

Introduction

God designed sex. In the first book of the Bible, in the first chapter, God blessed the first man and the first woman and encouraged them to “be fruitful and multiply” (**Genesis 1:28**).

As originally designed, sexual intimacy, in marriage between one man and one woman for all of life, was to create a bond void of shame (**Genesis 2:24,25**).

Unfortunately, the fall of mankind (**Genesis 3**) disrupted God’s original design for human sexuality. Ever since, sexuality in marriage for many couples is wrought with shame, fear, lying, hiding and blame.

In over 20 years of marriage ministry, we have found the keys to better sex in marriage have little to do with position or technique. Instead, the keys lie more in the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of both spouses.

Therefore, in this 6 lesson guide, we hope to help you and your spouse address the main issues that tend to cause couples the most trouble.

Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, we have written this guide to be an open discussion between a husband and wife alone. We anticipate most couples would prefer not to discuss these issues within a small group setting.

Our prayer is that God will use these 6 Keys to enhance the emotional, relational, spiritual and thereby physical intimacy between you and your spouse.

For God Designed Sex!

Scott and Dawn Smith

6 Keys to Better Sex in Marriage

Key 1: Align your thinking about sex with God's truth.

Key 2: Deal with sexual sin – past or present.

Key 3: Regard each other's needs as more important than your own.

Key 4: Fiercely protect emotional intimacy with and for one another.

Key 5: Pray with and for one another.

Key 6: Remove any barriers to sexual satisfaction.

Scripture Memory for the Series

One of the best ways to transform your sex life is to transform your thoughts and beliefs about sex. We have found scripture memory to be one of the most effective tools to accomplish this.

Over the course of your study of this guide, we encourage you to memorize these passages:

Key 1

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. –

Genesis 2:24,25 (NASB)

Key 2

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. –

James 5:16 (NASB)

Key 3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. –

Philippians 2:3,4 (NASB)

Key 4

Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. –

Hebrews 13:4

(NLT)

Key 5

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of God, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. –

Hebrews 4:16 (NASB)

Key 6

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. –

Proverbs 3:27 (NASB)

Key 1: Align your thinking about sex with God's truth

Couple's Conversation: What would you say is the purpose of sex?

We each come to marriage with a variety of thoughts and beliefs about sex. Those thoughts and beliefs have been shaped by our families of origin, religious teaching, as well as, life experiences.

As you reflect on your personal thoughts and beliefs about sex, the best place to start to gain a proper perspective regarding it is to see what God Himself says about sex in the Bible.

The Principle of the Boundary

Genesis 1:1,2 says, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."*

God is first revealed to us as ELOHIM, creator. Verse 2 tells us that the initial state of creation is formless, empty and dark. The rest of chapter one is the process of God bringing something from nothing and order to the chaos. He does so by speaking.

First, there is light and He separated light from darkness, creating night and day.

Second, He separated the water from the expanse, creating the sky.

Third, He separated water from land, creating land and sea.

So now we have five divided areas: night, day, sky, land and sea. Each having its own boundary.

Next, we see God assigning things to each area.

Vegetation goes on the land.

The sun governs the day. The moon governs the night.

Living creatures in the sea, the birds in the sky and the animals on the land.

This is an important pattern of creation. God creates a place, then He fills the place and it prospers in its place.

So here we go... **Verse 26-27**

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the

creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Chapter 2 of Genesis gives us more detail about the creation of man and woman. They were not spoken into existence, they were hand made and God breathed His breath into them They are unlike anything that has come before them. They are image bearers of God Himself. He created a place for them called The Garden of Eden. There, He pronounced them Man and Wife, establishing them in a special relationship with Him. Covenant Marriage.

Now, let’s look at **Genesis 1:28** to see what is assigned to this place, what belongs exclusively to man and wife in covenant marriage.

“God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

When we read this, we often think God did two separate things, He blessed them and He spoke to them, but in reality, His words ARE the blessing. We just don’t have the context for how significant blessings are, but in the Bible, blessings are very important. They carry so much weight. Blessings were spoken for the prosperity and wellbeing of the recipient.

So God speaks the blessing of these things into marriage:

1. Be fruitful and multiply. (Productive living, sex and children)
2. Fill the earth and subdue it. (Conquer the whole earth and make it subject to you)
3. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and every living creature that moves on the ground. (Make decisions for the wellbeing of creation)

We could talk about alot of things here, but for our purposes, we are just going to focus on sex. God created a place where sex exists as a blessing and marriage is the boundary in which it is set. It is the place where sex prospers and brings prosperity to the man and his wife. Namely children, but not simply children, also bonding the man and wife as one.

Moses states...

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. –

Genesis 2:24,25 (NASB)

So everything in creation has a place and there is a boundary around that place that is respected. The problems begin when what is assigned to that place crosses over its boundary.

God is neither negative nor merely tolerant of sex. He wants His children to be sexually active and sexually healthy. Our standard for sexual health is the Word of God. So...

What is the biblical purpose of sex?

1. Procreation –

God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” – Genesis 1:28 (NASB)

Sex within the boundary of marriage is blessed of God. In addition, God is pro creation. He is for fruitful sexuality that populates the earth. He’s not embarrassed by our expressions of our sexuality (in the proper confines). He encourages it.

2. Partnership –

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. – Genesis 2:24,25 (NASB)

Marital sex requires a joining together. Upon joining together a man and woman create “soul ties.” They are one: body, soul, and spirit. Ladies, you may find that your man will often feel most closely connected to you after your sexual encounter. Expressed appropriately, as God designed it, there is no shame in marital sexuality.

3. Pleasure –

*Let your fountain be blessed, and **rejoice in the wife of your youth**, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; **be intoxicated always in her love.** – Proverbs 5:18,19 (NASB)*

*Awake, O north wind, and come, wind of the south; **Make my garden breathe out fragrance**, Let its spices be wafted abroad. **May my beloved come into his garden And eat its choice fruits!**” The Bride to Solomon, Song of Solomon 4:16 (NASB)*

God purposely created sex for pleasure and not just progeny through procreation.

Understand this - sexual intimacy is designed for both of your enjoyment. God did not design sex for only the husband to enjoy and the wife to endure. Both the male and female bodies are designed to receive pleasure from sex.

In his Tyndale's commentary on Proverbs, Derek Kidner notes...

