreeing on a frequency is a starting point. Don't always wait for your husband to initiate or ever treat it like a doctor's appointment. You initiate sometimes, and make it a special time.

Blessing Each Other

Sex is from God, in His Word, a message to men and women. God is revealing His desire, the beauty that He has created sexually for husband and wife, and He really wants to bless us with this. God is giving us His secrets about the ways we can enjoy and bless each other.

A husband should fulfill his marital responsibility to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. Do not deprive one another sexually—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:3–5 HCSB)

God says the husband and wife both have authority over the other's body, and this is a challenge that is not popular today. Put this with the rest of the verse. Each one is told to render to the other, as husband and wife, the affections due, not the affections we *think* they deserve or the affections we *feel* like giving. This is God's instruction, and we need to treat each other this way, talk about this, and realize that selfishness can be a destroyer.

Turning sex into a reward or performance-based activity is a serious problem. If one partner feels that the other is not pulling their weight, failing in some way, or not meeting their expectations, they may lapse into such thoughts as "I will not participate and bless you," which is sin. God says our bodies are not our own. We are here to be vessels to bless each other. God says sex brings us tremendous pleasure and bonding of our souls. We are not to deprive each other in this area because we feel that performance in other areas is not up to our standards. We cannot abuse the relationship in any area and expect intimacy to be good. Communication and cooperation must exist and be growing throughout all areas of the marriage.

The Goal

Our goal as married couples is to be able to say we've got a great sex life, and we are learning, cooperating, and communicating. We are able to talk before sex and able to share afterward. We are willing to receive instructions. We have learned to please each other outside of intercourse because of good communication.

If you can't say that, you need to do something about it.

Even among Christians, this is a topic people do not like to discuss. We don't want people to know we are having problems. These materials can guide us, help us communicate, and show us where we have gone off the path biblically and how we may have tainted God's gift with sin. We must receive and follow the information on confession and forgiveness and believe we can start over to get this right. God has great blessings waiting for each one of us.

Husband and wife, if you're masturbating on your own and finding sexual pleasure on your own, you're looking at or thinking about someone who is probably not your spouse. Sex was not given for self-gratification. Your sexual drive needs to be adapted to your relationship with your spouse. God says to exercise self-control (Galatians 5:23; 2 Peter 1:6). When you have a good sex life with your spouse, the fulfillment you get when it's right is better than any moment of pleasure you do to yourself.

You need to see pleasing yourself as a sinful practice and taking something that God said is beautiful, wonderful, and pure and tainting it. *Stop*. If this is a habit or has become an idol, talk to your pastor, spouse, or a Christian counselor (usually gender specific, man with man, woman with woman) and get help. You are *not* the first Christian to seek help. Many started this practice as teens, spending years in a private sex life before they married. And they carried that right into their marriage and thought there was no problem continuing it. But it is a problem. *Stop*, seek help, and let God heal your mind and your relationship with your spouse.

As a couple, ask God to first speak to your hearts individually, and then be willing to come together and share what the Lord has asked you to change. If forgiveness is needed, ask for it and give it as needed.

You could pray like this:

God, we are asking for Your help. We want to be blessed here, and we want to glorify You in this relationship. Help us to start over, to stop all the sinful, demonic, and evil attitudes and thoughts that we are letting into our minds and hearts, where we are poisoning this gift You have given us. Help us to open up and talk about these things we have just studied. May we submit to Your Word and be obedient to it. Whenever we fall back into our sinful ways of perverting sex, Lord, help us to confess it to You and to each other and repent by turning the other direction. Amen.

For Further Reflection

For additional help with forgiveness, see *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness*.

For a deeper understanding of physical intimacy, including potential issues, complete *Appendix N: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Men* and *Appendix O: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Women*. To begin, stay with the material meant for you, as a man or woman, and resist reading the material not meant for you. This will result in a better understanding of your role in the marriage relationship. After completing your work individually, discuss the materials with your spouse.

Appendix Resources

These appendices are included as additional resources. They are found throughout all five volumes, but not all appendices are included in each volume. If you wish to review a specific appendix, find where it is located in the list below.

Appendix A: Commitment Letter	Volume 1
Appendix B: Committing Your Life to Christ	Volume 1
Appendix C: Developing Daily Intimacy with God	Volume 1
Appendix D: Recommended Books	Volume 1
Appendix E: Effective Listening Self-Evaluation	Volume 2
Appendix F: Improving Your Loving Communication	Volume 2
Appendix G: Breaking the Cycle	Volumes 2 & 3
Appendix H: Husband's Needs	Volume 3
Appendix I: Husband's Biblical Response to Opposition	Volume 3
Appendix J: Biblical Ways a Husband Sanctifies His Wife	Volume 3
Appendix K: Wife's Needs	Volume 3
Appendix L: Companionship Needs	Volume 3
Appendix M: Common Stumbling Blocks	Volumes 3–5
Appendix N: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Men	Volume 4
Appendix O: Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Women	Volume 4
Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness	Volumes 2–5
Appendix Q: Marriage Self-Evaluation	Volume 5
Appendix R: Glossary	Volumes 1–5

Appendix M

Common Stumbling Blocks

The Bible reveals some common reasons men do not lead as God desires and why women do not affirm their husbands. A stumbling block, or stronghold, can be one or more of the issues listed below. If the Lord speaks to you in any of these areas, confess it and ask Him to strengthen you to be obedient to His will. Write your confessions and prayers in the space provided for each area.

Reason 1: Unforgiveness

Has God brought someone to mind who you need to forgive?

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Forgiveness does not mean:

- the offender agrees what they did was wrong,
- the offender asks for your forgiveness,
- the offender accepts your forgiveness, or
- the relationship has to be or will be restored.

Reason 2: Deception

Satan tempts us to disobey Christ and doubt who we are in Him.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

Satan uses three common tactics against us.

1. Lies, so we doubt the promises of God

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (John 8:44)

2. Condemnation or accusations against others or ourselves

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” (Revelation 12:9–10)

3. Bringing up our past, obscuring who we are in Christ

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not [a]imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:17–21)

Reason 3: Persecution

As you and your spouse work toward making these changes, are you ready and willing to accept suffering as part of God’s perfect plan for your life?

Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:2–5)

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 Peter 2:20–21)

Reason 4: Selfishness

Remember it is not our way, but His. Not our timing, but His. Press on.

[Love] does not seek its own. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.
(Luke 14:26)

Satan desires to derail your focus from the priorities of God to things *not* of God—past failures, the world’s temptations, or your selfish wants.

God Tests and Refines Us

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the Lord
An offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3)

God tells us that He tests our hearts and will refine us through purification. This is a process, not a one-time event. As His testing reveals the sin in us, He desires that we would confess to Him and commit ourselves to abiding in Him daily, denying our sinful ways and following Him.

Our part is to be in His Word, and to humbly come in prayer, asking for transformation into the image of Christ. As we walk in obedience, He will do the work so we can glorify Him. God does not say we are perfect because we do everything perfectly, but we are perfect when we walk with a heart perfectly fixed on Him.

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. (Psalm 101:2)

A “perfect heart” is a heart firmly directed toward God and motivated by love to walk in a manner pleasing to Him in all our ways. In this we glorify Him. Write a prayer asking the Lord for a “perfect heart” to walk within your home as He desires.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:2–11)

Consider these additional verses: Psalms 73:23-24; 91:1-2; 103:8-18; Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 11:28-30; Romans 8:28-39; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 9:8; Ephesians 6:10-12; Philippians 4:6-7; Titus 3:4-6; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 5:6-7.

