

Waiting and Working: Help and Advice for the Interim

The Curmudgeonly Librarian

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So you've decided to have The Talk with your spouse, to start addressing the lack of intimacy in your marriage. You've decided that your situation is no longer tolerable, and so have decided to tell him/her that you can't tolerate it any longer.

Um, what next? ...

The purpose of this next .pdf is to talk about what happens now, during what I call The Interim Period.

"The Interim Period?" you ask. What I call the Interim Period is that time (weeks, months--hopefully not years) where they wake up and realize that something needs to be done to change their marriages, but they need to get to the place where they can do it. Or maybe they are in that place where they realize that, while they would like to do something, they are in no condition, mentally or spiritually to carry it out.

This is a time for you to do some reflection and to do some heavy lifting in order to get yourself into a place where you are a healthier you, and you are in a position where you can start the process of changing your marriage. This Interim Period is about working on you, not your spouse. After all,

You can't make your spouse change.
You can control what you do and how you will react.

These are things that you can and should be doing while your spouse is making up his/her mind on which way to jump.

This .pdf is in two parts. The first six chapters are the Waiting, Watching, Working series that I wrote in the fall of 2015. In it, I talk about working on yourself during the Interim Period, which I define as the period where you need to work to get yourself mentally and spiritually strong. As I have said, you can't change your spouse; you can only change yourself. And trust me, you are going to need to change.

And that's not a bad thing. One of my mantras is that there are two sinners in every marriage, so you can stand a little sprucing up of yourself. First, to be a better you, and second, to strengthen yourself. After all, a sexless marriage works a total number on you, your soul and your mind!

The second part of this .pdf is composed of later posts that address several issues that you will need to consider as you prepare for The Talk and as you and your spouse attempt to find a way forward afterwards. One of the series that I included was about what signs to look for in order to assess whether you and your spouse are even making progress or not.

Lastly, I have included a special appendix. One problem that many have to surmount in working on improving their marriage is past abuse. I freely admit that I know nothing about dealing with this and so I sought input from a person who had to deal with abuse in order to overcome her past and repair her marriage. When one of my readers wrote about how past sexual abuse was hurting his marriage, I asked Robin to come to my blog and help the reader. I am including her comments in appendix.

As always, I put this together to help you, and pray that you and your marriage find healing.

CSL

In my writing I sometimes use abbreviations that I have created, as shorthand (hey, I'm a lazy typist, so sue me) for some ideas that I reference often. One that appears in this .pdf is LYWACLTC, which is short for the Bible phrase "Love your wife as Christ loved the Church," a commonly abused scripture used to cudgel husbands into line.

Disclaimer: I am not a counselor, doctor, or pastor. For that matter, Wife says I don't play well with others. My advice and comments come from my concern for hurting Christian husbands and wives. Someone once said to me, "Church shouldn't hurt", and I believe the same thing goes for marriage. I'm going to call 'em as I see 'em, but please, don't take my word as gospel. Yes, read what I say, pray about what I say, but do your own "due diligence."

Chapter #1: Waiting, Watching, Working, pt. 1

As we were finishing up our Colloquy Summer [see link below], Chris Taylor, of Forgiven Wife, made a suggestion to me for a possible post to husbands who are experiencing, as she put it, a sex hiatus (never heard it called that before.) This is from that email:

How can a guy cope with a sex hiatus other than simply taking care of physical release on his own?

Whether he is giving time to a wife who is making genuine effort to work through some issues, creating a crisis but not yet seeing results, or trying to work on himself so he is sufficiently prepared for WW III, if he is not having sex, he is without an important connection. How does he cope with that mentally and emotionally?

I've been thinking about these questions, and if you garnered any information about me at all, you know I have the gift of complicating even the simplest of tasks with questions (needless or not, I've always got questions.) Chris suggested "a post", but as I thought about this, I realized that there are several different ways this could go, so I expanded it into six posts. Hence the first six chapters of this .pdf.

Making the Implicit "Plicit"

Before beginning, however, let's deal with the elephant in the room that's looming in Chris's first question, which is straightforward:

How can a guy cope with a sex hiatus other than simply taking care of physical release on his own?

Guys, to begin with, please realize that, *sans* porn and lust, there is nothing wrong with taking care of the physical exigencies that your wife's gatekeeping/refusal forces upon you. (And, yes, wives, I do know that there are wives who are sexually starved as well. Please accept that I do know you are there, and trust that I am not ignoring you, but that I am only trying to keep the grammar easy.)

By the way, I'm a former Catholic, so I know just how severe the RC teaching is about the sinfulness of "self-abuse." (Yes, I'm old enough to have been around when masturbation was called "self-abuse.") I know that the Roman Catholic church has doctrinal statements condemning masturbation; yes, many conservative Christian preachers and teachers condemn masturbation as sin. But I challenge you to find a citation in the Bible condemning masturbating as sin.

