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Always Enraptured

The Physical Aspect of Marriage

From ***My Beloved and My Friend***
*How To Be Married To Your Best Friend
Without Changing Spouses*

This ebook is an excerpt from the book *My Beloved and My Friend: How To Be Married To Your Best Friend Without Changing Spouses*, by Hal and Melanie Young.

For more information or to order the full book, please visit the book's website www.MyBelovedAndMyFriend.com

Learn more about the teaching and writing ministry of Hal and Melanie Young at www.HalAndMelanie.com

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**“...rejoice with the wife of your youth ...
And always be enraptured with her love.”**

~ Proverbs 5:18-19 ~

The Physical Aspect

*They did, and night is come; and yet we see
Formalities retarding thee.
What mean these ladies, which—as though
They were to take a clock in pieces—go
So nicely about the bride?
A bride, before a “Good-night” could be said,
Should vanish from her clothes into her bed,
As souls from bodies steal, and are not spied.
But now she’s laid ; what though she be?
Yet there are more delays, for where is he?
He comes and passeth through sphere after sphere;
First her sheets, then her arms, then anywhere.
Let not this day, then, but this night be thine;
Thy day was but the eve to this, O Valentine.*

— John Donne¹

A few weeks before we were married, we attended a friend’s wedding. At the time we were very interested in how they were handling some of the details, but all we remember now is the new groom standing with a few friends outside the reception hall, rhapsodizing over God’s gift of marriage. “Ah, the blessings of marriage,” he exulted, “both the temporal *as well as* the spiritual!”

¹ Donne, John. “An Epithalamion, or Marriage Song on the Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine Being Married on St. Valentine’s Day.” Poem. 1613, VI.

Although we still chuckle when we think of his proclamation—with all of twenty minutes' experience behind it—he was right. There are many earthly and spiritual blessings to marriage. We've certainly found it to be so.

What the Bible Says About Sexuality And Marriage

As a young ministerial student, what our friend did not have in personal experience, he knew from the Word of God and the wise men of church history. The theologians and pastors of the Westminster Assembly, for example, writing the confession adopted by Presbyterian and Reformed churches all over the world, had a remarkable gift for the succinct statement. In chapter 24, they explained marriage in 33 words:

Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.²

It's an elegant statement from a theological standpoint. It doesn't stir the soul of most people, but an awful lot of it is about sex.

Now that we have your attention, look back at that statement. They found three features of marriage as God established it—help (for both of you), legitimate children, and legitimate sexual relations. And we would argue that the *third* point is part of the *first*. Remember, God created Eve for Adam, making the observation, “It is *not good that man should be alone.*”³ It's a help to our moral walk to have a spouse.

² Westminster Confession of Faith, 24:2. The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, adopted by many Baptists in Great Britain and the United States, has almost identical language in its chapter 25.

³ Genesis 2:18

So all three points have a sexual component and they are all three Biblical, too.

Marriage is for mutual help: *And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'... Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*⁴

God gave us to each other to provide legitimate issue: *Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.*⁵

Marriage helps prevent sin: *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*⁶

So the Puritans found these three purposes for marriage, and two of them have to do with sexuality—and really, all three.

Christians are often derided as “hung up” about sex. There are good reasons, though not reasons obvious to most of the world. The Bible has a great deal to say about sexuality, and not just “Thou shalt not” statements, or even, “Do this here [if you must], but don’t do anything else anywhere else ...”

First, our sexuality is a core feature of our individual being. God created man and woman as sexually differentiated creatures from the very beginning, before there was sin and imperfection in the world:

⁴ Genesis 2:18, 22

⁵ Malachi 2:15 (ESV)

⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:2

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it..."... Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good...⁷

By the way, that's the first commandment recorded in scripture—to be fruitful and multiply, the man and woman would have to come together. So if our most fundamental nature is shaped by sexuality and the sexual union, it makes sense we would make much of it.

Other passages speak of the delights of marital love:

...rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love.⁸

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD.⁹

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life...¹⁰

⁷ Genesis 1:27-28, 31

⁸ Proverbs 5:18-19. It's interesting to note that this is one of the few passages in Scripture which alludes to keeping pets, that is, animals for companionship and beauty rather than sheer utility. See descriptions of King Solomon's commerce in apes and monkeys [or peacocks, in the ESV] (1 Kings 10:22, 2 Chronicles 9:21), and the poor man's pet lamb in the prophet Nathan's parable (2 Samuel 12:3).

⁹ Proverbs 18:22

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 9:9. Granted, the writer of Ecclesiastes (presumably Solomon) was working from an existential crisis, hence the cry of "vanity", but even then, you see how God often blesses unbelievers as well as His children with this earthly joy.

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself... “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”... let each of you in particular so love his own wife as himself...¹¹

And that’s not even touching the Song of Solomon, a section of Scripture so poetic and descriptive of the raptures of a bride and groom that rabbis used to counsel young men not to read it until they were thirty years old.

