

GARY THOMAS & DEBRA FILETA, M.A., LPC

MARRIED SEX



**A CHRISTIAN COUPLE'S GUIDE
TO REIMAGINING YOUR LOVE LIFE**

PRAISE FOR ***MARRIED SEX***

If the enemy can't take out your marriage on the battlefield, he'll do it in the bedroom. If you are struggling to see that God's plan for your sex life doesn't only involve pleasure but power, this book will hand you the keys to unleash God's rich blessing and strength on your marriage. Debra Fileta and Gary Thomas have a special way of combining science and truth in a powerful way. This book will help you become stronger and bring sexy back to your marriage.

Levi and Jennie Lusko, lead pastors of
Fresh Life Church and bestselling authors

It's time for Christian couples to renormalize and reclaim God's vision for married sex. This book shines the bright light of God's truth into one of the most dimly lit and underexplored areas of Christian marriage. It's bound to be a treasure trove of wisdom and hope for all who read it!

Ryan and Selena Frederick, founders of Fierce Families
and authors of *See-Through Marriage*

When you combine the wealth of knowledge that both Debra Fileta and Gary Thomas have about people, love, and relationships, you get this page-turner. Debra and Gary have skillfully provided a holistic guide to developing and maintaining a vibrant and satisfying sex life throughout the course of your marriage.

Chrystal Evans Hurst, bestselling author and speaker

When it comes to sex within marriage, the church has been awkward at best or silent at worst around the topic. That's why I'm thankful for the work of Gary Thomas and Debra Fileta to help married couples discover the good gifts God has given us through sexual intimacy. *Married Sex* is a practical guide for all married couples who want to know the sexual life God has created for you in every stage of your married life.

Kyle Idleman, bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and *One at a Time*

Gary Thomas and Debra Fileta will help your marriage get pretty hot and your bedroom even hotter. This is one of the most honest and descriptive books on married sex we've ever read. We honestly couldn't put it down. It will give you God's heart on married sex and get your heart pumping all at the same time! If you want to know what God dreamed for married sex, you just found it.

Dave and Ann Wilson, authors of *Vertical Marriage*
and cohosts of Family Life Today

Married Sex is a masterpiece, and it's one of the most practical, biblical, and helpful books on sex ever written. Apply its teachings into your own marriage, and your sex life (and many other aspects of your marriage) will see instant improvements.

Dave and Ashley Willis, authors of *The Naked Marriage*
and hosts of *The Naked Marriage* podcast

Gary Thomas and Debra Fileta have created a positive, balanced, and comprehensive resource that will guide you through the joys and challenges of sexual intimacy. Reading this book together and referring to it throughout your marriage will give you hope, encouragement, and practical help.

Juli Slattery, cofounder of Authentic Intimacy,
author of *Rethinking Sexuality*

Debra Fileta and Gary Thomas are both powerhouses in their own right. I'm thrilled that they have combined their wisdom to speak on this critical topic. Sex can be a source of great joy or great pain. I'm grateful for a resource that guides us into the enjoyment of God's gift according to his beautiful design.

Ben Stuart, pastor of Passion City Church D.C.,
author of *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*

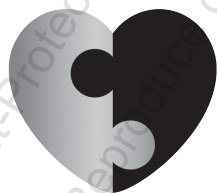
What a brilliant book! Written by two experts—different genders and different generations—sharing one faith and a common desire to help married couples enjoy God's gift of sex. This is a terrific blend of psychology and theology. Don't miss out on this grounded message, chock-full of practical suggestions.

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, #1 bestselling authors
of *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

I devoured this book and was constantly reading paragraphs out loud to my husband. I also found myself taking mental notes of all the upcoming weddings I'm attending and reminding myself to gift these couples with this book. No matter how long you've been married or how awesome or difficult your sexual intimacy is, you will find something beneficial in *Married Sex*. Thank you, Debra and Gary, for this wonderful resource.

Jamie Ivey, bestselling author and host of
The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey podcast

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TO REIMAGINING YOUR LOVE LIFE

**GARY THOMAS &
DEBRA FILETA M.A., LPC**

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Married Sex

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ABOVE THE SHEETS

Debra

They have no clue what kind of fun we had last night,” she said with a mischievous smile on her face.

