



A Guide to Better Sex

Great sex starts with the right mentality.

You can use this Bible Study on your own or as part of a group. Go to <http://todayschristianwomanstore.com/biblestudies.html> to download **free** resources on how to lead a life-changing Bible study and tips for getting the most out of participating in small group experience.

Scripture Focus: Song of Songs 1:2–4; Proverbs 5:15–19; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; Ephesians 4:25–27

Article: “Spirituality and Sex?” an interview by Ginger Kolbaba, MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP

You’d never know by listening to the voices in popular culture today that sex was God’s idea, but it’s true. He designed it not only as a means for procreation, but also to be pleasurable and deeply satisfying. Unfortunately, many of us have formed our ideas about sex from the culture around us instead of from God’s perspective.

In an interview from MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, four Christian sex therapists shed light on how sex in marriage can be both satisfying and God-honoring. How does a healthy and satisfying sexual relationship in marriage honor God? Why is sex more than a physical expression of love? What are the components that make great sex a means of deepening your love and commitment for one another? This study explores these questions in greater detail.

This Today’s Christian Woman Bible Study will help you deepen your faith as you dig into Scripture, reflect on the truth of God’s Word, and take action to live out your faith. You can use this Today’s Christian Woman Bible Study on your own or with your husband, or you can use it in a group setting as you discuss God’s Word with a community of women and grow in faith together.

Connect

Option: If you'd like, begin your study with this interactive experience.

Set out a bunch of women's magazines and entertainment magazines (and invite participants to bring some of their own to your meeting). Have women form pairs to flip through magazines looking for cultural messages about love, romance, sex, and marriage. Some may be blatant messages (such as an article about sex) while some may be more subtle (such as the types of pictures depicting couples in love). Prompt pairs to talk through questions like: How does our culture view sex? What does our culture tell us is the purpose of sex? What does our culture think brings about sexual fulfillment?

Get Ready

Before the study, read the article "Spirituality and Sex?" (included at the end of this study). Or, if you'd prefer, begin your meeting by reading the article aloud as a group.



Open Up

If we condense popular culture's resounding message about sex into a sound bite, we might say "do what feels good." But if that is the foundation upon which newlyweds build their marriage, they significantly increase their risk of eventually becoming a divorce statistic. Why? Because sex was not meant to be a selfish act. That mentality reduces sex to one dimension: the physical. God's plan for sex is multidimensional, involving the whole person. It involves your body, mind, emotions, and your relationship with God.

Sex was also designed by God to be a generous act of love toward your spouse. God's first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (**Genesis 1:27–28**). Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between you and your husband can produce emotional and personal fruitfulness as well. Your physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy deepens in a way that brings a growing sense of trust and security between you when both of you seek first to nurture each other in your sexual relationship.

>> What stands out to you most from the article "Sex and Spirituality?" Why?

- >> How would you characterize the main messages that emanate from the media about sex? Do you think the church is effectively presenting a healthier view of sexuality to our culture? Explain.
- >> Genesis 1:27–28 says that God made man in his image, “male and female he created them.” How is being created in God’s image related to sex being physical, emotional, and spiritual in nature?

Seek

Before launching into your time of Scripture exploration, pause as a group to pray. Express your desire to seek out God’s truth in his Word and to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit during your discussion.

Discover

View sex as an act of worship.

Read **Romans 12:1** and **Ephesians 5:31-32**.

Although sex is physical, it’s also a spiritual act of worship, as it is a picture of oneness that reflects the relationship between Christ and the church. In fact, the sex therapists interviewed in the “Spirituality and Sex?” article agree: “You cannot engage in a sexual act and not have it connect to the spiritual realm. It’s impossible.” The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for “to know deeply” is *yada*. When you and your husband are together sexually, God’s desire is that you know each physically, emotionally, and spiritually. For sex to be an act of worship that glorifies God, we must follow his design, and his design is that we each intimately know our husband and are “one flesh” with him. When we waver from that plan and fail to give our bodies fully to God’s purposes, sex becomes a distortion of what God intended.