“What about God’s slaying of Onan for masturbating, Brother CSL? Doesn’t that show God’s displeasure with masturbating?” For those of you who try to pull that canard out of the deck, stop right now. Every serious Bible student knows that Onan was refusing to obey God’s command to raise up an heir for his deceased brother. This practice was later codified into Old Testament law as Levirate Marriage. Look it up.

Basically, guys, if you are experiencing *blue balls*, then I don’t believe that there is any condemnation against relieving that pressure. Being the contrarian that I am, I am going to tell you that this is not permission to abuse it. It’s not your sexlife, but rather a poor substitute, so don’t treat it as such.

Why A Hiatus?

Before starting to answer Chris’s question about what to do during a *sexual hiatus*, I want to remark about the *sexual hiatus* itself. There can only be two categories of *sexual hiatus*: voluntary or un-. The Bible does refer to voluntary hiatuses within marriage, and they are good and proper. More commonly called a *sexual fast*, this is an abstention from sexual activity for spiritual purposes. I Cor. 7:5a says,

Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

This sexual fast has two requirements, according to Paul; first, the decision to engage in this *fast* is mutually agreed upon by both husband and wife. Second, this *fast* is of short duration, i.e., not a defining component of the marriage.

So much for the voluntary *hiatus*; now onto the *un-* one. This one is the unilateral imposition of celibacy by one partner onto the other; in other words, sin. (But, hey, that’s just me, thinking out loud.)

Lean on the truth; unlearn the lies of the past

And now we begin to answer Chris’s question about what to do, other than masturbating to take care of the physical pressure.

In my second *Plucked Chicken* post on my blog, I spoke of Fog. This is a mental fog that can be made up of false/actual guilt, bad teaching, bad theology and/or unreal expectations (yours or hers). The first thing you need to do is de-fog-ify your life and mind. To do that, you need the light of God’s truth to shine through your darkness. The first thing you are going to do is to institute a regimen of personal Bible reading and prayer.

I don’t know who may be reading this page, but I do know that serious sexual refusal is corrosive to a person’s soul and spirit. You may be a Moody, a Luther, or a Wesley in your faith, but if you are refused and in a marriage that makes you miserable, you have

spiritual handicaps that others don't have. As well, you have spiritual forces working on you that are capable of seriously warping your spiritual perceptions.

For this reason, I'm saying that you need to look at making the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer a major focus in your daily life. We all know the GIGO principle: "garbage in, garbage out." This is a saying from the old days of manual computer programming, explaining why programs would crash. An error in the programming resulted in computer crashes; a faulty line of code resulted in 'execution failure' notifications.

You, due to the input from your spouse and church, are told you are 'an addict', a 'pervert', that it's 'just sex and you won't die', etc. You may even get the "You need to mortify the deeds of the body" line. You need to hear from God and His word just what He says about sex, married life, and relationships. After all, He is the one who created sex and marriage, so why are you going to listen to those who feel that God got it wrong?

So here is my first recommendation to guys who are in a *sexual hiatus*: Realize that what you have received and believed is a lie, and go to God to do a mental and spiritual reset. In the next chapter, I am going to present several resources and ideas for this, so stay tuned.

CSL

Links:

A Wife's Heart Colloquy:

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/09/25/a-wifes-heart-colloquys-end/>

Forgiven Wife: <http://forgivenwife.com/>

Curmudgeonly Librarian, *What's Worse Than a Plucked Chicken?:*

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/08/28/whats-worse-than-a-plucked-chicken/>

Chapter #2: Waiting, Watching, Working: pt. 2

In the previous chapter, I wrote about how it was suggested to me to address what refused husbands should be doing in their “Interim” period; you know, that period where they wake up and realize that something needs to be done to change their marriages, but they need to get to the place where they can do it. Or maybe they are in that place where they realize that, while they would like to do something, they are in no condition, mentally or spiritually, to carry it out.

My first recommendation is to work on themselves, spiritually. From all I’ve read, and all I’m continuing to read, refusal is (to put it bluntly) emasculating, both in a spiritual sense and in a physical sense. My thinking is that a guy in a refusing marriage needs to learn what it means to become a man again.

In saying this, I’m not going all Schwarzenegger on you; after all, I’m a librarian. How butch is that, huh? No, by “being a man again,” I mean learning (re-learning?) what the Bible says about manhood, proper service to God, family and church, and what the Bible has to say about how he should relate to his wife, in every aspect of his marriage.

Why Bible Reading?

“That’s your first recommendation, CSL? Bible reading? I’m a Christian, I already read the Bible (well, a bit.)”

I make a big deal about refused spouses spending time in daily Bible reading; let me tell you why. There is a pseudo-Christian cult we’ve all heard of, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They have a monthly magazine, called *The Watchtower* that is crucial to the faith of every JW. Every issue of *The Watchtower* includes a doctrinal teaching for each week of the month.