I was a single college student at the time, sitting across the table from my fiftysomething-year-old mentor and friend, and we were talking about her marriage. She was telling me how fun it is to be a pastor’s wife, sitting in the front row while her husband preached, but holding on to a secret that no one else in the congregation knew. The secret was this: they had an incredible sex life. The night before, making love with her husband had brought an overwhelming ecstasy that nothing could compare to. She wanted me to know that when two people love God and love and serve one another the way God calls them to, their sex life gets taken to a whole new level.

Since that conversation many years ago, I’ve come to realize that there’s a big difference between making love and having sex.

If sex is the physical act by which two people connect their genitals, making love is the emotional act by which two people connect their hearts and souls. A deep and meaningful union occurs when two people become one as they intertwine their bodies and connect their hearts (Genesis 2:24).

In the process of making love, there is an emotional penetration

of the heart just as much as there is a physical penetration of the body. Because the emotional and relational connection is so vital to the process of making love, what happens above the sheets in a couple's life is just as important as what happens under the sheets. In fact, the former fuels the latter. When a problem arises in one of those areas, there's often a problem in the other as well.

In our survey in which we asked couples to share the problem spots they've faced in their sex life, one of the top concerns that came up revolved not around actual *sexual* issues but around *emotional* issues that ultimately impacted their sex life.* Couples who struggled the most sexually found that the strain was a direct result of problems they were facing relationally. Sex isn't just about the physical act of sex. It's about so much more. And the state of our sex life is often a symptom of what's going on beneath the surface of our relationship.

Couples will often come into my practice with what they think is a sex problem. They're frustrated that sex isn't "working" the way they want it to. But as we unpack the layers, the sex problem actually ends up being a relationship problem deep down. All the sexual techniques and strategies in the world aren't going to cure a sexual problem that's not actually a sexual problem. That's why we need to understand the connection and begin to track the health of our relationship. Recognizing the correlation between emotional and sexual intimacy is an important step in dealing with any sexual problem, because more often than not, satisfying sex is an overflow of a satisfying relationship. But we don't always recognize this truth at first glance.

Edward and Janice

From the very start of their relationship, Edward and Janice fell into their default roles. As the oldest of six and the most responsible child,

* See appendix 1 for research information.

Janice always found herself in the caregiver role. Naturally, when she met Edward, she carried that role into their relationship as well, which was easy to do, because Edward was the youngest in his family of origin, and he loved to be taken care of. He was a laid-back, fun-loving kind of guy who brought out the fun side of Janice. Her responsible, serious nature was quickly drawn to his fun, carefree personality.

Fast-forward twelve years into their marriage when they came to see me, and they were struggling in their sex life. For the past two years of their marriage, Janice hadn't been able to reach climax, and nothing Edward did seemed to get her there. The problem had started much earlier than two years ago, but it was two years ago that her orgasms had come to a complete halt. Their sex life had become such a point of contention that Janice was dropping hints that maybe it was time for her to say goodbye to their marriage. He couldn't please her, and she wondered if he would ever be able to do so.

All the “bedroom” strategies in the world wouldn't be able to help them get over this hurdle if their sexual struggles were in reality a symptom of their emotional struggles. This is where we had to dig a little deeper to try to uncover what might be happening underneath before we could begin to rebuild.

I discovered that Janice found herself “caring” for Edward in more ways than she bargained for. Because of her take-charge nature paired with Edward's laid-back personality, she ultimately became responsible for managing their finances, running the household, organizing their family schedule, and being the primary caregiver for their two children—all while holding down a part-time job. It was easy and natural for her to take charge, but over the years, she found herself slowly feeling burned-out and resentful that Edward got to have all the fun while she assumed all the responsibility for the household. Edward had in effect become like another child in her eyes, just another body she was responsible to feed, take care of, and motivate.

It's important to understand that when a husband gets put into the category of “child,” the power dynamic in the relationship changes, and

ultimately so does the level of sexual attraction. When we constantly care for someone in the form of giving and giving and giving in the relationship—losing our expectation of receiving anything—we will find that our desire and affection toward that person begin to fade. We become the caregiver instead of the lover. We become the parent instead of the partner.

And that was exactly what had happened in Janice and Edward's marriage over the years. And now their relationship dynamic was preventing Janice from feeling excited and aroused by Edward in the way she used to feel at the beginning of their marriage. He couldn't help her get to climax, essentially because she wasn't *allowing* him to get her to climax. She had been carrying so much responsibility in their relationship for so long that she didn't even realize how much of the struggle stemmed from underlying bitterness, resentment, and control issues. Edward had to learn to step up to the plate of their marriage, and she had to learn how to begin expecting him to—and then allowing him to.