Tim Alan Gardner writes, “Sex is holy because it can usher us into a genuine worship. Just as the appearance of the burning bush filled Moses with awe, the true experience of oneness that God designed marital sex to be can bring us to a place of heartfelt praise and adoration of him. It can leave us trembling at the wonder and beauty and love of almighty God, who gave us this incredible gift.”

- >> Why do you think the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of your relationship are intricately linked with worship? What happens if you engage in sex but are disconnected in either the emotional or spiritual dimension?

- >> What is your reaction to the concept of sex being an act of worship? How is it similar or different from traditional worship in church?
- >> What are some obstacles that keep your sexual relationship from being an act of worship? How do you plan to remove those obstacles?

Enjoy sex as play.

A child's job is to play. Through play, she explores her world and begins to master language, cognitive and motor skills, and more. When she tries to accomplish a new skill, like building a tower out of blocks, she's not deterred when it repeatedly tumbles because the satisfaction she derives comes not from the outcome of the activity (a tall tower), but from the enjoyment of building and experimenting with the blocks.

"Relaxing, refreshing, recreating." That's how Debra describes how sex is similar to play. And you and your husband should take a similarly approach to your sexual relationship. Be eager to learn about your spouse physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That includes exploring each other's bodies and preferences for physical and emotional closeness.

This also means that you don't have to "get it right" as far as sexual technique is concerned. The ultimate enjoyment comes from the playfulness of learning about one another and feeling secure in that play, not the quality of or the presence of orgasms. That's why the sex therapists interviewed in the accompanying article say it may take many years for couples to work their way to "great sex."

Read **Song of Songs 1:2-4**.

God views the exploration of our sexual relationship with our spouse as so important that he dedicated an entire book in the Bible, Song of Songs, to encourage us to experience it. Although it has spiritual meaning and application, Song of Songs is considered by a large number of scholars as primarily God's description of what a romantic, sexual relationship should be in marriage.

- >> What are your thoughts about viewing sex as a playful activity? How can it be both playful and worshipful?
- >> What can you learn about playful sexuality from Song of Songs 1:2-4?
- >> How can sexual play be a mutually satisfying experience? What specific attitudes and behaviors do you think would enable you and your husband to keep the proper focus on each other instead of on self-gratification?

Emotional intimacy is the precursor to great sex.

Bob and Sharon had more than a few bumps in their marriage. Both came from homes where conflict was handled poorly. Bob was prone to avoid conflict, while Sharon was explosive and blaming. It was not unusual when their conflict wasn't resolved by the end of the day. As Christians, they rightly felt it was important to not go to bed angry (see **Ephesians 4:25–27**). So they typically would attempt to patch up the emotional distance between them by having sex. It seldom worked.

Contrary to popular belief, it is emotional intimacy—not physical closeness—that is the true bonding agent for keeping a relationship strong. Sexual contact is a vital part of the relational equation, but the quality of sexual intimacy is determined by the degree of emotional closeness two people feel with each other.

For emotional intimacy to grow in a relationship, it needs the fertile ground of safety and trust.

Read **1 Corinthians 13:4–7**.

Notice in this passage that sex is not one of the many attributes of love mentioned. When a husband and wife are afraid of being hurt, judged, or criticized by their spouse, it is difficult to touch affectionately or share freely. C. J. Mahaney says it another way: “In order for romance to deepen, you must touch the heart and mind of your wife before you touch her body.” Although Mahaney is speaking to husbands here, his words could also apply to wives.

- >> Think of a time when you felt emotionally distant from your husband. How did that experience affect your level of intimacy? What could you have done differently to feel more emotionally connected to him?
- >> Would you agree that many couples try to bandage relational problems with sex? What are the potential consequences of this “bandaging” on the development of emotional intimacy in their marriage?
- >> If true emotional intimacy needs safety and trust in order to grow, how would you define “safety and trust”? What do these elements look like in a relationship?

