

# Sexuality: Foundations

## Biblical Principles

### **GOD IS THE CREATOR OF SEXUALITY**

God created male and female in his image. After he created the world and everything in it, he said that it was “*very good*.” Note that gender and sexuality were both created before the fall of man into sin. Sexuality was part of God’s original design (*Gen. 1:27-28, 31*).

### **GOD’S DESIGN IS FOR ONENESS**

God designed sexuality to bring the married couple together as “one flesh.” In some mysterious way, sexuality symbolizes the oneness and intensity of Christ’s love for the church (*Eph. 5:21-33*).

### **BY FOLLOWING GOD’S DESIGN, MARRIED COUPLES CAN ENJOY THEIR SEXUAL UNION WITHOUT FEELING SHAME OR GUILT** (*Gen. 2:25*).

### **PROCREATION WAS ONE OF GOD’S INTENTIONS FOR SEXUALITY** (*Gen. 9:1*).

### **GOD DESIGNED SEXUALITY TO BE PLEASURABLE**

God created our bodies to function and feel the way they do. He wants a couple’s sexual relationship to be an enjoyable blessing to them (*Prov. 5:18-19*).

### **AN ANALOGY OF SEX AND FIRE<sup>1</sup>**

When used correctly, fire can heat your home and cook your food. When out of control, fire can destroy. Likewise, sex within God’s design is a wonderful and creative part of a marriage. When used in a manner that is outside of God’s design, sex has the potential to bring intense pain and even destruction to individuals, couples, and families (*Prov. 6:26-29*).

### **SEXUAL STEWARDSHIP FOR ENGAGED COUPLES**

During the engagement, Satan may try to take advantage of your feelings and desires and try to lead you to sin by “highjacking” what God designed for good. Remember that true, Christ-like love is self-sacrificial. If you love your fiancé in a biblical manner, you will not put him or her in a position in which he or she could be compromised in any way (*1 Cor. 10:13, 2 Cor. 2:11*).

### **BOUNDARIES ARE FOR OUR PROTECTION**

As the Creator, God placed boundaries around sexuality to protect us. Therefore, sexuality within marriage can be a blessing, whereas sexuality outside of marriage is sinful and can be very damaging and hurtful (*Col. 3:5*). See the diagram on the page below.

### **DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SEX**

Single individuals sometimes develop the mindset that sex is “bad, dirty, or shameful.” This point of view can develop after years of trying to be diligent in resisting sexual temptation and avoiding anything sexual in nature. It can also result from

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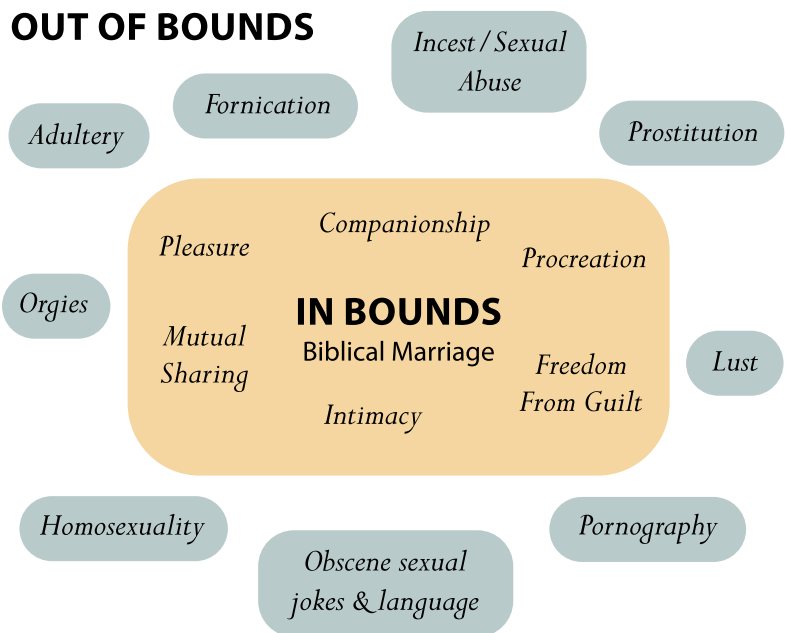
painful life experiences or inaccurate knowledge of God's plan for sexuality. As an engaged couple you must steward your sexuality as defined in the Word. Likewise, you need to shift your mindset toward viewing marital sexuality practiced within biblical bounds as a gift from God (*Heb. 13:4*).

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How and when did you learn about sex and sexuality?

Describe your views on marital sexuality as God has designed it.