It didn't happen overnight, but eventually, with a lot of therapy and sustained effort from both of them, Edward and Janice were able to restore balance to their relationship, which ultimately led to balance in their sex life. In fact, their relationship came out of that experience healthier and stronger than it had ever been. And so did their sex life.

Better Relationships = Better Sex

If you're struggling sexually, the first thing to do is step back and ask yourself how you're doing emotionally and relationally in your marriage. What is the relational temperature of your marriage, and is anything causing tension, a power struggle, distance, stress, or conflict that you haven't addressed? Do you think of your spouse primarily as a lover or as a parent? A child? A bother? An enemy? A threat? Maintaining sexual desire for your spouse requires you to keep your roles as lovers intact.

While not all sexual problems stem from underlying emotional or

relationship problems, the more connected and in touch you are with one another, the easier it will be to identify the problem and come up with a plan to work on it together.

Anthony and Veronica had a strong and healthy marriage, yet she found herself continuing to struggle with very low sexual desire. She *wanted* to want her husband, but she just couldn't get her body to cooperate. It was easier to get to the root of this couple's sexual struggles because they had already done the work on their relationship. With the relational component out of the way, Veronica was able to identify her need for medical intervention and made an appointment with her primary doctor to discuss medication and hormone options to get their sex life back on track.

But most couples aren't like Anthony and Veronica. Most couples have some work—or in many cases, plenty of work—to do on the emotional and relational health of their marriage. In a survey of more than one thousand married people for my book *Choosing Marriage*, the majority of couples reported engaging in zero to thirty minutes per week of quality conversation with their spouse.¹ I assure you that there is absolutely no way healthy relationships are happening in the context of zero to thirty minutes of communication per week. If we really want to work on the health of our sex life, we have to take the health of our relationship seriously.

Both Gary and I have written books about things we can do to strengthen our emotional and relational bonds.² For the remainder of this chapter, I want to give you a practical checklist to help you discover which emotional and relational areas may need attention in your marriage.

Your Sexual Struggle May Be a Relationship Struggle If . . .

- Sex is something you fight about often, but the fighting ends in tension and bitterness rather than resolution and intimacy.
- You feel like sex is the only time you physically or emotionally connect as a couple.

- ❑ When you feel hurt, you use sex to cover up the relationship problem rather than talk about it and deal with it.
- ❑ You find yourself blaming your spouse and harboring resentment for the sexual problems in your marriage.
- ❑ Your sexual struggles have gotten so bad you think about leaving the marriage or imagine what it would be like being with someone else.
- ❑ Your sexual struggles have led to fantasizing about others or engaging in pornography or masturbation.
- ❑ You commonly see sex as a duty and an obligation rather than something you want to enjoy with your spouse or a way to express your affection.
- ❑ You have no interest in sex and, frankly, very little interest in your spouse in general.
- ❑ You've experienced serious relationship wounds like adultery, addictions, or abuse in your past that seem to be triggered by sex.
- ❑ You feel anxious and uncomfortable around your spouse during sex and find yourself filled with insecurities.
- ❑ You never feel aroused by your spouse or interested in them sexually.
- ❑ You go into sexual intimacy with the automatic assumption that it's not going to be a good experience.
- ❑ The only time you touch or kiss is when you're having sex.
- ❑ You're generally disengaged from what your spouse is feeling unless he explodes with anger or she breaks down crying. They have to express some monumental emotion for you to notice.
- ❑ You're no longer curious about each other—what your spouse has done during the day, how they are feeling, how you can help them, what their opinion would be.
- ❑ You can't remember the last time you laughed together.
- ❑ You fear the thought of being alone together for any significant period of time other than when you're sleeping.

These are just some of the signs that your sexual problems may be rooted in emotional or relational problems. If you connect with one or more of the above statements, I challenge you to take seriously the emotional health of your relationship. Have an honest conversation with your spouse about the aspects of your relationship that bring satisfaction to each of you, as well as the things you believe need to change. Gaining healing in your relationship is an important step toward gaining healing in your sex life.

NOTE FROM GARY

Healthy sex serves a relationship; unhealthy sex *becomes* the relationship, which is asking too much of sex. Sex should be an expression of what is, not a way to temporarily and artificially create what we hope to be true. Our culture tries to make sex be the pathway to intimacy rather than reminding us that healthy sexuality is an expression of intimate connection.