Do you believe God has given you “exceedingly great and precious promises”? List them.

By His divine nature, we are courageous, victorious, and able to do His will. We can become the leaders, husbands, fathers, wives, and mothers He has called us to be.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

It is not by our power, for there is nothing good in us.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

It is only by His grace that we succeed.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” (John 20:21)

Identify where we get our strength, how we appropriate that strength, and the result. If God gives us all we need, what does He want us to do with it?

Be patient. Do not be discouraged. Commit yourself daily to being transformed into the image of Christ by God’s Word and His Spirit. Take responsibility when you fail. Then stand firmly in His will and watch what God does in your life.

Appendix N

Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Men

The Bible teaches two specific purposes for human sexual activity in marriage: procreation (Genesis 1:28; Deuteronomy 7:13–14) and pleasure/recreation (Song of Solomon 4:10–12; Proverbs 5:18–19). Sexual intimacy is also part of God’s plan to help us become one with each other. Do you view sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed only with your spouse?

Sex is a gift from God to humanity, created by Him to be enjoyed only within the union of marriage. He designed us, male and female, with the ability to both produce children and experience physical and emotional pleasure during sexual intercourse. Through the sexual relationship, as husband and wife, we have an opportunity to mutually present ourselves as a gift to each other to intimately become what God calls “one” as we share our bodies.

This is God’s plan for sex, but the sin of man and the deception of Satan have tainted His gift to us. Many have fallen under worldly influences, which have perverted the purity of sex and made it sinful, sometimes even thought of as something dirty or a tiresome duty. Attitudes toward sex are also affected by the teaching of our parents or personal experience, which can range from childhood curiosity and information gained from friends to pornography, molestation, rape, and experimental sexual choices. Remember, it is Satan’s plan to destroy, or make bad, the things God has created for good, including sex.

When two people join in a marriage relationship and are ignorant of God’s will, have selfish expectations, or maybe a negative view of sex, they will have difficulty establishing and maintaining a fulfilling sexual relationship.

A healthy sexual relationship is based on:

- a belief that sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed and practiced only within marriage;
- a commitment to give and receive sex within the context of biblical love, which is selfless, not selfish;
- the practice of open and honest communication between husband and wife, learning how to bring physical pleasure to each other; and
- a basic understanding of human sexual anatomy as it relates to sexual pleasure.

Sadly, many Christian couples are unfulfilled in this area of marriage and don’t know how to make it better. If you have a negative attitude toward sex or the sexual relationship with your spouse, you must determine why. When God reveals His will for us, then we need to see it as good. There can be medical or physiological reasons why men and women may experience difficulty with sex. In most cases, ignorance, selfishness, or resentment is the cause. Over the course of any marriage, there are seasons when we must deny ourselves in this area and exercise patience due to pregnancies, surgeries, temporary and terminal illnesses, life traumas, and more. However, whenever possible, we are to keep our sexual relationship fulfilling.

Examination for Men

On your marriage day, you never imagined there would be a time when you would turn down a sexual advance from your wife. Today, more than a few men are struggling with this problem, opening the door for Satan's lies, creating temptations and causing confusion. When a husband rejects his wife's sexual advances, she will begin to feel undesirable, unattractive, and unloved. A husband who is not initiating sex on a regular basis needs to find out why and work toward changing it. The most common reasons are not medical but come from a *heart* condition.

Examine Your Heart

1. Do you think you have been your wife's priority in marriage, second only to God?
___ Yes ___ No
2. Do you think your wife knows how to treat you with honor and speak to you with respect and affirmation? ___ Yes ___ No
3. Do you think your wife treats you like one of the children? ___ Yes ___ No
4. Do you think your wife trusts your leadership and yields to your decisions for the family?
___ Yes ___ No
5. Do you think your wife has rejected your sexual advances because she does not love or prioritize you? ___ Yes ___ No
6. Do you think your wife has been unwilling to talk about sex and to work toward making it better? ___ Yes ___ No
7. Are you angry or resentful toward your wife for any of the above reasons? ___ Yes ___ No

Any of these issues can affect your heart attitude and your desire to have sex with your wife. Through forgiveness and willingness by both partners to work toward reconciliation, your physical intimacy can be restored.

Consider Sinful Responses

1. Have you been rejecting your wife's sexual advances or not showing interest in sex to hurt her or to get revenge for past rejections and the way she treats you? ___ Yes ___ No
2. Have you given up on trying to make your sexual relationship better? ___ Yes ___ No
Ephesians 5 :27 says, "He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." This is an exhortation to settle for nothing less than God's holy will in your marriage. When we do not follow His will, it is sin. A man who gives up on the sexual relationship makes himself and his wife vulnerable to sinful practices, which can result in adultery or indulgence in pornography. Another common sin is overcommitting time to such activities as career, hobbies, volunteer work, and even ministry. When a man does not receive affirmation, this is a common problem. You need to confess, repent, and work toward making things right.
3. Have you turned to porn? ___ Yes ___ No

If you have turned to pornography and masturbation, this is a destructive and sinful antidote. If you have begun to practice this on a regular basis, it can become the preferred way to find sexual pleasure because there is no risk of rejection and or negative attitudes, but it is sin. You need to repent, seek help, and work on restoring your marriage in this and other areas.

4. Have you placed selfish expectations on your wife's physical appearance or certain sexual acts as a condition for you to lovingly participate in sex with her? ___ Yes ___ No

There is never an excuse to not do God's will in any area of our life, and that includes working at fulfilling your wife's sexual needs. Philippians 2:3 says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Sex is not about selfishness in the marriage. It is an expression of love and a commitment to God and your spouse to fulfill His will in your marriage.

Physical Problems

There are physical reasons why a man can lose his sex drive and performance prematurely.

1. Lower-than-average testosterone level. This can be determined through a doctor's visit and a simple blood test. There are many options available to increase testosterone levels.
2. Are you taking antidepressants? These can cause a man to lose his sexual drive. Talk with your doctor and seek other options. Get some *good* biblical counseling. Depression or anxiety can result from hurts that have never been forgiven, guilt from past sins or mistakes never resolved through forgiveness, unconfessed sinful practices, demonic lies accepted as true about yourself, and confusion about God's view of you or what you need to do to be accepted by Him.
3. Are you taking blood pressure medicines? This can affect sexual drive and the ability to get an erection—very humbling and embarrassing for a man. Both husband and wife should know the side effects of taking blood pressure medicines and be willing to work through this challenge together. Changing medication may solve the problem, or a doctor can advise using meds like Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis to address erectile dysfunction.

The truth is, a man needs to learn how to please his wife physically without having to reach an orgasm himself. Most wives have participated in sex many times without ever reaching a climax or orgasm. Why is it acceptable for a man to be sexually pleased with little or no pleasure for his wife? However, the reverse situation is not normal, but taboo and unacceptable. Yes, a good wife should be willing to participate sexually with her husband when she is "not in the mood," but a good husband should also be willing to fulfill his wife's sexual desires apart from his own.

A husband who loves his wife and desires to fulfill her sexually can do so without the ability or desire to reach an orgasm himself. This will take honest communication about techniques and a mutual willingness to explore new sexual avenues, perhaps using lotions, lubrication, hands, mouth, and positions.