JW leaders admonish their followers, their converts, to be sure to stay daily in the *Watchtower* magazine. The reason is that their own studies show that if a JW convert reads the Bible alone, without the commentary and teaching of the *Watchtower*, s/he will “backslide” and will leave the JWs within 2-3 years. But if they can keep their converts reading *The Watchtower*, they will stay with the group.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “*For the word of God is living and active, ...*” The Bible is the Word of God and as such, when read, it will be active in the mind of the reader. The famous **LYWACLTC** passage of Eph. 5 also includes a passage which tells us that Christ cleanses His Church “*by the washing of water with the word....*” The word of God can help us to cleanse our hearts and minds, like water washes away dirt. I have a story that helps to illustrate what I’m trying to say.

Story time!

A farmer had his rebellious grandson come to stay with him for a while; his parents hoped that the old man could help the kid straighten out. The first morning, the farmer took his grandson down to the barn, picked up an old dusty basket; he handed it to his grandson and said, "The horses need water, so bring them back a basket of water from the stream."

Of course the kid, who knew better, immediately said it was impossible, but the old man said, "If you want to earn your pay for working on my farm, you'll do the chores you're given. Now get those horses a basket of water." So the boy takes the basket to the stream and dips the basket into the water; sure enough, as he turns to go back to the barn, the water starts running out. He dips the basket again, and starts to run, but before he can get halfway back to the barn, the water has all run out.

He does this for three or four more times, but, of course, the water runs out of the basket. He finally gets frustrated and takes the basket back to his grandfather and gives it back to him, saying, "It's impossible; water just runs out of the basket." The farmer takes the basket and looks it over, and says, "It sure cleans out a basket good, though, don't it?"

You and Your Reading

In a number of posts on my blog, I've made the point that husbands who are in marriages marked with long-term refusal/gatekeeping are "in a fog" and need to re-learn what marriage is supposed to be.

Just as water running through the reeds of that farmer's basket cleansed it from the dirt and grime that had accumulated on it, so, too, allowing the Word of God to run through our minds cleanses us from the dirt and grime that we have picked up: the bad teachings and ideas we've come to believe. With that goal in mind, let me recommend a couple of Bible-reading methods to help you as you start to spend time alone with God and His Word.

One possible Bible reading plan you might want to consider is one I call the "*Heart and Mind of God*" Plan. Adding this plan to your regular reading will have you reading the books of Psalms and Proverbs each month. Proverbs is the book that shows us God's wisdom for living, and Psalms reveals the heart of God and his saints. Reading these two books every month will give you great insight into both God's wisdom and God's heart.

The structure of this plan is simplicity itself. In this plan, the day of the month tells you where you begin to read. Let's say you decide to begin this plan on the 15th of the month. For your first day, you will read five psalms, beginning with Psalm 15. After reading Ps. 15, you add 30 and read Psalm 45. Another 30, Psalm 75. Then Psalms 105 and 135. The next day, the 16th, you will read Psalms 16, 46, 76, 106 and 136. And so forth. Every day, you will read five chapters from the book of Psalms.

The only deviation from this is the humongous Psalm 119. On the 29th, you will only read 4 psalms: 29, 59, 89 and 149. Psalm 119 is reserved for those months that end with a 31st.

And reading Proverbs is even simpler. There are 31 days in the month and 31 chapters in Proverbs, so whatever the day is, that is the day's reading in Proverbs. In this way, using this plan, you will spend time learning the mind and heart of God .

A second reading plan is the *Professor Horner Reading Plan*, which you can explore at the website listed below. This is a much more immersive plan, having you read ten chapters of the Bible each day. Dividing the Bible into individual reading lists, you will daily read Biblical history, wisdom, law, prophecy, theology, and poetry.

This plan will call for daily commitment, as it will require you to commit a significant part of your free time to getting alone with God's Word. Remember, however, like that dirty basket, the goal of this practice is to help you cleanse your heart and mind of the sinful patterns and ideas that created the life that you want to leave.

"CSL, why are you writing about Bible reading plans; what does this have to do with dealing with refusal in a marriage?" For the purpose of working on you, that's why. I have written several articles about the bad teaching [aggregated into the Bad Teaching .pdf] that has accumulated about marriage and marriage relationships, like the dirt and grime on the basket in my story. Spending time, lots of time, reading God's word unfiltered by these bad teachings, will help you wash them away and give you clearer insight into God's ways. Hopefully, much clearer insight than you've had in some time.

You and Your Resources

Since this .pdf is being read online (or after being downloaded), I think I am safe in assuming that whoever accesses this is not completely clueless in the area of technology. Self-disclosure time: I am a Macintosh bigot, never having used a Windoze machine in my entire life. I am going to make suggestions of different resources for you, but understand that I am not knowledgeable of what is available in the Windoze world. That will be up to you to explore. All the following recommendations have websites listed at the end of the chapter.

From what I can tell, the 500 lb. gorilla of Bible apps is the YouVersion Bible, found at Bible.com. With over 1000 versions of the Bible, with reading plans galore, and a downloadable Bible for Mac, Windows, Android, Blackberry, and just about every conceivable electronic device. This has great possibilities. As well, it allows you to connect with other YouVersion users to share insights, study notes, etc.