No, the Bible is not prudish or hung up about sex; it is very much in favor of it—within the context of marriage. And just to balance the positive side of the question, there’s another reason to take this seriously—because sexual immorality is a different class of sin:

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.¹²

The apostle Paul wrote this to the church at Corinth, a city so notorious for its sexual abandon that the Greek language had a word for fornication, *korinthiázomai*, literally “to act Corinthian.”¹³ Converts coming into the church from the port-city culture around them had a lot to learn. [B]ecause of

¹¹ Ephesians 5:28,31,33

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:18

¹³ “Κορινθι-άζομαι, A. practise fornication, because Corinth was famous for its courtesans, Aristophanes, *Fragment 354*:—Act. in Hsch.” (Henry George Liddell. Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. with the assistance of. Roderick McKenzie. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3D*korinqia%2Fzomai>, accessed 8/28/12.)

sexual immorality, Paul wrote a few verses later, *let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*¹⁴ Surrounded by the raging carnality of Corinthian society, where prostitution was a religious act and business affairs and social events were held in the dining rooms of brothels (masquerading as temples), Paul pointed the believer to the God-ordained protection—the arms of his or her spouse.

Much grief in the world because of misuse of this gift

There is no debating that our culture's changing views of sexuality have brought about disturbing trends in marriage. Here in the U.S., there are fewer and later marriages than we once saw. Among working class American adults, the marriage rate has fallen from 84% in 1960 to less than 50% today.¹⁵ Cohabitation rates, on the other hand, have soared. Some 60% of American women ages 25-40 have lived with a boyfriend before (or instead of) marriage.¹⁶ Children are bearing the burden, too. Since 1970 the percentage of children born out of wedlock has gone from just over 10% to more than 40%, in 2008.¹⁷ Research has shown that children born

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:2

¹⁵ Murray, Charles. "The New American Divide." *Wall Street Journal* [New York] 21 Jan 2012, Saturday n. pag. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204301404577170733817181646.html>>.

¹⁶ Kennedy, Sheela, and Larry Bumpass. "Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States." *Demographic Research*. 19. (2008): 1663-1692. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol19/47/19-47.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Table 7, "Nonmarital childbearing, by detailed race and Hispanic origin of mother, and maternal age: United States, selected years 1970-2008", p. 83. National Center for Health Statistics. *Health, United States, 2011: With Special Feature on Socioeconomic Status and Health*. Hyattsville, MD. 2012. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus11.pdf#007>>.

out of wedlock fare much worse, on nearly every measure, than children born into two-parent families.¹⁸

Several factors have played into this change. Economically, the expansion of federal and state social welfare programs have made it *appear* easier for single mothers to get along without a husband and father in the picture. The reality is quite different, as single parents struggle to provide economic security for their children.¹⁹ But where concern for their support may have encouraged young women to think hard before agreeing to a young man's ring-less proposition, the safety net has taken some of the fear that may have guided that decision.

Our generation was the first raised with a completely secular education. Melanie's mother was led to Christ by a public school Bible teacher, but by the time we were in school it was daring to pray or refer to the Bible in any way. Cultural Christianity cannot substitute for actual faith and a living church, but it can inform the society of standards for right and wrong and set the tone for the community. This erosion of a cultural consensus that sex outside of marriage was simply immoral, period, coincides with other changes which have landed us right where we are as a society.

Even earlier, the Protestant church's acceptance of contraception "for sufficiently grave reasons" in the early 1930's opened the door for greater access to birth control. By lowering the risks of unintended pregnancy, another restraint to unbridled sexual adventurism was removed. The legalization

¹⁸. "Births to Unmarried Women." *Child Trends Databank*. Child Trends, Mar 2012. Web. 29 Aug 2012. <www.childtrendsdatabank.org/?q=node/196>.

¹⁹ Waldfogel, Jane, Terry-Ann Craigie, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing." *Future Child*. 20.2 (2010): 87-112. Web. 29 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3074431/pdf/nihms-273444.pdf>>.

of abortion in *Roe v. Wade* made this even worse, offering a “backstop” position if contraception failed to prevent “accidents.” Thankfully, many women with an unplanned pregnancy find they don’t have the heart to carry through with an abortion, saving the life of the child but also contributing to the increasing birth rate outside of wedlock.

It’s sad. This culture of promiscuity, abandonment, death, and despair are *not* the pattern God has given us for sexuality.

As the culture has continued down this path, the church has had its share of stumbling as well. Perhaps in reaction to licentiousness in the culture at large—an ongoing problem, whether considering 1st century Rome or 21st century America—sometimes the church has elevated celibacy as an ideal or higher calling. Jesus made it plain that celibacy was a particular gift, not a higher state. When He taught about divorce, His disciples protested, “*If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.*” Jesus replied, “*All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given.*”²⁰

Instead, we read that *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled.*²¹

Some in the church have erred by emphasizing procreation as the major purpose for sexuality, ignoring extended passages in places like the Song of Solomon which clearly celebrate the righteous enjoyment of pleasure in one another. The Proverbs call marital love *ravishing, enrapturing, captivating, intoxicating, or exhilarating.*²²

²⁰ Matthew 19:10-11

²¹ Hebrews 13:4

²² Proverbs 5:19, as rendered in KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, and NASB, respectively.

