



TIME OF GRACE®

Sexpectations: Sex Is Work

Study Notes

Summary

Too many people expect sex to be easy, just like it is in the movies. But that expectation leads to pressure, frustration, and disillusionment with others. God, on the other hand, expects sex to be the result of a process of love and respect. The apostle Paul's classic words to husbands and wives aren't mainly about sex, but they are the key to true intimacy. Love like Christ. Respect like the church. That's where love grows. "One flesh" love included.

- Your #1 question: Why are we so sexually _____?
- Sex is _____.
- **Genesis 4:1:** Adam made love to his wife Eve.
- Adam "made love" = _____ (Hebrew) = Adam "_____ " his wife.
- **Ephesians 5:31:** "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."
- **Ephesians 5:28:** In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.
- **Ephesians 5:21:** Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- God's answer: Differences let you (make) _____.
- Sex is _____.
- **Ephesians 5:25-27:** ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Points to Ponder

1. Think of the last depiction of sex you saw in a movie or TV show. What did it teach you to expect about the ease/difficulty of good sex? Did the people involved “know” each other, love each other, and respect each other?
2. Agree/Disagree: Selflessness is the key ingredient to good and godly sex.
3. Reread Ephesians 5:25-17. What word from those verses would bring the most comfort to someone who feels ashamed for messing up God’s plan for sex?

Homework for Next Week

Read Proverbs 5-7.

“Love is the doorway through which the human soul passes from selfishness to service.”
—Jack Hyles

Time of Grace Ministry
Sexpectations: Sex Is Work
Ephesians 5: 21-31
August 15, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

A few weeks ago, I sent a survey to the members of our church family, and part of the survey said, "If you could ask God any one question about sex, what would that question be?" And you know what the most common response I got to that was? I'll show you up on the screen.

Your number-one question, if you're taking notes, you can write this down, is, why are we so sexually different? Pastor, why are we so different? Why do I want more sex than my spouse does? Why does my spouse want so much more sex when I'm okay with this much? A bunch of you asked the question, why do guys want it more than girls? And, that's not always true, and seven out of ten relationships, they say that's the case, but in almost every relationship, there's a difference when it comes to sexual desire. There's someone who we might call the higher desire partner, and another that's the lower desire partner. And it might seem like just another difference and another dynamic when it comes to relationships, but this one is different in a powerful way.

I mean, if you marry someone, and one of you is an extrovert, and one of you is an introvert, it probably won't cause that much tension and problems, in fact, those opposites might attract for a reason. You know, you go to a party, and one of you likes to talk a lot, and one of you doesn't like to talk very much, and it's the perfect combination, but it's not that way with sex. When there are sexual differences, and we don't deal with them, the difference can be destructive. And they say one of the leading causes of divorce is not just marriage and finances and kids, it's sex. Because if we don't figure out the difference, the partner who we might call the higher desire is going to feel frustrated and rejected and ignored, and perhaps even unloved.

If there's only one person in a relationship who seems regularly interested enough to initiate sex, the person might feel, you know, disrespected, unappreciated, undesirable, or even unattractive. Give them enough time, and a higher desire partner, who often gives and receives love through physical touch and sex, will wonder, am I really loved at all? And the lower desire partner has just as many destructive thoughts. The lower desire will often feel pressured, and exhausted. He or she feels like she's trying, but it's never good enough, and we're having another conversation, and another fight about sex, and I'm never going to meet his needs, I'm never going to satisfy her desires.

This gets destructive, and a couple starts to wonder, are we compatible? Are we meant to be together? What's wrong with me, or him, or her, or us, or our marriage? And the world doesn't help with that question. Because if you watch the shows, and the movies, and you listen to the songs, no one tells you about the frustration of sexual differences. No, sex in the media, if it's one thing, is easy. Right? You just need a look, you just need a spark. You just need a zing. You

just need a comment, an innuendo, an outfit, and boom, two people are enjoying sex, and they're passionate, and they're exhausted, and they're satisfied, and so, when you see that your entire life, and you get into a relationship and sex is not like that, you wonder, what's wrong? It's supposed to be so easy, so why is it so difficult, why is it so much work for us?