In the Apple App Store, I discovered the Lexham Study Bible app from Logos Software, and have been using it for some time. A proper "study" bible, it comes with commentary

and a Bible dictionary in the base package. I have found the notes to be very even-handed, not favoring one flavor of theology over another. Those of you with an iPad should be able to download it for free from the App Store. (PC and Android users, I would recommend exploring the Lexham website to see if there is something that you can use.

I can also recommend the Bible Hub website and the Bible Hub app. Two of the features that I have found useful is the automatic comparison of verses by different translations, and the ease in which they seamlessly integrate the Hebrew/Greek lexicons with the English translations.

Another excellent resource is Crosswalk's Bible Study Tools, with dozens of translations, lexicons, commentaries, dictionaries, etc. While not as numerous as the plans that YouVersion provides, you will find several reading plans available to you, including the *Professor Horner* plan I mentioned, above.

Lastly I would like to put in a good word for the Bible Gateway website. Yes, access to the site is limited to internet access, but I find that I like its interface and ease of copying text, and the fact that my favorite translation, *The Complete Jewish Bible*, available to me whenever I am online.

One Last Recommendation

I know that with this recommendation, I will probably upset some people, but tough shibbutski. Guys, unless you are fluent in Elizabethan English, ditch the King James translation. I'm sorry, but as things stand, if you are in a marriage defined by refusing, you've got problems enough. You don't need the added handicap of trying to learn God's thoughts by having to translate them before you can understand them. Do I have any translation recommendations? Only to stay away from the King James** and the New World translation (JW's); everything else can only help.

There you go, guys. I realize that those of you looking for magic bullets for turning your marriages around are disappointed, but if you are just beginning to try to change your marriage, you're starting at the wrong end of the stick. You need to change you.

Spend time in the Word of God, and be renewed and transformed by His Word. Paul was brazen and arrogant enough to claim, "*But we have the mind of Christ.*" (1 Cor. 2:16) Spend time in the Bible, and you will be able to say the same thing. Next chapter, prayer and other activities.

CSL

** Wife said to tell those of you who like the cadence of the King James that there is a New King James translation, done about 30 years ago, that she deems acceptable. The NKJ updates the KJ, getting rid of the archaic language, and relying on modern scholarship (well, to some extent.)

Links:

Professor Horner Bible Plan: <http://www.challies.com/sites/all/files/attachments/professor-grant-horners-bible-reading-system.pdf>

YouVersion website: <https://www.bible.com/>

Lexham Bible website: <https://lexhamenglishbible.com/>

Bible Study Tools website <http://www.biblestudytools.com/>

Bible Gateway website: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Chapter 3: Waiting, Watching, Working: pt. 3

In this Waiting/Working series, I'm presenting some suggestions on what refused spouses can be doing to work on themselves during a waiting period. This "waiting period" may extend from the time that they realize that they are miserable in their marriages and need to get it right, all the way up to the time their Other decides to **** or get off the pot.

In the last chapter, I wrote about the need for a refused spouse to be in God's Word in order to transform his mind, cleansing his mind of all the bad teaching that has created Fog in his life. In this post, I want to address the accompanying tool of Prayer.

I don't know if you have noticed this about what I try to do with this blog, and what I am trying to do with these .pdfs, but I am big on how-to's. There's an old Native American story of a frog who envied the birds their ability to fly and wanted to learn to fly. Frog was told that the wisest creature in the forest was Owl, so he went to Owl and asked if he, a lowly frog could learn to fly. Owl replied, "Yes, but first you have to grow wings."

"How do I do that?", Frog asked. Owl answered, "I don't know. I can tell you what you must do, but I can't tell you how to do it."

Many teachers are great at giving general advice on what a person should be doing, but don't really tell you HOW. With what I write, I try to give you some ideas on HOW to do what it is that needs to be done. What I am presenting is not an all-comprehensive list of things to do; just things that I think are necessary. With that in mind, let's talk about Prayer.

Why Prayer?

Why am I making a big deal out of prayer, emphasizing prayer as something that refused husbands need to be engaging in? For many reasons, I believe, but the uppermost reason in my mind is the need for reestablishing and reinforcing their connections with God. I'm reading a book on prayer that has been a help to me (there are only about 20 million or so, so the title doesn't matter), and there is a quote or two from it that I want to share with you that will, I hope, illuminate why I think this aspect is important for refused husbands.

If we do not pray, we fail to realize that we are in the presence of God.
~Karl Barth, *Prayer*

My first reason: prayer will help lift us from "average" to "normal". In case you don't know it, there is a difference between the two. Many Christians live "average" lives, which, unfortunately, is not the way God wants Christians to live. His life, abundant life

in the presence of God, is what SHOULD be our version of “normal”. All too often, we settle for “average,” and prayer, being in the presence of God, is the act of ignoring the voices that would attempt to negate His voice. If we fail to pray, we get lost in Fog and settle for “average.”

Prayer, we can now see, is communication, in which God's word has the initiative and we, at first, are simply listeners. Consequently, what we have to do is, first, listen to God's word and then, through that word, learn how to answer.