But in these liberated and sexually saturated days, it is more often that the church has fallen into the world's way of thinking about sexuality. Instead of acknowledging that God created the marital union for both pleasure and pregnancy, we follow the world's lead and try to keep the sexual act and the conception of children as separate as possible.

We may talk about the blessing of children occasionally, seeing as it's in the Psalms and all, but like the world, we tend to think more about fertility as a risky side effect of our intimate fun.

The world's view of sexuality, where it's not actively evil, is unbalanced at its core. Our family enjoys the flavors of international foods, and occasionally we treat ourselves with a stop at an Indian restaurant. Most we visit serve buffet style, and we have a positive relish for curries, *biryanis*, and *dahls*. Hal is the typical meat-and-potatoes guy, but always remarks, "If I ever had to go totally vegetarian, I could do this."

But life is not lived in constant feasting, a blazing barrage of cream, peppers, coriander and *garam masala*—even in India. Neither is our sexuality intended to be a non-stop buffet of exotica, with our personal pleasure of the moment being the predominating focus. Down that path lie hedonism, egocentrism, and a desire for conquest and domination—the triumph of one's will over another's—rather than an expression of love, oneness, and commitment. Why would the world use sexual epithets as insults and curses, when the Christian is told to consider the marital union as a picture of Christ and the church?

We Might Not See The Worldliness Creeping In

Being bombarded by the world's view from the time we can focus our eyes, we need to be very alert to its influence on our thinking. Striving to overcome too much reluctance to discuss these matters, perhaps, the church may be giving a backhanded approval to some of the worldly expectations. We know to steer clear of outright adultery, maybe, but don't see some of the underlying issues we've simply absorbed and adopted from the culture around us.

Take, for example, our expectations of the sexual act. When we were newlyweds, we read several books by well-respected Christian authors, attempting to counsel people like us and steer us clear of secular sexologists. Certainly, we learned some interesting and occasionally helpful things about physiology and psychology of both of us. It's good to get that information from a source which respects God's purpose and design in creating us.

But all of these books had advice which we later found to be problematic. Most of them seemed to spend a lot of time on what you might call performance issues—not just sexual dysfunctions, though those are there—but more of the scorekeeping variety. And we use the word “score” advisedly. They left us wondering, “Are we doing this right? Are we reaching the proper levels of enjoyment? How does our sexual achievement match up to our goals?”

It can make the marital relationship into a sporting event, and make us into athletes in training, or spectators of our own love affair.

It led us to realize one of the important things we wish we'd understood at first.

Your Love Life Only Has To Please Three People

That spectator experience made us sit back and think. If we are putting ourselves against a standard, whose? If husband and wife are happy and God is pleased, then that settles it, doesn't it?

It doesn't matter what the national average is, or the prevailing wisdom, or the neighborhood standard, or the advice of the author. God's word is our only external standard, and it's mighty broad. Beyond that, who cares? We aren't selling tickets. Hopefully we've matured out of the Monday-afternoon-in-the-locker-room kind of conversation some folks had in high school, sharing gossip and braggadocio about their weekend romances. If no one but us and the all-seeing God have the slightest awareness of our intimacies, then what do we care what the world's opinion might be?

The other side of that, of course, is that other people's sex lives are none of *our* business either. When the Jesus admonishes, "*whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,*"²³ and the Proverbs say, *of the wife of your youth, to let her breasts satisfy you at all times,*²⁴ then the question of pornography has already been addressed. Yet there are some additional things which need to be said.

Tim Challies observes that since the rise of the Internet, "it is actually far more difficult to avoid pornography than it is to find it."

*[When] I meet a young man, even a young husband,
I pretty much assume he either is or was into por-*

²³ Matthew 5:28

²⁴ Proverbs 5:18-19

nography. I honestly don't think that's unrealistic, unfair, or cynical. It's the accessibility problem... Porn is so prevalent that it's nearly certain every young man will find it; and once it has been tasted, it is difficult not to indulge.²⁵

It has become so pervasive that it is influencing popular culture. Images and behavior which were considered edgy and risqué a few decades ago are becoming commonplace, lifted into view by the tide of sewage rising beneath them.

God gave us six sons first, then our daughters. We have finally discovered for ourselves what we heard many Christian parents complain about—that it is difficult to find clothing for a six- or seven-year-old girl which doesn't look like the sort of outfits favored by the campus flirts of our college days. Who thought it would be appropriate to print a double-entendre across the seat of a young girl's sweat suit? Why should my third grader dress like a sorority pledge ten years older? It's a symptom of a disturbing taste which is being cultivated in secret but is creeping more boldly into the daylight.

Of course, it's not just sexualizing little girls. The industry of making women into objects is polluting our whole understanding of beauty. Recently one of the top models approached a news outlet to ask if they would publish her unretouched photo from a recent studio session, next to the finished, polished-up image. It was startling to see that someone said to be one of the world's most beautiful women didn't look anything close to the perfected image we saw of her in the media.

²⁵ Challies, Tim. *Sexual Detox: A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn*. Adelphi, MD: Cruciform Press, 2010. 12, 25. eBook.

