Session 5: Developing Physical Intimacy
By Ken and Donna Kessler

The Importance of Physical Intimacy

Warning: This session presents an open and honest discussion of physical intimacy in the context of marriage.

Often the topic of sex and physical intimacy is an off limits topic for christians. It is though sex doesn’t exist. Many pastors never talk about it, teach on it, or even mention it. However, it is a very important issues in the real lives of men and women. It is the topic in most marriages that drives them to the pastor’s office for counseling.

God doesn’t shrink back from talking about it in His word. He talks about it’s importance. He speaks of what to avoid in sexual relations. He talks about many dimensions of our sexual relationship.

As we spoke about in Session 3, sex is even the mark of the marriage covenant. Note what Jimmy Evans writes about sex as the mark of the marriage covenant,

The covenant sign of marriage is sex. We consummate our covenant through sexual intimacy. Each time we enter the marriage bed, we are remembering the commitment we made to each other. Through sexual intimacy we are saying to our spouse, "I remember that I selected you among all others, and I believe that God brought us together. I am here to meet your needs and to honor God, and I am choosing to be faithful to you. I give myself to you, and only to you for the rest of my days on earth.” Sex is a sacred and binding sign of our covenantal promise. Each time we engage in sex, we are reestablishing our commitment to each other.¹

So, even though people sometimes avoid the subject, it is important to address when you speak of marriage and how to be blessed in a marriage. So, be aware that this session will discuss the topic openly and honestly.

For couples to have a healthy marriage, they need a healthy sex life.

A television game show called Family Fued matches two families against each other asking them questions. The question would go something like this: What are the top five reasons for something, or what are the top five activities in a certain area. Then when the contestants got the answer that was number one, the host would say, “the number one answer is...”. If this TV show had asked what are the top five problems in a marriage, the number one answer would be a couple’s sex life.

In our 30 years of counseling couples, the number one problem in most troubled marriages is a dysfunctional sex life. When we do pre-marriage counseling every couple thinks they will be different. We warn them to guard their physical intimacy and to make it God honoring and special. I believe every couple we have ever counseled believes their marriage will be different. I am sure a lot of marriages are different. Even so, this is probably the number one trouble spot in most struggling marriages.
Physical intimacy in a marriage is much more important than you would think.

Couples who are physically able and who desire a strong, fulfilling marriage must have a solid, God honoring sex life. God has created sexual intimacy for both procreation and pleasure. It is the universal language of love, and it is intended to be special. It is the only activity practiced in a marriage that is only between a husband and his wife.

Since this issue is most likely one of, if not the most important issue in a marriage, we want to devote a session to developing a strong physical relationship in your marriage.

Years ago, the Lord showed Donna and I that couples must be determined to have a marriage characterized by a fulfilling physical relationship.

Let me illustrate with an example from our marriage. Donna and I were planning a get away for our 30th wedding anniversary. We both had a great anticipation of having some time alone. At that time, we had three children still at home, and we needed some much needed fun time alone. We think of it now, humorously, as the anniversary from hell. Even though we laugh about it now, it wasn't funny at the time. Shortly after we reached the beautiful place in the mountains where we were staying, Donna became so weak she could hardly move. This frustrated me because I wanted to have fun with her riding bicycles and enjoying the mountains. We realized later that her blood count had dropped for some unknown reason to a very low level. If that weren't enough, I was hit with an allergic reaction to a cleaning product I been exposed to at my parent’s home a few days earlier. A very irritating rash burst out over my entire body. I could not stand to be touched by anyone because to do so produced an irritating itch. We spent the first day of our trip at the emergency room getting treatment for my rash. Finally, as our stay at the first place ended, I started feeling better, and we decided to go to one more place to spend a night. The second location had a reputation for being a romantic bed and breakfast, and had been highly recommended by some friends. We were excited about it, but as we drove to go there, we could not find the place! Later, we realized there were signs directing people there, but we never saw them. It took us over an hour of trying to follow our directions without success. We finally said, "if we can't find the place on the next pass through, we are going home". Fortunately, this time we found it and had a great time of renewing our love relationship and celebrating what God had done in our 30 years of marriage.

As difficult as this trip was, the Lord showed that physical intimacy is very important to a fulfilling marriage, and that couples must continually work to maintain the joy of this essential component of a marriage.

