

WHY GOD CARES ABOUT YOUR SEX LIFE (AND YOU SHOULD TOO)

(Julie Slattery in *God, Sex, and Your Marriage*)

"What do you do for work?"

It's a question I usually dread. How do I tell the person sitting next to me on an airplane or my husband's coworker that I run an organization that "reclaims God's design for sexuality"? After all, the person was just trying to make light conversation. As strangers, neither of us have a desire to wade into conversations about anything related to sex.

But, that's my job. Although I don't like explaining it to a stranger, I am genuinely passionate about the work to which God has called me.

Don't get me wrong, I don't enjoy talking about pornography, the cultural clash of biblical sexuality and social justice, sexual trauma, or really any specific sexual issue. These are very sensitive and difficult topics that represent a tsunami of pain for most people. But I also recognize that we need help navigating sex from a biblical perspective. While the larger culture speaks endlessly about sex, those who represent God have stayed relatively quiet.

To be honest, I needed help too. My husband, Mike, and I know what it feels like to struggle with God's "gift" of sex in marriage. I've felt the shame of having questions that I didn't know how to ask. Even as a clinical psychologist and marriage counselor, I secretly struggled for over fifteen years of my marriage with a conflictual and difficult sex life, not knowing where I could turn for help. I just assumed that sex was always going to be a struggle. Some couples enjoy sex, but I believed that just wasn't going to happen for us. During the most discouraging years, I wondered why people would refer to sex as a gift at all.

Maybe you're in the same situation. Instead of unity, sex creates conflict. Rather than bringing pleasure, sex represents pain. While sex was intended to foster the intimacy of being deeply known, it actually evokes a deep shame that makes you want to hide from each other.

If this describes you, I want you to know that you're normal. Practically every couple I talk to describes sex, for one reason or another, as a difficult area of their marriage. But don't confuse normal with healthy. Just consider that the normal American is overweight, over stimulated, exhausted, and lonely. In a similar vein, the normal marriage has a storage room full of baggage related to sexual frustration and conflict. While it is very common for a married couple to have significant conflict in their sex life, remember that what's normal can often be described as dysfunctional.

What's normal in marriage is some level of frustration and resentment about why sex is unfulfilling. It's normal for both the husband and wife to enter marriage with baggage, like a history of porn use or past sexual partners. Unfortunately, it is normal for both men and women to have experienced the devastation of sexual trauma or exploitation. From what I've observed, most Christian couples who find themselves running into these normal barriers to intimacy just give up. Some eventually leave their marriage to find a more compatible soul mate, and many others endure through years of simply existing as roommates.

What you read in this book may be a different approach to sexuality than you have ever heard before. It's frankly a book that I wish someone had given Mike and me as we began our marriage. You're not going to find diagrams of anatomy, recommended sexual positions, or basic information to improve your sex life. I don't want to replicate the wonderful resources already available that walk through the physical and emotional fundamentals of sex. Two that I would recommend: *A Celebration of Sex* by Doug Rosenau and *The Gift of Sex* by Cliff and Joyce Penner. In this book, we are going to take a look at the foundation of why sex matters in your marriage and what to do in response. Far too many couples attempt to use tools to improve sex in their marriage without a fundamental understanding of what they are supposed to be working toward.



In this book, you will learn two important truths. First of all, sex will never be a neutral issue in your marriage. By its very nature, sexual intimacy was created to draw you together in body, soul, and spirit as "one flesh." This powerful gift, when used wisely, will create a magnificent bond between a husband and wife. But that same power can be turned against you and become the source of pain and division in your marriage.

You may be surprised to discover that while you and your spouse have significant sexual problems in your marriage, sex can be a glue forging your hearts together. Sex unites you not simply when it is fun and satisfying, but when you journey together through disappointment and discouragement.

Secondly, sex will never be a neutral issue in your relationship with God. In this book, you will read about how sexuality was created to be a divine metaphor, teaching us about the nature of God's covenant love. Our sexuality should actually be drawing us into greater intimacy with God! However, for most people (including Christians), sex is a barrier to knowing God. It represents the shame of moral failure or pain that we believe a loving God should have eliminated from our lives. For many Christians, God and sex is a very confusing combination.

I care about your sex life because God cares about your sex life. Yes, you read that right. God cares about your sex life. He knows your secret thoughts and frustrations. He doesn't leave the room when you and your spouse get naked or even if you look at porn. While this reality might make you feel somewhat awkward, God's presence with you is not to condemn you but to invite you into healing.

I remember the day when God made it clear that He was calling me to start a ministry focused on sexuality. I was on my knees, praying and fasting, and this passage from Isaiah flooded my mind:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor
and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (Isa. 61:1-3)*

What to Expect

Whenever my husband confronts a challenge that involves hard work, he says, "It's like eating broccoli and doing push-ups." When we have a compelling vision for health and wholeness, we make everyday choices to work toward that goal. There are parts of this book that may feel like "eating broccoli or doing push-ups". I'm inviting you to think about sex in a way that may seem foreign to you. Whether you have a good sex life in your marriage or you are really struggling, God wants to reveal some truths that may transform how you view sex and intimacy. As you read, this book will prompt you to have some uncomfortable conversations with your spouse and with the Lord. But remember, sex isn't just about the hard work. You choose to engage in the work because you desire the greater good of what God designed sexual intimacy to be within your marriage.

This book is divided into two sections. Part 1, *Foundations of a Great Sex Life*, will help you identify ways your understanding of sexuality sets you up for frustration and disappointment, and you will learn how to think about sex from God's perspective. Part 2, *Pillars of a Great Sex Life*, will teach you the four key characteristics of a thriving sexual journey in your marriage. The final chapter will give you some next steps to consider. The book also contains a study guide for each chapter to be used for personal study, conversations as a couple and in small groups.

I'm excited that you've decided to take this challenge! I know God will meet you in each step you take toward His amazing design for sexual intimacy.