By nature, sex can last only so long and be performed only so often, and sexual chemistry eventually slows down. *Sexual desire simply cannot sustain a lifelong marriage. But an intimate sacred marriage can sustain a tremendous lifelong sex life.*

When sex becomes the relationship, it's like trying to support a fifty-story hotel on a foundation made of toothpicks. We build a healthy sexual relationship by building a healthy marriage on all levels—emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and relational.

Wise couples avoid asking too much of sex *or* too little of sex. A spouse who says, "The rest of our relationship is so strong you shouldn't need sex," is just as misguided as the spouse who says, "Our sex life is so good you shouldn't need anything besides sex." We can fall off the rails on *either* side of the equation—asking sex to do too much or failing to take advantage of its power altogether.

Naked from the Inside Out

One of the most beautiful things two people can share is the vulnerability of being physically naked together. Naked, yet loved. Naked, yet desired. Naked, yet accepted. Every flaw is exposed; every blemish is on display; every insecurity is out in the open in front of a spouse who sees you just as you are and loves you anyway. But just as beautiful, if not more so, is *emotional* vulnerability—the “nakedness” of the heart. One of the things that brings sex to a whole new level is the ability to feel fully known and fully accepted emotionally by our spouse. It’s the safe place of knowing that in this relationship, *I have nothing to hide*. It’s a true nakedness that starts from the inside out.

A man who has nothing to hide becomes a safe place for a woman to hide her heart. But this is just as true the other way around. A woman who is living authentically and honestly becomes the safest place for her husband. A marriage in which we have nothing to hide is a marriage we have to work at, because that type of intimacy and authenticity doesn’t come naturally to any of us.

We live in a world where we’re taught to put our best foot forward. And through the culture of social media, we’re conditioned to live in a way that presents the best version of ourselves to the world. But sometimes we can get so accustomed to this way of living that we allow this mentality to affect our closest relationships—we bring it into our marriages. We want to present our best self, and so we put our sins and struggles on the back burner. We may even convince ourselves that they don’t really exist.

One of the best things you can do for your marriage, and in turn for your sex life, is to think about how naked you are being emotionally. How vulnerable are you with your spouse? How much do they know about the inner workings of your heart, your weaknesses, your struggles, your hardships? If they could see inside you, would they be surprised at what’s really going on there? Are you living a life in which you have nothing to hide? Can you say you’re truly naked from the inside out?

One way my husband, John, and I have tried to be intentional about

this level of nakedness in our marriage is through what we call our “Sunday night check-ins.” Every Sunday night, we sit down together at 9:00 p.m. after the kids have gone to bed for a time of sharing, confessing, and encouraging one another. We talk about our struggles, share the things we’re stressed about, and confess the ways we’ve sinned against one another and then ask for forgiveness.

Let me be real: this was not an easy process in the beginning. And sometimes it still isn’t. Sharing weaknesses and struggles, being vulnerable, and confessing what we’ve done wrong takes a lot of courage. But this emotional nakedness is what brings intimacy like nothing else can. By engaging in those moments, we’re choosing to live a life where we have nothing to hide from one another. We’re choosing to be naked from the inside out.

Since we started this ritual about a decade ago, it has truly transformed our marriage. We started this process because, simply put, our marriage desperately needed it. We were going through a difficult time in our relationship and weren’t connecting the way we needed to. John was stressed-out and working crazy hours as a medical resident, and I was dealing with the postpartum hormones and complete exhaustion of having a new baby, all while taking care of our one-year-old. We were both struggling in different ways, but we weren’t being totally transparent about what we were going through and what we needed from one another. The gap between us got a little larger with each passing day, because hiding always inhibits intimacy.

I think about the story of Adam and Eve in the garden after they had eaten from the tree that God commanded them not to eat from. They were struggling, and instead of choosing to lean into God, they chose to run from him. “The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). That’s essentially what we’re doing when we keep things from one another in marriage. We’re choosing to hide instead of choosing to connect. Choosing distance instead of closeness.

But when we choose openness and honesty in our marriages, we invite intimacy. For me and John, this level of openness brought an emotional connection far beyond what we experience in any other relationship in this world. And not only that, it also brought our sexual intimacy to a deeper level. In fact, I remember one specific Sunday night check-in. I had just finished talking through some of the dark anxiety I was struggling with at that time in my life, and John was there to listen, encourage, and offer words of support. He had just finished sharing about some stress he was facing, as well as ways he was being intentional to keep the lure of lust out of his life. We prayed together, hand in hand and heart to heart. And let me tell you, nothing is sexier than the honesty, support, and vulnerability of a loving husband. Nothing is more attractive than a man who will be real with you, engage with you, and pray with you. What started off as a Sunday night check-in, an act of emotional vulnerability, turned into making love on the couch. Our emotional connection led to a deeply satisfying physical connection, because the former will always fuel the latter. We were able to engage with one another with complete freedom and security.