The images of women in advertising has gone beyond an earlier year's airbrush pimple-removal to wholesale re-engineering of the female form. Melanie has made a bit of a study of it, and it's shocking how the digitally-altered images in advertisements and catalogs present a figure no woman could stand—literally: one recent ad campaign had trimmed a model's hips so smooth there was no room for a pelvis. Where do her legs connect? Bet that's an interesting x-ray.

At least no one dies from digital manipulation; the promotion of extremely thin fashion models has resulted in at least one death and is blamed for the continued rise of anorexia in young women.

The sad result of this imagery is a cultural preference for a female figure which is difficult, dangerous, or impossible to attain, an unrealistic expectation in the eyes of men, and a self-doubt in the hearts of women. Alarmingly, that preference for women who appear to be pre-pubescent also may lead our culture down even more perverted paths which endanger children.

Likewise, the behavior shown in pornography (and in a lesser form, in popular media generally) influences how we see one another and what we expect from our mates. Even if we virtuously resolve to keep our thoughts on our wife or husband and not on the images we've seen or the books we've read, we misjudge what real life and real people are like. A generation ago, researchers found that avid soap opera fans tended to overestimate the number of doctors, lawyers, extramarital affairs, and illegitimate children in society.²⁶

²⁶ Greenberg, Bradley S., Kimberly Neuendorf, Nancy Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Laura Henderson. "The Soaps: What's On and Who Cares?" *Journal of Broadcasting*. 26.2 (1982): 519-535 . Print. <<http://academic.csuohio.edu/kneuendorf/vitae/GreenbergNeuendorfBuerkel-Rothfusssetal82.pdf>>. Given

In the same way, if our attitudes and expectations of the marriage bed are informed by popular culture or worse, we will bring unrealistic (and unreachable) standards to our mates.

We're So Used To Sin, We Don't Need To Rehearse It Any More

Melanie recently read a question online from a Christian wife, a mother, who was concerned that her husband wanted her to be restrained for physical relations. She ought to be concerned! That sort of “play” is pretending at rape. Where in the Bible do you find sexual assault as a part of marriage? Why should a wife, in a different scenario, be expected to give in to ideas which are degrading and offensive, taking the role of harlot, or else pushing back against her husband’s advances? Why should a husband find pleasure in pretending to violate his own bride?

Yet, this kind of behavior may become more common. The prevalence of violent and perverted pornography seems to be changing people’s standards. Shockingly, nearly a quarter of male college students admitted to being so sexually aggressive that they’d caused “their date to cry, scream or plead.”²⁷

Should we play at that? No! Rather, the Word warns us that sin is no laughing matter and nothing to play around with. *Fools mock at sin*, warns the proverb, and *to do evil is like sport to a fool*.²⁸ From the Old Testament and from the lips of Jesus we learn that while man only judges by what he can see, God looks on the heart, and a heart which is inclined

the skyrocketing number of unmarried parents, you might wonder if it’s still possible to overestimate the rate of illegitimacy.

²⁷ Javed, Noor. “Insight.” *TheStar.com*. Toronto Star Newspapers, Ltd., 22 Apr. 2013. Web. 08 May 2013.

²⁸ Proverbs 14:9, 10:23

toward a gross, outward sin has already crossed the line in the area seen by God alone:

For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder...’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ [“You good-for-nothing!” (NASB)] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire ...

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”²⁹

That doesn't minimize the grosser crimes at all, but tells us God takes our inner thoughts and fantasies much more seriously than we probably do. And if God sees our casual ogling across the neighbor's pool fence as adultery in our spirit, then we have to consider that playing at rape is much the same thing—a heart which delights in assault and domination.

We're not big fans of Halloween—for the same reasons, come to think of it; why would we dress the children God gave us as if they were servants of the Prince of Hell?—but beyond the supernatural aspect, we are seeing a serious downward trend in the costume aisles. The costumes for women, and even young girls, tend to be highly sexualized

²⁹ Matthew 5:28

–“naughty” nurses, suggestive schoolgirl uniforms, servant’s costumes, and worse. What are they suggesting? Pedophilia, perversions of different sorts, wealthy men taking advantage of their household staff. It’s simple—they are playing at sin, even if they’re “safely married.”

Besides, we’re so good at falling into the real thing, why would we go role-playing “notorious” sinner? Even if Jesus hadn’t warned us, it seems like we get enough practice on our own without acting out a make-believe scandal.

Why are we tempted to do these things? Probably because sinful acts carry the risk of being caught, and our tempters whisper the ancient refrain, *Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.*³⁰ Beyond that, though, is the tempter’s lie that familiar intimacies with the same person, year after year, will grow boring and mundane. It’s patently false, yet every worldly magazine is screaming from their covers, the latest list of secrets which will breathe new thrills into your sad, sad, sex life.

Don’t buy it.

The Problem of Just Looking

There was a country song several years ago where the singer assures his jealous wife that although he had wandering eyes, he was “just looking”; his heart was firmly at home. The problem is, that’s not Biblical, and it works even less as an excuse for pornography.

The righteous (if troubled) Job says at one point, “*I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a*

³⁰ Proverbs 9:17

young woman?”³¹ In view of his marriage, he isn’t going out to gaze on virgins, as the English Standard Version renders it—even though polygamy was still permitted in the culture.