Therefore, in this session we will discuss four important dimensions of having a fulfilling sexual relationship. We will examine these areas: romance, keeping your marriage bed pure, practicing sexual intimacy regularly, and making physical intimacy special.

Let’s start with romance.

Husbands, Romance Your Wife
Many men think that romancing their wife and having sexual intimacy are the same thing.

In the early years of our marriage, Donna would complain that I was not romantic. I could not understand. I thought I was romantic. I desired her physically. In my mind, I thought, "what else was there for me to do to be romantic?" My misconception was that I thought that desiring to have sex with my wife and romancing her were the same thing.

I have finally realized, and it has taken a long time for me to get to this point, that sex and romance are two totally different things. They may lead to the same ultimate end, but the roads by which they get there are totally different.

Here is what I have learned. First, men and women are very different. Men believe their wife thinks about sex like they do. Men can be reading a book or watching TV totalling ignoring their wife, and then when bed time rolls around be ready for sex. However, women are much different. Their sexual makeup is much different than a man’s.

One person expressed the differences like this. Men are microwave ovens and women are crock pots (a crock pot is a cooking device that cooks food very slowly and often requires an entire day to cook a dish). Physically and emotionally, women respond to sex very differently than a man. A woman does not separate what has happened throughout the day from her sexual makeup.

Husbands must understand this difference. This difference creates the need for husbands to romance their wives. If a husband wants a close sexual relationship with his wife, he must learn the completely foreign skill to most men of romancing his wife.

She will love it as it will fulfill a tremendous need in her life. And, men, you will enjoy it too because it is actually enjoyable for you and it prepares your wife to be more eager for physical intimacy.

And romancing your wife is biblical!

Husbands, romance your wife like Solomon romanced the Shulamite maiden.

Many have referred to the relationship between Jesus as a Bridegroom King and the believer as His bride as a divine romance. Note the key word romance. Our Lifeschool class, Understanding the Bride of Christ, goes into great depth on the divine romance between the Lord Jesus and His bride. The gospel is a divine romance in which our Bridegroom King, the Lord Jesus Christ woos us and leads us into the depths of spiritual intimacy with Him. He draws us to Him by romancing us. In essence, Jesus romances us so that we desire to draw close to Him spiritually.

Song of Solomon, depicts this wonderful allegory between Jesus and His bride. Even though the allegorical relationship between Jesus and His bride is the highest application of this book, this book also shares how Solomon romanced his bride, the Shulammite maiden.
Having previously romanced his bride, the book begins with the maiden responding to King Solomon by saying, “May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine. Your oils have a pleasing fragrance, your name is like purified oil; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you and let us run together!” (Song 1:2-4).

Even from the beginning of the book, Solomon’s romance of the maiden draws her to desire him. Throughout the book Solomon woos his bride toward a deep love relationship. The ending point is a fiery love that cannot be quenched (Song. 8:6-7). He romances her into an intimate relationship with her.

As you read through the book, you observe phrases like “you are the most beautiful among women” (Song. 18), and “arise my darling, my beautiful one and come along” (Song. 2:10). He describes her beauty to her saying things like “your hair is like a flock of goats”, “your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes”, “your lips are like a scarlet thread”, “your mouth is lovely”, “your temples are like a slice of pomegranate” (Song. 4:1-8). These phrases don’t sound that romantic to us. Try telling your wife she looks like an entire herd of goats and see where it gets you. But, for this maiden it was very romantic making her desire him more.

He says to her as she begins to desire him, “You are altogether beautiful, my darling and there is no blemish in you”...“you ravish my heart, my sister, my bride” (Song. 4:7-10).

I think you get the point. Solomon romanced the Shulammite maiden and from his love, she desired him and responded to his romantic advances. Through this, they developed a deep love relationship. Song of Solomon 8:6 describes the type of love produced,

Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it (Song 8:6-7).

Here is the principle. When you romance your wife, it builds a much deeper love relationship between you and your wife. When this type of love is produced, a much more satisfying sexual relationship also results for both the husband and the wife.

Now let’s hear from the expert in our marriage on romance, Donna, to share several specifics of what makes her feel loved and desired by me—and romanced. She, too, drew from Song of Solomon to explain how she views romance.