“But it is highly important to see sexual delight in marriage as God-given; and history confirms that when marriage is viewed chiefly as a business arrangement, not only is God's bounty misunderstood, but human passion seeks other outlets.”

4. **Praise** –

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. –

Romans 12:1, 2 (NASB)

Sexual intimacy in marriage, when rightly understood, becomes an act of worship – not of one another – but of the gracious goodness of God.

Even when wrongly understood, sex is still an act of worship - either of yourself or somebody else - and in both cases that is idolatry.

5. **Picture** –

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.** – **Ephesians 5:31,32** (NASB)*

Sexual intimacy, between one man and one woman in marriage, is designed to be a picture of the union of Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church. Our life-long fidelity to one another can be a gracious display of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Only in Christ can unconditional acceptance, love and respect (**Ephesians 5:33**) be granted between a husband and wife. The ability to do so is an affirmation of our union in Christ.

We've discussed God's intent for marital sexuality and how it is viewed by Him. Let's turn our attention now to a few ways to know if our view of sex is not as God intended.

3 ways to know if your sexual relationship is unhealthy...

1. You have a negative mindset about sex.

This line of thinking is an indication there is likely distorted thinking or false beliefs about sexuality. This can be the result of years of being told to say "no" to sex prior to marriage or that sex before marriage was "bad." Now, in marriage, it may be hard for you to "flip the switch" to say "yes" to sex and mentally assert that sex is "good."

A negative mindset about sex may also have been developed from never being adequately taught about biblical sexuality, or you may have had a traumatic sexual encounter or an unpleasurable sexual experience.

The majority of our teaching about biblical sexuality will focus on our mindset. We've found if a person's thinking about sexuality is properly aligned with God's, the sexual experience becomes all the more enjoyable.

2. It has to be perverse to work.

If perversion is required to bring about pleasure, it is likely there are deceptive and distorted thoughts about sexuality. The enemy (Satan) attempts to take that which is beautiful by God's design and pervert it.

If what you want or need from your partner for sex to work is - unbiblical, immoral, illegal, unethical or violates your partner's conscience - it's highly likely you're relying on perversion to bring you pleasure. We can't in good conscience ask God to bless that which He does not bless.

3. **It is about addiction instead of affection.**

Biblical sexuality is about love and not lust. God-designed sex is intent on giving affection and attention to one's partner. Distorted sexuality is focused on satiating one's lustful desires – and that will never be accomplished. Lust is never satiated.

As we conclude **Key 1**, remember that healthy sexuality amid cultural perversity is never accidental, it requires intentionality. Guard your and your spouse's sexual hearts.

Soloman encourages you and me to, "*Watch over (our) heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life*" (**Proverbs 4:23**, NASB). We will focus our time on ensuring what is within our hearts is what God wants there. Our goal is, through scripture, to remove any thoughts or intentions that are not in alignment with God's heart.

You and your spouse can possess not only a good sex life... you can possess a blessed sex life.

At the end of each **Key**, we've supplied some questions for you and your spouse to discuss. Our hope and prayer is that the two of you have a *safe relationship* where you can discuss issues openly and honestly without fear.

Here's **5 Keys to a Safe Relationship**:

In safe relationships, spouses are:

1. **Approachable**

- Defenses are lowered
- Assumptions aren't made
 - If assumptions are made, each partner assumes the best and not the worst
- Listening to understand is practiced
 - See **1 Peter 3:17**

2. **Attentive**

- Distractions are removed
- The tv is turned off (or paused)
- Phones, tablets or any other devices are laid aside
- Children are not present

3. **Affirming**

- Appropriate body language is used:
 - Nodding of the head
 - Arms are not crossed
 - Eye contact is made

- Feedback is given: Not merely parroting back what was said, but paraphrasing what was said.
- Clarifying statements are given to the listening spouse from whom you've received feedback.

4. **Accepting**

- Differences are acknowledged and discussed.
- Differences are embraced as *beneficial* for the relationship and not a *barrier* to the relationship.

5. **Actionable**

- Resolution is sought
- Appropriate next steps are agreed upon
- Next steps are *measurable, realistic* and *specific* to gauge momentum the relationship is achieving.

Each time you begin your **Couple's Conversation**, we encourage you to review the **5 Keys to a Safe Relationship** to better ensure you have a healthy and productive conversation.

Couple's Conversation

- What does “affection” mean to you? Record your spouse's answer below:

- How much affection was there in your family growing up (verbal and nonverbal)?

- What was the attitude toward sex in your family? Was it talked about?

- Where did you learn about sex?

- What do you see as the relationships between *communication*, *intimacy* and *affection*?

- Do you believe sex is intended for marriage, or anyone in a loving relationship?

- What do you believe is the basic difference in the way men and women approach sex?

Key 2: Deal with Sexual Sin – Past or Present

In recent years, our experience in dealing with pre-marital couples in counseling has revealed that at least 3 out of 5 Christian couples are already sexually active and cohabitating prior to marriage.

In the early 2000's, if this were true, generally one or both partners would state something to the effect of, "*I know what the Bible says, where the church stands, and what our parents believe but...*"

Nowadays, that is no longer the case. When discussing sexual activity and cohabitation prior to marriage, most couples discuss it in rather matter of fact terms. There are no longer, "*I know what...but...*" statements made. Sexual activity prior to marriage is often an assumed behavior.

Sexual activity prior to marriage, now, is not only an accepted norm outside the Church with our corrupted culture but inside the Church with deceived and deluded believers.

Whether these couples realize it or not, they are now packing and bringing with them sexual baggage into marriage. If not dealt with adequately, this baggage has the potential to come "unpacked" in their sexual intimacy in the coming years of their marriage.

The Apostle Paul states...

¹⁸ Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. –

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NASB)

Sexual immorality of any sort is never to be tolerated – in or outside of marriage. We cannot ask God to bless that which He has never blessed.

As believers, our bodies belong to God. They are not our own. Jesus Christ paid a high price, with His life, for you and me. As a result of His sacrifice and our receiving of His gift (**Romans 6:23**), we now have the Holy Spirit as a constant companion.

Key 2 to *Better Sex in Marriage* deals with both past and present sexual sin. A crucial aspect to experiencing a mutually fulfilling sex life inside of marriage is to ensure there is not past or present sin yet to be dealt with.

We see from both Apostles Paul and James the powerful impact confessed sin has on a believer...