~Hans von Balthasar, *Prayer*

Have you ever seen those charms/pendants that are two halves of one coin, and the coin is only whole when the two are joined? Well, prayer is the second half of the coin that is communion with God. In the previous chapter, I spoke about the importance of Bible reading. In this quote, von Balthasar nails it when he says that God speaks to us through His word, and by prayer, we answer. This is complete communion; the coin is one.

Since I'm on a roll with my citations, I'll include one more. One of my favorite speakers used to say that there are only two types of prayer. First, there are the King James prayers: you know, the ones with the “Thee”s and “Thou”s and the “-eth”s and “-ests”. “O, Lord, Thou knowest, in Thy greateth majesty-eth, that we are-eth but dust-eth,” and so on.

Then there are the real prayers. As this speaker said, real prayers are the one where you hit your knees as soon as you enter the front door, slide to the edge of the bed and yell, “**Lord, HELP!!!!**” Real prayers, born of real need.

I'm talking about real communion with a real God. My whole purpose in emphasizing prayer is because of a guy's need to commune with the God Who Cares.

Create Prayer Space In Your Life

At the time that I wrote this chapter for my blog, the pastor of our church spoke on the need for “prayer places.” And as I listened to the sermon, my heart resonated with the words, because this has been something that's been ‘percolating’ within me for some time. I have been meditating on, praying about, and pondering prayer and meditation and how I, CSL, need to engage more with God.

For some time, I've been tumbling to the idea that I need to create a conducive atmosphere for meeting God. I do this by creating “prayer places” in my daily life; by adopting attitudes about needing to pray and adapting my daily life and schedule to incorporate prayer, I purposefully create an atmosphere in my heart and my day where I can meet with God.

There are several factors that you must consider, and creating solutions for each will help you create your personal prayer place. The first, simply, is time of day and your energy levels. Are you a night owl, finding that you are most awake and alert in evenings, or are you, like me, one of those annoying morning persons who can wake up cheerful and happy, and make the rest of the world want to shoot you? Maybe you will find that your best time is your daily commute. Look at your day for a clue to finding your best time to meet with God.

Next, believe it or not, is posture: some can kneel at a chair or bedside and pray effortlessly. For others, that would be agony. Some can sit in a chair and meet God, while others are the living embodiment of the saying, "When I sit, I think; and when I think, I fall asleep." Put them in a chair and it's "lights out" in two minutes. Guys, you are not restricted to any posture for praying, no matter how many movies you've seen of kneeling. If pacing the room helps you to pray, pace; if jogging helps your mind and spirit to focus on God, then jog. Like the song says, "It's you standing in the need of prayer." So find the way that helps you pray.

Finally, find your own personal ritual that helps you to center your mind and spirit on God. As a former Catholic, I can still recall the focusing of my mind as I genuflected at my pew and made the sign of the cross. Do I do it now? No, as it has no meaning for me today, but at that time it did. (I do have something that helps me, which I will discuss in the next chapter.)

Others may light candles, whether it be tapers, votive candles or pillar candles, as they begin prayer. To borrow from a quote by Pope John Paul II when asked about how to pray the rosary, "Do what you want; it's your prayer time."

Question At The Back Of Your Mind?

I believe that there is an unspoken question hovering around these two recommendations (bible and prayer), and that is, "Won't the fact that I am spending more time with God mean that I will be spending less time with my wife? Won't this mean even less opportunity for intimacy with my wife, even though I'm getting nothing, as is?"

Yes, it does mean that very thing. But as your experience continually demonstrates, closeness to your refusing spouse does not produce feelings of love, intimacy and happiness, but feelings of being unloved and rejected. You don't need more of that message; you definitely don't need that reinforced. Instead, you need experience the reality of Psalm 27:10, *Even if my father and mother [or wife] abandon me, the LORD cares for me.*

You need to know and experience the God Who cares.

CSL

Chapter 4: Waiting, Watching, Working: pt. 4

As I said at the beginning of chapter 1, this 3W series was my attempt to respond to Chris Taylor's (*Forgiven Wife*) suggestion that I give refused husbands guidance on what to do in the Interim Period (by my definition, from the time of 'awaking & smelling the coffee' to D-Day). Either before or after *The Shot Across The Bow*, I have suggested that these refused hubs spend time with the Bible (to clear away false beliefs) and prayer (to reconnect with the God of Truth). That last (pray!), while good advice, is akin to putting a novice in a dinghy and saying, "See you in Hawaii."

As I said in the last chapter, I try to do more than just give generic advice, and instead, try to give some specific helps. That's what I want to do in this post. Keep in mind that none of this is Gospel. In fact, there's very little "how-to" in the Gospels, so read what I say with a multitude of grains of salt, weigh my ideas in your mind, consult other teachers/writers who have given advice and make up your own mind about how you approach praying. But be sure to pray.

Prayer Models

I find that there are two templates for prayer, in the Bible. The first one is, of course, The Lord's Prayer, in Matt. 6:9-13. I'm not going to give the text, because most Christians already know it by heart. And I am sure that it is a simple task to find any number of writings on the internet (Bing/Google) on how to use the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for prayer.

