When Sex in Marriage Doesn’t Work
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Ponder this….

- Where does the Christian couple turn when sex is unsatisfactory; when they fail to achieve orgasm or unity in sexual expressions?
- What are some of the problems that lead to sex problems in marriage?
- Are you prepared to discuss sexual matters in a careful, clear, and God-honoring manner, without embarrassment?

Thesis

- Christian counselors and wise friends have an opportunity to
  - speak about the beauty and brokenness of sex and,
  - invite wounded individuals to explore sex problems within a holy and safe context

30 Second Advertisement

- A joint venture by CCEF DE & Biblical Seminary
  - Counseling & The Local Church for credit!
    - January 18, 2010
  - Dynamics of Biblical Change for credit!
    - April 2010
  - Convert other CCEF courses to graduate credit?
  - See Biblical Seminary’s table (and get your Thyme)
By the end the hour you should

- Reviewed foundational truths about sex problems
- Identify the 3 main types of problems couples have in regard to sex (and their sub-issues)
- Be able to identify good assessment procedures to help couples talk about embarrassing matters
- Have some ideas about practical helps
- Recognize when sex therapy is NOT a good idea

Foundations: Truth about sexual problems

- Sexual dysfunction stems from multiple causes
  - Disease (liver, prostate, diabetes, high blood pressure)
  - Medicines (beta-blockers, anti-hypertensives, SSRIs)
  - Desire (abuse, rigidity, hormones, stress, addiction)
  - Expectations (naiveté, idealism, bad experiences)
  - Habits, skills
  - Relational difficulties (conflict, abuse, affairs)

Happily, most dysfunctions are quite solvable
But, "Just do it", "relax", or other forms of force and manipulation NEVER work

Foundations: Popular notion of good sex

- Desire
- Excitement
- Resolution

Problem with this model?
- Individual, rather than couple focused!

Foundations: Better ingredients!

- Touch
- Desire
- Letting Go
- Trust!

Positive Experience
Foundations: Some baseline assumptions

- God intended couples to have pleasurable sex
- Sexual desire can be a good and godly pursuit
- Good sex is defined by that which promotes oneness
- After Gen. 3: It is common for couples to struggle with their sex life
  - Deception
  - Oneness (relationship/trust) problems
  - Sins done by us; done to us
  - Failing bodies

Foundations: Complications to godly sex

- We live in a sex-saturated, “pornified” society
  - Tons of information…much of it distorted; focused on me and on technique
- Sex is good but not the greatest good
  - Orgasms are good but do not define good sex
  - Exposure to cultural views of sex shape our views of and experiences of sex
    - From the church?
    - From the world (or Viagra)?

3 Types of Problems*

- His problems
- Her problems
- Their problems

*There aren’t any problems that are just his/hers

Assessment: Find the problem(s)
Simpler…

Sex Therapy Assessments

- **Sex Therapy Questionnaire**
  - Surveys desire, arousal, technique satisfaction, orgasm, pain, and relationship domains

- **Erectile Dysfunction specific questionnaire**
  - Pfizer owned questionnaires (free with registration) for male and female specific dysfunctions

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**His Problems**

- **Premature Ejaculation**
  - What constitutes “early”?
  - Most ejaculate within 2 minutes of vigorous thrusting; some before
  - Goal: to delay orgasm by becoming aware and stopping
  - Use of medications possible
  - Is there a better goal? How does she feel about it?

- **Erectile Dysfunction**
  - 2nd more frequent problem; few seek help
  - Problem:
    - Blood flow, nerve dysfunction, aging, or relationship problem
    - Ask about medicines; prostate issues; diabetes

- **Weak Orgasm and Anorgasmia (next slide)**

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**Skills, Habits, or Perception Problems**

- Where is his focus? Self? Wife?
- What is his view of sex? Use of porn? Masturbation?
Recipe for male orgasm?

Blood-flow

Desire

Friction

Volume

Aging Issues

His problems, continued

› Do men struggle with desire?
  › YES! Don’t stereotype
  › Why?
    › Discord
    › Shame (body, history, failure, etc.)
    › Low testosterone (test for total available testosterone)
  › Note that many things masquerade as desire problems

Good questions for him

› What are your expectations for sex? Fears?
  Concerns? What do you consider to be good?
› Where do you first notice the problem? Desire?
  Arousal? Orgasm?
› How long has this been a problem?
  › Was it ever better? When did it change?
› First exposure to sex? Pornography? How often do you masturbate?
› Known medical problems? Medicines?
› Attempts to solve this problem?
› Level of trust and/or conflict with your wife?

Her problems:

› Desire
  › 33% of random survey indicated “lack of interest” (next highest reason: lack of lubrication (22%))
  › Note the vicious cycle here
  › Why?
    › No clear Christian message on how to cultivate desire
› What is the engine for sexual desire?
  › Lust?
  › Romantic love?
  › Or…
Why low desire?