But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. – **Ephesians 5:13** (NASB)

God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of light, not darkness. Darkness is the absence of light. To be overcome, darkness has to be exposed to the light. The darkness of sin, when exposed by the light of God's Word along with confession and repentance, begins the process of healing.

Sin that is brought to the light often provides a literal sense of "lightness" to the confessor. They are no longer "weighed down" by the heaviness of sin.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. – **James 5:16** (NASB)

According to James, confessed sin brings healing. In the sexual context, that may mean emotional, mental, as well as, relational and possibly physical healing.

To experience better sex in marriage, you must be prepared to confess sexual sins to one another.

This is not to be entered into lightly though. Confession of past or present sexual sin requires relational maturity and safety. Once again, we encourage you to review the **5 Keys to a Safe Relationship** on pages 9 and 10 as you enter conversations about **Key 2**.

3 steps to consider when dealing with sexual sin:

1. Agree on what is "*need to know*" information versus "*want to know*" information.

If you have a sexual past prior to your spouse, your spouse may "want" to know all the details of your past, but they may not "need" to know all the details of your past.

They "need" to know if there have been sexually traumatic experiences in your past – rape, incest, molestation, or abortion. They "need" to know if you bring to marriage sexually transmitted diseases. They "need" to know if you have had same sex attraction and/or encounters.

They may “want” to know about your past sexual partners – who they were, how often you were together, what you did, etc. But, that type of information rarely does the curious spouse any good. If anything, it often only serves to create further insecurity, as well as mental, sexual comparisons.

Does the inquisitive partner have the “right” to have all of their questions answered? Of course they do. But, we encourage them to understand that whatever information they receive from their partner, they will need to be willing to forgive them (**Ephesians 4:32**).

2. Confess sexual sins you may have committed.

a. Addiction to pornography or excessive masturbation.

In recent years, we have dealt more and more with both men and women who struggle with pornography and masturbation.

In marriage, we see no need for pornography and little, if no, need for masturbation. God has given you a spouse who can legitimately meet your legitimate sexual needs. Why resort to less legitimate means to have legitimate sexual needs met when you are married?

We find the use of pornography and masturbation often circumvents the God-given responsibilities of open and honest communication where needs and desires are freely discussed (See **Key 6**).

If you are engaged or newly married and have struggled with an addiction to pornography, you may be tempted to think that marriage will resolve your addictive tendencies. We have found marriage only seems to mask the addiction for a 2 to 3 year period. Then, inevitably, the addiction reappears. So, we encourage you to be proactive in addressing this issue before it reappears.

If you find yourself struggling with sexual temptation or lust, we encourage you to spend some time with our resource at the end of this guide entitled, *Biblical Meditation for Temptation* (pages 37-41). This resource will assist you in taking tempting and lustful thoughts captive before you act on them.

b. Abortion or other traumatic experiences.

As stated in **Step 1**, there may be sexual experiences in your past that your spouse “needs” to know about. Often these experiences leave emotional and mental scars that take time to heal. These experiences may be the result of your own sinful choices. Regardless, it could be that God wants to use your spouse’s unconditional love and acceptance of you as part of your journey to healing.

3. Acknowledge sexual sins that may have been committed against you.

If you have at any point been the victim of rape, incest, or sexual molestation, find a trusted counselor to first confide in. Seek guidance in addressing these issues with your spouse, if you have not already.

Confession of these forms of sexual sin aids in your experience of personal reconciliation and restoration. In addition, it may help bring reconciliation and restoration to your marriage.

It is not uncommon that hiding these painful experiences of your past only brings frustration, misunderstanding and potential resentment to your marital sexuality.

What do you do if there is existing sexual sin?

Scripture tells us to “*be sure your sin will find you out*” (**Numbers 32:23**). It’s not a matter of *if* sin will come to light. It’s a matter of *when* sin will come to light. As we’ve stated previously, God’s kingdom is a kingdom of light. Therefore, darkness cannot abide there. In His mercy, God will often allow the darkness of sin to be brought to the light. Unfortunately in most relationships, sin is often brought to the light through the *discovery* by an innocent partner rather than the *disclosure* of an offending partner.

If you are presently in the midst of sexual sin (i.e. pornography, adultery, etc.), we encourage you to be *proactive* rather than *reactive*. Before your sin is *discovered* (and it’s only a matter of time before it will be) by your partner or someone else, begin the process of *disclosure*.

Below are 10 practices we use with couples when either an addiction to pornography or an extramarital affair has come to light. We find for most wives, the discovery or the disclosure of pornography or adultery in the marital relationship has similar devastating affects on her. The vast majority of wives view the revelation of a pornographic addiction to be the same as if they discovered their husband having an adulterous affair. So, these practices will be interchangeable with pornography or adultery.

10 necessary practices for restoration after sexual sin has been exposed

- 1. Seek the guidance of a trusted and biblically wise marriage mentor.** Try as they might, most couples cannot navigate restoration on their own. You are most likely no different. You need help. Doing what you’ve been doing is what got you into this mess. So, don’t think you’ll all of the sudden be able to break out of it on your own.

Once you find someone you trust, here’s some guidance for the relationship. Do not lie to them. Be completely truthful. If you still feel the need to lie and deceive, you’re not ready for restoration and reconciliation. Absolute truth is imperative to the restoration process. Don’t waste your time, your partner’s time nor your mentor’s time by lying.