If you ever had to wrestle with that, I want to tell you today, I get it. I mean, I really, really, really get it. And my wife said I could share a little bit about our journey and our relationship with you, and I want to tell you that my wife and I do not have a really happy marriage. We have a ridiculously happy marriage. Like, can I boast to the glory of God right now? We love being married so much. We got married when we were 22 years old, and I'm so glad we married young, because it's been the best, like, earthly thing that has ever happened to me.

Someone gave us some advice early in marriage that you should try to pray together every day, you should go on a date every week, you should get out of town every quarter, and you should vacation together every year. And, we haven't done that perfectly, but we've tried to, and it has been so good for us. We never get sick of spending time with each other. We laugh together, we love -- we're going to date each other until we die. I adore my wife. We are on the same page spiritually, financially, relationally, as parents, like, I -- no disrespect to any of you married couples, but I would not want your marriages, because I love having mine. But after seven years of being married, you know where we were? In a therapist's office. Want to guess why? Why are we so different? I mean, we love each other, we adore each other. How can we be on the same page with, like, everything in marriage, except for this?

So today, I want teach you something really, really important, and just so you don't miss it, in case you fall asleep, I mean, let me give you the big idea, right up-front. I want to teach you today from the Bible that sex is work. That sex is good, and sex is from God, but if sex is going to be good and what God intends, it will be work. And that's what we learned from the very first time that sex happens in the pages of the Bible.

Last week, I told you that the invention of sex pops up on page one. God says to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply, enjoy sex," and He says, "It's very good," and page two, we find out that Adam and Eve are naked and unashamed, but we never hear about them actually having sex until Genesis 4, and how God describes their connection, that the first act of intimacy is meaningful and it's beautiful, and I don't want you to miss it. Here's what that passage says, Genesis 4:1. Says: "Adam made love to his wife Eve," and the verb there is everything, right? He made love, he didn't just have sex, he made love. You know, think about the billion different ways that we talk about sex, you know, he didn't just get lucky, he didn't just get some, he didn't just get it on, he didn't, you know, do the nasty, the naughty, the dirty, what do we always call it, the bow-chicka-wow-wow, you know?

No, the Bible says Adam made love to his wife Eve. It's like, there was no sex without love. And you know what love is? Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't rude. It's not self-seeking. It's not easily angered. Love always protects another person. Love always perseveres with another person. God knew, like, from the very inception, that if sex was going to be good, it would have to be love.

Some of you have been through my premarital counseling course, where lesson one is about love, and I try to blow up this idea that, you know, love is just some passionate feeling that you fall into. No, love is a choice. It's a verb. It's something that we do day after day after day, we do the work of love, which makes people feel loved. And God knows that leads to good love. But even more interesting than that is how Moses originally wrote those words.

You might know that Genesis 4 was written about 1,500 BC by a guy named Moses, who wasn't writing in the English language, he was writing in Hebrew, and if you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write this down, that the Hebrew word for made love, it's just one word, it's the word "yadah" in Hebrew. Could you say that out-loud with me? Yadah. Yeah, one more time. Yadah, is the Hebrew, and it doesn't actually mean make love, here's the literal translation. It means that Adam knew his wife. Yadah is just the simple Hebrew verb that means to know something, like, to know the answer to a question. So when God first said that a man had sex with a woman, He said he knew her. Like, sex wasn't just about, like, technique or passion or pleasure, it was about deeply knowing someone.

My wife and I read this really great book the other day called "Friends, Partners, and Lovers" by Kevin Thompson. And Kevin Thompson says he often gets to speak to college students about God and sex, and he has this great opening line, I think I'm going to steal it from him. Here's his opening line. He says to college kids: "Listen, your parents are better at sex than you are." And can you imagine the looks on these college kid's faces? I mean, first, they say, "Ew, no. I don't want to think about that." And second, "Not a chance. Like, my parents? My -- you know, getting older, gaining weight, kind of parents? No way." And, he wonders, well, why do kids think that? I mean, why would they assume that the people who have years, maybe decades, of experience having sex would somehow not be better at it? And the answer is because our culture has taught us that sex has nothing to do with knowing someone. You know, it's more about acrobatics than it is about true intimacy. It's more about three techniques that you read in some article of some teen magazine, than about three years of doing life together, and talking and listening and learning and loving, but God knows what makes sex good, and interestingly, in surveys of Americans, the most satisfied people sexually are? Old, married people. It's not young, honeymoon sex that's the most satisfying and passionate. When people truly know each other, because they've done life together, sex gets really, really good.

