

HEADACHES, HEARTACHES, AND WHAT'S OK
Tough Questions on Sex
Pure Sex Series Conclusion
February 24-25, 2007

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With this lesson, we bring to a conclusion a two month lesson series entitled, "Pure Sex." I deeply appreciate the teaching team that presented these messages: Brad Tuggle, Fareed Tulbah, Keith Kennington, Debbie Boggs, and my wife, Denalyn. Much prayer and thought was invested in each presentation. And, according to the feedback I have received, you have appreciated the effort. Many have acknowledged the relevance of the topic and importance of the church's voice.

Sex is a delicate topic to discuss. Perhaps that is why, according to one joke, the preacher couldn't bring himself to tell his wife he was going speak on the issue. He had agreed to present a message on sex at a marriage conference. The night before the event his wife asked him: "What is your topic tomorrow?"

He, embarrassed to tell her, fabricated an answer, "Uhhh, I'm going to speak on sailing." She thought it curious, but didn't ask anything else.

The next evening at the market she ran into a lady who had heard her husband's message on sex. "Your husband gave a great message today," she told the preacher's wife. "He really has great insight on the topic."

"That's funny," the wife answered. "As far as I know he's only done it twice. One time he lost his hat, another time he threw up."

This couple isn't the first, nor the last to miscommunicate on the topic of sex. God, however, has made his message very clear. Sex is God's good idea. "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1Tim. 4:4-5 NIV).

Dismiss any notion that God is anti-sex, anti-affection or anti-intercourse. After all, he developed the package. Sex is a part of His plan. Sex is practical: it populates the earth. Sex is personal: it strengthens a marriage. Sex is pictorial: it symbolizes the bond between husband and wife and Christ and his church. Sex is powerful. Properly used, it can help

heal the heart. Improperly administered, it can ravage a life.

For that reason, God builds a fence around sexual activity. He reserves it as a holy privilege to be shared by husband and wife. We, however, are prone to jump the fence. Because we do, we have problems and questions. Questions about right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate. We asked you to submit your questions. We don't have time to address them all; but most of them fell into one of three general areas. Headaches, Heartaches, and What's O.K.

Question number 1. The headache question. "My spouse and I have uneven sexual interests. My 'now?' is often returned with a 'no.' Any advice?"

Paul has some. Apparently, he collected some questions from the Corinthian church. The first one had to do with our topic.

"Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, is it a good thing to have sexual relations? Certainly—but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to 'stand up for your rights.' Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out" (1 Cor. 7:1-4 MSG).

Paul acknowledges that sexual relations are healthy, sexual drives are strong and that the marriage is God's ordained place to pursue "...a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder..." He issues a call for spouses to seek middle ground and serve each other in their sexual lives. He calls the marriage bed a "place of mutuality...not a place to stand up for your rights." The marriage bed, in other words, is a place to serve, not to be served.

The heart of a servant is other-focused. They ask: "How can I help you?" "What can I do to better your day?" This is a far cry from the view of sex that says: "It's all about me and all for me." So what would God say to the marriage suffering from uneven desire? He would say "...serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13 NIV). "Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10 NIV).

There are times when one spouse or the other simply "isn't there." There are occasions when the interest levels don't meet. One is more enthused than the other. During those times, let the servant spirit reign.

Communicate. If something is burdening you, open up. Let your mate know what troubles

you. Suggest a different plan. Explain to your spouse that you are tired tonight, but known to get frisky with the sunrise. Or, lower your expectations of the evening. Marital sex is like evening meals: sometimes we snack, sometimes we feast. Healthy marriages learn to serve hors d'oeuvres when a Thanksgiving Dinner isn't possible. Wives, you can be responsive, even if you are not totally engaged. Husbands, you can be patient, even if you had your hopes high.

But what if the disinterest lasts longer than a few days? The arrival of kids disrupts, not just the sleep patterns, but available energy. Parenting Magazine surveyed 6,000 couples and found that 80% say their sex lives suffered as a result of having children. Some men avoid intimacy for fear of failure. Commercials tell them they need to "perform" and ask them, "Will you be ready?" For fear they won't be...they avoid the possibility. Some wives avoid sex because it dredges up memories of abuse or mistakes. Physiological issues like stress and depression can diminish interest in intimacy for weeks at a time. In the book, "How to Make Love to the Same Person for the Rest of Your Life," Dagmar O'Connor says that 90% of sexual problems aren't sexual at all. The causes of extended sexual inactivity are many and manifold. A cure might route you through a counselor's or doctor's office...but the cure always begins with mutual understanding. "It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong" (Pro. 24:3 NCV).

Absence of sex can be endured. Absence of discussing the absence cannot. Somebody needs to speak up. Both need to look up...look up to God for help. You are not without solutions.

Question #2: The heartache question.

This question comes in many fashions. "I caught my husband with pornography." "My wife cheated on me." How can I sleep with him, when he slept with her? When I'm with my wife, I feel she is thinking about him. How can we recover from past failures?

Let me direct my answer to the different parties.

Have you failed your spouse? If so, own up to your sin. Don't minimize or deny it. Confess it...seek the forgiveness of each person you have hurt. Then, give them time to mend. It's not up to you to determine the length of the recovery period. Don't attempt to dictate the time it takes for a heart to heal. You have inflicted damage.