See *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* to help you understand and practice forgiveness in your marriage. Trust God and His ways, and pray that He will heal and bless your obedience.

An Honest Prayer about Intimacy

Lord, help me to trust You in why You created sex. I know it is not to torment or possess me, but a gift to glorify You. Help me to forgive my spouse for past hurts in this area, and give me the grace to ask forgiveness for everything I have made it that was not from You. Teach me how to view it as You made it—with passion, tenderness, and selflessness—and to know my body is not my own but a gift to my spouse to bless and bring physical fulfillment.

Remove my fears and reservations about my body so my nakedness is not hidden or shameful. Help me to share openly what pleases me physically and to learn how to please my spouse. Remove my selfish conditions and fears that have made this gift something far less than what You made it to be. Anything You have made is good, Lord, and that includes sex.

Guard my mind from fantasies that are selfish or of this world that would taint this pure gift from You. Make my heart truly thankful for sex, and make me willing to experience the pleasures that You made me able to feel.

Lord, You made me a sexual being that is able to give and receive sexual fulfillment in my marriage, and I thank You for that. Please, Lord, have Your own way in all areas of my life and in our marriage. Thank you, God, for sex. Amen.

Appendix O

Physical Intimacy in Marriage for Women

The Bible teaches two specific purposes for human sexual activity in marriage: procreation (Genesis 1:28; Deuteronomy 7:13–14) and pleasure/recreation (Song of Solomon 4:10–12; Proverbs 5:18–19). Sexual intimacy is also part of God’s plan to help us become one with each other. Do you view sex as a gift from God to be enjoyed only with your spouse?

Sex is a gift from God to humanity, created by Him to be enjoyed only within the union of marriage. He designed us, male and female, with the ability to both produce children and experience physical and emotional pleasure during sexual intercourse. Through the sexual relationship, as husband and wife, we have an opportunity to mutually present ourselves as a gift to each other to intimately become what God calls “one” as we share our bodies.

This is God’s plan for sex, but the sin of man and the deception of Satan have tainted His gift to us. Many have fallen under worldly influences, which have perverted the purity of sex and made it sinful, sometimes even thought of as something dirty or a tiresome duty. Attitudes toward sex are also affected by the teaching of our parents or personal experience, which can range from childhood curiosity and information gained from friends to pornography, molestation, rape, and experimental sexual choices. Remember, it is Satan’s plan to destroy, or make bad, the things God has created for good, including sex.

When two people join in marriage and are ignorant of God’s will, have selfish expectations, or maybe a negative view of sex, they will have difficulty establishing and maintaining a fulfilling sexual relationship.

A healthy sexual relationship is based on:

- a belief that sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed and practiced only within marriage;
- a commitment to give and receive sex within the context of biblical love, which is selfless, not selfish;
- the practice of honest and open communication between husband and wife, learning how to bring physical pleasure to each other; and
- a basic understanding of human sexual anatomy as it relates to sexual pleasure.

Examination for Women

If you had loving parents in a great relationship who taught you a biblical perspective on sexuality, then it follows that you should have good expectations and be excited about having a sexual relationship with your husband. Even if this was not your exact history, a normally adjusted bride usually looks forward to a life of mutual sexual satisfaction and pleasure in marriage. But, as time passes, hopes and expectations can change for a variety of reasons. Perhaps repeated unsatisfying sexual experiences with your husband, his unwillingness to

receive any instruction from you, pregnancies, raising children, and other relationship challenges have quenched your sexual pleasure and changed your attitude to discouragement and a desire to avoid sex.

If you have a negative attitude toward sex or the sexual relationship with your spouse, you must determine why. If God made something and said it is to be part of our relationship in marriage, then we need to see it as good and be willing to learn how to give it in the best way. It needs to be treated with the same importance as communication or any other companionship need.

Sadly, many Christian couples are experiencing unfulfilled sexual relations and don't know how to make it better. Medical and physiological issues can affect either spouse. In most cases, it is ignorance, selfishness, or resentment that negatively affect this area in a marriage. Over the course of any marriage relationship, there are seasons when we must deny ourselves and exercise patience due to medical reasons, pregnancies, life traumas, and more. However, if the condition is not terminal, we are to work toward keeping our sexual relationship fulfilling.

As a wife, if you are not initiating or participating in sex on a regular basis, then you need to find out why and work toward change. The most common reason women do not desire or initiate sex is not physical, but it is a *heart* issue. Generally, the frequency of sexual intercourse and the need to have an orgasm every time are not the same for women and men. Men usually require greater frequency in both. So which sex drive is the determining factor for sexual intimacy? Neither, as sacrifice and self-denial must be practiced by each at different times to maintain a balanced and mutually loving relationship. Examining the following issues can help resolve problems that affect a woman's sexual relationship with her husband.

Examine Your Heart

1. Does your spouse show an interest in learning how to love and prioritize you in the manner of a godly husband? Yes No
2. Do you think he faithfully takes responsibility when he speaks to you harshly?
 Yes No
3. Do you think he has been willing and interested in learning how to nurture and cherish you? Yes No
4. Do you think the family is his greatest earthly possession by the way he has prioritized his time and his attitude when home? Yes No
5. Do you think he is willing to lovingly lead in parenting the children? Yes No
6. Do you think he uses excuses or is unwilling to apologize when he uses anger and harsh discipline toward the children? Yes No
7. Do you think he takes seriously his responsibility to provide for the family? Yes No
8. Do you think he has been willing to lovingly discuss and receive input from you on how, and how often, to have sex? Yes No
9. Do you think he is attracted to you? Yes No
10. Do you think he has shown spiritual leadership in the home? Yes No

These questions address hurts and wounds you may have, which can affect your heart attitude toward sex. All these hurts can be healed through forgiveness. When a husband and wife are willing to ask forgiveness, to give and receive it, and then learn how to tend to each other biblically, this can heal the hurts and bring reconciliation to the relationship in all areas.

Consider Sinful Responses

1. Have you been denying sex to your husband to get revenge, hurt him, or manipulate him? ___ Yes ___ No
2. Have you allowed the world's demonic, dirty image of sex to taint your attitude toward it? ___ Yes ___ No
3. Have you allowed a negative self-image to prevent your husband from enjoying your body? ___ Yes ___ No
4. Have you been withholding sex from your husband because he has not lived up to what you think he should be doing as a father or spiritual leader? ___ Yes ___ No
5. Have you been willing to cooperate with your husband in expressing how he can sexually please you, and are you willing to learn how to please him? ___ Yes ___ No
6. Have you turned to romance novels or TV programs to meet your emotional needs rather than improving the relationship with your husband? ___ Yes ___ No
7. Have you just given up trying to make it better? ___ Yes ___ No

If any of these answers are yes, you are vulnerable to problems including emotional and physical infidelity. These issues will drive a wedge between husband and wife, resulting in an unhappy cohabitation that is far from God's will and plan for marriage.

It is a fact that wives participate in marital sex without an orgasm more often than husbands. Have you wondered why it is accepted for a man to be sexually pleased with little or no pleasure for his wife but, when that is reversed, the outcome is considered abnormal, taboo, or unacceptable? A good wife should be willing to participate sexually with her husband when she is not "in the mood," but likewise a good husband should desire to please his wife even without achieving orgasm himself. To reach this level of intimacy requires open and honest communication about how to please each other and willingness to mutually explore new avenues for pleasure, possibly with lotions, lubrication, hands, mouth, and positions.