And let me tell you why. I brought something with me here today. This is a violin, and I'm about to play it for you. I should tell you, though, that I've never played a violin before. I've been tempted, but I want to tell you, in my 38 years of being on this earth, I've never actually touched a violin, so I asked an incredible violin player from our church, "Could I borrow your violin?" And apparently, this is her back-up to the back-up to the back-up of her back-up violin. So I don't think she trusts me very much. All right, here we go. And I should tell you, I've watched some YouTube videos on how to play a violin. And I even read a couple articles on beginners -- show of hands, how many of you think this is going to be awesome? Nah, I mean awesome, like, good, talented? And all those hands went down? All right, here we go, ready?

Wow. That just happened, huh? Like, of course, of course you wouldn't expect that to be any good. I've never done it before, so why would we expect that about sex? Like, why we would use the phrase, honeymoon sex, and think that we're going to know what we're doing? Why would people feel embarrassed when they have their first sexual experience, and it does not go well? We would never expect that about anything in life, so why would we expect it about sex?

It's an incredibly liberating thing that takes all the pressure off of our sexual experiences, when we read of how that first experience is described, that Adam knew his wife. He had to know her. And how incredible it is when we don't put this tension and pressure, I mean, if sex is really about being comfortable, and naked, and unashamed, and not embarrassed, how freeing would it be to say, you know what? I have no clue what I'm doing, and neither do you, but let's learn together.

But, what a healthy way to approach sex that no one tells us in this world. And if you're married, the same advice is so beautiful. I mean, the best thing about being married is that you have days and weeks, you start to gather years and decades, of knowing each other, which is what makes sex really, really good. I mean, you have a chance to study your spouse, to take notes, to learn from the times that go well, and the times that don't, for the times you fight and fall on your face, and truly connect and are intimate. If you're willing to be a student of your spouse, you'll learn what makes sex really, really good.

So I'd ask you questions like this, like, when does your spouse feel most connected with you? Like, is there a time of day when she is just, like, energized and alive? Is she a morning person, or a night owl? What's the best time that her mind is going to be most engaged and with it? Well, what kind of man did you marry? Is he spontaneous? You know, if he's in the middle of some work, if he's returning emails, like, if you interrupt that, and hit on him, and put on the moves with him, will he be annoyed, because he really wants to get this job done and check this box, or will he be flattered and willing to put his work down?

Do you know that? Do you know your spouse's love language? I mean, is it gifts and flowers, is it time together, is it talking and praying and holding hands, is it a back rub, is it a thoughtful note, is it a flirtatious text, is it an emoji in the middle of the workday? What connects? What kind of person did you marry? Are they comfortable with sex, or do they get nervous about it? Can you spring new ideas on them in the moment, or do they panic and get afraid? And the beautiful journey of marriage is that we get a long, long time to answer these questions. And if we don't see sex as something bad or shameful or taboo, if we can actually talk about this and gain knowledge, we can truly find the foundation that makes sex as beautiful as it can be.

It makes me think about a field trip I took a couple years ago with my daughter. We were up in Green Bay, and I saw these female turkeys eating their lunch. And all of them are, like, pecking seeds out of the ground, and then, this tom turkey showed up, have I told you this story before? I've never seen anything like it. Feathers go up. And he puffs up his chest, like, as big as I've ever seen a turkey, and he starts doing this.