There is one template that I know of that, while often used to encourage people of the effectiveness of prayer, isn't really seen as a model of prayer; however, I believe that James 5:13-16 presents us with a simple template for prayer.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

The template I see gives three things to pray about: Sufferings, Joys, and Confessions. And while that is the order in which James presents them, I'm not thinking that this is in any prescribed order, that James was laying down the law, saying, "You are bound to pray in this order, 'cause I'm the apostle and you're not."

Using these three broad headings as a guide, your prayings might be organized like this:

- Sufferings – your concerns, your fears, your hurts. Under this, I would put friends and family. Anything and/or anyone that concerns you; if something is big enough for you to worry about it, it's big enough to bring to the Father. (Of course, your marital situation comes under this heading.)
- Joys – all your praise and adoration, of course. Gratefulness for the things that He has given you that give you joy, or at a minimum, lessen your burden.
- Confession – Of course your sins, but also your prayers and concerns about growing as a Christian. This last will be a time of introspection and analysis, asking God to show you, from His Word and from the advice of others, where He wants you to grow.

Devotionals, Aids, ...

“CSL, are devotionals okay to use?” I know that that is a question that some have and I would have to say that I am ambivalent about them, at least for meeting the deep needs of recovering Refuse-ees. Yes, a little pericope, accompanied by a thought for the day and 2-3 paragraphs of encouragement, is a nice little scriptural snack but certainly not deeply soul-satisfying spiritual nourishment. Something like an *Our Daily Bread* or a reading from *Streams in the Desert* can be used as a lead-in, an intro to your reading and prayer time, but they cannot, by themselves, satisfy, in the long run, as full spiritual nourishment.

A devotional is a good tool for thinking about God when you have a small amount of time that you can set aside. Sitting down with the day's reading from an *Our Daily Bread* booklet at morning coffee break, as an example, is good, but just as you would not try to live on Coke and Cheetos, you shouldn't try to get well on a diet of five-minute devotionals. Instead, use them as a guide to inform your prayers. Is the daily reading about faith? Talk to God about your faith and ask His help to increase yours. Is the pericope about fear? Tell God your fears, and ask Him to calm them as He did the Sea of Galilee. Use them, but don't rely on them alone for your spiritual nourishment.

There is a book that I would highly recommend that you have next to your Bible in your times with God, and that is a hymnal. Did you notice that in the prayer template in James, above, that one of them included singing? And do you think that it is just by chance that one whole book of the Bible is a collection of songs? Not by a long chalk, folks; not by a long chalk. Music and prayer go hand in hand, and it would be good for you to have help in creating the environment you need for prayer.

There is no way I am going to try to tell you what music you should be using when you're setting aside this time to pray and read. I will say that you need to have music that is personally conducive to fostering the environment in which you can seek God, but I can't say what you will personally find helpful. I will say that if the music that you use gets your mind on the music and not God, it's not helpful.

If you find it necessary to supplement a hymnal, I would suggest an iPod with playlists of the music that you like. Putting the earbuds in, starting a playlist set on low, and picking up my Bible is my idea of slipping into Heaven for a short visit. If my iPod is charging, or I am alone while Wife and the girls are swimming at the Y, I will fire up my Blu-Ray player that also streams the internet, dial in Pandora and select one of the channels I've created, and spend some time in prayer and reading.

Music is personal, as is prayer. Use the music that will help you pray.

... And Other Accoutrements

“Accoutrements”? Well, that sounds better than tchotchkes. :)

They are the things, the earthly things, that remind you to pay attention for the Voice and to trust that it will speak to you. They are the things of this world that remind you of the world beyond.

~Robert Benson, *Living Prayer*

By accoutrements, by “earthly things”, I am referring to physical objects that can help us focus our minds as we pray. As a card-carrying iconoclast, I am more than chary about taking objects and sacralizing them, but I am not so Calvinistic that I am willing to run into a Christian bookstore and destroy those little “Cross In My Pocket”s or grind all those “Jesus Loves Me” pencils to nubbins.



Instead, I understand that there are objects that we can use to help us in our spiritual life. This is the corner of a *tallis*, showing the *tzitzit*. *Tzitzit? Tallis? Tallis* is the Hebrew name for the Jewish prayer shawl, shown here.



Hebrews were commanded by God to wear tzitzit at the four corners of their garments, in Numbers 15:37-41. Now, why would God do that?

... so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.

A *tzitzit*, a fringe, is to help you be holy? That's a lot to ask from a little bit of string, isn't it? Not really. If we remember that the *tzitzit* is merely a visual reminder, we understand that the *tzitzit* has no redemptive power, but is merely a tool to help keep God's law in their minds and hearts, we can see that God used something physical, touchable, as a help.

In the same way, we create our own 'sacred objects' to help us as we follow Christ. Whether it be the “Cross In My Pocket”, a WWJD bracelet or a cross necklace, we have

religious objects that help us. For me, that is a set of prayer beads. Sometimes called an Anglican Rosary, I find that this set of prayer beads is a help to me in keeping my mind focused as I pray.