Job understood, as Jesus made explicit at the Sermon on the Mount, that enjoying the thrill of desire for an attractive young body other than his wife’s was a violation of his marriage vows. Neither Job nor Jesus are confining their remarks to the lecherous beach-goer, ogling the co-eds with binoculars, nor to the foolish youth described in Proverbs 7, following the seductive woman to her bed. Just checking out an unsuspecting young woman going about her normal business could be Job’s own pathway to sin.

Lust is a corrosive, consuming sin, and it starts small. It starts young, too. A few years ago, we read a study from the University of New Hampshire, where incoming freshmen (both men and women) were asked about their experience of Internet pornography. While both had been exposed, fully 93% of the 18-year-old men admitted to seeing porn online, and 69% had actively sought it out and watched it. Nearly a third, 29%, said they were first exposed when they were 13 or younger.³²

And that’s in the U.S., which much of the world considers hopelessly prudish about sex. It’s as bad or worse in other places.

A British survey published by Psychologies magazine in 2010 found that 81 per cent of 14-to-16-year-olds (regardless of gender) had looked at porn

³¹ Job 31:1

³² Chiara, Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor. “The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth.” *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 11.6 (2008): n. page. Web. 2 Sep. 2012 <<http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV169.pdf>>.

online at home while 63 per cent called it up on their phones; a third of them had seen sexual images online when they were 10 or younger. A 2006 study involving rural Alberta youth from 17 schools found that 88 per cent of Grade 8 boys [14-year-olds] had viewed porn online...³³

Men need to discipline themselves to look away from temptation, no matter where they find it. That may mean skipping the commercials on the Super Bowl, studying the candy bar display in the checkout line to avoid the tabloid rack, or even keeping a very formal relationship with a co-worker at the office. It may mean mowing the backyard only when the neighbor isn't enjoying her pool—or calling it a day on the yardwork if she comes out. God made men very responsive to visual stimulation, and men have to take seriously their commitment to their wives and to their Lord. There is more than one covenant in place, you see.

The physical danger of pornography

When the product is pornography, there's not even the minimal excuse of "accidentally" seeing a tempting image in a commercial or advertisement. Its sole purpose is to excite sexual desire, or at least, the desire to purchase more and more expensive images. Its goal is your lust. Pornographers have no concern about your spiritual well-being; if they successfully lure you into their trap, leading you into repeated acts of spiritual adultery, that's your problem.

³³ Bielski, Zosia. "In the age of Internet porn, teaching boys to be good men." *Globe and Mail* [Toronto, Ontario] 21 Apr 2012, Saturday n. pag. Web. 2 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/parenting/teens/sexuality/in-the-age-of-internet-porn-teaching-boys-to-be-good-men/article2409690/>>.

But if the spiritual danger weren't enough, research is revealing a physical danger as well. The sight of a stimulating image, whether the wife of your youth or a porn queen online, causes the body to produce dopamine, the hormone which mediates sexual arousal in the brain. Because Internet pornography can be displayed and changed at a rapid rate, the user can quickly overstimulate himself; like pupils contracting in bright light, the brain's dopamine receptors desensitize to protect themselves against the unnatural onslaught of hormones. This means the pornography user must seek higher and higher levels of stimulation to experience the same level of arousal. As the sin increases, so does the desensitization.

Researchers are now reporting frequent cases of sexual dysfunction and impotence among young men in their twenties. Some of these are young husbands who find they can't respond to their wives, as much as they wish to. Eventually even the extremes of pornography are unable to break through their calloused response.³⁴ Doctors say that complete abstinence for as long as two to six months may restore sensitivity—a difficult prescription for a man habituated to constant, over-the-top sexual titillation.

The apostle Paul warned the church in Corinth,

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*³⁵

How sad to discover, twenty-one centuries later, yet another way immorality leads to physical harm.³⁶

³⁴ Robinson, Marnia. "Porn-Induced Sexual Dysfunction Is a Growing Problem." *Psychology Today*. Psychology Today, 11 July 2011. Web. 25 Aug. 2012.

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:18

³⁶ The other danger is the "cranial EGDOL" problem. Hal is convinced that if he indulged a temptation of this sort, he could expect a permanent

And we shouldn't forget ever, that participation in this industry fosters exploitation and abuse of real women and real girls, and cheapens the culture's view of womanhood. This is not a victimless sin, it hurts everyone it touches. Don't even start down that path, not the first step. And if you're already down that road, get help and get out.

Women's Temptations

Women have their own temptations, too. Sadly, a growing number of women are becoming addicted to Internet pornography, with the same kinds of effects the men experience. Studies referenced earlier record that girls are not immune to the onslaught of pornography—they just seem to fall less frequently than the boys.

More commonly, though, just as men are drawn to images, women are drawn to emotions. Long before there were “beefcake” magazines for women to lust over, there were romance novels and romantic movies.

Every generation seems to have its worst-ever example of “mommy porn,” as the current bestseller has been called. One of Hal's teachers in high school, a very proper and very conservative woman with a sharp eye for cultural trends, told of overhearing a conversation at the circulation desk of the library. A prim, elderly woman was sheepishly returning a scandalous novel.