And none of the female turkeys look up, so he -- and I'm just watching this guy, I'm like, dude. Like, you didn't yadah them, like, you didn't know, like, this isn't the right time, but, you know, I know a lot of husbands that do that. Like, they strut through the kitchen and they think, you know, I'm going to flex, maybe, I'll take my shirt off, and she'll be interested. Like, no, you have to know her. You have to know what she's like. You have to know what makes her feel connected. There's so many guys who think, like, I'm going to put this brash move on, and then we're going to connect, when she can't connect until you talk, until you communicate, until you listen, until you understand. You have to yadah, you have to know the person that you're with. And a lot of women who make a similar mistake. They think through communication and talking, we're really going to-- he's really going to be into me, when really, he just wants you to take your shirt off, and strut through the kitchen, right?

So, you have to know the person that you're with, like Adam knew his wife. Put that knowledge into practice, work, love, and respect. And sex can be everything that God intended. Which is what the apostle Paul said. You know, I've been squeezing a whole lot of message here out of that little phrase, Genesis 4:1, but when you get to the most famous section on marriage in the New Testament, Paul makes a really similar point. Lemme prove it to you.

In Ephesians, where he talks about love and respect and husbands and wives, Paul says: "For this reason a man will leave this father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." Now, that's a quote from Genesis 2. And one flesh is a reminder that we're not just, you know, one mind or one heart, like, our two bodies are becoming one, this includes sex, so much more, but definitely sex is included. But before Paul gets to that point, he makes a really incredible point about knowledge and about love and about work. Look what he says, just a few verses earlier in Ephesians 5:28. He says: "In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

I like that verse. Guys, do you know how much you love your own body? A lot. You might not like the pounds you've put on since high school, but I guarantee that you love your body a lot, and here's the proof. You know your body, and you work on that knowledge. You know immediately when your body's cold, and you do the work of putting on a sweatshirt. You know immediately when your body is hungry, and you do the work of going to the fridge, or driving through the drive-thru. You know when your body's too warm, and so, you reach and you immediately do the work to turn on the air conditioning. A man loves his body because he knows it well, and he's willing to do the work to meet his body's needs.

And what does Paul say? Even before he gets to sex. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives. They ought to know, from all their days and hours and conversations, they ought to know what makes their wife feel loved. And they ought to do the work to meet those needs. Before Paul gets to sex, he wants to say this. Know your wife. Ladies, know your husband. Put that knowledge into practice, do the sacrificial work of love. And then, you're truly ready to become one flesh in all the ways that God intended that to be.

I might summarize it the way Paul did a few verses earlier, in Ephesians 5:21, he said: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." You love Jesus, you've been moved by His

unconditional love, so, submit. Serve each other. Put each other first. And then, marriage, and this beautiful gift, will be what God intended.

And I think, really, that's the answer to your question. Some of you asked me, why are we so sexually different? Why is this so challenging? Why is this so much work? If you're taking notes, here's my answer to that question. God's answer is because those differences let you make love. Because when you do the work for someone, they know that you love them. And imagine, if both of you in a relationship wanted the exact same thing sexually, you could be totally self-centered and self-serving when it came to sex, but if you're different, then it forces you to love.

Then, if you're a higher desire partner, and your spouse isn't interested when they say no, but instead of pouting and punishing them, or turning to pornography, instead, you're patient and you're kind, and you still serve -- they'll know that they're loved. And if you're the lower desire person, and maybe, you're okay with sex once a month or once a week, but you pursue more than that, what is your spouse going to know? Not just the momentary pleasure of sex, but that they're actually loved, that you're willing to do the work, because you value your relationship, and you value them, as a spouse.

So the differences open up something so much bigger that God cares so much more about, and that's love. But I made you a promise, when I started this conversation. That every time we would talk about sex, we'd talk about something else. And that something is forgiveness. And before I say amen, I'm going to keep that promise to you, and I'm going to remind you of something that I had you write down last week. I want you to write it down again, that sex is forgivable.

And maybe, you're a person that didn't do the hard work of waiting, and you jumped into sexual pleasure before God wanted to give you that good gift. Maybe, you were the higher desire partner, and you didn't do the work of being patient, and being kind, and you turned sex, which was supposed to be so good and comforting and connecting, into a point of tension, and conflict, and division.

