

## Conversation #2:

sex



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**NOTE: If you're concerned about your past...**

If you have a sexual history that you are reluctant to talk about, we encourage you to first read the special section on page 8, "Sharing Your Sexual History With Your Fiancé." This will offer some guidelines on the appropriate level of disclosure regarding your sexual experience.

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It is widely assumed that if you are dating someone, you are having sex with them. And if you are engaged, you are absolutely having sex. This commonly held view comes from the fact that our culture is obsessed with sex. And because we are all naturally influenced by the culture in which we live, it is important for you, as an engaged couple, to have a biblically guided conversation about this aspect of married life.

Through this conversation, you will begin to see sexual intimacy as a beautiful gift from God. You will have the opportunity to talk about some of your fears and expectations. And you will gain an appreciation for your unique, God-given design as a man or a woman and how your differences will continue to strengthen your marriage bond.

- 1) Why do you think it is important to consider what the Bible says about sex?





## IT'S TIME TO HAVE "THE TALK" AGAIN

Whether your parents had "the talk" with you when you were young, you "learned" about sex from kids who had no more knowledge about it than you did, or you were left to wonder and wander on your own, it's time for "the talk" again. Only this time you have a truer picture of what's at stake, and there is now a person in your life who deserves—and needs—your love and your respect.

When sex is approached *selfishly*, if you treat him or her as only a means for your gratification, well . . . that's neither love nor respect. Which is why we look to the Bible first for guidance on this and every other marriage-related topic. God teaches us to love in life-giving ways, and that includes the way you love each other sexually as husband and wife.

## THE BOUNDARIES ARE GOOD

Proverbs 6:27 uses the image of fire to illustrate the dangers of sexual sin: "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?"

The answer is clearly, "No." If you pull a log from a blazing fire and hold it to your chest, bad things are going to happen. In terms of your sexuality, those bad things could include:

- sexually transmitted disease
- porn addiction
- guilt-driven reduction of sexual vitality once you're married
- comparing your spouse to previous sexual partners or fantasies
- improper expectations of your spouse based on previous sexual experiences or fantasies
- trying to use sex to "fix" problems or end arguments
- being selfish, demanding, or even abusive in the bedroom
- wrapping your identity around your sexual performance

Fire is beautiful, warming, comforting, and inviting. But take it from the proper environment (like a fireplace or fire pit), and fire is damaging and destructive. Likewise, sex is a beautiful blessing within the environment of a marriage relationship, but outside of that context, it can devastate. God knows this, and because He loves you and wants you to experience the joys of intimacy, He has created the boundaries of marriage.





## THE RIGHT PURPOSES

It's important to remember that sex is not just a physical act. God created it as a process of intimate communication, of which intercourse is a significant part. It's a powerful, emotional, bonding experience designed to strengthen a marriage.

God wants us to experience the absolute best, rather than a substitute version of the real thing. In light of that, for each of the following verses, state in your own words the purpose you see that God has for sex in marriage.

### PURPOSE NUMBER ONE

*"God blessed them [Adam and Eve]; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'"* (GENESIS 1:28)

*"Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."* (PSALM 127:3-5A)

1) According to these verses, one purpose God has for sex is:

### PURPOSE NUMBER TWO

*"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)

2) According to this verse, another purpose God has for sex is:





## PURPOSE NUMBER THREE

*“But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 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. Do not deprive each other, 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 7:2–5)*

3) According to these verses, a third purpose God has for sex in marriage is:

Your answers could probably be summed up using three key words:

**Procreation:** Sex is intended for the creation of children. God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” has not been revoked.

**Pleasure:** Sex is intended for the pleasure and enjoyment of a man and woman who are married. Contrary to the interpretations of the medieval church, God is the author of sexual pleasure, not the censor of it. It’s also important to know that in marriage, pleasure given is pleasure received—serving your future spouse with this unique and enjoyable gift is God honoring and should be prioritized.