“Why, Miss ———, I wouldn't have expected *you* to be reading this,” said the librarian.

imprint of the trademark from Melanie's iron skillet, as made by the Lodge Manufacturing Company of South Pittsburg, Tennessee.

Blushing bright scarlet, the embarrassed spinster stuttered, “But... it’s so beautifully *written*.”

Once upon a time, men who knew better claimed they only read *Playboy* for the articles, too.

The current blight on the literary world is an explicit story of a sado-masochistic relationship—one book even has the effrontery to display a pair of handcuffs for the cover art. Its popularity suggests the same kind of escalation we were talking about among men watching online porn is very likely happening among women. It’s just a different stimulation.

We hear about men encouraging their wives to read trashy novels like this in the hopes that it will increase their desire. Really, it’s likely to do the opposite in the long run. Just like no real woman can compete with the altered images of the Internet, neither can any real man be as rich, handsome, powerful, and aristocratic as the protagonist of a novel.

Repentance

When the apostle Paul speaks to the oversexed culture in Corinth, he lays out a depressing list of lifestyles leading to condemnation:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

It’s no coincidence that four of the first five are sexual in nature. *And such were some of you*, he continues (ouch),

But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.³⁷

As damaging as sexual immorality can be to body, spirit, and relationships all around, it is not final, nor irredeemable. There is a way out, through the forgiveness and restoration which Jesus can give. But it takes repentance to lay hold of that.

How can you do that? First, you have to confess your sin and commit to change. Repentance is about a radical change of direction, and part of repentance is doing something to stop. This is the time to get real accountability.³⁸ Make sure that someone you respect will be notified if you seek out sin on the net.

Commit yourself to fighting temptation, too. In our book, *Raising Real Men*, we talk about how we teach our children “The Five Fingered Fist to Fight Temptation” and it works just as well for adults as it does children. When confronted with temptation, we tell them, take five steps:

1. **Pray:** Seek the Lord’s help to overcome the temptation.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.³⁹

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

³⁸ We recommend Covenant Eyes. <www.CovenantEyes.com> Use the code **raisingrealmen** to try it free for a month.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:13

2. Sing praises to God: Music engages the heart even when we are feeling very cold and blue, spiritually, and it can draw us closer to God as we remember His grace, love, holiness and power.

And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.⁴⁰

3. Read the Bible.

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.⁴¹

4. Leave the Situation. At the computer? Close it and get moving. In the shower? Dry off and get out. Alone? Get in a room with other people.

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.⁴²

5. Go to Your Authority. For adults, this means our mates (remember, God has given us authority over our mate's body) and our pastors. Go to someone who will counsel with you, pray for you, and give you practical advice.

Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.⁴³

⁴⁰ 1 Samuel 16:23 (ESV)

⁴¹ Psalm 119:11

⁴² 2 Timothy 2:22

⁴³ Ecclesiastes 4:12

These five ways to fight are like a fist that knocks away temptation!

The only way to deal with sexual sin is no excuses, no tolerance, a complete fast. It's an addiction, physical and spiritual, and you need to BREAK it. You don't give an alcoholic a drink, you help him fight the craving.

But are we doing this right?

There are obvious traps that many fall into, and we've tried to talk about the real troubles and some help to avoid them or escape them. Thankfully, the physical relationship is not all a listen of *watch-out* and *don't-dare* and *avoid-at-all-cost* instructions. After all, it's supposed to be a fountain of joy to a husband and wife.⁴⁴

Hopefully, you're not reading this chapter in the hopes of finding a Christian sex manual. If you started at the beginning, you can guess we're not going to offer you one. And really, God created you for one another, in part for this very thing—glorifying God in your bodies, by enjoying one another in obedience to His command, and quite probably bringing a new generation of His servants into the world.

It's not that hard to figure out, and really, the finer points are something that the two of you need to figure out yourselves. Recognize that a lot of the advice you'll see, whether in person or more likely in print somewhere, has come from people with too much baggage and jaded tastes. Especially if you are coming to this as virgins, it's a land of pure delight.

If *you're* the one with baggage and jaded tastes, you may need to rethink a lot of what you believe about sexuality, in

⁴⁴ Proverbs 5:18

order to begin to think about it Biblically. You may need to seek forgiveness of God. You may need to abstain from thinking about certain things. You need to remake your mind, but our God is the one who restores the years the locust have eaten.⁴⁵

And remember the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land. Don't volunteer to go back to Egypt. If God has set you on a pathway of fulfillment, both of your own desires and of His will, then don't let the world or people around you put conditions and expectations on you. Don't let them lead you to dissatisfaction and discontent.