2. **Cut off any and all contact with the other person.** This applies specifically in the case of adultery. No calls. No texts. No social media messaging. No secret meetings. Cut the person off completely. If, as the offending partner, you're unwilling to do this, then you're not ready and serious about restoration.
3. **Speak the truth and nothing but the truth.** Do not lie about or sugar coat anything to your spouse. Do not let the truth trickle out about the addiction or the affair. Confess all of your sin (**James 5:16**). It is best to confess your sins before you're pressed to answer your spouse's inquiries. Do not hide anything. Be completely up front and honest. Hiding anything on the front end will only set you back further down the road and will greatly hamper the restoration process. Read **Proverbs 28:13**. Pray you will find compassion as sin is confessed.
4. **Give your spouse complete and unhindered access to any and all of your accounts** - finances, social media, email, etc. An unwillingness to do so will communicate you still have something to hide. There should no longer be anything hidden. Hiding didn't work for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) and it won't work for you. Covenant marriage leaves no room for secrets.
5. **Be willing to go the "extra mile."** Be where you're supposed to be, doing what you're supposed to be doing with those to whom you're supposed to be doing it. If your spouse requests you to download *Life 360* on your phone, do so. You will most likely get frustrated over time having to go the extra mile. You'll feel as though your partner will not relinquish the right to punish you. If they are doing that, leave it between them and God. You do your part and trust your partner to God. In the power of the Holy Spirit, do your part to regain your partner's trust.
6. **If travel is required for your job, develop a plan of accountability with your partner that you both agree to.** Then, work the plan. Failure to do so will communicate to your spouse that you're not really repentant and serious about restoration. Nothing creates greater insecurity for your partner than these two questions: 1) *Does my partner have a plan to deal with their sexual sin?* 2) *Is my partner working their plan to deal with their sexual sin?* If there is doubt or ambiguity in your partner's mind about either of these two questions, restoration will be tenuous at best.
7. **The job of the betraying spouse is to rebuild trust.** You will do this with *consistency over time*. There are no shortcuts to restoration. You cannot fast track the process. Consistency in your faithfulness to the process of restoration is key. Failure to be consistent will set your spouse back. In the case of adultery, any contact made with the other person will set the restoration process back to square one (if not further). Be patient with your spouse as seemingly random thoughts or incidents pop into their head. See **1 Corinthians 13:4**.

8. **The job of the betrayed spouse is to forgive.** Understand that forgiveness is an ongoing process. It will not be a one and done scenario. It will be continual. Don't let this frustrate either of you. Grant the same forgiveness to your spouse that God through Christ has granted to you (**Ephesians 4:32**). The betrayed spouse has the right to know everything that happened. However, they have to be willing to forgive everything they are told. So, be cautious of pressing for extremely intimate details. Too many intimate details may leave the betrayed spouse with visual images they're unable to forget.
9. **Establish a specific time and place (weekly) that questions can be discussed (beyond the counseling sessions).** This will ensure the betrayed spouse that they will be able to address their concerns. It will also ensure the betraying spouse that they will not always have to be on pins and needles awaiting a question to be posed indiscriminately.
10. **Understand you don't want things to "go back to normal."** "Normal" is what got you where you are. Your marriage has been perfectly designed to get you where you are. So, if you're not where you want to be as a couple, something's got to change. Biblical restoration takes time. It will not, nor should it, happen too quickly. Restoration is a process of growth spiritually, emotionally, mentally and relationally. None of that happens over night. To think otherwise is foolish.

Should there be a setback, and there most likely will be one, it's important to regroup and keep moving forward. Don't let setbacks set you back. Understanding this is part of the process will hopefully give you the grace and patience you both will need to continue moving forward.

Remember, God is with you (**Isaiah 41:10**). He will not leave you. He will not forsake you (**Hebrews 13:5**). He is an ever present help in your time of need (**Psalms 46:1**). Trust in Him (**Proverbs 3:5,6**). Rehearse these truths daily. Remind yourself and your spouse of these realities often.

As we conclude **Key 2**, we've found that that sexual sin breeds immaturity in men and insecurity in women. Neither of these traits are beneficial for a healthy marriage or sex life. If you have sexual sin in your life, past or present, we implore you to deal with it now. Suppressing your sin, denying your sin or ignoring your sin will not make things better. Read **Psalms 32:3** to see what happened with King David as he kept silent about his sexual sin. Remember, *without revealing there is no healing*.

Couple's Conversation

- In our marriage, what do you consider “need” to know information and “want” to know information?

- What are your thoughts about masturbation?

- Do you believe pornography is wrong or “no big deal”?

- How does sexually explicit material impact our relationship?

Key 3: Regard Each Other's Needs as More Important than Your Own

God-designed sexuality is best expressed through selfless intimacy rather than selfish interactions. As God purposed, a husband is to be tender and affectionate in the pursuit of his wife. He is most pleased by seeing the pleasure his wife derives from their intimacy.

Likewise, a wife is to be responsive and keenly aware of her husband's sexual needs and desires. She is to prepare herself emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually for her mate.

The Apostle Paul writes...

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. –

Philippians 2:3,4 (NASB)

You and your spouse will experience *Better Sex in Marriage* as you embrace the selfless nature of biblical sexuality. As you regard your mate's needs as more important than your own, you'll begin to sense a heightened awareness of the spiritual dimension of marital sex.

So, how do you begin to practice selflessness in your marital sexuality? Become a student of your spouse. How do you do that?

Start here....

3 ways to become a student of your spouse:

1. Discover his or her love language.

Dr. Gary Chapman identified 5 Love Languages. They are:

- Words of Affirmation
- Quality Time
- Acts of Service
- Giving/Receiving Gifts
- Physical Touch

The best way to discern your spouse's love language is to answer these questions:

- What does my spouse most often request of me?
- How does my spouse most readily express love to me?
- Over the course of our marriage, how have I hurt my spouse the most?

Often understanding and seeking to express your spouse's love language will prepare the pathway for greater intimacy in marriage.

If you and your partner are still unsure about one another's Love Language, go to <https://www.5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/> and take the brief assessment.

2. Determine when he or she is most receptive to sexual intimacy.

- Is it when she is out of her regular routine and in a special environment?
- Does there appear to be a desired frequency on his part?
- Is it when she feels good about herself physically, emotionally and mentally?
- Is it when he is overly stressed and in need of a physical release?

3. Discern what destroys sexual intimacy for him or her.

- Is it when she's concerned the children will interrupt?
- Is it when he feels you're disinterested or indifferent towards intimacy?
- Is it when she feels the only time you want to be with her is when you have a sexual need?
- Is it when he feels he's the only one that initiates intimacy?

The Apostle Peter admonishes husbands...

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. – **1 Peter 3:7** (NASB)

Is She a Red Solo Cup or a Crystal Goblet?

In our office (where we meet with most couples), on our coffee table we keep a red Solo cup and a crystal goblet from Dawn's wedding china. If we were to ask you to give adjectives describing the two, you'd most likely say something like this...