## OUT OF BOUNDS

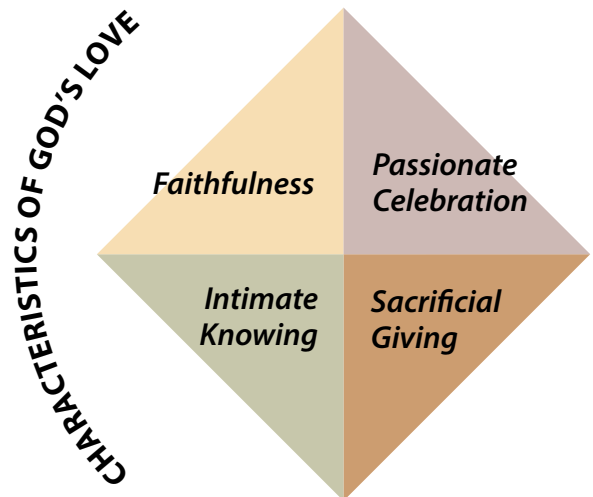


## God's Design for Intimacy

### CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S LOVE REFLECTED THROUGH SEXUAL INTEGRITY<sup>2</sup>

A couple's marriage and sexual relationship was designed to point to the love God has for his people. God calls you to steward your sexuality in a manner that represents him and his divine story of redemption. Pray that your sexual relationship may strengthen your union, reflect God's love and remain undefiled. Consider the following attributes of God's love and use the questions to self-reflect on sexuality within marriage:

1. **Faithfulness** – God's covenantal love for us is based on his character. He is faithful to what he has promised (*Deut. 31:6*; *Heb. 13:5-6*). Faithfulness is more than avoiding adultery; it is wholehearted commitment to establishing a relational atmosphere of trust. What are ways you are willing to commit to cultivating an atmosphere of trust within your marriage?
2. **Intimate Knowing** – Daily we are given opportunities to grow in deeper intimacy to God or to build walls. Sexual intimacy is more than having sex; it is about intentional acts of moving toward one other by sharing your mind, body, and soul. Intimacy can be defined as "into me you see." This definition speaks to the vulnerability and depth of knowing each other true intimacy can bring. How will you respond to daily opportunities of moving toward intimately knowing one another?
3. **Sacrificial Giving** – God's love toward us is patient kindness (*Rom. 5:8*). At the cross we see the depth of the love Jesus had for his Father and his people. Marriage and sex will provide you opportunities to live out sacrificial love. What does healthy sacrifice look like in marriage & sex?

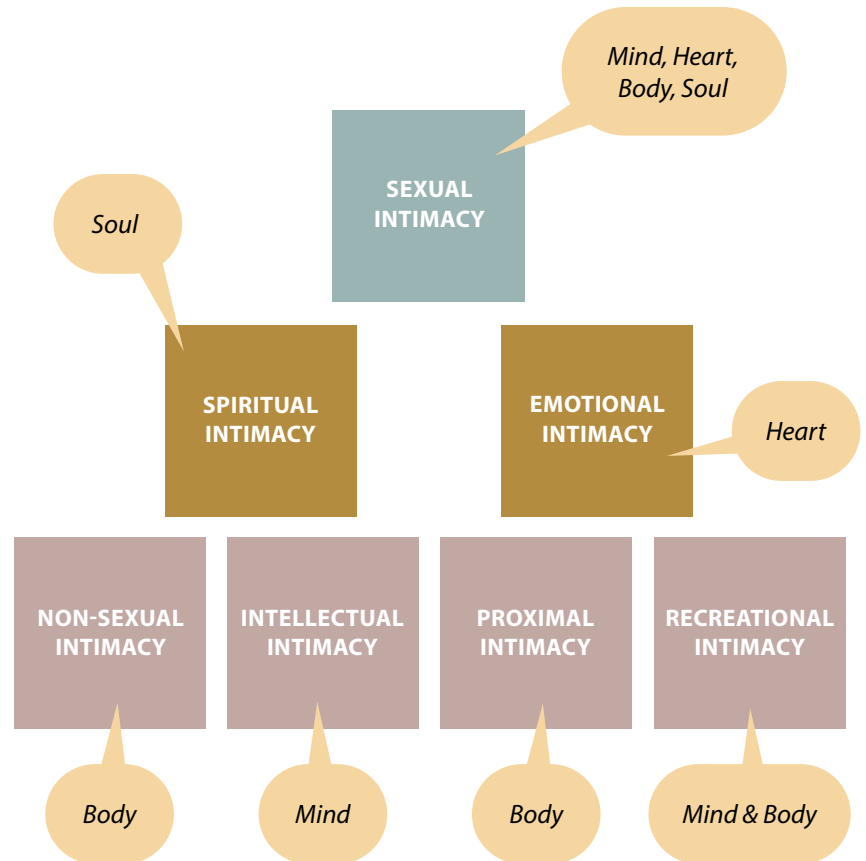


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4. **Passionate Celebration** – Vibrant worship is a part of what we are called to as his children. Sex is one of the most profound ways we celebrate covenantal love. God created sex to be pleasurable, passionate, fun, and exciting as it celebrates your covenantal love. What is it like for you to consider your sexual relationship as a celebration of God’s covenantal love?