See *Appendix P: Trust and Forgiveness* to help you understand and practice forgiveness in your marriage. Trust God and His ways, and pray that He will heal and bless your obedience.

Physical Problems

Physical differences between men and women make medical considerations especially relevant regarding sexual intercourse. Katharine O'Connell, MD said, "For two-thirds of women, intercourse is painful at some point." She has done extensive research on women's health issues to help women better understand why they experience discomfort during intercourse.

Dr. O’Connell explained that women often suffer in silence because they’re too embarrassed to speak up or because they assume there’s no remedy. But if sex hurts, it’s important to understand why *and fix it*. She identified the most common reasons in an article no longer available online. Her ideas are paraphrased below.

Vaginal Dryness

Simply not being lubricated enough is the number one reason for pain during sex. There are two parts to the body’s response to foreplay. The first is *engorgement*, a rushing of blood to the vagina that expands the vaginal walls—the female version of an erection. The second is *lubrication*, a release of moisture from the glands around the vaginal opening. Both actions signal readiness for sex, so starting before they take place can hurt. Using a lubricant like Astroglide or K-Y can help relieve discomfort.

Antihistamines (for allergy symptoms) are one of several medications that can lead to dryness. Others include antidepressants and even birth control medication. Talk to your doctor if needed. Communicate and be willing to give and receive input from each other about how to help in the foreplay leading up to intercourse.

Vulvodynia

The word basically means “painful vulva.” Dr. O’Connell said 16 percent of women have this condition, and the medical field still doesn’t understand what causes it. Women often describe it as a burning, stinging, itching, irritating, or raw feeling on their vulva and labia. Sometimes it hurts even when they’re sitting or walking. Dr. O’Connell recommended seeing a vulvar pain specialist (your doctor can find one at nva.org) or talk to your ob-gyn. Topical creams and oral medications (including antidepressants) can also help.

Herpes

Genital herpes is another possibility. Look for pimple-like bumps appearing as clear blisters on a red base. If anything appears suspicious, see your gynecologist. Don’t google herpes pictures; it will just freak you out.

Yeast Infection

This overgrowth of the microscopic fungal candida often makes the vulva, vagina, and cervix become irritated, inflamed, and incredibly sensitive. Some have complained of a sandpaper-like feeling during sex. Symptoms are tenderness, itchiness, and clumpy discharge. An over-the-counter vaginal yeast infection treatment can clear it in a few days to a week. If not, see your gynecologist to rule out sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and other infections like bacterial vaginosis (BV).

Bumping the Cervix

Dr. O’Connell said 20 percent of women have a retroverted uterus, meaning the organ tips back toward the tailbone instead of forward toward the bladder. This makes it easy for the penis to brush up against the cervix. But the mishap can happen to any woman during sex in positions with deeper penetration. If it “feels like he’s pushing your uterus up into your stomach,” try a different

position. Lying on your side or being on top can better control how deeply and quickly your spouse thrusts.

Ovarian Cyst

If the pain is on only one side, it could be an ovarian cyst. Ovaries make cysts each month. A little one forms around the developing egg and then bursts to release it during ovulation. But if the cyst isn't quickly reabsorbed like normal, it can swell up with fluid or blood and get very uncomfortable, especially during sex. Most cysts will go away within a few weeks or months on their own, but in rare cases, persistent cysts may need surgery. Ask your ob-gyn for an ultrasound to check your ovaries. Ibuprofen can ease the pain, and hormonal birth control can ward off cysts in the future.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

If it hurts more in the middle of the pelvis—especially if it burns during urination or you need to urinate frequently—see your doctor for antibiotics. (No, cranberry juice won't cure it.)

Endometriosis

This is a condition in which tissue that looks and acts like the lining of the uterus grows outside of it—on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, or even the abdominal wall. Aside from uncomfortable sex, it can also cause constant pelvic pain and excruciating periods. Hormonal birth control is the best treatment.

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

Another possible culprit for discomfort is pelvic inflammatory disease, which usually results from an untreated infection like chlamydia or gonorrhea traveling into the uterus and fallopian tubes. Until reaching this advanced stage, STDs, aside from herpes, almost never cause painful sex on their own. Other symptoms of PID may be stomach pain, fever, and smelly discharge. See your doctor as soon as possible. PID is usually curable with antibiotics, but it can affect fertility if left untreated.

Interstitial Cystitis (IC)

This inflammation of the bladder causes a stinging sensation during urination and a frequent, urgent need to go. It's often misdiagnosed as chronic UTI because of the similar symptoms. If you're visiting the restroom hourly and hurting during or after sex, see your doctor for an evaluation and ask about IC.

Pelvic Congestion

During foreplay and arousal, blood rushes to the pelvis. After sex, the muscles and blood vessels relax, allowing the blood to reenter the rest of the body. But if the muscles don't unclench and the blood doesn't dissipate, it can cause a dull pain. It's not dangerous, but it can be uncomfortable. The best remedy is an orgasm. If that doesn't relieve the discomfort, Dr. O'Connell suggests 600–800 milligrams of ibuprofen before sex to treat the pain.

An Honest Prayer About Intimacy

Lord, help me to trust You in why You created sex. I know it is not to torment or possess me, but a gift to glorify You. Help me to forgive my spouse for past hurts in this area, and give me the grace to ask forgiveness for everything I have made it that was not from You. Teach me how to view it as You made it—with passion, tenderness, and selflessness—and to know my body is not my own but a gift to my spouse to bless and bring physical fulfillment.

Remove my fears and reservations about my body so my nakedness is not hidden or shameful. Help me to share openly what pleases me physically and to learn how to please my spouse. Remove my selfish conditions and fears that have made this gift something far less than what You made it to be. Anything You have made is good, Lord, and that includes sex.

Guard my mind from fantasies that are selfish or of this world that would taint this pure gift from You. Make my heart truly thankful for sex, and make me willing to experience the pleasures that You made me able to feel.

Lord, You made me a sexual being that is able to give and receive sexual fulfillment in my marriage, and I thank You for that. Please, Lord, have Your own way in all areas of my life and in our marriage. Thank you, God, for sex. Amen.

Appendix P

Trust and Forgiveness

Psalm 139 teaches that God knows each of us intimately, that all our acts and thoughts are known to Him even before they are known to us. Before you opened your heart to God, by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, He knew you would come. God is not willing that any should perish; however, through the exercise of free will, He gives every individual the freedom to reject Him.

Trusting God with Our Past and Trials

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
 But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
 And among the inhabitants of the earth;
 And no one can ward off His hand
 Or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:35 NASB)

You have searched me and known me.
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 You understand my thought from afar.
 You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
 And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before there is a word on my tongue,
 Behold, O Lord, You know it all. (Psalm 139:1–4 NASB)

FACT FILE

Sovereign—Possessing supreme power, unlimited wisdom, and absolute authority.

God created Adam and Eve, and He gave only one restriction: do not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But they were deceived by Satan and, in disobedience, chose to eat the fruit of that tree. This brought the curse of sin on all mankind. In Adam, God gave mankind the freedom to choose good, but he turned to evil. Therefore all who now choose to be reborn as God’s children, by faith in Christ, still live in a fallen world and are touched by the evil around them. If God shielded His children from all trouble and evil, people would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of an easy life. This very argument began the historic show down in heaven between God and Satan concerning the life of Job.

Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.” (Job 1:9–11 NASB)

God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith through the loss of his possessions, his children, and finally his health. God is a loving Father and does not bring evil into our lives; however, for His purpose and for our ultimate good, He allows us to be touched by trials. Job continued to trust God throughout his suffering, which ultimately resulted in a deeper, more intimate relationship with his Creator and complete restoration of blessing.

Job questioned why God was allowing him to suffer. God had declared Job a righteous man in Job 2:3, so he asked why. For several chapters, he agonized over the reason for his trials. God never answered directly but turned Job's attention to His power and glory, which is displayed in creation. Job's search was eventually satisfied through deeper understanding of the greatness of God. Just like Job, when we experience trials, we look for an explanation. And so it is with our marriages and the trials that seem so overwhelming. One of the many lessons we can learn from Job is that *why* is the wrong question. We should instead ask God *what*.

What Are You Trying to Teach Me?

What is Your will for me in this season of suffering?

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.
(James 1:13-14 NASB)

Then Job answered the Lord and said,
"I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. . . .
I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You." (Job 42:1-2, 5 NASB)

Is any of part of your life beyond God's power, wisdom, or authority? Why or why not?

What circumstance in your life did God not know beforehand that you would face?

In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.
(Ephesians 1:11 NIV)

How should you respond to disappointments, difficulties, suffering, and trials?

If God knew all that would happen before we were born, then it follows that, through His foreknowledge, we were predestined through His grace to live the life given to us. God does not keep trials or evil from touching us, or prevent our bad choices, but He does promise to work all for good in the life of those who are committed to Him.

And we know that God causes all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8:28-29 NASB)

You can choose to either harbor bitterness toward parents who disappointed you, a spouse who deserted you, friends who failed you, or a drunk driver who killed a loved one. Or we can place our faith in a sovereign God.

When we come to Christ, we trust God with our eternal destiny. We must also trust Him with our past and present circumstances. Christ can comfort and strengthen us both in and through our trials and can bring good out of bad. It is only through our faith and obedience that God can and will give us peace and bring praise, honor, and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Describe what these verses mean and how they can be applied to your personal circumstances.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7 NASB)

Our Trials and Tribulations

God's word teaches that trials and tribulations are part of the Christian life.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Jesus tells us that we can have peace and that He has overcome the world, but amid trials we ask, "Why? What is God's purpose?" Just as the refiner places crude gold into a crucible and administers heat to bring dross (impurity) to the surface, God allows His beloved children to go into the crucible of suffering to be refined and transformed into the image of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. (Malachi 3:3 NASB)

If we trust ourselves to God's goodness and purpose, our hearts will become permeated with the love, hope, and confidence of Jesus Christ. Others will see the righteousness of Jesus Christ being worked out in us.

Remember Romans 8:28–29? God does not say *some* things work together for good, but *all things*. The key is faith. If we choose to believe God's promises and trust Him in all our trials and tribulations, we will be victorious, and God will be glorified. In this passage, "to those who love God" refers to those who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, which includes an understanding that God's purpose in this life is to deliver us from the power of sin, which translates to becoming one who is able to choose righteousness over evil, glory to God.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.
(2 Corinthians 2:14 NASB)

Are you willing to trust God with the trials and challenges in your life? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to allow God to transform your life through these trials? ___ Yes ___ No

Are you willing to trust God as you work through these hurts and trials in your life?
___ Yes ___ No

There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God behind all things strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular unless God's will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him. —Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

The Cost of Unforgiveness

When a debt is forgiven, the right to payment is given away. The word *forgive* literally means "to give away." If someone injures me and I forgive them, I give away the freedom to continue being angry and resentful. This breaks many strongholds that lead to emotional and psychological problems. Forgiving someone means giving our hurts to God, letting Him take them away from us. In this way we give away any resentful thoughts we may have and eliminate acts of retribution.

As God pardons us, we give a pardon for the offense. God commands that we forgive others as He has forgiven us. The word *pardon* is derived from Latin, *perdonare*, meaning "to grant freely." True forgiveness is undeserved, unmerited, and free. It is not our place to decide what is just or fair—we are called to forgive. In Scripture, to *forget* means "to let go from one's power."

When we refuse to grant forgiveness, there is a price to pay. Unforgiveness, being unwilling to let go of offenses when we believe another person has wronged us, results in a negative emotional condition. The most common is resentment, which means "to feel again." Resentment clings to past hurts, reliving them over and over. Resentment, like picking a scab, prohibits our emotional wounds from healing.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled. (Hebrews 12:15 NASB)

Bitterness is like a deep root taking hold in the human heart, which then grows and produces fruit. However, rather than nourishing others, this bitter fruit defiles both us and others.

Most people do not readily admit to harboring unforgiveness, resentment, or bitterness because they only recognize it as a logical emotional response after being hurt. They see their condition as justified and seek others to listen to their complaints or sympathize with them. Ephesians teaches that there will be undeniable evidence in an individual's life that the bitter tree of resentment is growing within their heart.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Ephesians 4:31 NASB)

Are any of these common in your life?

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-pity
- Emotional disturbances
- Anxiety, tension, or stress
- Health problems
- Eating disorders
- Unhealthy sense of self-confidence
- Lack of trust in relationships
- Lack of intimacy in marriage
- Sexual dysfunction
- Judgmental or critical of others
- Ultrasensitive and easily offended
- Absence of peace or joy
- Feeling distant from Jesus
- Afraid to lead as a husband
- Afraid to follow as a wife

FACT FILE

Wrath—An outburst of a strong, vengeful anger or indignation, seeking retribution.

Anger—A state of mind marked by fretfulness and reacting to life's challenges with frustration.

Evil speaking—Unkind words, verbal abuse against someone, clamor, slander, wounding someone's reputation by evil reports, backbiting, insult, and defamation.

Malice—Hateful feelings we nurture in our hearts. A desire to see another suffer or to separate ourselves from that person, not wanting to work toward reconciliation.

Why Forgive?

Along with the emotional and social devastation that results from unforgiveness, we are indebted to forgive.

God commands it.

Obedience to God is not optional. Deciding when we will and will not obey His commands leads to an unfruitful, ineffective, and spiritually barren life.

But love your enemies, and do good . . . and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36 NASB)

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

In forgiving, we bear the image of Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to carry the name of Christ to a lost world. The term *Christian* means “little Christ.” Christ demonstrated forgiveness, came to this earth, died to establish forgiveness for the guilty, and commissioned the church to proclaim forgiveness. To bear His image we must be willing to forgive others as He forgives us.

Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”
(Luke 23:34)

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1 John 2:6 NASB)

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of pain, blame, and strongholds.

Forgiveness brings healing to a hurting person and functions as an antidote to the poison of bitterness. However, it does not address all issues of blame and fairness but often disregards those altogether. The hurt and resentment is left behind with God, while obediently offering forgiveness brings freedom and enables one to start over in a relationship.

This truth is demonstrated in the life of Joseph, found in Genesis 37–45. Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, he refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold in his life. After years of separation, when the family was reunited, Joseph testified of the healing work God had done in his life through forgiveness, demonstrated by the names of his sons.

Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”
(Genesis 41:51–52 NASB)

In this passage, *forget* does not mean cease to remember. It means “to let go,” or cease to let hurts control present life. Joseph’s fruitfulness was directly related to putting his trust in God’s sovereignty and forgiving others. Instead of multiplying his hurt by feeling it again and again (resentment), Joseph chose to trust God as the overseer of all events in his life.