Red Solo cup: *Disposable, Replaceable, Plentiful, Inexpensive (Cheap!)*

Crystal goblet from Dawn's wedding china: *Fragile, Expensive, Beautiful, Refined*

A Solo cup is a modern gift to man. It says, "*Hey, let's have a good time together, no real commitment needs to be made here, unless you have a Sharpie with you. But even then, I know we'll only be together for a short while. I'm replaceable and I'm cheap, so no concern for how you handle me... there's plenty where I came from. I'm here to make your life go and see that your momentary pleasures are fulfilled.*"

Dawn's wedding crystal says something totally different. It says, "*I am SPECIAL. A much greater price was paid for me and I was given as a gift with thoughtfulness and love. I possess unique beauty. I am more valuable, more refined and more fragile. Handle me with great care. My purposes are more noble and my place in your home is permanent. I'm here to share your life and be present in the most special moments of it.*"

1 Peter 3:7 (NIV) says, "*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*"

In Peter's day, women had the value of a Solo cup. They were not deemed worthy of respect. They had no voice, no civil rights. She could easily be divorced for any and every reason. Her value came from marriage and her ability to bear children, sons in particular. It didn't matter if they had the love of their husbands, marriage meant security.

Peter speaks out against these cultural norms and challenges husbands to think differently about their wives. He says to view them as Dawn's wedding crystal. In essence, Peter is saying, "*She is to be treasured. Let your manner with her be the way of understanding. Treat her with respect and see her the way God sees her. God created her to be a life-giving vessel. She pours out her life as Christ pours His life into hers. Your part as her husband is to protect, love, and cherish her as she goes about her life-giving ways. That may range anywhere from hanging curtains to raising babies. Lend her your strength when she needs it.*" This is the security a wife needs. Here's the reality, men - God equips us as husbands to provide such security. Christ in us empowers us to be Christlike with her.

Peter issues a warning to husbands who treat their wives as Solo cups. He says their prayers will be hindered. That means they are cut off, there's interference on the line. As the leader of our home, this is one thing we cannot afford to lose. We lived on a farm a few years back. We couldn't take calls inside the house. The metal roof on the farm house caused some interference. We didn't call AT&T and ask them if they could move their cell tower into our living room. How

absurd would it be for us to even ask that? Instead, we got up and went outside to get a better signal. We made the necessary adjustment to have a successful conversation. Husbands, we want and need open lines of communication with the Father. God will not move His will and way to accommodate us, we must move our will and our way to align with His. We need to be able to hear His direction on how He wants us to care for our wives (and His daughters).

That's what it means, husband, to live with your wife in an understanding way. You'll need to become a student of your wife. You'll need to ponder and consider her ways. Study her to figure out how she ticks. I can tell you, it won't always make sense to you. That's okay. She's WHOLLY different from you. She's a crystal goblet. She's not a red *Solo* cup.

To be considerate and understanding of your wife, to be a student of her and to ponder and consider her ways requires *patience*. It requires *self-control*. It requires *gentleness*. It requires *kindness*. All four of these virtues come to you as fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). Abide in Jesus and you'll bear the fruit you need (John 15:5) to live with your wife in an understanding way. As you do so, you'll be better prepared to deal with the issues that affect intimacy.

So practically speaking, when and how might you need to live with your spouse in an understanding way with regard to sexual intimacy in marriage?

Dealing with Issues that Affect Intimacy

At various seasons of marriage (especially after a pregnancy) and as you and your spouse age, you may have to deal with issues that can potentially affect your sexual intimacy.

It's important to realize that health related issues and seasons of life require greater grace and communication.

4 Experiences to Live with Your Spouse in an Understanding Way

1. Wives "coach" your husband to increase his knowledge and understanding of your unique biology, gynecology, health, and health history.

Ladies, to leave your husband guessing as to what may be going on with you physically is to leave him frustrated and helpless. He is a man. You are a woman. There are things you know about your body that he just does not understand. As Jerry McGuire would say, "*Help (him) help you...*"

Don't leave your man guessing. He loves you. He wants to understand you. He longs for your sexual experience to be *as* pleasurable, if not even *more* pleasurable, for you as it is for him!

But, here's one thing you need to understand about your man. He's not like you. In addition, there's two other people he's not quite like either. He's not your girlfriend. He's not God. Those two know you better than anyone. But, unfortunately, your husband is not like either of them. So, don't expect him to read your mind. Only your girlfriend and God can do that! To expect him to do so will only leave the two of you frustrated. It will set you up for disappointment and him up for failure. And neither outcome is acceptable. That's not what either of you want. So, do your man a favor and "coach" him up.

2. Illnesses, medication changes, injuries, and chronic pain can greatly affect your sexual relationship – communicate, seek wise counsel, and pray.

Don't assume your spouse knows and understands what's going on with you. Communicate, communicate, communicate. If you're unsure how to handle issues sexually, prayerfully seek wise counsel.

3. Pregnancy and different seasons of life can present challenges.

Wives, during pregnancy, it's highly likely you'll feel as though your body is betraying you. Be clear with your husband about your needs and desires.

4. Often, infertility consumes the sexual relationship – talk and pray with each other. Also, don't bear this burden alone.

Infertility is quite possibly one of the most painful experiences a young couple can face. In our experience, it can be so painful, it can lead a couple into isolation. The pain of watching their peers experience the joy of pregnancy can be too much to bear. It's not that they don't want to celebrate the joy of others. It's just that their own personal sadness and grief can at times be overwhelming.

If this is your experience, don't walk this road alone. Allow others to bear this burden with you (**Galatians 6:2**).

As we conclude **Key 3**, one of the greatest ways to regard your mate's needs as more important than your own is simply...

- *Learning to deny yourself for the benefit of your spouse.* Denial of self goes against the grain of our culture, especially when it comes to sexual relationships. Self-denial (whether it be abstinence prior to marriage or the regarding of your mate's sexual needs as more important than your own in the context of marriage) makes no sense to an unbelieving world. Yet, in the confines of a loving and God-honoring marriage, denial of self may be one of the most holy and mature acts you may ever do.

King Solomon wrote...

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. – **Proverbs 3:27** (NASB)

When it comes to sexual intimacy in marriage, **Proverbs 3:27** gives both a husband and a wife great perspective:

- Husbands, if your wife prefers simply to be held or cuddled by you, be willing to deny your sexual urges for her benefit.
- Wives, if your husband has a legitimate need for intimacy, realize you are the only one given to him by God to meet that need legitimately.

Neither of you should withhold from one another what is due, when it's in your power to provide what your spouse needs.