Optional Activity

Think back to your first few years of marriage. Reflect on how your perspective on intimacy and sex has changed since then. How have your expectations changed? How do you look forward to spending time with your husband? Describe a time when you were happiest in your sex life. Then write a letter to your spouse sharing your thoughts. In the privacy of your bedroom, use the letter as a conversation starter to help build your marriage and level of intimacy.

Change

Sex is meant to be enjoyed. But we can experience something more meaningful when we move past making pleasure our goal and instead seek an intimate connection with our spouse. This intimate connection is one that has a clear spiritual and emotional component. This type of sexual union holds a deeper meaning and, therefore, offers deeper pleasure. But without a relationship with the One who created sex, and a full understanding of his purposes for sex, couples will fall short of the encounter of oneness that God intends.

- >> In what ways are you willing to work to touch the heart and mind of your husband before you touch his body? Brainstorm concrete ways you can do this on a regular basis.
- >> In light of all you've read and discussed, what's one attitude, action, or pattern in your life that you sense God is leading you to change?

Take Action

Choose one of the following steps you'll do after the study to apply God's Word to your life.

- ▶ Select one of the passages you read during this study and commit it to memory. Make a daily habit of meditating on that passage from Scripture, inviting God to impress his truth upon your heart.
- ▶ Evaluate your sexual relationship with your husband. Of the three Discover points in this study, which one needs your immediate attention? Partner with your husband and pray about your findings. Then make it a habit at least once a month to discuss how your sexual relationship is going. Talk about how it can improve and changes each of you can make.
- ▶ Commit to reading through Song of Songs at least two times per week for a month. Ask God to help you embrace a hopeful, playful, excited mindset about your sexual relationship with your husband.

Commit

Select one specific verse or principle from Scripture (highlighted in this study) that you sense God really challenging you to more purposefully apply to your marriage and sex life. Then pray silently about your passage or principle asking God to help you live out his Word in your marriage.



Explore More

Want to dig deeper deeper into this topic? Check out these articles and online resources.

- >> **Building Intimacy in Marriage** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Christian Sex Rules** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Improve Your Sex Life** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **My Fairytale Marriage** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **My Six-Week Headache** from TodaysChristianWoman.com
- >> **Top 10 Tips for Keeping Sex Fun** from TodaysChristianWoman.com

—Study prepared by Gary A. Gilles and **Natalie Lederhouse**. Gary is a mental health counselor, adjunct instructor at Trinity International University, and freelance writer. Natalie ([@nataliejean](https://twitter.com/nataliejean)) is the editorial coordinator for TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Sex and Spirituality?

What 4 Christian sex therapists wish you knew

Interview by Ginger Kolbaba



“Welcome to Atlanta!” Michael Sytsma, one of the Christian sex therapists I’d flown in to interview, greeted me at the airport, holding out a small, white paper bag.

“Thanks,” I said, noticing that wrapped delicately within the folds of fire-engine red tissue paper was a white feather.

“That’s for you and your husband,” he continued.

Uh-oh, I thought, almost afraid to unveil the other contents. *Let it just be chocolates*. I had no idea what to expect. This was a sex therapist, after all.

Indeed, there were mini Hershey bars and heart-shaped goodies . . . along with two tea lights, the feather, and five packets of lubricant gel. “I think you’ll like the warming one. But the mango orange is nice, too,” Michael told me nonchalantly. “There’s even one that’s sugar free.”

“Whew, that’s good, since I’m on the South Beach diet,” I said, trying to sound just as casual, even though I was mentally wide-eyed. Right then I knew this would be no ordinary interview.

You never know what to expect when you get in a room with sex therapists. One thing is certain—you’re going to talk about sex. But in the case of these four profound and deeply committed Christians, you’re also going to talk a whole lot about God. Combine the two topics, and you get one fascinating dialogue.

