

You hold a gift that your spouse can't receive from anyone else. Spiritual sickness seeps into our marriages when we stop viewing sex as a gift we can give to our spouse, and start seeing it as a demand that must be met. Most sexual problems in marriage aren't due to a lack of knowledge or mechanical skill; on the contrary, I think most of the problems between the covers are due to sinful selfishness. Since, biblically speaking, the only sex life my wife can enjoy is the sex life I choose to give her, anything I deny her, by definition, becomes an absolute denial, because she has no other outlet. You know what this reality produces? *Power*. The stereotype is that husbands usually want sex more often than do their wives. There are valid physiological reasons for this. But I've talked to plenty of couples where it's actually the other way around, and the wife feels cheated by her husband's diminished desire. Whether it's the wife or husband who feels denied, one thing is almost always true: *Whoever wants sex the least tends to have the most power in bed, because he or she possesses the absolute power of denial*. And the old adage, "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" is particularly true in the bedroom. If you're the spouse who holds the power, you're going to be tested spiritually. Will you use that power generously, or to manipulate? Will you use that power to demonstrate kindness, or to pay back your spouse for perceived slights?

The apostle John tells us how Jesus used power. He tells us that while "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power" (John 13:3), instead of abusing that power, Jesus got up from the meal, wrapped a towel around His waist, and washed His disciples' feet, becoming a servant. Two of those feet, by the way, belonged to Judas—the man who was even then plotting to betray Him. Yet Jesus still loved Judas in a very physical way, taking his perhaps smelly and certainly dusty feet into His lap and washing them with His own hands. The sexual relationship within marriage gives us a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth, to become generous and kind like Christ even in the face of others' unkindness. When we have power over another and we use that power responsibly, appropriately, and benevolently, whether they deserve it or not, we grow in Christ, we become more like God, and we reflect the fact that we were made to love God by serving others.

Ask yourself honestly: *Is sex something I am demanding or offering? Is sex something I use as a tool of manipulation or as an expression of generous love? If God looked at nothing other than my sexuality, would He see me displaying the mature qualities of a growing believer in Jesus Christ, or would I look like some selfish, non-believing pagan?*

Selfishness can't be satisfied; on the contrary it needs to be crucified. What does this mean for you women? Well, let me ask you this: When was the last time you put some serious thought, effort, and planning into a special sexual experience with your husband? If you're the only one he can be sexual with, are you making him glad he chose *you*, or are you taking that commitment for granted and maybe even using it against him, to make him pay for a perceived slight, rather than using it to bless and serve him?

If I accept the biblical truth that the only sex life my wife can enjoy is the sex life I choose to give her, then complacency in this area becomes cruel. I'm taking an incredible commitment for granted; I'm acting like her amazing fidelity—that she will keep herself only for me—is a gift of little value.

We have to fight against taking our sexual responsibilities for granted. On the day we marry, we gain a monopoly. Our spouse commits to have sexual relations with no one else. Regardless of whether we act thoughtfully, creatively, or selfishly in bed, they receive *only* what we provide. Some of us, quite frankly, simply stop making an effort. Do I want to reward my wife's commitment to me, or do I want to make her regret it? Do I want to bless her, or take her for granted? Do I want to be a generous, enthusiastic lover, or a miser reluctantly doling out occasional "favors"? When the Bible tells us in Hebrews 13:4 to keep the marriage bed "pure," the application goes far beyond avoiding physical acts of immorality to include inner virtue.

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Resources:

Passion and Purity by Elisabeth Elliot

Helper by Design by Elyse Fitzpatrick

When Sinners Say "I Do" by Dave Harvey

Feminine Appeal by Carolyn Mahaney

The Excellent Wife by Martha Peace

Rekindling the Romance by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

Preparing for Marriage edited by Dennis Rainey

Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas

Intended for Pleasure by Dr. Ed and Gay Wheat