Couple's Conversation

- Why is it sometimes difficult to be affectionate?
- Do you talk about how you can meet each other's need for affection? If not, why not?
- What do you need in order to be in the mood for sex?
- Do you feel comfortable initiating sex? Why or why not?
- How often would you prefer or expect sex?
- What sexual activities do you enjoy most?
- Are there specific sexual acts that make you uncomfortable?
- How could we each contribute to making our sexual relationship more satisfying?

Key 4: Fiercely Protect Emotional Intimacy with and for One Another

Since the early years of our marriage, I never would promise Dawn I would not have an affair. In my mind, that could potentially give her false hope I would never let her down through relational betrayal. I wanted her hope to be in Christ Jesus and not in me (**Colossians 1:27**).

As you would imagine, this created a great deal of insecurity for her. Yet, with the passing of time since we married in 1987, what I have given Dawn is the assurance that I will do everything in my power to prevent being in a compromising situation sexually.

Years ago, I read a book by Jerry Jenkins entitled *Hedges: Loving Your Marriage Enough to Protect It*. The principles outlined in that book forever shaped my view of loving Dawn and our marriage enough to protect them both.

As his evangelistic ministry began to achieve national popularity in the late 1940's, Billy Graham and his team famously crafted what has come to be known as the "*Modesto Manifesto*." In the manifesto, Graham outlined a strategy to keep he and his ministry above reproach financially and sexually.

Philippians 2:15 teaches that you and I are to, "*prove (ourselves) to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom (we) appear as lights in the world.*"

If we are to be "*above reproach...and...appear as lights in the world,*" we believe we must each have our own *Marriage Manifesto* that we function from to ensure the fidelity of our covenant commitments.

Key 4 deals with the necessity of fiercely protecting your marriage. In this key, we will share the "hedges of protection" we have placed around ourselves to protect the fidelity of our marriage. This is our *Marriage Manifesto*.

We encourage you to incorporate similar "hedges" in your marriage...

8 "Hedges of Protection" to Place Around Your Marriage

1. Never ride in a car alone with someone of the opposite sex.

Though it may be purely innocent, you never know who's in the car beside you. Gossip travels faster than good news. It's better to be safe than sorry.

You've probably passed someone on the road before and thought, "*That was _____*. *Who was that in the car with them?*" Why put yourself in a situation where others will ask that question about you?

2. Never eat alone with someone of the opposite sex.

Similar to being in a car alone, you never know who you will run into in a restaurant. All it takes to soil your good reputation is for a rumor to start.

Further, sharing a meal together lends itself to heightened closeness. It's not uncommon for conversations to become more intimate over a meal than in most any other situation.

After over 25 years of working with hundreds of couples, we have all too often seen how meals with someone of the opposite sex became the spring board for an adulterous relationship.

3. Never meet alone with someone of the opposite sex.

This seems to be pure common sense to us. In situations such as this, any accusation made against you would come down to your word against theirs. Don't put yourself in that type of situation.

You also want to alleviate potential temptation for you or the other party. They may not be tempted by you, but that's not to say you may not be tempted by them. Conversely, you may not be tempted by them, but what's to say they are not tempted by you.

Why place either of you in a position of possible temptation?

4. When traveling alone, have an accountability system in place.

In the fall of 2012, I flew to Detroit to lead a small groups conference. Dawn had taken me to the airport Friday morning and was going to pick me up Saturday night. I was not going to be gone more than 36 hours.

After I got to Detroit, I went to Starbucks to work on my notes. While sitting outside, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a lady walking from a nearby hotel. As she passed in front of me, my eyes caught her eyes. I distinctly remember thinking in that brief moment, "If she propositioned me, would I turn her down?"

The fact that that thought even ran through my mind scared me senseless. After all, I love my wife. We are very happily married. How could I think something like that?

I quickly closed my laptop and left to go eat dinner. Over dinner, I called my accountability partner, Robert Puckett, to tell him what had just happened. He literally stayed on the phone with me until I finished dinner and was headed back to the hotel.

Now, notice with me, what (by the grace of God!) did I do when temptation presented itself? Did I stay there and flirt with it? No! I fled! I did exactly what Paul instructed young Timothy to do when confronted with temptation - to “*flee from youthful lusts...*” (**2 Timothy 2:22**).

Paul didn't tell Timothy to stand around and flirt with temptation. Nor did he tell him to stand there and fight like a man. He told him to “*flee from youthful lusts!*” That's what we have to do. There's no better plan to protect our marriages.

From my Detroit experience, I quickly learned I am one dumb decision away from stupid. I am not above doing something really dumb. I gravely need accountable systems to keep me from straying.

My hunch is that you're no different. You, too, need an accountable system in place.

What is your system of accountability? Who will you call when temptation comes (because it is coming!)? Make sure to make the call *as* temptation strikes, not *after* you've fallen prey to it.

5. Be cautious of social media interactions with others of the opposite sex, especially former “flames.”

From time to time, we hear individuals who swear off social media for how evil it is. We have learned this – social media is not evil, it simply provides a platform to display the evil that is within people's hearts.

Jesus said, “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile a man...*” - **Matthew 15:18,19**

Social media has done nothing more than to demonstrate to each of us what is within our hearts. If you know you are susceptible to temptation through social media interactions, by all means, place “hedges” around yourself. Limit your interactions.

In today's “wired” age, there is a much shorter path between sexual temptation and the fulfillment of sin. Sin, for many of us, is merely a click or two away.

6. Keep no secrets

Secrets may be great to throw surprise parties or to purchase a gift someone has longed for. But, beyond that, we've found little (if any) good that comes from keeping secrets.

In covenant marriage there is to be no secrets. Through covenant we are one. Therefore, we vow to give one another free and unhindered access to each other's lives. Nothing is hidden.

Jesus said, "*For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed, nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light.*" - **Mark 4:22**

If you're trying to keep secrets, it's only a matter of time before Jesus allows them to be revealed. We encourage you to give your spouse the password to your financial and social media accounts. Share joint bank accounts with each other. Keep no secrets from one another. Do whatever it takes to protect you and your marriage.

7. Be Mindful of Affairs of the Heart (Emotional Affairs)

In his book, "*The 5 Love Languages*," Gary Chapman discussed the "*tingles*." *Tingles* are what you and I may experience from time to time with someone of the opposite sex that is not our spouse.

Tingles often arise innocent enough through prolonged interactions with another person. It may be from a close working relationship at the office, serving together on a church or civic team together or some other natural interaction of life.