## HEALTHY INTIMACY INVOLVES THE MIND, HEART, BODY AND SOUL

Part of stewarding a healthy sexual relationship in your marriage involves accurately understanding intimacy. At times, the word “intimacy” can be used to mean “sexual intimacy.” However, this can lead to misunderstanding God’s design for healthy sexual intimacy. See the diagram below.<sup>3</sup> Notice that part of deep sexual intimacy in your marriage involves actively cultivating growth in all areas of intimacy.



## GOD’S DESIGN FOR SEXUALITY IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

- **Physical** aspects of sexuality include: 1) God uniquely designed male and female bodies for sexuality and for each other. 2) God created sexuality to be the context in which children were brought into the world. 3) God created sexuality to be physically pleasurable.
- **Emotional** aspects of sexuality include: 1) Sexuality allows couples to be deeply connected emotionally. 2) Marital sexuality is designed to be an expression of love and connectedness. 3) The emotional connection between spouses greatly determines whether sexuality will or will not enhance a couple’s relationship. 4) One of the results of healthy, emotional intimacy in marriage is feeling securely connected and accepted.
- **Relational** aspects of sexuality include: 1) The level of emotional intimacy in a couple’s relationship provides the foundation for sexuality. 2) Good communication and effectively managing conflict are core skills that draw couples to deeper intimacy. 3) Understanding gender differences between men and women helps spouses better meet the other’s needs. 4) Each partner should focus on fulfilling the other partner’s needs and not become overly focused on his or her own fulfillment.
- **Spiritual** aspects of sexuality include: 1) A couple’s “one flesh” relationship symbolizes the relationship between Christ and the Church. 2) Christian “one flesh” sexuality allows two individuals to connect in a creative and radiant expression of God’s love. 3) God’s Word and his design for sexuality (physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual) shows his blessing on sexuality in marriage.

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## Beliefs and Attitudes About Sex Have a Significant Impact

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What do you believe God thinks about sexuality within marriage? Have you always felt this way? Where did these attitudes and beliefs come from?

Where, when, how, and what you have learned about sex can have a tremendous impact on your attitude toward marital sexuality. Some of the sources of information that shape our beliefs about sex include parents, friends, school, church, society, life experiences, and the media. The reality is how you feel about your sexuality and your body parts directly impacts your experience of sex. If you struggle to embrace your sexuality and how God has created you, it will likely negatively impact your sexual relationship. Many of our beliefs about sex are so subtle that we hardly recognize we have them.

Below are some helpful self-reflection questions when considering belief and attitudes about sex:

- Is sex something I'm giving to my spouse, or withholding?
- Is sex something I am demanding, or offering?
- Is sex something I am using as a tool of manipulation, or as an expression of generous love?
- If God looked at my sexuality, does it reflect the nature of a mature Christian?<sup>4</sup>

Some minds find that they struggle with lingering negative attitudes toward sexuality in marriage, repeating the following affirmations can be helpful in assisting you in shifting your thinking toward a more healthy and biblical view of sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

- “The negative things I learned about my body and sexual feelings as a child no longer apply to me as a married adult.”
- “There is nothing sinful or unnatural about sex. I can rejoice in my body and its sexual feelings. They are a gift from God.”
- “God created lovemaking and orgasms for my enjoyment.”
- “God designed sexuality to be a beautiful expression of my love for my spouse. I do not have to feel guilty and shameful about living out God’s design for my marriage.”

## Things to Consider

### PERSONAL FACTORS THAT CAN IMPACT SEXUALITY

1. **Physical Health:** illness, medical conditions, weight, or hormones. If either of you have not had a recent appointment with your gynecologist or primary care physician, you are encouraged to have a physical examination in preparation for marriage.

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2. **Body Image:** frequently thinking about the things you perceive as flaws or comparing yourself to others in a negative manner. Sexual intimacy is a very vulnerable experience. How we view ourselves will have an impact on our ability and willingness to engage in sex. We must become comfortable with our own bodies and the exposure which intimacy will bring. We must also be sensitive to the impact which the comments we say (or do not say) can have upon our fiancé/spouse.
3. **Stress:** life circumstances work, family, finances, etc.
4. **Age:** both the male and female bodies change with age.
5. **Mental Health or Substance Abuse:** depression, anxiety, alcohol, drugs, etc.
  - **Alcohol:** even small amounts of alcohol can affect inhibitions as well as have an impact on arousal and performance.
6. **Sexual History:** your attitudes about sex, your sexual development, and your sex education.
7. **Trauma or abuse in your past:** be willing to seek out help if this has been part of your past experience as it can have an ongoing impact upon your sexuality over the years if not dealt with properly.
8. **Medications:** certain medicine can inhibit or factor into marital sexuality.