Unforgiveness imprisons us in the past and locks out all potential for a fruitful life.

During Joseph’s years in Egypt, he allowed God to heal a heart that had been broken by his own brothers. Later, when given the opportunity, he demonstrated his healing through acts of love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers.

Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. . . . He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him. (Genesis 45:5, 6, 15 NASB)

There was no blaming and no explanation demanded, only the voice of mercy and forgiveness. The way was cleared for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

Forgiveness loosens the stranglehold of guilt in the offender.

In the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7 NASB)

Forgiveness brings freedom to all involved. God set Joseph free, but his brothers would have carried their grief to the grave if Joseph had not forgiven them. We forgive because God forgives us in Christ. That same forgiveness, undeserved and unearned, is what we owe to others. It relieves the oppressive burden we know as guilt.

If Jesus had not extended kindness and forgiveness to sinners, we would all forever exist in the stranglehold of guilt. He made the first move toward us, which made it possible for us to be reconciled to Him.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the removal of enmity, the resolution of a quarrel. It implies that the parties being reconciled were formerly hostile to or separated from one another. Any successful reconciliation will be accompanied by kindness and peace rather than anger and turmoil.

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To restore to a right relationship, to settle or resolve differences.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32 NASB)

Reconciliation is to be sought out for family members and other believers in our lives. In all our relationships outside our immediate family setting, respectful boundaries and maintaining a healthy relationship are important.

However there are some cases or situations where reconciliation is not necessary, possible, or even needed, such as an emotionally or physically abusive parent or ex-spouse or a random person who hurt you or a loved one (a rapist, a drunk who hurt or killed a loved one, an old teacher or coach who verbally hurt you, etc.).

Scripture instructs us to put away all bitterness, to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

How do we put away bitterness?

How do we reconcile with someone whom we have offended?

How do we repair the hurt we have caused others?

How do we forgive someone who has offended us?

How can we change our own feelings about a wrong done?

If You Need to Be Forgiven

As an act of the will, you must do four things.

First, confess your sin to God, ask Him to forgive you, and ask His Holy Spirit to fill your heart with His love.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered. . . .
When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:1, 3-5)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

Take a moment right now and cry out to God. Ask Him to forgive you, to fill you with His Holy Spirit, and strengthen you to obey.

God alone forgives sins. He forgives and He forgets. By faith, accept God's absolute forgiveness and cleansing.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. . . . Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. —Corrie ten Boom

Second, if possible, go to those you have wronged, humbly make confession, and ask for their forgiveness.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

Write your commitment to obey Matthew 5:23–24.

Write the names and a brief description of what needs to be said for forgiveness.

Six of the most powerful words in the English language are, *I was wrong. Please forgive me.*

Don't let distractions or other obstacles delay this act of obedience. Share your decision with a trustworthy Christian friend, asking them to pray with you and hold you accountable to follow through on this commitment. It is best to seek forgiveness face to face. However, due to logistics or a possible confrontation, you may need to communicate on the phone or in writing. If the person you have wronged has passed away, simply go to God with your confession.

Third, spend time daily with the Lord in His Word and in prayer.

One of the many negative consequences of not seeking or giving forgiveness is a hindered relationship with God. Praise the Lord that He never leaves us or forsakes us, but our own hearts can grow cold and distant, thus affecting our intimacy with Him. God designed this consequence to motivate us to practice forgiveness.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

Write your decision to spend time daily with God by reading His Word and in prayer and meditation.

Fourth, ponder the meaning of the cross and the sacrifice Jesus made for your sins.

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:3-5)

Take a moment right now to thank Jesus for all He has done for you, for forgiving you for all your sins, for His perfect plan of transforming you into His image, and for the gift of His Holy Spirit.

If You Need to Forgive

As an act of the will, you must do two things.

First, pray and ask God for the strength to obey and to forgive.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt . . . if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

God promised to give us the strength to move mountains. This may be your Mount Everest!

Whenever I see myself before God and realize something of what my blessed Lord has done for me at Calvary, I am ready to forgive anybody anything, I cannot withhold it. I do not even want to withhold it. —Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

We know it is God's will that we forgive others. Be confident that when you ask for this strength, it will be granted.

Second, communicate your forgiveness to the person or persons.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Romans 14:19)

Desiring Reconciliation

In Matthew, the Lord Jesus was asked an important question. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36). His response revealed an essential truth: “Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40). Jesus Himself said our love for others is equally as important as our love for Him.

We want God to forgive us, and we ask for this regularly and depend on it. God shows His love to us, and we are to respond by first loving Him and then loving others. This verse is *not* encouraging a love that would put us in conflict with God’s desires or will for us, but it says that all love we show toward others should be within the scope of our obedience to Him. We must not put our own desires or the desire to satisfy others above our obedience to God.

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.
(Matthew 5:22)

Let’s bring some clarity to the words in this verse. To be “angry with his brother” means treating someone in thought, word, or deed in an unloving way. Even believers treat loved ones in an unloving way and excuse it rather than seek reconciliation.

The word *raca* means “to hold someone in contempt, judge, or believe them to be worthless or less than yourself in some way.” The word *fool* means “one who is morally worthless and undeserving of salvation.” These are serious charges that many believers are aiming at others for one reason or another. The Lord says, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

We are to glorify or *reflect* Christ to all with no exception. Lingering thoughts or behaviors toward others that are unloving or not Christlike are inexcusable and require repentance both toward God and the person.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
(Matthew 5:23–24)

When do we go to the altar? This refers to our fellowship with Jesus, our time in prayer and thanksgiving and asking petitions of Him, our daily acts of devotion and desire to abide in Him.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

To abide means “to dwell with, to live in a constant awareness of being the temple of the Holy Spirit.” And it says that *if* we do it, we will bear much fruit; for without His grace we can do *nothing*. *Going to the altar* refers to our fellowship with Jesus and our ability to receive the grace necessary for bearing fruit and obeying His will.

Examining Ourselves

When we owe someone forgiveness, either by the asking or giving, God says we first must clear this up before we can expect His blessing and grace. What are the *gifts* to bring in Matthew 5:23? Bringing sacrifices to the temple was a common practice for the Jews as part of atoning for their sins. Our gifts today are praise, tithes, worship, obedience, and service to Him. Yet Jesus said He will not receive these gifts if you owe anyone reconciliation.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

Service and work for God will not fix this problem. We are exhorted to examine ourselves before we take communion.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26–32)

How often do Christians partake of communion without first examining their hearts to see if they are harboring bitterness or have sinned against someone and have not repented or do not plan to be reconciled?

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

FACT FILE

Reconcile—To make things right; to change one’s feelings or perspective toward another; or to pay a debt owed.

A Debt Owed

As Christians we have a debt to pay that God Himself says we owe to others: to love them in thought, word, and deed. This also includes forgiving those who have hurt us. Many Christians are harboring bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness toward someone and justifying these feelings because this person has not yet paid any consequence or taken responsibility for their behavior. But we *will* be hurt by others, even those who are supposed to love us, either ignorantly or deliberately.

The word *forgive* is a verb—an *action*. God is using His Word to speak to you right now, revealing truth that requires action. Forgiving is not easy. It can help to seek the support and accountability of a mature Christian to encourage you to follow through.

Write your commitment to forgive the person or persons or to ask for forgiveness for what God revealed to you. Give yourself a deadline to follow through.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
(Matthew 6:14)

In some cases, due to logistics, cost of travel, safety to you, or the ability of the other person to be quiet long enough to let you say what you need to say, a letter, email, text, or phone call may be the best option.