Tingles will catch you unaware. More often than not you're not even looking for them. They just catch you. Before you know it, you find yourself looking forward to an interaction with this person. You may even find yourself thinking about them throughout the day or even talking about them to your spouse.

The key is to be mindful of the *tingles*. For most, it's not a question of *if* they will happen but *when* they will happen. *When* and *if* they do, here's what we recommend...

Hopefully you've established an accountable system with someone of the same sex. If not, let us remind you that your accountability partner needs to 1) *Love Jesus*, 2) *Love you*, 3) *Love your spouse*, and 4) *Love your marriage*. All four of these criteria are important for your accountable system to work effectively.

Once you have this accountable system in place, bring the "tingles" you are feeling to the light with your accountability partner. Paul teaches, "*But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.*" - **Ephesians 5:13**

We have found the simple act of bringing *tingles* to the light with an accountability partner often dispels the power they may have over you. Be completely honest with yourself and with your accountability partner. Don't minimize or sugar coat what you have been feeling. Admit it.

Confession and prayer with your accountability partner will be the most helpful aspect for you (**James 5:16**).

8. Don't lose your mind.

"Be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." - **1 Peter 5:8**

To be "sober-minded" is to be able to see things as they are and to have control of your ability to discern right from wrong and make decisions accordingly. While there may be many things that can challenge our "sober mindedness," the predominant culprit we see is alcohol. We've counseled people who did or said things while under the influence that they would not have done or said otherwise.

Proverbs 20:1 states, *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise."* As we see from Solomon's exhortation, our wisest decisions will not likely come when we've lost our sober-mindedness.

As we conclude **Key 4**, can we ask you, *"If these are not your 'hedges', what are your 'hedges'?"*

Please don't fall prey to the thought that you don't need hedges. If you're like us, you too are just one dumb decision away from stupid.

Couple's Conversation

- What “hedges” have you and your spouse agreed to place around your marriage?

- How are those “hedges” working?

- Are there additional “hedges” you would like your spouse to incorporate into their daily life?

- Are there areas of your spouse’s life where they may have “blind spots” (areas of susceptibility they have that others see but your spouse doesn’t)?

Key 5: Pray with and for One Another

Of the 6 *Keys* we share with you, we believe this is the master key with the potential to unlock all the doors of biblical intimacy for you and your spouse.

Paul encourages...

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. – Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

Then John states...

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: 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 what we asked of Him. – 1 John 5:14-15 (NIV)

Where does sex fit into these two passages?

- We can talk to God about *everything*.
- We can confidently approach God with *whatever* is on our heart.
- It stands to reason, then, that God is waiting to hear our prayer requests regarding our sex life.

We can say with assurance that a healthy, fulfilling sexual relationship with your spouse is God's will for you. If that is not your current reality, may we suggest you begin taking steps toward it by first talking to God about it and asking Him for it.

Below are 3 ways we began praying for our sexual relationship. If you're unsure about how to pray for your marital sexuality, why not start here?

3 Ways to Pray with and for One Another

1. Pray for God to show you false or distorted beliefs you have regarding God and sex.

If we can't embrace the truth that God blessed sex and is blessed by our having sex, we forfeit His help and His power in this area.

Marriage, Sex and Prayer are three aspects of our lives where God joins us and our spouse in a “Holy Threesome!” He deeply longs to be a part of all three areas of our lives.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us...

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of God, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – **Hebrews 4:16**

2. Pray for God to give you longings only for one another.

To have a God-blessed, healthy and vivacious marriage, we must see intimate interaction with our spouse as our solitary sexual outlet.

If you know in your heart of hearts a neighbor, coworker, or friend of the opposite sex has caught your eye and affections, do everything within your power to flee (**1 Corinthians 6:18**).

Confess those thoughts to a trusted “walking buddy” so that those affections may lose their grip on you (**Ephesians 5:13**).

As I (Dawn) began inviting God into my and Scott’s marital bed, this is the prayer He led me to pray:

“Father, give me a longing to be with Scott. Help me to thrill to his touch. Excite me at the sound of his voice. Help me to look forward to seeing him. Restore the frequency, power, passion and depth of intimacy that You have intended for our sexual relationship.”

Would you be willing to pray this type of prayer for your sexual relationship with your spouse?

3. Pray Proactively.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” – **Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)**

What kinds of prayers and requests can you pray for your sex life? All kinds!

- Pray for frequency
- Deeper intimacy
- Mutual pleasure and enjoyment
- Energy
- Body image
- Time
- Your husband or your wife
- Cooperative little ones who go to bed when they are supposed to!

In **Step 2** we encouraged you to pray for God to give you longings only for one another.

Here's 3 ways we've found helpful to do this:

3 Ways to Fan the Flame of Longing for One Another:

1. Be loving to your spouse.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. –

Romans 12:9 (NASB)

In marriage, we can often do the exact opposite – cling to what is evil and abhor what is good. Focus on what is good and right about your spouse; not on what is bad and wrong.

We want to challenge you to attempt to catch your spouse doing something right. When you catch them in the act of “right behavior”, affirm them in what you observed. You'll be amazed how the loving temperature of your relationship will rise.

2. Treat your spouse as desirable.

When it comes to love and marriage, you will always find what you are looking for.

The writer of Proverbs said...

“He who seeks good finds goodwill; but evil comes to him who searches for it.” –

Proverbs 11:27

Read **Philippians 4:8**. Spend some time focused on how your spouse displays those traits. Record some of your reflections below. Take the time this week to share your thoughts with your spouse.

3. Remember that sex in the head erodes sex in the bed.

I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. – Job 31:1 (NIV)

Pray that you would have eyes for your spouse and your spouse only. As you notice the beauty or handsomeness of someone other than your spouse, remind yourself of these 2 things:

1. That is not my spouse.
2. That person is someone else's.

Couple's Conversation

- With regard to our sexual relationship, how can I best pray for you?
- From this study, what false or distorted beliefs have you uncovered within your thinking?
- Share what you find most attractive or appealing about your spouse.

Key 6: Remove Any Barriers to Sexual Satisfaction.

As we conclude *6 Keys to Better Sex in Marriage*, we encourage you and your spouse to be purposeful in removing any barriers to your sexual satisfaction.

One of the primary barriers we see between couples is the inability to discuss openly and honestly sexual desires and needs.

