

Time of Grace Ministry
Sexpectations: Sex Is Work
Ephesians: 5: 21-33
November 10, 2019

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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 do 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 in seven out of 10 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 that 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 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. You know, 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 then 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's it so difficult? Why's it so much work for us?

If you've ever had to wrestle with that, I want to tell you today I get it. I mean, I really, really, really get it. 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 try to and it's 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're on the same page spiritually, financially, relationally as parents. Like, I - no disrespect to you married couples - but I would want not your marriages because I love having mine.

But after seven years of being married, do you know where we were? In a therapist's office. You want to guess why? Why are we so different? We love each other, we adore each other - how can we be on the same page with like everything in marriage except for this? You see, no one told us when we started marriage the thing that I want to tell you today; the thing that I wish I would have heard the first day of my marriage. The thing I wish I would have heard before I even got married. It's a thing that you find in the Old and New Testament. It's right there in the Bible but if no one opens the Bible and talks about sex, you'll never hear it and you'll have to suffer the consequences of not knowing it. So today, I want to teach you something really important and just so you don't miss it in case you fall asleep on me, 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 learn 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." He says it's very good. And on page two, we find out 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. 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 - it 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, you know, he didn't 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 do 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 1500 B.C. 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. The Hebrew word for "made love" is just one word; it's the word "yada," in Hebrew. Could you say that out loud with me? Yada. Yeah, one more time: Yada is the Hebrew and it doesn't actually mean "make love." Here's the literal translation; it means that Adam "knew his wife." Yada 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. That sex wasn't just about 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 there's 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." Can you imagine the looks on these college kids 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? Not - 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 about 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. I think of how paradigm shifting this idea is that sex is about knowledge. I think it's an incredible relief for people who are about to get married. I think it's the best encouragement for people who are married and I think it's incredibly liberating for people who are dating and one day hope to be married.

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 backup to the backup to the backup of her backup violin, so I don't think she trusts me very much. Alright, here we go. I should tell you, I've watched some YouTube videos on how to play a violin and I even read a couple articles on beginning violin - show of hands of how many of you think this is going to be awesome? No, I mean awesome like good, talented and all those hands went down. Alright, here we go. Ready? Wow. That just happened. Like of course, of course, of course you wouldn't expect that to be any good. I've

never done it before so why, why, why would we expect that about sex? Like why would we 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?

This incredibly liberating thing that takes all the pressure off of our sexual experiences when we read 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 have this tension and pressure. I mean, if sex is really about being comfortable and naked and unashamed and not embarrassed, how freeing it would be to say, "You know what? I have no clue what I'm doing and neither do you but let's learn together." What a healthy way to approach that except 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 engaging with it? 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, if you interrupt that and hit on him and put on the moves, 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 what? 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 backrub? 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 fieldtrip I took a couple of years ago with my daughter. We were up in Green Bay and I saw these female turkeys eating their lunch and all of them were 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 was just watching this guy and I'm like, "Dude! Like, you didn't yada them." Like, you didn't know. This isn't the right time but you know, I know a lot of husbands that do that. They strut through the kitchen, they think, you know, I'm going to flex; maybe I'll take my shirt off and she'll be interested. And no, like 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 yada; you have to know the

person that you're with. And I know 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.

But I want to be careful with the generalities, right? Because Adam didn't know all the wives; the Bible passage said Adam knew his wife. His wife. Lots of couples get in trouble when they compare their sexual experiences to other people. You know, you hear the American average is how many times a couple is having sex and you compare and you feel pressure but you're not the average American couple. You're you. I've read 84 books on dating, marriage, sex and relationships; I counted them this past week. And the best thing I've read in all those books - and actually just came across this here - was a pastor who said a couple's sexual relationship is kind of like a child to them. And just like I couldn't compare my child to your child, I can't compare my sex life with my wife to anyone else's. And just like bringing the child into this world, we know it can be a really good thing but sometimes it's going to be a really difficult thing and it's going to cost us a lot of time and communication and effort. But that the thing, if we put in the work and the effort, it's going to bring us so much joy and happiness. When you have a child together, you don't say, "Well, this is your kid," or "this is your kid." No, this is our kid and when there are problems with the kid, we work through it together as a couple. And when we see sex that way, that there's going to be ups and downs or we have to figure some things out and we're going to go through different stages of life, there's going to be pregnancy and depression and anxiety and confusion and stress at work and things we have to work through from our past. But if this is our thing, like this child that we want to raise to be healthy and happy, as it grows older it will bring us more satisfaction and joy than we could ever imagine.

How does the Bible talk about sex? Knowledge. Know each other. 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. Let me prove it to you. In Ephesians 5 when he talks about love and respect and husbands and wives, Paul says, "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh." That's a quote from Genesis 2 and one flesh is the reminder that, you know, we're not just the 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 verse twenty-eight. 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 you 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 through. 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.

You might summarize it the way that Paul did a few verses earlier. In verse 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. So many of you ask me why are we so sexually different? Why is this so challenging? Why is this so much work? And 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. 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. See, 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. That because of Jesus, a virgin who was born of a virgin, sex is forgivable, which is really, really good news, isn't it? I don't know, maybe I was talking about the good work of good love today; you're just feeling the burden of sex that wasn't good in your past. Because maybe in your past, you didn't do the work that sex required. That 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 is 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 and then 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 about how husband 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. 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 and loves. 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. You know, 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 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 Jesus keeps presenting her, presents 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 is 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've got to convince you that Jesus Christ is the best.

Let's pray.

Thank you, Jesus. I thank you that as we figure this out, we don't have to wonder of 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 sins, 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. 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 can respond today in love. I pray today, God, for every person who's not married today; that you'd give them satisfaction in knowing 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've 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.

I thank you, God for our church. Thank you that we are blameless and holy in your sight because of 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.



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