I was made for communion to dwell in the courts of the Lord all the days of my life. One day is better than a thousand elsewhere. Revelation 3:20 states, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me.” The way that we interpret this verse is that it is a picture of Jesus wanting to come into the hearts of His people to dine or, in other words, commune with His bride. Because few invite him in, for the most part, He is on the outside looking in. We need to daily open the door of our heart and invite Jesus to come in and dine with us. Entering into this type of communion with Jesus is like entering into a divine romance with Him. In the same way, husbands need to romance their wife.
Dining takes time. It is not like going to a fast food restaurant but like going to a place of fine dining—a place with a white tablecloth and candlelight—where you take time eating and communing with one another, spirit to spirit. Giving each other your undivided attention and not being in a hurry—devoting yourself to each other.

Song of Solomon 1:2 reads, “May He kiss me with the kisses of your mouth, for your love is better than wine. Then verse 4 reads, "Draw me after you and I will run with you. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will rejoice in you and be glad; we will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you.”

The king brings the maiden into his chamber and in that place of intimacy she gets revelation that she is black but lovely. She knows that she has a sin nature, but she realizes for the first time that she is still lovely. The communing of her beloved has caused her love to be awakened. The king affirms her. He tells her she is the most beautiful among women. Women need to be affirmed. He tells her (V. 9) that she is his mare among the chariots of Pharaoh. He is saying to her that she is his favorite one among the finest of horses. She is his choice one. He goes on to tell her how beautiful she is. They are sitting at the king’s table and she gets revelation of His finished work of the cross as He is feeding her out of the provision he has made available. He is sitting and inviting her to feast at the table with her as they commune inwardly together. The point is that this deep level of spiritual and emotional communing awakens love that ultimately becomes physical and is very fulfilling to both Solomon and the maiden.

Dining like this affords a deep level of inward communion and it takes time to accomplish. In a marriage, it is where you connect with your mate spirit to spirit and soul to soul. When this occurs it naturally leads to a strong physical connection too. Romance is communing with the whole person.

So, this leads us to our next life principle,

**Life Principle 33:** Husbands, make romancing your wife a priority in your day, every day. It will not only enhance your sexual relationship with your wife. It will also build a much, much deeper love bond in your marriage.

Now, on to our next action that builds strong physical intimacy—purity.

**Keeping Your Marriage Bed Pure**

The scriptures speak volumes on sexual purity.

It is a challenge writing this session because to a large extent, sex is an off limits discussion in the body of Christ. However, God is not shy about talking about sex. The scriptures are filled with discussions about sex, mostly from the standpoint of leading believers to avoid sexual pitfalls and to keep our sexual relationships pure.

Understanding biblical limits about sex are critical in our day because sexual perversion is rampant in the world today. It is very hard to watch a TV show, a movie, or even a television commercial without being bombarded with sexual perversion. Even the half time of the Super Bowl football game has become virtually a display of pornographic licentiousness.
Let’s present a few verses about the believer’s sexual relationships. First from the words of Jesus as He speaks of how sexual impurity defiles a man. Notice how many of the defiling things listed are related to sexual sin,

Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mark 7:18-23).

The author of Hebrews writes, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4).

Finally, Paul writes to the Romans that when people stop honoring God as God, they fall away from God and often drift into sexual sin,

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error (Rom. 1:24-27).

Without a doubt, God wants all people but especially believers to keep their sexual relationships pure and undefiled. He warns us that sexual sin will be judged.

**We know that God wants husbands and wives to enjoy their sexual relationship; likewise, we know He desires our sexual relationships to be pure.**

A lot of young men when they marry want their sex life to imitate what they have seen in the movies. Often, this leads to husbands pressuring their wives to do things either forbidden by God or opposed by their wife. When this happens, not only is the sexual relationship not pure, it erects a wall of separation between husbands and wives and hinders deep intimacy that accompanies a pure sexual relationship.

When we talk about sexual purity in the marriage, the question naturally arises, “what does God permit and what does He forbid if we want to keep our marriage bed undefiled and to maintain sexual purity in our marriage relationship?”