**Protection:** Sex is intended to protect a husband and wife from temptation. Failure to sexually satisfy each other in marriage can lead to a spouse looking outside the marriage for fulfillment. This is why intercourse is often referred to as “making love.” When a married couple makes love (instead of simply viewing it as having sex), they are proactively communicating care, respect, and a giving attitude toward each other. If this happens frequently in a marriage, protection of that marriage is being sincerely valued.







4) How does this biblical picture of sex affect your view of it? Are you surprised at all by what the Bible teaches? If so, why?

5) What, if anything, seems difficult for you to accept about these purposes for sex? Why?

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR DIFFERENCES

Researchers continue to observe consistent differences in the attitudes, needs, and responses men and women bring into a sexual relationship. This reinforces the idea that God created us “male” and “female” as different and distinct for glorious purposes. Understanding your differences in the sexual area is foundational to developing a healthy, mutually satisfying sex life once you get married.





The following chart points out a few general, commonly observed differences between men and women. They are not, however, concrete facts. Don't observe this chart and use it to determine how you "ought to be." Instead, observe and use it to help your fiancé understand some of the things that are true of you. This is a great way to discuss and communicate with each other as you attempt to understand and be understood. (Note: If you find yourself questioning what or how much to share with your fiancé about your past, see the section at the end of this chapter entitled *Sharing Your Sexual History With Your Fiance* to help guide you through that process.)

**Editor's note:** *None of us like being on the receiving end of stereotypes. At the moment generalizations stop creating authentic understanding, they stop being helpful. So use these as stepping stones to ask questions of—and create thoughtful dialogue with—your fiancé. Sex isn't formulaic, and neither are they."*

Commonly Observed Differences in Sexuality		
	M E N	W O M E N
Attitude	Physical, Compartmentalized	Relational, Holistic
Stimulation	Body-centered, Sight, Smell, Actions	Person-Centered, Touch, Attitudes, Words
Needs	Respect, To be Physically Needed, Physical Expression	Respect, To be Emotionally Needed, Relational Intimacy
Sexual Response	Acyclical, Quick Excitement, Difficult to Distract	Cyclical, Slow Excitement, Easily Distracted
Orgasm	Shorter, More Intense, More Physically Oriented	Longer, More In-Depth, More Emotionally Oriented

- 6) What potential sexual problems can be anticipated in a marriage because men are generally more oriented toward the physical act of sex while women are more relationally oriented? How can you address these differences in a healthy way?





- 7) Why is it important for men to realize that women usually require more time to become sexually aroused?
- 8) Why is it important for women to realize the deep desire within men to be physically needed?

## AN INCREDIBLE GIFT

In the context of a satisfying marriage relationship, sex serves as a reinforcing bond. It is the most personal and private act husbands and wives can share, and acts as a celebration of their unity and oneness.

Sex in marriage is the physical expression of what is true about a couple on the emotional, mental, and spiritual levels. It is the gift God has given to a husband and wife to communicate love and to demonstrate emotional and spiritual oneness on a physical plane.

Because this bonding is so powerful, breaking that bond through infidelity can cause devastating damage to a marriage. And because our culture is so saturated with and casual about sex, it's critical for you and your future spouse to do what you can to protect your relationship once you're married. After all, it's the protection of a gift given to you by a loving and perfectly wise God.

## ANTICIPATIONS AND ANXIETIES

From your observations of the sexual differences chart earlier, complete the following phrase individually and then share your answers with each other:

What I need you to understand about me from this chart is that because I am a man/woman...





- 9) Individually, write down three or four things you are eagerly anticipating in your sexual relationship and three things you are anxious about.

**Anticipation:**

**Anxiety:**

Now, share your answers with each other, and ask your fiancé what you can do now, or later, to alleviate or address the most pressing anxiety issue. Also discuss any differing expectations you may have.

- 10) What are the most important insights you have gained from this chapter about God's design for sexual intimacy?