With that in mind, I am going to say that if you find that having an object helps you as you pray, helps you keep your focus (not making out grocery lists when reciting The Lord's Prayer), then good on ya.

Conclusion

Pray. Discover what helps you to create your prayer space and discover the different tools that help you find your way into your prayer space. Whatever works, do it. As Nike says, Just pray.

CSL

Chapter 5: Waiting, Watching, Working: pt. 5

To review, here is what Chris Taylor, of *Forgiven Wife*, suggested (via email) I write for refused husbands:

How can a guy cope with a sex hiatus other than simply taking care of physical release on his own?

Whether he is giving time to a wife who is making genuine effort to work through some issues, creating a crisis but not yet seeing results, or trying to work on himself so he is sufficiently prepared for WW III, if he is not having sex, he is without an important connection. How does he cope with that mentally and emotionally?

Guys, for this Interim Period, this period of waiting to see how things will shake out, you have to think in terms of You. Your main concern isn't going to be about fixing your marriage, it's going to be about fixing you. I've explained, in my previous posts about the need to get your mind and heart cleansed and cleared. Now, I want to address your needs during this period.

Shooting The Big Dog First

Ditch the porn!!!

I know that I'm writing for a Christian audience, but being a Christian doesn't mean that you are sin-free, right? I'm addressing this on the off-chance that you might be one of the, oh so FEW, Christian guys who might dabble with porn.

ahem

I'm always reading where some husband says he turns to porn for some sense of satisfaction because his wife ain't givin' him any. But that's not the way it works, guys; it just isn't.

First, porn is a lie; that all-too-willing babe who seems to actually like sex? So stinkin' what? You're a Christian! You aren't gonna bed her, so what can she do for you?

Second, porn is sin. Before you start getting all excited about that babe, think to yourself; "she was some dad's baby girl", and then think what you would do to the guy you found drooling over your daughter. Puts a whole new twist on the Golden Rule, doesn't it? "Do unto another father's daughter as you would want another father to do to your daughter."

Third, it won't help your marriage. To prove my point, why don't you go tell your wife that you won't be bothering her for sex anymore, that you're watching porn instead. See just how happy THAT newsflash will make her!

Okay, someone might be (probably is?) thinking, “CSL, you don’t understand! I’ve got a sex drive and I’m frustrated out of my gourd!” I get it. I really do. But if you’re not getting, guy, you’re just not getting, and porn isn’t going to help. That will only raise the pressure, you’re going to masturbate to someone NOT your wife, and it’s not gonna be a solution.

Does that mean I say “Don’t masturbate?” No it doesn’t. As I said in the first chapter, I think masturbation WITHOUT lust (read that as porn!) is an acceptable route for physical relief. But here’s something that you need to factor into your thinking. Some time ago, Paul Byerly, of *The Generous Husband*, wrote a post [see link below] for his *XY Code* blog, in which he cited a joint Texas A&M/U of Texas study that showed that men and women have the same level of sexual control. That means that you are not a slave to your libido. You can control it.

You’re thinking, “I’m married, I shouldn’t HAVE to control it!” No arguments here, guy. But it is what it is. Because of the imposed celibacy, you have to do so while this Interim Period lasts. You can ignore porn, you can control your thoughts, you can channel your energies into healthy activities until the Interim comes to an end, one way or another.

Get Help To Get Healthy

By this, I am not (automatically) saying that you need professional help. Instead, I am addressing Chris’s spot-on assessment, “*he is without an important connection.*” After all, sex isn’t just sex, it IS a connection for guys, and when a wife delivers a ukase on little-to-no sexuality, the hubs IS without this connection.

Many writers have made the point that it is unfair that wives can have their need for emotional support met outside their marriages but that Christian husbands have no outlet to have their sexual needs met outside their marriages. (It’s this ‘plight’ that always brings me back to Julie Sibert’s line about Christian husbands “*feeling trapped by the Christian morals they have grown to resent.*”) Okay, guys, it’s true, but it is what it is. You need to tell yourself that God’s morality is not at fault here; your wife’s sin is.

The fact remains that this “important connection” is missing from your life, so you are going to have to compensate for it by forming other connections that will be able to provide you with support. No support in your marriage? Then find support from your faith community. The key thing is to find support.

Pastor/Counselor

Guys, be willing to go get help from someone other than your not-so-helpful/not-so-caring wife. Yes, I know the mantra: “Everything in our marriage is great; Except.....” Face it, guys, you wouldn’t be reading my blog and you wouldn’t be downloading my .pdf if things were all that wonderful. Your relationship with your wife ISN’T all that great; she likes you as a companion, but desires you? Eh, maybe not so much.

So be willing to take your situation to your pastor; s/he should be able to help you as you try to make The Fog dissipate. Mind you, I have heard from some husbands who have gone to their pastors who then basically sloughed off these valid concerns, saying that they didn't know anything about that area, or even saying, in effect, "Well, what can you do? That's life."