I will draw once again from Jimmy Evans in his book, *Marriage on the Rock*. He lists seven sexual practices that God forbids in His word. He lists the following:

1. Sex outside of marriage: adultery, fornication.
2. Sexual relations with a member of the same sex: homosexuality.
3. Sexual relations with a member of your family: incest.
4. Sexual relations with animals: bestiality.
5. Sex fantasies or desires for someone other than your spouse, which amounts to adultery in God’s sight; pornography of any kind, as well as mentally playing out lustful fantasies for real or imaginary women or men.
6. Sex that provides pleasure in pain or violence: rape, sadomasochism, brutality.
7. Sex that involves body parts not designed by God for intercourse: sodomy, anal sex.\(^2\)

Although this list does not state that oral sex is forbidden by God, I would differ on that issue. First, sodomy is defined by several dictionaries to include not only anal sex but also oral sex. Second, as Paul stated in Romans, when a people stop honoring God as God, then one of the societal deteriorations that occurs is that people begin to exchange the natural sexual function for the unnatural. This passage in Romans is clearly speaking in the context of homosexuality; even so, the principle of unnatural sexual practices would include oral sex.

I like a statement made by Bob and Audrey Meisner in a marriage conference our church sponsored in 2011. They called for sex to be “face to face”.

Having listed these prohibitions in our sexual practices, God wants our sexual relations to be pure but at the same time for us to enjoy sex. Just like He told Adam in the garden not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He also told him to eat freely from any other tree there. In other words, be free to enjoy His creation as long as you don’t violate those things He forbid.

The same is true as it relates to purity in our marriage bed. Enjoy freely God’s gift of sex and honor God’s boundaries that He has established to protect us and help us maintain a holy walk with Him.

So, here is our next life principle,

\textit{Life Principle 34: Developing purity in your sexual practices will produce a much more fulfilling sexual relationship and will build a much deeper ongoing love bond between a husband and a wife.}

\textbf{Make Physical Intimacy Regular}

\textbf{Couples should make regular times of sexual intimacy a priority in their marriage.}

I went to my doctor about two years ago when I was about 64. We were discussing a man’s prostrate health. Surprisingly, he told me the best thing that a man can do for a healthy prostate is to have regular sexual activity. He then told me that my wife and I should aim for having sex three times a week. My immediate response was, “I am going to have to have a note sent home from my doctor for that to happen.” We both laughed, but at that time I realized that regular sexual activity is very important for a man’s health.

In addition, there are other reasons too for keeping intimacy happening regularly.
Sexual intimacy is one of the four basic needs of a man.

We discussed this in session 2; so we will only touch on it briefly here. Regular times of sexual intimacy is one of the most important needs in a man’s life. For most men, regular times of sexual intimacy is the number one need they need fulfilled by their wife.

Men need two traits to be displayed by wives in meeting this need. First, men need to know that their wife is willing to meet their husband’s need in this area. What I mean by this is that men must not feel that their wife is participating in regular sex as though it is an obligation that must be fulfilled. Men need to know that honoring the marriage bed is not a chore but a delight to them. Second, men need to know that their wife desires them sexually. When a wife responds to her husband with these two traits clearly recognizable to her husband, her husband will feel loved and cherished by his wife.

Sexual intimacy draws a couple close like nothing else a man and wife can do together.

We actually shared about this earlier in this session, but I want to mention it again here. A pure and romantic sexual relationship bonds a couple together like nothing else a couple can do.

Physical intimacy is the one activity that is only between a husband and his wife. It is that special activity that no one else in the world shares with them. Men can have fun playing golf or going to a ballgame with another man. Women can talk for hours with their best female friend or go shopping with other women. But the marriage bed is shared only between a husband and wife. It is special and if done right, it will build a very strong love bond between a husband and a wife.

In fact, there is a very strong connection between physical intimacy and how a husband and wife connect emotionally and spiritually. A strong physical relationship draws couples together closely in body, soul, and spirit. The reverse is also true. A close connection emotionally and spiritually also enhances physical intimacy.

Regular sexual activity helps spouses avoid temptation.

Paul writes this about marriage, “Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5).

In our years of counseling, we have noticed that the lack of regular physical intimacy creates all sorts of problems in a marriage. Many times couples come to us very angry with their spouse. A common scenario goes like this. The husband is not doing something he should do. His wife gets upset and has no desire to be intimate with him. This goes on for a while and the husband gets very angry at his wife. He begins to think “why am I in this marriage”. If this goes on, he becomes bitter and often is tempted to stray so as to have an affair, or if not an affair, to want a divorce.

There are many possible ways this scene can play out, but know for certain that regular physical intimacy with those two traits present—willingness and desire—go a long way to stop a man or a woman from the temptation to stray.
There is a time to abstain from physical intimacy.

Like the preceding passage stated, there are times when it is necessary and appropriate to abstain from sexual activity. When the Lord calls us to times being set apart for prayer and fasting, we should abstain from sexual activity.