Communication Reminders

Keep these points in mind when either speaking or communicating in writing.

1. You are doing this out of obedience to your heavenly Father, who loves and cares for you.
2. He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of unforgiveness.
3. You do not need to rehearse every detail of their offense against you.
4. Many times, especially when forgiving a spouse, they may be unaware of what they have done to hurt you.
5. Do not compel others to admit their offenses.
6. God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, judge, or to try and make them confess that what they did was wrong.
7. Keep it short.

8. In many cases, due to the high level of emotion, we can find ourselves saying things we didn't intend to say and undermine the purpose of the meeting, conversation, or letter.
9. Finally (if applicable), ask forgiveness for harboring bitterness toward them.
10. Remember that what they may have done was wrong and offensive, but bitterness and unforgiveness are equally wrong.

God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
(Romans 2:16)

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)

The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father's forgiveness for me. —Phillip Keller

Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

You may encounter a battle between the Spirit and the flesh after you have asked for forgiveness or have forgiven another person.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22–26)

The forgiveness experience will change you and your relationships over time. God has had a major victory in your life, bringing you to this place of surrender and obedience. But this is only the beginning. Now you must press in and work through the needed changes. This will require that you seek God daily for His strength to continue on your path of mercy and compassion.

For example, you might have forgiven a parent for being harsh and unloving and asked them to forgive you for harboring bitterness. Yet they may continue to be harsh and unloving. Your flesh may want to react the way you formerly reacted. God will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life as you surrender to Him moment by moment.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

You must keep in mind that your obedience in forgiving was not so your spouse (or the other person) would change. If they surrender their will to the Lord, they will experience God's grace, healing, and the ability to change. Only God can change our hearts and renew our minds, but it will only happen as we surrender to Him.

We are involved in a spiritual battle every day. The Enemy, Satan, does not want you to obey God or have victory over sin and hurts. He will attack your mind with memories, evil thoughts, lies, temptations, and condemnation. You must exercise mental self-control and remember what and whom you are battling!

“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:26–27)

This is the reality in which we live. Satan hates to lose ground in your life. He wants to rob you of God’s peace and joy.

Satan’s Destruction

Stop giving the devil opportunities to work his destruction in your life. Test each thought that enters your mind by God’s Word to see if it is from Him, from your flesh, or from the Enemy.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3–6)

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Pray in every temptation, asking for God’s power to do His will.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Resist and rebuke the devil in the name of Jesus. *Fight!*

Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil . . . dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. . . . Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. (1 Peter 5:6–9)

I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:10–11)

God wants you to be victorious. Be aware of the devil's devices. Unforgiveness is one of his most powerful tactics to keep us in bondage. Jesus showed the importance of using Scripture to combat Satan's deceptions (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Develop an action plan by using any of the verses above, or the many verses in this study, to combat unbiblical thoughts and to set your mind on God's perspective. Write a verse on an index card and memorize it by carrying the card with you and reviewing it in the morning and night. Continue to add to your victory kit by memorizing verses. As you pray over and memorize Scripture, you are hiding God's Word in your heart (Psalm 119:11). This will be your victory.

Quote Scripture to replace evil thoughts, reinforce God's truth, and answer the Enemy as Jesus did. When Satan brought lies to Jesus, He said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7), and He quoted Scripture. We must do the same. Truth will *always* prevail.

Establishing Boundaries

You may need to establish boundaries. Asking for forgiveness or forgiving another does not give that person the right to treat you with disrespect or be harsh.

If your mother was harsh or manipulative toward you when you were growing up and she continued after you moved out, you need to set boundaries in your relationship (after forgiving her). Kindly explain that you want a relationship with her but need to establish boundaries to not be hurt by her. Perhaps you could add, "Mom, I need you to speak to me in a loving way, and I promise to do the same toward you. If either of us say something unkind, we need to express that the other person hurt us. Or if we wish to not talk about a certain subject, we need to honor that. If those boundaries are not respected, then I will end the discussion. Mom, the only way we can truly know if we desire to have a relationship is by the way we love and respect each other."

Unable to Reconcile

Sometimes it is not possible to reconcile. If the person you need to forgive is deceased or unwilling to reconcile, you can still forgive them.

Bitterness in the human heart lives on long after the object of that bitterness has died. It is important to view forgiveness as a powerful antidote to heal the human soul of unhealthy human conditions. If you choose to trust God and receive this "antidote," God will bring healing and even fill those voids in your soul. The death of the offender does not nullify God's Word.

True, biblical forgiveness requires us to take action. We must do more than agree in our minds or hearts that we should forgive. The Bible does not command us to merely *feel* forgiveness. We must exercise our will and follow through with our actions.

You must begin with confession to the Lord. It is helpful if you speak your confession out loud and verbalize your forgiveness of the deceased person in the presence of a trusted friend, spouse, pastor, or counselor.

FACT FILE

Confess—To acknowledge or disclose one's misdeed, fault, or sin.

Your Responsibility

You are only responsible for *your part* of reconciliation. Regardless of the position your spouse takes (or the other person), you must obey God by asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness. If they refuse to grant you forgiveness, or they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy upon your life. You will still experience His freedom from bondage.

You cannot place any expectations or requirements on the other person. Surrender all to the Lord and trust Him to work in your circumstances. We must not lean on our own understanding but obey and surrender to God and His will. He has given us spiritual laws to govern, protect, and set us free. His Word gives us understanding and instruction about how to follow these laws. Our flesh, pride, and fear will keep us from trusting and obeying God in these situations, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Use the following prayer to guide you:

Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I know You alone can heal me and my spouse for the wrong we have done to each other. I pray for reconciliation with my spouse, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for my spouse to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust You entirely with the results. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

Conclusion

It can be extremely difficult to forgive, but life is harder when we do not forgive because we are harboring sin and missing out on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our experience of God's forgiveness is directly related to our ability to forgive others. A readiness to forgive others is one indication that you have truly repented of your own sin, surrendered your life, and received God's forgiveness. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others.

Pride and fear keep us from forgiveness and reconciliation. Refusing to give in or be broken, insisting on your rights, and defending yourself are all indications that selfish pride is ruling your life, rather than the Lord. When fear of *what if* is consuming and controlling you, pray for the faith to trust and obey God. Enemies are very expensive to keep. The parable in Matthew 18:21–35 warns that an unforgiving spirit will put you in an emotional prison.