When we feel emotionally safe, we can feel sexually safe. When we feel emotionally secure, we can feel sexually secure. When we've been emotionally naked, physical nakedness is just an external representation of something so much more meaningful—it's the outworking of deep intimacy between two people.

Practically speaking, what does this check-in time look like? What are some things you should share with your spouse? What are some areas in which you need to choose to be emotionally naked before them? And is there such a thing as “oversharing”? Drawing from both my personal experience and my clinical experience as a licensed counselor, let me share some of the most important topics that can usher couples into emotional nakedness.

Current Sins and Struggles

The book of James tells us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so that we might be healed (5:16). Confession and

prayer lead to healing! In marriage, we have a built-in accountability partner—someone to confess to, pray with, and seek healing with hand in hand. So often we fail to take advantage of this beautiful opportunity, and instead we isolate and withdraw from one another in our sins and struggles. Is there any sin or struggle in your life that you've kept in the dark from your spouse? What could it look like to begin the process of confession and healing?

If you're struggling with secret sins or even leading a double life that you've never before confessed to your spouse—maybe you're battling pornography, committing sexual sin, feeling trapped in deceit and dishonesty, or engaging in something else that could cause harm to your marriage—I recommend that you choose to share your story for the first time with the help and guidance of a professional counselor to walk you through the process of disclosure in a healthy and productive way.

Past History

I have worked with many clients who are struggling in the present because of problems from the past. Whether it's experiences of trauma or abuse, a sordid sexual history, or past mistakes and failures, the past is holding too many people back from living fully in the present. But if we don't deal with the past, we can't be freed from the past. Is there anything significant or painful in your past that you've failed to share with your spouse? How could that past experience be affecting your present life?

Relationship Struggles

When it comes to relationships, I try to teach my clients that we can't hold someone responsible for something we never told them they were responsible for. Maybe there's something in your relationship that's bothering you—an unmet expectation, a wounded heart, a difficult

disappointment, an unfulfilled need. Sometimes it's a small unexpressed need, like that of the wife who didn't want to have sex at the end of the day because her husband failed to unload the dishwasher when she was tired—but she had never told him how much that irritated her. Or the husband who felt neglected at the dinner party while his wife roamed the room, socializing with everyone else—but he had never let her know how he truly felt.

Sometimes the unexpressed needs run even deeper. Like the woman who longs for more affectionate physical touch outside of the bedroom but hasn't had the courage to express that desire to her husband. Or the man who feels criticized and critiqued by his wife but keeps his hurts to himself.

No matter how small or significant the unexpressed need may be, you're responsible for being an active participant in sharing your needs and desires. Don't mistake passivity for selflessness by keeping things to yourself; instead, take a step toward your spouse by gently and graciously sharing what's on your heart and mind. The truth spoken in love has the potential to bring profound healing to a relationship.

Mental/Physical Struggles

I'm so passionate about mental and emotional health that I wrote an entire book about it,³ no doubt in part because I've suffered through both clinical depression and anxiety, which led to a host of other physical symptoms. Whether we're struggling with physical health or with mental and emotional health, the truth is that these issues can seriously impact the quality of our marriage if we try to walk through the situation alone. An attitude of openness means being real with our spouse about how we're really doing, inviting them into the process and journey. Sometimes people don't want to burden their spouse with difficult information, but by keeping these things from our spouse, we're creating distance that leads to isolation instead of to the intimacy that closeness brings. Are you letting your spouse into every part of your life, no matter how vulnerable it might make you feel?

People often ask me what it looks like to live a life where you have nothing to hide. *Can't too much honesty damage a relationship? Aren't there some things your spouse is better off not knowing?* One practical way I encourage spouses to be open and honest is to imagine their life like a book. It's important to share a summary of every chapter of your life with your spouse, but it's not necessary to take them through it word for word. For example, while they don't have to hear the nitty-gritty details of your past sexual history, they *do* need to be aware of your past partners. While they don't need to know the exact details of your past traumatic experience, they do need to understand the things in your past that have shaped you into the person you are today. While they don't need to know the exact names of the people you lusted after today, they do need to understand you're struggling in this area and working to transform your heart and mind. Share the summary with your spouse, and share the details with the Lord. And then wait and see how this level of openness and authenticity brings an intimacy to your marriage that you've never experienced before.