When it is a woman’s time of the month, there is a need to abstain. Following the birth of a child as well. Times of fasting and prayer are other reasons.

Other times, husbands and wives will be apart for legitimate reasons where separation is unavoidable. But it is important that when these times are over, that couples come back together.

It is important that couples find a way to keep their physical intimacy regular.

Young children, teenagers, busy work schedules, exhausting drives to and from work—all of these can hinder physical intimacy.

Nonetheless, it is important that couples find a way. Physical intimacy is critical to a healthy marriage and must be fought for so that it is a regular activity between a husband and a wife.

But, not only should physical intimacy by regular, it should also be special.

Making Physical Intimacy Special

Not only should physical intimacy be regular, it should also be special.

It is not feasible for every time you and your spouse come together physically to be a special time; but, it is very important that couples regularly slow down in their schedules and responsibilities to have special times of physical intimacy.

This is really important to maintain freshness and excitement in your sexual relationship. The Saturday before I wrote this session Donna and I attended the wedding of a young couple who are friends of our youngest son, Stephen. Donna and I are also friends with their parents—their fathers are both pastors in the area. It was a very anointed ceremony with both dads leading the service. The couple had kept themselves pure while dating and it was a very special day. Following the ceremony they had a very nice reception that we attended. At the wedding and at the reception, it was obvious to all that this young couple are very much in love. They enjoyed every moment of the day, but it was also clear they were looking forward to being alone on their honeymoon. They were looking forward to that time with great anticipation.

Times like this do not have to be limited to one’s honeymoon. It is possible and should be normal for husbands and wives to have a high level of expectation for special times set aside for romance and physical intimacy.

Couples should set aside times for an extended period of romance that culminates in physical intimacy.
Set aside date nights weekly or at least monthly during which you do something special. Your special night might include a nice dinner at home or at a restaurant or a special fun day of doing something you like doing together. Your special night would allow time to separate for a few hours from the pressures of life so that you can talk and share how much you love each other.

The specifics can vary greatly, but the idea of special extended times for romance and physical intimacy is critical to maintaining excitement in your marriage.

**Couples should also try to schedule romantic getaways several times a year.**

There is something special about getting out of town for a few days. The pressures of work, raising children, and ministry can be great at times. Periodically, many people feel the need to pull away from the routines of life to get refreshed and re-energized for the next season in their life.

The busyness of life can also create the need in marriages for couples to pull away from routine activities to get refreshed. Doing this with your spouse also refreshes in your love relationship with your spouse.

Getting out of town with your spouse for a time set aside just for the two of you can inject a dose of fresh love into your relationship that will bring a new excitement into your marriage.

Many people fantasize about exotic vacations in beautiful places. It is great if you can afford something like that. But getaways do not have to be expensive or lengthy in duration. One day and night at a nearby location can be just as rewarding.

Whatever you decide to do, a change of scenery can produce a great time of physical intimacy and be a great booster to your marriage.

**Schedule special times for romance and physical intimacy.**

Some couples think that a lack of spontaneity spoils physical intimacy. At times this can certainly be true, but often scheduling your special times of romance and intimacy can be very helpful.

When you schedule a time, whether it is a certain day of the week or whether it is a day you decide on ahead of time, you look forward to that day. When you wake up that morning, you can begin to look forward to the evening, heightening the anticipation for your special time with your spouse.

Scheduling also ensures you follow through on having special times set aside for romance and intimacy. We are all busy, and often a lack of planning leads to no planning which leads to nothing happening.

So, scheduling is an another important element in establishing special times together.

**Keep your special times of romance and physical intimacy varied and different.**
The final point is to vary what you do on your special times of romance and intimacy. Sometimes you might have a nice dinner at home. Other times go out to dinner. Other times go on a walk or another active activity.

Use your imagination, keep it pure, but keep it special and exciting.

Physical intimacy is much more important than many couples think. It is much more than an enjoyable activity between a man and his wife. It is much more than a way to populate the earth. It creates a deep bond between couples like nothing else. Thus, it is worth putting energy into building a pure, satisfying, and intimate physical relationship.

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1 Jimmy Evans, Lifelong Love Affair, pp.183.
2 Jimmy Evans, Marriage on the Rock, Marriage Today, Dallas, TX, 1994, pp. 249-250.