The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. . . . When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us. —Lewis Smedes

Appendix R

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, G & C Merriam Company, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers.

abide: To stay, remain; to continue in a place; to endure without yielding.

affirm: To confirm; assert as valid; assert positively.

arrogant or proud: To be conceited; feeling or showing self-importance, disregard for others. Proudful; giving oneself high rank, an undue degree of significance.

bears all things: Bears, *stego* (Greek). To hide, to conceal. Love hides the faults of others or covers them up. It keeps out resentment as the ship keeps out the water or the roof the rain.

believing: *Pisteuo* (Greek). Having faith in or to be firmly persuaded in something. It indicates an attitude of expectant hope.

brag: To talk about oneself, or things pertaining to oneself, in a boastful manner; to boast.

companion: One who has accompanied or is in company with another; a spouse, an associate, an interest of some special relationship as a spouse or comrade.

comparable: One who is the counterpart, the other side, a part opposite, a mate, a companion, but not identical.

compromise: To settle differences by mutual consensuses.

correction: God's Word tells us how to restore something to its proper condition, setting upright something that has fallen, pointing to godly living.

defile: *Miano* (Greek). To stain with color as the staining of glass, to tinge, pollute, defile.

discipline: *Hupopiazō* (Greek). Used to describe boxers giving knockout blows; punches to the part of the face right under the eyes until they were black and blue. (Related passages: 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:5-6)

divine power: Power, *dunamis* (Greek). Dynamic strength, or ability to do what only God can do.

doctrine: God's divine instruction provides a comprehensive and complete body of divine truth necessary for life, godliness, and family.

edification: *Oikodome* (Greek). To build up for the spiritual profit or advancement of someone else; used to indicate building up a house or structure.

endure all things: To endure, *hupomeno* (Greek). To abide under, to bear up under, suffer, as a load of miseries. Patient acquiescence, holding its ground when it can no longer believe nor hope.

enraptured: *Sagah* (Hebrew). Isaiah used this verb to suggest swerving, meandering, or reeling in drunkenness (Isa. 28:7). Could define intoxication, not only from wine or beer but also from love (Proverbs 5:19–20).

envy: Discontent or uneasiness at the sight of another's excellence or good fortune, accompanied with some degree of hatred and a desire to possess equal advantages; malicious grudging.

expectation: Anticipation or notion of something happening; an expected standard.

forsake: To deny. Daily align our priorities to God's Word, which places His will over ours.

gentle: Seemly, fitting; equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing, not insisting on the letter of the law. Expresses considerateness that looks humanely and reasonably at the facts of a case.

genuineness: *Dokimion* (Greek). Something that has been tested and approved. Used to describe metals that had been through a process to remove all impurities.

glorify: To reflect, to honor, praise, to give esteem or honor by putting Him into an honorable position.

heart: *Kardia* (Greek). The seat of desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses; the mind.

heart: *Lebab* (Hebrew). Mind, inner person (will, emotions). The word primarily describes the entire disposition of the inner person.

helper: *Azar* (Hebrew). To aid, to support, give encouragement; one who surrounds, protects, and helps another.

helper: *Ezer* (Hebrew). To aid or assistance that is given; indicates persons who give help. The woman created as Adam's complementary helper (Genesis 2:18, 20). The Lord as Israel's help (Hosea 13:9). The Lord as Israel's chief helper (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; Psalms 33:20; 115:9–11).

helper: One who comes along and assists, not leads.

instruction in righteousness: Scripture provides positive training. *Instruction* originally referred to training a child in godly behavior; not merely rebuke and correction of wrong behavior (Acts 20:32; 1 Timothy 4:6; 1 Peter 2:1–2).

kind: *Chrestos* (Greek). To do good; denotes being gentle, merciful, sympathetic, gracious, and good natured in contrast to harsh, hard, sharp, bitter, or cruel. The idea of moral excellence.

knowledge: *Epignosis* (Greek). Thorough participation in acquiring knowledge, and applying it.

longsuffering or patience: To be long-tempered, the opposite of hasty anger; involves exercising understanding and patience toward people. Requires that we endure circumstances, not losing faith or giving up.

love: *Agape* (Greek). The response of God's heart toward unworthy sinners. Agape is God's love demonstrated in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the objects of His love, His Son bringing forgiveness to man. God's essential quality seeks the best interests of others regardless of the others' actions; it involves God doing what He knows is best for man and not necessarily what man desires. Agape is choosing to love unconditionally.

love: *Phileo* (Greek). The response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. Distinct from agape and speaks of esteem, high regard, and tender affection and is more emotional. Friendship love; determined by the pleasure that one receives from the object of that love. Phileo is conditional love.

meditate: To moan, utter, or growl muttering sounds, like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself, interacting with the text so it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scripture permeates our minds. In the biblical world, meditation was not a silent practice.

minister (noun): A servant or waiter; one who oversees, governs, and fulfills.

minister (verb): To adjust, regulate, and set in order; to serve, render service to another; to labor for the Lord as a servant.

not rejoicing in unrighteousness (iniquity): When you see someone fall into sin or make a mistake, you are not happy or vindictive toward them.

perfected: *Teleio* (Greek). To make complete, which indicates that something is in process. Particularly with the meaning to bring to a full end, completion, reaching the intended goal, to finish a work or duty.

preference: What one prefers before or above another. Neither right nor wrong.

provide: *Pronoeo* (Greek). To give careful thought to, take thought for, take into consideration, have regard for, to think about beforehand in a solicitous manner, to care for in providing for someone else.

purpose: An intended or desired result or goal.

react: To act in response to a stimulant or to stimulus, to act in opposition.

reacting in the flesh: A Christian reacting to a situation in a sinful manner, in the habit of their old fallen nature, or reacting in their strength and understanding rather than the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

rejoicing in the truth: Having great joy; rejoicing at what is true based on God's promises.

repent: To resolve; to amend one's life as a result of contrition for one's sins; to feel regret for what one has done or omitted to do before God. To turn around and go another direction; to change one's mind, will, and life, resulting in a change of behavior; to do things another way.

reproof: God's Word tells us what is wrong or sinful in belief and behavior.

respond: React positively or favorably.

responding in love: Responding with the inward guidance, love, wisdom, and power of the Holy Spirit.

rightly dividing: Cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry, or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

rude: Characterized by roughness; harsh, severe, ugly, indecent, or offensive in manner or action.

satisfy: *Rawah* (Hebrew). To give water, to drench; to drink one's fill. It refers to giving someone a drink literally and figuratively (Psalms 36:8-9; 65:10-11). It means to drink all one wants, to satisfy (Proverbs 5:19; 7:18).

security: The state of being free from danger or threat, having confidence that one is secure, and that one's well-being is assured by another, as in a wife resting securely in the husband's leadership.

seek and set your mind: Imperative verbs indicating the action is a continual process. *Seek* means to look for and strive to find. *Set your mind* refers to the will, affections, and conscience.

seek first: A command to do and never stop (Matthew 6:33).

seek your own way: Pursuing what best fits your own interests without any concern of how your actions or ways affect others. Unwilling to receive input, which includes instruction from God's perspective or your spouse.

study: Imperative verb; a command to do and to continue to do. Denotes a zealous persistence, to be diligent, to make every effort to do one's best, to be eager and earnest in accomplishing a goal.

submit: *Hupotasso* (Greek). A voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.

thinks no evil: *Logizomai* (Greek). Used as an accounting term, meaning to put things together in one's mind, to count or add up, to occupy oneself with calculations.

thoroughly equipped for every good work: God intends for us to understand His will and be empowered to follow through in obedience by following the biblical principles in His Word.

transformed: *Metamorphoó* (Greek). From which we derive the word *metamorphosis*. To change into something entirely different, as a caterpillar to a butterfly.

truth: Comes from the Word of God; makes clear what is right and wrong.

workmanship: *Poiema* (Greek). From which we derive the word *poem*. To make something; a work, workpiece, workmanship, or masterpiece.

Endnotes

1. Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996) Logos Library System.
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3. Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1039.
4. Baker and Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1101.
5. Max Anders, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 50.
6. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 984.
7. David L. Allen, *Hebrews, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 609.
8. Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 9.
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About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the US and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on marriage, parenting, understanding teens, and church discipleship planning.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches within the US and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at FDM.world.