Jon Anderson, an Oak Hills member who leads "Marriage Dynamics" seminars compares the offender to a dishonest worker. Suppose you are a company bookkeeper who embezzled \$2,000 a month for two years. Then, under conviction, you confess your crime to your boss. You are genuinely sorry. But one day after your admission you show up at work and expect to continue your job. You expect your supervisor to entrust you with the company finances. How will he boss react? With understandable reluctance, he may give

you a broom, but he's not going to trust you with the books.

When you violated your marital covenant, you lost the trust of your spouse. Your confession may make you feel better. But your confession broke the heart of the one you hurt. The burden you got off your chest landed on the shoulders of your spouse. He/she needs time to recover. How much time? As long as it takes.

Has your spouse failed you? As difficult as it may seem and impossible as it may appear, forgiveness is your goal. Seek to give them what God has given to you- grace. Your marriage can be saved and intimacy restored in time "as you are kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:28 NIV).

Jon Anderson offers helpful words to you as well. He discusses the importance of "Reassigning value to your spouse." What they did was despicable, but who they are is essential...they are God's child. They are bought by Christ and known by heaven. See less of their mistake and more of God's grace and, with time, healing will come.

Have you failed you?

Does shame from your youth hound you? Or mistakes from last week dog you? Does suppressed guilt consume you? Guilt stirs misdirected anger and unhealthy shame. It prompts people to lash out at and withdraw from the people they love. Do you have unaddressed moral failures? Then give them to God. Give your sexual past to God.

God restores spiritual virginity. He lifts his children to a blameless place. "Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the Cross, we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly free!*" (Eph. 1:7 MSG).

Let God cleanse you. Offer specific prayers. Tell God the name of the persons or the occasion of the pornography. Bring the moment out into the light of God's grace. Sexual sin requires specific confession because it affects us so deeply.

"There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for 'becoming one' with another" (1 Cor. 6:18 MSG).

Offer these sins to God and move on. His grace is sufficient and mercy is ample. His word to you is his word to the ancients: "Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands" (Is. 43:18-19 MSG).

This is an ideal time for me to announce the winner of my Valentine's date contest. Applause to everyone for the creative days. I laughed out loud at the wife who wrote: I bought my husband the weedeater and attachment of his dreams. I hid them where I knew he'd look: the pantry and the bathroom."

But the award goes to the wife who gave her husband the gift of reconciliation. Here is a portion of her letter:

"Dear Max,

My Valentine's Day gift for my husband was to draw a big heart on the bathroom mirror. In the heart I wrote, "I love you." Then I played our wedding song and gave him a single red rose as a reminder of his marriage proposal when we exchanged single red roses.

I also surprised him by dressing up in my white satin honeymoon gown and making the bed with brand new red satin sheets sprinkled with lots of fresh rose petals.

Later on that night, a more important event was about to take place. the words from your Sunday message about "hitting below the belt" were ringing in my mind, and I could not shake those words. For deep down, much to my shame, that message has, at times, applied to me. remembering past arguments, if I had been in a boxing ring, I would have been disqualified for breaking the rules.

After much prayer, the Lord placed in my heart what must be done. I asked my husband to please go and sit in the bedroom chair. Then I brought a basin of water, knelt down before him, and proceeded to wash his feet...while through my tears, asking for his forgiveness for my sin against God and him.

We ended up with a sweet embrace, crying in each others' arms.

Praise God for his precious gift of forgiveness, mercy, and grace."

We have one more question to address. We've discussed headaches (treat them with understanding). We've discussed heartaches (minister to them with grace). But what about the question of permission?

Question #3 What's o.k.?

What sexual activities are acceptable to God? Sub-questions include everything from wearing negligees, to using body oils, engaging in specific activities, using sensual language, and watching stimulating movies. What does God prohibit and permit?

We know what he prohibits:

Any sexual activity outside of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2; 1Thess. 4:3). Including adultery, incest, homosexuality, any sexual stimulation outside of marriage.

Unbridled lustful passion for someone who is not your spouse (Mt. 5:28). Including pornography and voyeurism.

Obscenity and crude language (Eph. 4:29).

Pass your questions through these filters. Someone asks, for example, about using sensual language in moments of intimacy. "Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift" (Eph. 4:29 MSG).

Are you using words that build up your mate and honor God? If so, use them. Do your words degrade your mate? Do they reflect the language of evil more than the vernacular of God? If so, you know what to do.

Some wonder about certain practices and activities in marital sex. With the exception of the Song of Solomon, scripture says very little. God gives his children license to enjoy each other in any fashion that is mutually upbuilding. But if one spouse feels diminished or uncomfortable, if their conscience is violated, it is not the place of the other to insist on his/her own way.

Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate (1 Cor. 6:12 MSG). What is permissible is not always beneficial.

By the way, just to be clear, if a certain activity involves anyone else than your spouse, whether by image, written word or, of course, in person, it is absolutely wrong. No exceptions.

Singles, this includes any sexual stimulation with anyone. Oral sex between singles is still sex. Men, this includes gawking and ogling after women as they pass by. One female member of our congregation asked me to ask men to keep their eyes at eye level when addressing women. So, men, heads up. Also, women, if you dress with the goal of turning a man's head who is not your husband, you are leading someone into temptation.

Let's be above all this. Let's remember what is at stake: the reputation of God. God's goal is not our comfort, nor our preference; God's goal is His glory. We are called to proclaim and protect His reputation at all costs. May God give us strength to do so. May we amen the prayer of Isaiah:

"The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth. Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and

renown are the desire of our hearts” (Is. 26:7-8 NIV).

Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, *Intimate Issues*, p. XI. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 1999.

Ibid, p. 67.

Ibid p. 121