



What Does Sex Mean To Your Spouse?

by Matt Schmidt



One of the most beautiful and enjoyable things in life is sharing the intimacy and joy of married sex. But, if you've been married for more than 5 minutes, you recognize that you and your spouse see sex differently. Of course, you also see things differently when it comes to finances, parenting, and which Netflix series to binge next. But that's a different matter. Or is it? One of the most important things we must recognize in marriage is that our spouse is likely to have a very different perspective about literally, everything.

While these differences can be a great source of conflict, these differences also represent a great opportunity for growth toward beautiful intimacy. You and your spouse will inevitably differ with respect to sexual desire, sexual frequency, sexual variety, sexual fantasies... If you feel frustrated, disappointed or bitter about your differences, it may be that you have failed to see things from your spouse's unique and equally valid perspective. Learning to appreciate your spouse's perspective is the first step in truly learning to love and cherish your beloved. Ironically, growing towards oneness requires that we share and appreciate what makes each individual unique perspective.

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But, we were talking about sex weren't we? To fully enjoy and improve your married sex life I would urge you to begin by considering two important questions:

First, what does sex mean to me?

Many (most?) of us have never thoughtfully considered this question. Introspection is difficult. It is easier to complain that our spouse is not fulfilling our needs or that they are too obsessed with sex. Rather, I compel you to consider and challenge the meanings that you may have attached to sex. What emotional needs are you seeking from sex? What trauma are you running from? What feelings do you have about sex that you may have developed even before you met your spouse? In what ways have you been using or avoiding sex to soothe past wounds or shame? No doubt, these are tough questions, but if you hope to improve your relationship with another person, you have to know yourself first. You can only break down sexual barriers between you and your spouse if you are first willing to confront your own sexual thoughts, feelings, fears and desires. For some of us, this is a scary proposition due to a history of trauma or distorted messages about sex from society or religion. In many cases, talking through some of these issues with a trained godly counselor or wise mentor would help bring proper healing and redemption. Whatever your sexual history, the power of the blood of Jesus Christ offers resurrection and new life — even in your sex life. But, you must be willing to confront unhealthy thoughts, feelings, addictions, fears and desires. When you (and your spouse) are ready, share your journey together.

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Second, what does sex mean to my spouse?

Believe it or not, you are not a mind reader and I guarantee that your spouse wants something very different from sex than you do. While gender differences alone do not entirely explain these differences, sexual stereotypes about husbands and wives are often true for most couples. As they say, "individual results may vary," but I want to discuss meanings we attach to sex through the lens of husbands and wives. *Ladies, first:*

Husbands, what does sex mean for your wife?

1. Sex Demonstrates That She Is Cherished

When you approach your wife with tender affection, meticulous preparation, and a singular intention to connect with her emotionally, spiritually and physically, she cannot help but know that she is valued and treasured. Husband, I am certain that you would willingly sacrifice your life to save hers. But do you demonstrate on a daily basis that you cherish her? Betraying her value with an affair, pornography or crude sexual joking will wound her deeply.

If we love our wives as Christ loves the church, we must not only provide and protect, we must nourish and cherish (Ephesians 5). We must take the time and effort to learn what she needs and wants from sex. If your approach to sex resembles a two-year-old devouring a bag of cookies, then your wife is not feeling cherished. She wants so much more than orgasm (yours or hers). She wants so much more than to be your receptacle. She desperately wants to feel that she is precious and valuable, in and out of the bedroom.

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2. Sex Affirms Her Femininity

When you invite your wife to intimate sexual connection, it should be an invitation for her to delightfully and fully embrace her femininity. To be female in this society means that your wife's womanhood is constantly assaulted by the burdens of needy children, pressures from work, unattainable body image standards, societal sexual objectification, and the nagging stress to have the perfect social media presence. Fair or not, if you married a woman, these burdens are your burdens as well. One way that you can help ease these burdens is to provide a safe space for your wife to be a woman to the fullest.