For instance, we encourage you and your spouse to share openly your thoughts about these subjects:

- Are you comfortable with our current level of sexual activity? Why or why not?
- How often would you prefer or expect sex?
- Are there certain sexual positions that you like or dislike?

A second barrier to sexual satisfaction is when one partner makes requests that makes another partner uncomfortable.

- Never demand or request anything sexually of your spouse that is unbiblical, unethical, illegal, immoral, or violates their conscience.

Ask your spouse:

- Are there sexual acts I request that you dislike or make you uncomfortable?

A third potential barrier to sexual satisfaction regards birth control.

Make sure you both agree on forms of contraception.

- Contraception is a responsibility of both the husband and wife. Contraception requires a team effort.
- Contraception requires good communication and periodic evaluation.

Questions we encourage you and your spouse to discuss are:

- What are your feelings about using birth control?
- Is what we're presently doing regarding birth control working for you?
- When would you like to start a family (if you have not already)?
- How many children would you like to have?

Though it may be uncomfortable for one or both of you to discuss these issues, we cannot stress enough the importance of candid conversations.

Ask God to give you courage to “press in” to these discussions. You may want to avoid them, but don’t do that.

We’re confident as the two of you build relational safety (see pages 9 and 10 as a reminder) with one another, these conversations will become more and more comfortable and common place.

If you haven’t had enough conversation with your spouse, here’s some more questions to discuss...

Couple’s Conversation

- How does the language used when discussing sexual issues make you feel?

- What can we do to strengthen our love for each other?

- Do we understand one another’s preferences for non-sexual touch and affection?

- How do you think my interest in sex might be different from yours?

Recommended Reading

Introduction to Biblical Meditation

When you think of meditation, what comes to mind? New Age thinking? An eastern mystic sitting on the ground with legs crossed? A person achieving a mental state of nirvana? The recitation of some form of chant or mantra?

In the Christian life, biblical meditation seems to be largely misunderstood and rarely practiced. A close examination of scripture reveals the practice of biblical meditation is greatly encouraged (Psalm 1:2, Psalm 4:4, Psalm 63:6, Psalm 143:5, Joshua 1:8). Still, it seems the Church today places little emphasis on this life-transforming discipline.

As we work with individuals and couples, we've noticed that many, if not most believers, struggle with what we call "stinkin' thinkin'". "Stinkin' thinkin'" is the distorted thinking, false beliefs and lies the enemy, Satan, uses to deceive us, to cause doubt and dread or merely to tempt us.

These thoughts may be some form of lust – either of the flesh or the eyes, anxious or worrisome thoughts, fearful thoughts, thoughts of anger or the inability to forgive, you name it.

So, how do you overcome these destructive thoughts? It surely doesn't happen by self-will. Rarely does one overcome negative thoughts simply by saying to themselves, "I'm not going to think that..." If anything, attempts such as this only reinforce and magnify the power of poor thought patterns.

For "stinkin' thinkin'" to be overcome, it must be replaced with a positive, more powerful thought. That's where God's Word comes in. In John 17:17, Jesus states to God the Father, "Sanctify them (set them apart) in your truth, Your word is truth."

In Eastern forms of meditation, one is encouraged to empty their mind. In biblical meditation, you're encouraged to not only empty your mind of wrong or false beliefs, tempting thoughts, etc. but to then fill your mind with what is right and true (Philippians 4:8).

You can see this practically displayed in Jesus and the devil's interaction in Matthew 4:1-11 (the wilderness experience). The devil approached Jesus with deceptive or distorted thinking – God's Word taken out of context. With each temptation of the devil, Jesus responded with the truth from God's Word.

It's interesting to note, even the devil is knowledgeable of scripture. He is not above using the scripture, out of context, against you. So, this illustrates an even greater importance of not only being familiar with scripture, but knowing and understanding scripture in context – through the full counsel of God's Word.

So, how does one go about meditating on scripture? Here are 3 steps we'd encourage you to employ to develop the discipline in your life. As you read and focus on a particular passage of scripture:

1) **Murmur the verse** – Say the verse over and over. This can be done verbally with a low, indistinct, subdued sound. Quietly repeat the verse phrase by phrase in low, muttered tones.

2) **Mull over the verse** – Ponder the verse. Think it through. Psalm 143:5 states, *“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands.”* Think about the verse’s various applications. Ponder the various logical conclusions to the verse. What would your life look like if you applied it? How would your life be different than it is now?

3) **Memorize the verse** – Commit the verse to memory word perfectly. You may want to write the verse on an index card. To aid the memorization process, on the back side of the index card, write the first letter of each word. Then, recite the verse by simply looking at the group of letters.

You can also use a dry erase marker and write the verse(s) on your bathroom mirror. Or, using post-it notes, stick the verse in a place where you will frequently see it. You may even want to download the verse as a screen saver on your phone.

If you are working through the meditation and memorization process with others, we encourage you to continually review verses you’ve previously memorized and meditated on. Each time you gather, repeat previously discussed verses together until you get to the current verse. Then, allow everyone to recite the current verse individually.

This pamphlet is designed to help you begin filling your mind with what is right and true. Our prayer is that as you begin the process of meditating on God’s Word, you will find the power of destructive thoughts beginning to wane. And, as a result, you will then experience the freedom of the abundant life for which you were created (John 10:10).

In Christ,

Scott and Dawn Smith

Biblical Meditation for Temptation

The Process and Purpose of Biblical Meditation

How blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 1:1-3

The Power of God's Word

Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.

Psalm 119:11

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

Destroying Fortresses by Taking Thoughts Captive

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 Corinthians 10:4

We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.
1 Thessalonians 4:3

Christ Knows My Struggles

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 2:18

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of God, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

I Am Not Alone

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

Guard My Eyes

The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

Matthew 6:22

But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness how great is the darkness!

Matthew 6:23

I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

Job 31:1

I will set no worthless thing before my eyes.

Psalms 101:3

Deny the Flesh

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust.

Romans 13:14

I Am Crucified with Christ

I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Galatians 2:20

I Am Dead to Sin

Even so consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

Resist the Devil

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:7

And do not give the devil an opportunity.

Ephesians 4:27

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

Present My Body as a Sacrifice

I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:1

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

Romans 12:2

My Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? **1 Corinthians 6:19**

For you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:20

I Am Free from Condemnation

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:32

If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

John 8:36

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

The Lord redeems the soul of His servants; and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

Psalms 34:22