In the mid-1990s Doug Rosenau, Michael Sytsma, Christopher McCluskey, and Debra Taylor—each working in private practice across the country—found one another. Realizing the need to stick together in a field that had few Christian sex therapists (“We could just about count them on two hands!” Debra says.), they founded Sexual Wholeness, Inc. (SWI), a multi-functional organization devoted to training and certifying professional Christian therapists in the area of sexual healing.

One of their greatest passions has been to create a “theology of sexuality”—a biblical, practical, Christ- and Christian-honoring understanding of sex.

Now, more than a decade later, they’ve counseled or trained thousands of individuals and couples.

“There is no area of our being in which we can become more deeply wounded than our sexuality,” explains Christopher. “And within marriage, there’s no area in which you can minister to a couple and bring greater healing and stability than in their shared sexuality. You’ll impact both their intimacy together and their individual sense of wholeness as male and female, created in the image of God, reflecting Christ and his bride, the church. If you get a Christian couple on the same page with God’s vision for marital intimacy, you’ll have poured super glue over that marriage, and you’ll have a beautiful picture of the relationship God desires to have with us.”

After meeting the Sexual Wholeness professionals, I was overwhelmed by how fun they were. They were witty, smart, empathetic, and passionate about helping people discover God’s unique and wonderful gift of sex. Not to mention they have some solid insights on how to have a great sex life. Here’s what they shared on how to have a great sex life.

We hear about “myths” of sex. What do you wish couples knew about their sex life?

Debra: Every couple except maybe one or two in the entire universe will have sexual problems at some point in their marriage. Anyone who tells you otherwise is misleading you.

One of my favorite verses is Psalm 34:19: “The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.” That’s a great theme for a couple. You’ll have sexual problems. Don’t be surprised. Seek the Lord and get counsel. God will rescue you—not always the way you want him to, but there are ways to work through it. Get over it. Move on.

Doug: Sex is complex, and a variety of things weave together to create a good sex life. So many of my clients expect a neat cause and effect, as if they’re dealing with a case of appendicitis. They think, *Let’s take out the appendix*. Sex isn’t typically that simplistic.

Michael: Another myth is that great sex should be natural and should happen easily. Here’s the truth: *Great sex* doesn’t happen for many couples until they’ve been married 30 years or more, after they’ve learned about each other and themselves.

Really? Thirty years?

Michael: When couples are first married, they have the tendency to believe that sex is body focused, that it's about how big your penis is or your breasts are. But it isn't. It's about the heart. Great sex is heart sex.

Christopher: The big O is not orgasm. The big O is *oneness*. It's not how great the bodies, how great the orgasm. It's, *Was that a loving experience where you shared with each other? Was it contributing to your oneness?*

Michael: So many people think sex is about the pleasure—which it is—but it isn't. Or about the act itself—which it is—but it isn't. Sex reflects something far grander, far more beautiful. The problem is that people want to look more at the details.

What do you mean?

Debra: What's okay and isn't okay in the bedroom.

Christopher: One of the most damaging myths is the notion that anything the Christian husband and wife agree to sexually is okay or is somehow going to be blessed by God. This idea that everything you do within the marriage bed, as long as the rings are on and it's with the one you chose, is okay.

You're talking about the verse in Hebrews?

Christopher: Right. In **Hebrews 13:4** the writer says that a marriage should be kept pure and undefiled. But I know Christians who take that verse and cheapen it in order to justify whatever they want to do. It's a huge distortion of Scripture, of the freedom we have in Christ.

So then what is and isn't okay in the bedroom?

Michael: That's really the wrong question to ask.

It is?

Doug: It's about intimacy and connecting. You need to ask, *Is what I want to do selfish? Is it giving? Is it loving?*

“What can I do?” or “How far can I go?” are the wrong questions. “How can I help my spouse become sexually whole?”—that's a good question.

Christopher: Go to the spirit of the act. When Christ was confronted with people who wanted to know, *What's the boundary? What's the rule?* invariably he cut through all the “surface” questions, all the rules, and went to the core, which is the spirit of the act.