Learn to appreciate everything that makes her feminine. Let her cry for no reason. Listen intently to the story that has no point and no end. Express your sincere desire for her beautiful curves, and all her imperfections. Provide a sexual sanctuary that is free from pressure and everyone else's needs (including your own) where she can selfishly enjoy the amazing power and pleasure of her female sexuality. Affirm her femininity by letting her enjoy sex for her own reasons and in her own ways.

3. Sex Provides Emotional Connection

What your wife desires in every aspect of your relationship — emotionally, spiritually and sexually — is a sense of connection and oneness. She longs to be desired and wanted (but not needed, see points 1 & 2). What kind of response do you get when you ask at the end of a long day, "Hey babe, you wanna do it?" Instead, consider asking, "Tonight, I would love to make some time for us to reconnect." She needs to know that you are interested in more than just your own physical release. As she learns that you are willing to be emotionally available and vulnerable, she may find courage to be more sexually vulnerable and available. But beware, her radar for half-hearted connection and manipulation is strong. Just like you can tell when your best friend is cheating when you play cards, she will know when you are faking it to get to her body. Do what it takes to help your wife feel emotionally connected. Pro-gamer tip: It would help if you put your phone down, turned off the video game or sports highlights and talked about your — oh, my! — your feelings.

Wives, what does sex mean to your husband?

1. Sex Affirms His Masculinity

For most men, his sexuality is deeply and inextricably tied to his self-worth and self-confidence. Words that insult his ability to provide or protect are wounding, but words that put-down his ability as a lover and sexual-being cut the deepest. On the other hand, when you respond to his sexual advances or initiate sexual affection, you are accepting and affirming him as a man. And believe me, when you half-heartedly tolerate sex with him, you will affirm to him that he is not good enough or man enough to be desired. A man without solid confidence in his sexuality and masculinity will not be the kind of provider, protector, or lover that you desire. He wants you to want him, not just tolerate him. But if you accept and encourage his masculinity — sexuality and all — he will fight for you, provide for you, and seek to cherish you with all of the masculine strength that he can muster.

2. Sex Opens His Heart For

Communication & Connection

It has been said that food is the way to a man's heart. I think this cliché is shallow and clearly false. Have you ever been to a Thanksgiving dinner? Finishing off a delicious meal with dessert will surely put a man to sleep, not put him in touch with his feelings. If you want to touch a man's heart, you need to unlock the door with the key of sexual connection. Within the context of sexual desire and

connection, a man is likely to open up and express himself more than at any other time. A hormone called oxytocin is likely the reason for this phenomenon, but there's something more important than a biochemistry lesson here. A wife should also understand that when a man is craving sex, he is often craving an emotional connection with you. Most husbands don't just want their wives for the sex. He wants to have sex so that he can experience this intense emotional connection. When you make love, he feels more connected to you — spiritually, emotionally, and physically — than at any other time.

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3. Sex Engages His Sense of Adventure

Little boys are never satisfied with playing on the soft, manicured lawn if there is a tree to climb or a mud puddle to splash in nearby. A boy's sense of adventure keeps their mothers fretful and worried until they grow up. Most men learn to reign-in this sense of adventure by focusing on more sophisticated and "grown-up" endeavors like a career. And civilized society is grateful. But men do not outgrow a boy's desire to push limits and seek the thrill. Committed, married sex is a safe and appropriate avenue for a man to find the adventure that he craves. Certainly, godly boundaries must be established, but within those biblical confines an intrepid

husband will be ever-grateful to have a mate who enthusiastically follows him through the playground of the marriage bed. If it's not immoral and it doesn't hurt (physically or emotionally), be willing to challenge your preferences.

Just as examining your own motivations helps you understand your behavior, seeing your spouse's perspective is crucial to understanding how to better serve them. This is never truer than in the bedroom. If we know what our spouse needs, we have a much better chance to be able to deliver. Of course, this means that we have to learn to communicate what we want and we have to work hard to listen to what our spouse needs. Sometimes, we have to let go of preconceived ideas about what we think they need or what we want them to desire. It should be clear by now that the two of you will not agree on everything, especially when the bedroom door is locked. But if you lean into the conflict and listen to what your spouse is seeking from sex, you can begin to create a fuller relationship and extraordinary sex life!