- Health issues
- Energy level
- Depression/meds
- Young children
- Hormones
- Breast feeding
- Medications
- Painful intercourse or other unsatisfactory experiences
- How she feels about her appearance
- How she perceives her marriage partner
- Different views on frequency
- How she feels about other relationships
- Aversion due to past abuse or family culture of rigidity

One more thought...

- There will always be a higher desire person and a lower desire person in every marriage
- The lower desire person “controls” sex
- This does not have to be a problem! Unless
  - The HD feels their personhood is tied up in the LD sexual desire because...
  - The LD feels guilty and a problem for being LD because...

Ideas from David Schnarch, *Intimacy & Desire*

Physiological problems

- Pain/fear problems
  - Vaginismus, Dyspareunia (pain), Vulvodynia
- Hormonal issues in cycle or in lifespan
- Medicine side-effects
- Always request careful gynecological exam and workup

Problems and solutions to pain

- Rule-out/resolve physiological issues
- Take intercourse off the table
- Explore fears and concerns and promote relaxation
- Non-penetrating sexual activity plus private use of dilators in safe environment
Good questions for her

- When you think about sex, what feelings come to mind? What would be good sex for you? What barriers are getting in the way?
- Did you ever consider your sex life good? When did the problems begin?
- What attempts have you made to solve it?
- Early experiences with sex (exposure; abuse)?
- Habits with sexual fantasy and masturbation?

Aging and sex

- For him...
  - Decreased volume of semen
  - Decreased firmness in erections
  - Increased direct stimulation needed
  - More likely other disease states interfere

- For her...
  - Decreased vasoconstriction (arousal)
  - Increased need for direct stimulation, BUT
  - Decreased lubrication
  - Thinning of vaginal tissues

Refer to a Doctor or Trained therapist

- Aversion or compulsive problems
- Sensate-focus to extend his length of time until ejaculation
- Medical interventions for ED
- Medication review to deal with side effects of medications or other disease states
- Pain or vaginismus and the use of dilators
- Hormone imbalances
- Gynecological examination
- Aversion and disgust for all sexual activity

Things you can (and should!) explore

- Perception differences about “good” sex
  - What is “normal” (e.g., what constitutes PE? Use of sex aids? Simultaneous orgasms? Scheduled vs. spontaneous?)
  - Redefining healthy marriage and sex
- Unsatisfactory experiences, fears, dreams
- Barriers to satisfactory experiences
- Relationship conflicts
  - Approach-avoidance dance (often about frequency)
  - Better communication of desires and requests
  - Trust, vulnerability, and letting go of control
- Cultivating desire
- Developing alternative sexual activities when penetration or orgasm is not possible
- Protecting purity and honor of the covenant
Prepare for these questions!

- Is masturbation okay? If my wife says it is okay? As part of our sex life? What if my doctor says I need to do it to understand how to have an orgasm?
- What about the use of sex toys? Anal sex? Oral sex? Is there anything off limits in our bedroom?
- Use of explicit books/videos in sex instruction?

Ethical and Boundary Goals

- Avoid all unnecessary details (watch yourself, your own fantasy life, and your interest in their sex life)
- Seek supervision; question your motives
- Avoid sex therapy in dual relationships
- Avoid all dictating or directing sexual activity
  - Goal: oneness & pleasure building; not intercourse!
- Know when sex therapy is NOT indicated:
  - Current/past affairs; addictions, sexual trauma; domestic violence and controlling behaviors
  - Deal with these other problems first
  - Sex therapy works only in a safe, trusting relationship

Sex therapy and the abuse victim

- Deal with the trauma first when possible
- The spouse will need extra support and education; Assess whether he is able to support his wife in her counseling
- Prepare them how to respond to triggers
  - Communicate!
  - Interpret!
- Encourage her to be active rather than passive in her sexuality

Good questions for YOU!

- Are you able to talk about sex using proper terms without embarrassment?
- Can you talk intelligently about the variety of sexual problems in marriage?
- Are you overly curious about sex?
- What sexual issues, experiences, or expectations hinder your ability to talk with others about sex?
- Are you patient, gentle, and flexible?
- Are you willing to refer for matters outside your expertise?
Summary

- The goal of sex is pleasurable oneness in a trust environment.
- There are a number of threats (expectations, habits, diseases, aging, fears, conflicts)—explore, don’t jump to conclusions.
- There are a number of technologies and counseling interventions for desire, arousal, orgasm, pain, and relationship issues.
- Technologies are neither good nor bad but goals need to be evaluated.
- Goal: connection not penetration; patience rather than demand.
- Wise “friends” encourage practical helps, look at the bigger relational picture, comfort, BUT do NOT direct.
- The best technology? Your careful questions!!!

Consider these helps

BOOKS

  Also *The Gift of Sex*.
  Also *Celebration of Sex for Newly Weds*.

Experts

- Find out what gynecologists and urologists have a good reputation to understand and treat individuals with sexual problems; Get to know them!

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Musings of a Christian Psychologist

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