

From Broken to Beautiful
A Primer on Marriage Counseling
Week 8 – Helping Couples Overcome Sexual Dysfunction

Introduction:

Big Statement #1:

God gave sex to mankind for more than procreation. It is divinely designed to reflect the “one flesh” union of Genesis 2:24 and, in the context of marriage between one man and one woman, it is meant to increase marital **INTIMACY**, to provide a space for spouses to **SERVE** one another, and to provide a shared **WORSHIP** experience.

One survey that I saw said that 39% of marital arguments are about attitudes, 36% are about money, and 28% are about sex. So, what God meant for good, gets corrupted by sin and idolatry and that well of intimacy and pleasure gets poisoned.

Big Statement #2:

Sex, even if it's the presenting problem, is **NEVER** the root problem. It's a symptom of the underlying heart problems that the couple brings to the marriage relationship.

I've only had one marital counseling experience where the marital conflict didn't affect the sexual dynamics of the marriage. So, even if sex isn't the presenting problem, it's often in the mix of problems that have to be addressed. So, once again, we don't start with this. We start with motives so the couple can recognize, perhaps for the first time, the saboteurs that they've brought into the marriage and their marriage struggles.

Helping Couples Overcome Sexual Dysfunction:

Step 1 – Begin in the **PAST** and work your way to the present.

Question:

What questions would you ask to gather the appropriate data to understand the scope of a couple's sexual dysfunction?

Were they sexually active prior to marriage with one another or with others? Have one or both had a relationship with pornography, if so, for how long, frequency, etc.? Has there been sexual trauma in either of their stories? How do they define “intimacy” and what are they seeking from marital intimacy? Is penetrative intercourse the only way to achieve that desired goal? Is there physical pain involved in sexual activity? How often do they argue about sex? What do those arguments look like and how do they resolve? How does the Gospel affect their sexual relationship?

General Principles to Bear in Mind:

- Be **GENTLE**. There is probably a high degree of pain, insecurity, and shame involved in the struggle.
- If there is physical pain involved, the counselee should see their **PHYSICIAN**.
- Give **HOPE**. God redeems broken things, and He has given us wisdom and instruction regarding sexual intimacy.

You don't want to tell them just to start having sex. In the beginning, you don't truly know the depth of the problem and how emotionally, relationally, or mentally painful it might be for one spouse to be intimate with the other if there are multiplying factors at work such as verbal or physical abuse, manipulation, deceit, or control issues. You may want them to agree to a season of sexual fasting to allow for healing to take place (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

- Remember that success in this area doesn't mean more sex. Success means **GLORIFYING** God in the entirety of the marriage relationship.

Sex is good, but it is not the highest good. It's important, but it is not the most important thing and rhythms will change over time, but the goal of glorifying God in your sexual relationship never changes.

Step 2 – Help them get to the **ROOT** of their conflict.

This is the part of the process that ought to feel most familiar. You are seeking to identify their driving motives and idols and the problematic and sinful behaviors that arise from them. You should be seeking to encourage them toward repentance which will include confession and the seeking of forgiveness, as well as an intentional process of putting off ungodly behaviors and putting on godly behaviors.

You may need to teach on forgiveness, identity, insecurity, the fear of the Lord, putting the past in its place, the sovereignty of goodness of God, and even how to lament the path they have been on. This will obviously be an extended process, and it might be helpful to counsel them separately during some of this phase, especially if there is sexual trauma in one or both of their past or if one is actively involved in pornography use. It isn't mandatory, and discernment is needed to know if it would be helpful. The alternative is to proceed as a couple and then counsel the spouse who has the traumatic past afterwards.

Step 3 – Provide a **BIBLICAL** view of sexual intimacy.

- Sex is designed to be a **UNIQUE** experience between one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage.

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. ²⁰ Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? ²¹ For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. (Proverbs 5:15-21)

- Sex is about **SATISFYING** and **PROTECTING** your spouse.

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

This text can be misused and **WEAPONIZED** where there is sexual dysfunction. It is important to understand what the apostle Paul is saying here.

- The verb translated “have” in verse 2 is a euphemism for sexual relations. It is in the **PRESENT** tense. So, the command could be written, “each man should live sexually with his own wife and each woman should live sexually with her own husband.”
- There is an element of **DUTY** implied in verse 3 because of the realities of verses 4 and 5, that means that sex should never be reserved for a reward or withheld as a punishment.
- According to verse 4, God gives the gift of **AUTHORITY** over one’s body to your spouse in the marriage ceremony.
- According to verse 5, sexual abstinence in marriage should **NOT** be normative. It often leads to temptation and sin. Therefore, if sex is denied, it should be rescheduled.
- The text must not be used to **COMMAND** a spouse to have sex. That would be inherently **SELFISH**, and sex is supposed to be inherently **SELFLESS**.

If a spouse refuses to engage in sexual intimacy without a compelling and reasonable reason, they are primarily sinning against God. Each spouse is responsible for their own obedience and not the obedience of the other.

- Sex is about **SERVING** one another.

Question:

Which of the many “one another” commands of the New Testament can be applied to the sexual relationship?

Serve one another. Show hospitality to one another. Love one another with a sincere love. Prefer one another. Bear with one another. Be kind to one another. Do good to one another. Be devoted to one another. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Submit to one another.

Step 4 – Help them **PREPARE** for intimacy.

- Teach them about intimacy with **GOD**, in Christ.
- Teach them to employ **OTHER** forms of marital intimacy.
- Teach them to see sex as an act of **WORSHIP** (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- Teach them to see the **ORDINATIONAL** nature of sexual intimacy (Genesis 2:24).

Sex doesn't just represent their flesh coming together. It represents the unity of heart that was created in marriage. The Hebrew "Dod" represents the "mingling of souls" that occurs in marriage and is reflected in the sexual union.

- Encourage them to **PRAY** before and after sexual intimacy.
- Encourage them to **SERVE** one another before and after sexual intimacy.

Question:

What questions or comments do you have concerning counseling couples struggling with sexual dysfunction?

[Allow for response]

Homework:

- A Biblical View of Sex from Song of Solomon chapters 4-7
- Restoring Intimacy in a Stressed Marriage
- Expressions of Love
- Marriage: Sexual Inventory
- Sexual Unity (Chapter 6 of Wayne Mack's book, Strengthening Your Marriage)

Conclusion:

The Gospel frees us from a performative mentality so that we can actually enjoy the good gifts of God. The question, in a redeemed marriage, isn't supposed to be, am I getting my needs met? It ought to be, is my spouse satisfied? Are their needs being met inside and outside the bedroom? Are they content in the marriage relationship? Have I loved them and served them well?

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

(Song of Solomon 7:10)