Love Life Changes—And That's Okay

Most of us come to our marriage with great expectations, and the anticipation of the honeymoon is high on the list. It's a milestone time which is not to be minimized. In ancient Israel, a man received a one-year exemption from the draft when he took a wife—in fact, he was exempt during his engagement, too:

So it shall be, when you are on the verge of a battle...the officers shall speak to the people, saying: ... what man is there who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in battle and another man marry her.⁴⁶

When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Joel 2:25

⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 20:2,5,7

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 24:5

But honestly, there is usually a lot of uncertainty and anxiety during that time, too. For all its special memories, there will be plenty of times over the years to come that will be more passionate and enjoyable than any hour of your honeymoon could have been. At other times, job separation or illness or some other reason may make your time together rare and unusual.

It's all okay as long as both of you can be patient and content with the situation.

The news media had a little stir last year over a Christian author's challenge to couples in a stale or almost troubled relationship, to commit to making love every single day for a period of several weeks (or even longer). Is that a Biblical goal, or a world-teasing stunt?

It's probably somewhere in between. The Bible doesn't give specifics, but Paul indicated the answer is *regularly*:

[Because] of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:2-5

So a couple should be intimate often enough to head off temptation for either of them. That word, “intimate,” has two meanings, and they both apply. On the one side, there should be regular sexual relations, to address the temptations of immorality; but there should also be a strong and frequently renewed emotional intimacy, as we discuss in another chapter. Neither one is the primary domain of one partner; both husbands and wives need both physical and emotional unity, on an ongoing basis.

As Ecclesiastes says, there is *A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing*.⁴⁹ While we are freed from the requirements of the Mosaic law, it’s instructive that the Levitical code fenced off certain times for abstaining, such as during the normal monthly cycle and several weeks after childbirth.⁵⁰ If either spouse had any sort of discharge, that time was treated like the woman’s period.⁵¹ It would seem that considering both Paul’s instruction and God’s law in the nation of Israel, there is plenty of justification for abstaining for health or for special, devotional reasons. That, in itself, says the love-every-day challenge probably steps over a line; even if ritual impurity is no longer a consideration, it’s more kind to the wife especially to leave off for a few days when she’s indisposed.

Beyond that, though, it’s up to you—and it will vary as your day-to-day circumstances vary. As we said, this whole area is between husband, wife, and God. There’s no scoreboard in the bedroom.

⁴⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:5

⁵⁰ Leviticus 18:19, 12:2-5

⁵¹ Leviticus 15:1-33

Passion Has A Place, But Not All of It

The church, as well as the rabbis, has sometimes been a bit cautious about the Song of Solomon. Some commentators scurried away from the romantic language and waxed lyrical about the love of Christ for His bride, the church—which certainly may be an accurate reading. Yet if the Song is primarily or only an allegory of the Savior and His people, even so God used very powerful and evocative language to describe it! Surely He would not have blessed an unholy passion by describing the mystery of Christ and the Church in this way.

But reading the book as literal, it *is* romantic. The narrative of courtship, betrothal, and nuptials is poetic, exotic, and yes, even erotic at times. There can be no question that passion has a big place within the bounds of marriage.

And yet, it's not all passion all the time, like a satellite radio station with only one theme. There are those times of separation and abstinence, as we said. There is also a different sort of married love in Scripture.

Consider the case of Isaac and Rebekah. When famine drove them to the Philistine city of Gerar, Isaac committed the same sin as his father Abraham—he lied about their relationship and claimed Rebekah was his sister, not his wife, in hope that no one would kill him to take his bride.

And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister?⁵²

⁵² Genesis 26:8-9 (KJV)

They were “sporting”—and what was that?

It was something intimate enough that Abimelech knew they weren’t brother and sister, but innocent enough they might chance it in public. The Hebrew word means “laughing”—it was intimate, but playful. Some translations say “caressing.”

The world might say that all your time together should be earth-shaking passion, or heart stopping romance. The Bible shows us it can be both of those, or it can be affectionate, or playful, or comfortable, or profound—at different times in different ways. Different cycles of life will affect this too—different parts of the monthly cycle, different parts of the child-bearing cycle, different times of life.

Other things might affect you

Melanie remembers her friend, Emily,⁵³ coming to her with a very serious concern.

“I don’t think I love Chad any more!” she burst out.

Melanie asked her why in the world she would say that; why in the world she would *think* that.

“I just have no desire at all for Chad! I have never felt this way before, but I don’t feel anything. I don’t have any thoughts of making love at all!” Emily said.

Melanie suddenly recalled that though they had several children, the new baby was the first one she’d breastfed.

⁵³ Names have been changed to protect the couple’s privacy in this sensitive area.

“Oh, Emily!” Melanie exclaimed. “You haven’t fallen out of love. It’s just your hormones!”

Melanie has been a lactation consultant for many years, and she recognized Emily’s symptoms. The hormones associated with nursing sometimes make the mother feel like she couldn’t even remember why people *do* that anyway. If Emily would just make herself open to her husband’s advances, Melanie suggested, she would almost certainly respond like always, though perhaps a little slower, and enjoy it just as much.

A few days later, Emily stopped by the house.

“Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!” Emily cheered. “I had no idea! I thought it was all over, but now that I understand... well, it was just great! Chad is so happy, too!”

Pregnancy can do the same thing, while some women find their libido actually increases when they’re expecting. Sometimes sickness will mean a time of lessened or no relations. We talk about this more in the chapter on sickness and health. A wife’s hysterectomy or having her tubes tied, or a husband’s vasectomy, can decrease desire, too. It’s a process profoundly involved with hormones, and anything which changes the hormonal balance is likely to change your interest in relations—up or down.