## SHARING YOUR SEXUAL HISTORY WITH YOUR FIANCÉ

As you contemplate marriage, you may look back with regret at sexual choices you've made in the past. You may also wonder, *How much of the past do I need to share with my fiancé?*

This is not an easy question to answer, for several reasons:

- Sharing your past mistakes and sins may lead to several days of shame-filled, painful moments between you as a couple.
- It may mean reliving incidents you'd rather not remember.
- It could even result in a broken engagement.







You may be tempted to avoid sharing anything from your past; after all, as a Christian, your sins are forgiven because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the Bible says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

And while these things are absolutely true in our relationship with God, there are consequences of past sins that need to be honestly dealt with as a couple moves toward marriage. While you do not need to share every detail, you cannot avoid the fact that your life has been shaped by your choices. If you and your fiancé desire to make a solid decision about marriage, you need to be honest with each other and deal with your pasts. It is better to speak the truth prior to your marriage than to live with the fear, deceit, and shame that come from hiding the truth from your spouse.

There is one other benefit to sharing your past. True healing can occur when you confess your sins to each other. God has used marriage to heal individuals from past hurts that have haunted them for years. This is especially true when dealing with sexual immorality. Many men and women have found forgiveness, grace, and liberty by confessing these scarring circumstances to their future spouses.

Of course, these are not easy issues to discuss. And keep in mind there is no cookie-cutter solution to what you may be facing. But in an effort to guide those who are struggling with knowing what to do and how to go about it, here are some principles and perspectives.

***If you are burdened with something you feel, you should tell your fiancé:***

- 1) Write out a list of all that you are feeling a need to share with him or her. Note, however, this is not a time for great detail—just a list of events, choices, or hurts you’ve experienced. This list will most likely contain things you’ve done or that have happened to you that you now regret.
- 2) Once you’ve completed your list, make sure you have experienced God’s forgiveness and cleansing for everything you’ve written. If you haven’t, spend some time in prayer, repenting and confessing your sin. Remember, God tells us in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (NIV).
- 3) Determine which items on your list you should discuss with your fiancé and why. If you have doubts about any items, make sure you seek wise and godly counsel before talking with your fiancé. Another person’s compassionate, listening ear and prayerful concern can guide you before and after you marry.





- 4) Set a time and place to talk with your fiancé. Choose a private setting where you are both free to express your emotions.
- 5) Before you meet, pray that your fiancé will have the strength and grace to respond in a loving manner. However, don't go into the meeting expecting immediate forgiveness. Your fiancé may need time to work through emotions and think about what he or she hears.
- 6) As you talk with your fiancé, explain why you think it's important to share these choices from your past. But avoid sharing more than is necessary. Be careful about sharing too many explicit details, as this can become a problem later in your marriage. By going into too much detail, you may give the one you love too much of the picture. It's important to use discretion and help your fiancé avoid morbid curiosity.
- 7) Give your fiancé the time he or she needs to process this new information. This process may include hurt, anger, or withdrawal.
- 8) If it becomes apparent that either of you cannot get beyond the hurt caused by relating this information, seek wise counsel together or individually. If forgiveness and reconciliation cannot occur at this point, then delaying the wedding could be the wise decision. If God is calling you to marriage, then His perfect love will be manifested in your hearts for each other. And Scripture tells us, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

### ***If you are hearing a confession from your fiancé:***

First, make an effort to really hear what your fiancé is sharing. Ask yourself, *Why did he/she come to me with this?* Look beyond the past and its ugliness to the broken heart that is sharing.

Second, consider your own condition before God—a sinner saved by grace. We are all flawed human beings. Because we don't love perfectly and because we can feel that we "deserve the perfect person," we might be tempted to condemn another for a past failure, whereas God calls us to forgive each other.

While you may legitimately decide that, given this new information about your fiancé, marriage is not wise, don't let pride prevent you from responding with love and forgiveness when your fiancé is willing to share mistakes from the past.