Or maybe, you were the lower desire partner, and you didn't do the work. You thought of what was easy for you, and you worked for the kids, and you worked for your boss, but you didn't work for your spouse. And they had nowhere else to go, they made a commitment to you that they would explore their sexuality nowhere else but you, and you gave them nowhere else to go. If that's you, amen, that's been me. How amazing is it that sex is forgivable? That despite the mess, Jesus is crazy with His forgiveness. He's so incredibly patient, because Jesus Christ did the work.

That's what the apostle Paul said. You know, Paul gives all this good advice, husbands should love his wife as his own body, submit to one another, love and respect, serve, become one flesh, but in the middle of that, do you know what Paul spent the most words on? Jesus. Look what he says in Ephesians 5. He said: "Husbands, love your wives," and he goes on a big tangent: "just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the

washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Isn't that incredible? If you believe in Jesus Christ, you are the church that Paul is talking about, and look what he says, that Jesus Christ loved you. He loved you. He didn't just have a feeling, He did the work to love you. He is patient with you. He's not easily angered with you. He does not keep a record of your wrongs. He always protects your soul, and He always perseveres in love. And He didn't just say that, He didn't just write that in a Hallmark card, Paul said Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

And we tattoo crosses on our bodies, we put them up in our churches, because Jesus showed the extent of His love, and He worked His way all the way to the Cross, why? Well, Paul says, to make you holy. You know, holy means, it means you can look in the mirror, and you don't have to be mad anymore. It means that there's not a spot or a stain or a wrinkle or a blemish, it means God sees something beautiful and powerful and kind. It means that God isn't angry, He's not disappointed, He's not disgusted, He has made you holy, and Paul's not done, because He cleansed you by the washing with water through the word, have you been baptized before? Well, that's what God did for you. He cleansed you, like, you're not dirty to Him, no matter how big your sexual struggles have been. He cleansed you so that you're white and pure and perfect, and brilliant, and Paul keeps going, to present her, present you, to Himself as a radiant church, like, if you had to stand before God and He knew everything about the past, what would He see? And Paul says, because Jesus did the work, He doesn't see someone who's wretched, He sees someone who is radiant. He doesn't see someone who disgusts Him, He sees someone who delights Him. We are the bride of Christ, and He is not disappointed with His bride. Because there is no stain, there is no wrinkle, there's no blemish, because Jesus did the work. We are holy and blameless.

Believe that. God's not going to blame you. He will not shame you. He will not be ashamed of you. Because Jesus forgave you. I want you to know that sex is good. And if you do the hard work of love, sex gets even better. More than anything today, I have to convince you that Jesus Christ is the best.

Let's pray.

Thank You, Jesus. And thank You, that as we figure this out, we don't have to wonder what You think of us. Thank You for grace, Your grace that is new every single morning. Thank You for mercy for all of us here today. God, we struggle so badly when it comes to honoring You with our bodies, so thank You, that You're willing to forgive those things, too.

Jesus, You are our Living Hope, that when You rose from the dead on Easter morning, You made a promise to us that when You began to breathe again, that there would always be hope for us, there would always be a future, and it's a great future because of You.

Thank You, God, that You never let us go. And some of us have had really great experiences with sex, and some of us wish we could forget that, but in every high, and in every low, God, like we sang tonight, You never let us go.

I thank You, God, that we have a church where we can talk about this. I thank You, that we don't have to carry these secrets, these burdens, these addictions, these memories on our own. We can talk about them, we can confess them, and we can remind each other what You say on so many pages of the Bible, that there is hope, because You are a merciful and a saving God.

Thank You, Jesus, that You didn't come down to this world to give us good advice, because we can't fix it. You came to give us good news, that You did fix it. And I pray that we could respond today in love.

I pray today, God, for every person who's not married today, that You would give them satisfaction in knowing that You are their God, and You give them patience to wait until the time is right. I pray for every husband and every wife, especially those who have struggled with sex, that You would give them patience and kindness and love and forgiveness. I pray they could talk today on the car ride home, that they could figure some things out, and make this the joy that You intend it to be.

And I thank You, God, for our church. Thank You, that we're blameless and holy in Your sight, because the blood of Your Son, Jesus. It's in His name that we pray, and we pray with confidence, because we know who we are, in Jesus' name, amen.