Spiritual Intimacy

Husbands, let me tell you one of the most powerful aphrodisiacs you can give your wife: *praying for her out loud*. If she is feeling judged by your mom or hers, nervous about speaking to a friend, anxious about work, or stressed by anything else, take a moment to ask, "Can I pray for you?" Put your hand on her shoulder while you pray, hug her afterward, and then, later in the day, follow up and ask her how she's doing or how the anxiety-producing situation went.

Some of the deepest and most powerful moments of intimacy in a marriage happen above the sheets, in the spiritual connection between a husband and wife. When we share our heart and bare our soul before God, with our spouse by our side, a supernatural bond brings us together like nothing else can. When the Lord is the third party in

our relationship, the marriage is stabilized and strengthened because “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

As I look back on my relationship with John, I realize some of our most intimate moments had more to do with prayer than sex—moments when we were broken by the hardships of life, sitting hand in hand on our bed, crying out to the Lord together for our children, our families, and one another. If that’s not intimacy, I don’t know what is. And I’m not the only one who resonates with this sentiment. Across the board, all the couples I interviewed recognized the power of spiritual intimacy in their marriage and, also most interesting to note, acknowledged how the spiritual connection positively affected their sexual connection:

When my husband and I are in sync spiritually, it impacts everything. It even brings a new level of freedom to our sex life.

When we aren’t connecting spiritually, sex can almost feel flat and impersonal.

When we have a genuine spiritual connection, sex is always so much more intense.

When we aren’t connected, sex feels like work at the beginning. I almost always end up enjoying sex, but it takes quite a bit of warming up and a ton of mental work on my part, where I have to constantly refocus my mind and ask the Lord to help me engage and serve my husband. It can feel very impersonal to me and sometimes like a Band-Aid fix for the spiritual intimacy that is lacking in our relationship.

I want to address a false notion that can have a great impact on our sex lives. We’re often told that men are *just* wired to be visual, or that they’re simply physical or sexual beings. And while men may be more inclined toward a physical experience of sex, to put them in such a small

box is not only degrading but inaccurate. Men are fueled by emotional and spiritual intimacy because God wired them that way. The need for a deep and meaningful connection with another human being is not a male/female thing—it's a human being thing—human beings who are made in the image of God. Let's not underestimate this truth or make light of the need for emotional and spiritual connection. Mature men understand this need and work to achieve a deep connection in their marriage. In fact, one of the most insightful responses to our question about spiritual intimacy came from a man married for twenty years:

When we're not connected emotionally or spiritually, it has a chilling effect on our sex life. When it feels like we're disconnected, I don't want to initiate sex. I don't want Janell to feel like she has a duty to have sex with me even when she's not in the mood, and if we're not truly connected, she's not likely to be in the mood.

Early in our marriage, I didn't understand this. I thought, *We know how sex works and we both enjoy it, so why shouldn't it bring us together even if there are other aspects of our relationship that aren't perfect?* Basically, I thought that as long as we had sex, everything else would work itself out eventually.

Of course, it's more complicated than that, and I've since figured out that obligatory, perfunctory sex is just not that great. It's still sex, sure, but it leads to a lot of hurt, and it's definitely not what God intends a fulfilling marriage to look like. I do believe that God can use sex to bring healing to other areas of a marriage, as we've both experienced, but the healing came from God and not from the act of sex itself.

The quality of our relationship above the sheets impacts the quality of our relationship under the sheets. How are you nurturing your personal relationship with the Lord, and in turn, how are you allowing that relationship to overflow into the life of your spouse? What does your spiritual connection with your spouse look like today, right here and right now?

Human beings are holistic. We're made to connect on every level—emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically. When all of these components are in sync and aligned, the outcome is a deeper satisfaction, joy, and intimacy than you ever thought possible. But when one of these components is off, it will inevitably impact the others.

All of this matters because once the initial sexual chemistry in a marriage has waned, a healthy sex life is a reflection of the overall health of a relationship. But a struggling sex life is often a reflection of a misalignment in one or more of these areas. It's a symptom of an emotional or relational disconnect in the relationship. No strategies, techniques, or sexual positions are going to give you what you need in your sex life if you don't care for the health of your relationship overall. But as you work on the other areas of your marriage, your sex life will ultimately reap a great reward. As you take time to learn about strategies for under the sheets, I challenge you and your spouse to take a moment to think about how you're doing above the sheets.

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