Although sex is physical, it's an emotional connection of souls, and it is a spiritual act. *Every single act* of sexual intercourse is an act of worship. The question is, *Who is being worshiped? Who is being glorified through this act? Is it glorifying God, or is it glorifying the enemy?* You cannot engage in a sexual act and not have it connect to the spiritual realm. It's impossible.

The apostle Paul tells us, “give your bodies to God . . .” because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him” (**Romans 12:1**). We offer our bodies in spiritual worship through our singing, our praise, our teaching, our hands through service. Our bodies are a living sacrifice offered every day in various physical expressions of spiritual glorification of God. When we offer our bodies in sexual union, it is a spiritual act of worship, but we can blaspheme just as surely as we can glorify.

This feels like your theology of sexuality.

Doug: It is. Why did God create sex? To reveal his love and his creativity. To reveal himself.

Debra: We're basically talking about how to live out the Word of God. What is the truth God has about sexuality? How do you live that out for Jesus?

You talk about worshiping God through sex. How can couples embrace that idea?

Christopher: Connect it to the scriptural principle of feasts. In the Old Testament God ordained feasts to celebrate his glory. What's a feast? It's eating sumptuous foods and drinking fine wines. If you do that without the right spirit, you get gluttony and drunkenness, and God is certainly not going to be worshiped. But if you worship in a feast while still having discipline, still having boundaries, God says he's greatly glorified.

Marital union is meant to be a feast—look at Song of Songs. There's so much metaphor that is about feasting and fine wines and good, rich foods. See it as another type of bodily feast as the two “consume” each other. It's the consummation of their oneness. They offer themselves for consummation, and God is glorified.

Doug: And that requires making sure couples give themselves permission to learn those disciplines—the discipline of feasting, of playfulness, of sensuality—and give themselves permission to be erotic, to be truly naked and unashamed.

Michael: A couple can really drink in and enjoy each other. But that means they have to slow down. They have to tune in to the sensuality of it, which is part of the beauty of it all.

That's difficult to do.

Michael: Yes. That's why it takes some 30 to 35 years to have great sex.

Doug: A practical way to talk about the discipline of partying and celebrating is Jesus telling us to be childlike. For my granddaughter, play is a way of life. Being childlike is not just about faith. Jesus is talking about that ability to be naked and unashamed. To cavort, to frolic, to laugh and have awe and wonder and anticipation. Oftentimes a couple is more childlike in their dating experience than they are in their marriage. I'm not talking sexually. I'm talking about the creativity and planning little treats and surprises for each other.

Christopher: Play replenishes. But the problem is that we either turn our play into a part-time job and wring all the fun out of it, or it's a vegetative escape, entertainment, amusement.

Debra: Which is not play.

Michael: It doesn't feed the soul. It doesn't replenish.

Doug: Playfulness really is an important part of spirituality. We've lost that.

Debra: Relaxing, refreshing, recreating. There are a lot of couples struggling, and part of it is they've lost the joy of just being together sexually and intimately.

Christopher: A paradigm shift has to occur first that says it's not only *okay* to play; it's *important* to play. It's wrong if I don't play. A lot of couples, when they get to their forties or so, have a midlife crisis. They go off and have an affair because it's somebody to "play with." They recapture a spirit of play, but it's childish instead of childlike. Right idea; wrong direction. They recognized they were starving but didn't understand where the real food could be found.

How can a couple rediscover that childlike play?

Christopher: Ask yourself, *What puts my spouse in the most playful moods?* I've had women say, "You know, I've noticed when I get him away from home, away from the office, when we're in a car, he talks. He'll talk and talk and talk. What's that about?" Get him in different contexts.

Michael: Part of what I teach couples is they've got to set aside some sacred time and let nothing encroach upon it. That creates a bubble of safety they can relax and play in. But we have such a mindset in our society of, *Okay, I flipped a switch and I can be there.* No, you can't. That's not how we're created.