Scan or click for  
more information  
on body image.

## BE PRAYERFUL, CAUTIOUS, AND SEEK COUNSEL BEFORE SHARING ISSUES FROM YOUR SEXUAL HISTORY

1. At times, one or both individuals in a couple may have current or past issues that can potentially affect their sexual relationship in marriage. These issues can include things like having a history of sexual abuse, having had an abortion(s), having had premarital sexual experiences, same sex attraction and/or having struggled with pornography, etc. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to share with your future spouse and what to consider as history that is “passed away” (2 *Corinthians* 5:17).
2. Engaged couples are encouraged to counsel with their elder, mentor, or professional Christian counselor about what they share to prevent unnecessary hurt in their relationship. This is because while sometimes we need to share certain things, other times we need to let things remain in the past.
3. Seek counsel and be willing to share issues with your future spouse, especially when the issues:
  - Are currently present or part of an ongoing struggle.
  - Hinder your relationship with God or your ability to live out God’s plan for your life.
  - Hinder your relationship with your spouse.

## ISSUES RELATED TO FERTILITY AND FAMILY PLANNING

God plans for married couples to bear children (*Genesis* 1:28; *1 Timothy* 5:14). For any decision about fertility and family planning, couples are encouraged to prayerfully consider the Word, seek counsel, and come to mutual agreement together. Couples are strongly cautioned against using any method of family planning that is abortive in nature (i.e., that ends a

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pregnancy after conception has occurred). The Stewarding Fertility document (see QR code) provides important considerations for believers regarding birth control, infertility, and family planning. It is an informative and helpful guide as you are seeking to make decisions in this area. If you have questions or difficulties regarding this topic, counsel with your elder, mentor, physician, or professional Christian counselor.



Scan or click for the Stewarding Fertility document.

## PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DECISION MAKING ON WHAT IS AND IS NOT PERMISSIBLE

As believers, our desire is to live by God's word in every aspect of our lives. The reality is when it comes to how a couple specifically engages in sexual behaviors, the scripture doesn't lay out specifics. However, there are biblical principles that help couples decide if a particular way of engaging in their sexual relationship is within bounds according to scripture.

### QUESTION TO CONSIDER

As a couple, how will you know what is biblically acceptable and not acceptable sexual behavior within your marriage?

## FOUR CORE ATTRIBUTES

Godly, healthy sexual behavior in marriage has four core attributes.

1. **Mutuality:** while either spouse can initiate sexual intimacy, they agree together to any sexual behavior. Either spouse has the option to decline. It is critical that neither spouse feels forced, coerced, or controlled. Withholding sex should not be used as a tool of control or manipulation (*1 Cor. 7:3-5*). Both spouses should avoid selfishness and seek to meet the other's sexual needs.
2. **Oneness:** sexual intimacy bonds the couple's marriage and strengthens their sense of being one ("We"). This principle is not met if one spouse seeks to engage in sexual behavior for the sole purpose of fulfilling personal pleasure ("I").
3. **Honor/Respect:** each spouse feels valued and cherished by the other; the best interests of the other spouse are always kept in mind. Each spouse takes seriously the opportunity to prepare himself/herself to be sexual (i.e., in terms of hygiene, time/priorities, and mentally).
4. **No Shame:** the couple enjoys their sexual relationship and experiences pleasure without either of the spouses feeling guilt or shame (*Gen. 2:25*).



## Boundaries in Engagement Resources

### MAINTAINING GODLY, HEALTHY BOUNDARIES DURING YOUR ENGAGEMENT

#### Extreme View

No physical contact during engagement. Unprepared for intimacy in the marriage relationship.

#### Balanced View

Healthily growing in physical & emotional intimacy.

#### Extreme View

Too much intimate contact during engagement. Putting self in compromising positions.



Scan or click to learn more about healthy boundaries and accountability in engagement.

### REFERENCES

Referencing these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

1. Tim Gardner, "Sex's Mission: Why God Created Sexual Boundaries," quoting H. Robinson, *Marriage Partnership*, March 2002.
2. Juli Slattery, *God, Sex, and Your Marriage*, 2022.
3. Shelley S. Martinkus, *Rescued*, 2015.
4. Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God designed Marriage to Make us Holy More Than to Make us Happy*, 2015.
5. D.E. Rosenau, *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of Married Sexual Pleasure, Revised and Updated* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 205-206.