Our friend Abigail,⁵⁴ for example, had her tubes tied when she and her husband Phil believed their family was complete. For some time afterward, she bounced from doctor to doctor with female problems and a complete lack of desire. Finally she realized that all this started with the sterilization. She

⁵⁴ Names have been changed to protect the couple’s privacy in this sensitive area.

began doing research and asking questions, and finally she approached Phil and suggested she undergo a reversal.

He was shocked, and worried that they might get pregnant again. Abigail wisely stopped talking about it and started praying. About a year later, out of the blue, Phil said to her, “Hey, weren’t you going to set it up to have a reversal?” When he also said he was open to more children, Abigail was ecstatic; her own heart had been leaning that direction more and more.

The surgeon who performed the reversal found that the tubal ligation had restricted the blood flow to her ovaries, resulting in her hormonal difficulties. After the reversal, she began to recover, and while the Lord only gave them one more child, that young man was to become a light of their life and a Christian with a worldwide testimony.

Don’t use your affection and attention as bargaining chips.

In college, some of our classmates encountered the Greek play *Lysistrata*. In the ancient narrative, the women of Athens and other Greek cities conspire to withhold their sexual attention from their husbands and lovers until the men agree to settle and end a costly war.

It’s not a Biblical response, though, and some couples get themselves into conflict because they try and use sex as a tool to manipulate each other. Paul told the Corinthians that the bodies of the husband and wife each belong to the other, and urged them not to stay long apart, he was aiming for that goal of “preventing uncleanness.”⁵⁵ When we let ourselves get too busy, too distracted, or too misdirected to spend time

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

together physically, we open the door to temptation. God expects us to be lovers, and to be regular about it.

So how can we rightfully use our affections to manipulate, control, or punish one another? We can't. If the lack of affection wasn't treacherous enough for our spiritual life, we mix in anger and resentment between us!

Instead, let's work towards sacrificing ourselves for the other. In the end, it leads toward happiness for both.

For your love is better than wine⁵⁶

If the front covers in the magazine racks were an indication, the entire population of American adults must be desperately bored or lamentably boring in the bedroom. Every month there's a new crop of "secrets" that promise to fan that pitiful, dying ember of decaying romance in your life. Oh, the humanity.

Here's a radical suggestion. Want to know how to make your romantic time great? Talk about it. Ask your mate what feels good. Encourage them to speak up if something is ticklish, or uncomfortable, or just unpleasant. It's not an insult, it's a sign of trust to open up your intimate lives to one another. And whatever you do, float any constructive criticism in oceans of love and praise.

To some extent, the physical act of marriage is like food. Some meals are feasts in the experience and jewels in the memory; some are experiments that don't end up like you thought they would; a lot of meals are simple, familiar things of comfort and sustenance. And very, very occasionally, a meal really doesn't agree with you afterward. That doesn't

⁵⁶ Song of Solomon 1:2b

mean you stop eating—you just go back to recipes which work and try again.

Just make it your point to enjoy one another. It's so satisfying to see the excitement, nervousness, and wonder of the honeymoon mature into the comfort, joy, and passion of longtime lovers. The Bible says a lot more about sex than "Yes" here and "No" everywhere else. If you live in the garden where God planted you, you find there is a lot more inside that hedge than you ever expected looking in at the gate. It's all good.

And that fruitful part?

We always intended to have children, sometime, but really weren't thinking about it in any great detail when we first got married. Yet the connection between sex and childbearing is so obvious and foundational, it really ought to be considered—and embraced—from the very start. Children are a gift from God and should be welcomed, not feared or despised. Being open to conception makes a remarkable difference in the experience of lovemaking—we found it more joyful and intense, when there's no holding back, no worry about something "going wrong."

Unfortunately, we keep meeting couples who are having a silent dialogue at home:

Wife: "I feel like you're using me for your pleasure but you'll blame me if I get pregnant."

Husband: "You hold back when I approach you, and your response makes me feel less of a man."

But the alternative? We'd say the alternative is *wonderful*, but it can feel pretty scary at first. Let's talk about it.

We hope you've enjoyed this excerpt from

My Beloved and My Friend

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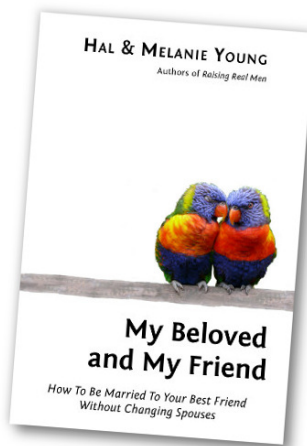
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Hal and Melanie Young have been married for nearly thirty years and have eight children. They are the authors of the award-winning ***Raising Real Men: Surviving, Teaching and Appreciating Boys*** and speak and write frequently on marriage, parenting, education, and family policy issues. To find out how to have Hal and Melanie speak at your church, retreat, or conference, visit www.HalAndMelanie.com/speaking/



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