My son collects lizards. You can't get much stupider than a lizard. I mean there's not much brain there. And they play. They have so much fun just chasing each other around. And I think, *What kind of a God instills play in such a base creature?* That says something about God. And I watch when they do and don't play. They play when their tummies are full and when the heat's right and it's a safe environment. Then they start chasing each other just for the fun of it. And I think, *Well, we can't expect couples just to go in and say, "Okay, it's eight o'clock, it's our playtime."*

Christopher: "I got candles lit. I drew a bubble bath."

Yet we talk about scheduling sex.

Michael: That's important to do, but we can't expect all of that to happen at the same time. There are times we schedule sex because it's nurturing and we have to discipline it. But we also need times that we just relax and revel in it, that we get away for a weekend. And it takes 36 hours before we're relaxed enough and calm enough that we can look at each other and say, "Hey, you're kind of cute. Want to go play?"

So just to bring this all back around. Playful sex can be worshipful sex?

Debra: Oh, yeah.

Michael: Very highly.

Comfort sex can be worshipful sex?

Debra: Oh, yes.

Quickie sex can be worshipful sex?

Debra: Yes, yes.

Christopher: Because we're talking about making love, not simply having sex, and it's flowing out of the rest of the spirit of the marriage. If they've been playful throughout the day, with little kitchen hugs and notes in the lunch, or phone calls, or e-mails, or anything that is playful and loving—not necessarily sexual—then it naturally connects.

Doug: Structured optimal time for sex, such as every Friday night, can be worshipful like going to church from 10:30 to 12:00 on Sunday morning. But if all we have is structured time with God and never just hang out and “waste” time with him, we're probably never going to have the worship we'd like. Sometimes you have to do more than that 15 minutes or 45 minutes and have that wasting time together. It's all worshipful, but sometimes to get the connecting, intimate worship, you've got to do the extended time, too.

This is a paradigm shift, which means we can't expect things to change overnight.

Michael: I tell couples it took 40 years of wandering in the desert to teach the Hebrews a lesson. Why do you think you're going to learn it overnight? Some things are more difficult than that. It takes awhile to sink through our thick, sin-filled skulls.

When the goal becomes oneness, the sex gets really cool. But if you make really cool sex the goal, you destroy it all.

For 30 minutes last week, I helped a husband caress his wife's hand and then tell me what he was experiencing. It started with, “Well, I feel her skin.” And after a bit, it became, “I can feel blood vessels and maybe nerves.” After about ten minutes he said, “These are the hands that touch my face. These are the hands that care for my kids. These are the . . .” He started to go from just the sensations, which were important, to the *meaning* in those hands. And tears began to stream down her face as he was really beginning to experience her.

When we finished, I said, “Hands are the least intimate part of your body. This is the part you’ll let anybody touch. But what if you start doing that with all of her body?” How intimate that becomes when you start tuning into the more sacred parts of the body. And is that sexual? Very much so.

Doug: One of the church fathers, Jean Pierre de Caussade, talked about the sacrament of the present moment. Michael gave that couple a gift of a sacrament, of truly tuning in—in ways that we don’t take time to do.

Christopher: And the cool thing is that they’ll wind up with a far better sex life because they’ve learned how to make love.

Doug: Which is the point. Great sex becomes ancillary; it’s not the goal. We really believe that when you truly learn to tune into God, you’re going to tune into each other. And you’ll end up with a great sex life.

—For more information on Sexual Wholeness, Inc., to contact Michael, Doug, Debra, or Christopher, or to find a certified Christian sex therapist in your area, visit www.SexualWholeness.com. This article was first published in MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP in 2007.

Subscribe to Today's Christian Woman



Web + Print

Subscribe now and get complete access to **TodaysChristianWoman.com**, one year of the bimonthly *Today's Christian Woman* digital magazine, and 3 special edition print issues.

Get more TCW Bible studies and resources at **TodaysChristianWomanStore.com**

Subscribe at OrderTCW.com/sub

\$9.95