Sorry, not helpful, Rev.

Be willing to search out counselors, whether they be personal or marital, for help. Again, be willing to ask tough questions in order to discern whether or not these counselors are sex-positive. My personal bias is to seek out Christian counselors, but that's just me. Also, just claiming that you are a Christian counselor doesn't make you competent. I know of several husbands who have reported that they and their wives have met with counselors who were, in essence, crap. Be willing to let a counselor know that they aren't hitting your bat if you find that they are whiffing.

One objection I hear is "But my wife will be upset if I go to the pastor or if I go to a counselor." There's only one response to that objection:

So?!?!

Dude, you're going to the pastor or a counselor because you're upset and miserable in your marriage. Why? Because your wife is imposing celibacy on you, against the dictates of the Bible and your wishes. And you don't want to upset her? What will she do, stop having sex with you?

Find Fellowship

Taking an active part in the ministries and activities of your local church is a good place to start. Now, I don't know your church or the churches in your area, so I'll just use my church as a starting point. Wife and I attend a local Methodist church, and there are several ministry and fellowship activities open for members to take part in.

Our Methodist Men's group will do different fundraisers throughout the year to benefit the church's outreach, such as purchasing and maintaining the bus ministry. They make Brunswick stew for the Fall Festival, do breakfasts and suppers for wives/families, and help older members with home maintenance that they can no longer do. This last gives the men an opportunity to minister help to others, and saves those elderly from having to dip into badly-needed financial reserves.

As well, our men will be active in service for the Salvation Army, doing bell-ringing during the Christmas holiday season, and helping the SA with their soup kitchen. As well, twice a year, our men's group coordinates an activity for an overseas relief agency that provides food for the poor in Haiti.

You can see where I'm going with this: get outside yourself and your frustration, by connecting with others and serving others.

Sublimation?

“CSL, isn't this just a diversionary tactic? There are already a raftful of preachers, teachers and writers telling me to just sublimate my sexual drive and frustration into other activities. What are you saying that is any different, and actually helpful?”

Yes, in a way you could say that what I am writing in this column is just like that. Believe it or not, there is a difference, however. All those folks, those pastors, writers, counselors and advisors are basically telling you, “Well, that's the luck of the draw. You pays your money and you takes your chances, and you lost. The best thing to do is make the best of a bad situation, keep praying and hope that God can somehow turn your wife around.”

I am saying that this is what you do to get yourself on the road to Well, just on the road.

Those who tell you to sublimate your drives are saying “sit tight, you're stuck.” What I'm telling you is that you are to get up and move forward. If you are working toward having the wherewithal to have The Talk, you are building yourself up into being the man that God wants you to be. If, as Chris has said, you have already had The Talk and are waiting for your wife to decide just where she is going to land, you are seeking God for His help and direction. If you feel that your wife is making small, slow, halting steps, you are working on improving your character with patience, so that however things shake out, you will face it from a better position.

By cleaning up your life and clearing up your mind, by finding counselors, pastors and friends who can help with support and advice, and by moving outside of your frustration, you are working with God to create a better man.

You.

CSL

Links:

Paul Byerly, *How Hard Up Feels*:

<http://thexycode.com/2015/10/05/how-hard-up-feels/>

Chapter 6: Waiting, Watching, Working: pt. 6

After we finished our Colloquy, Chris Taylor/*Forgiven Wife* suggested that I write

How can a guy cope with a sex hiatus other than simply taking care of physical release on his own?

Whether he is giving time to a wife who is making genuine effort to work through some issues, creating a crisis but not yet seeing results, or trying to work on himself so he is sufficiently prepared for WW III, if he is not having sex, he is without an important connection. How does he cope with that mentally and emotionally?

In this series, I've written about the need for refused/denied spouses to cleanse their hearts and minds of the garbage they've come to accept and believe, to spend time with God in both Bible reading and prayer, and meet with other Christians to help them get their heads screwed on right.

In this last chapter of this series, I want to talk about you as You.

Do You Know Who “You” Are, Anymore?

While it sounds like I've gone off my crumpet, I think that you really need to let this sink in. Some time ago, I wrote a series about Bad Teachings (which is included in the Bad Teachings downloadable .pdf), with special emphasis on how the Church distorts Paul's dictum to husbands to “*love your wife as Christ loved the Church.*” In one post on my blog, I presented a list of ten things that readers of a marital forum would say did NOT constitute LYWACLTC. One of them was

LYWACLTC does not mean losing yourself in your wife.

There is a popular aphorism that tells us, “A man marries a woman hoping she won't change, and a woman marries a man hoping he will.” Given the dynamics of marriage, the guy is going to be disappointed on both counts. Marriage means that both the man and the woman change and adapt, forging a life as one from the material of two different lives. A man MUST change, that is just a given.

However, when the man stops being himself due to the wants, wishes and whims of his wife, he is no longer his own man, and quite often, not even God's. Yes, I believe wholeheartedly in a man becoming the bedrock support for his wife and family, but this is still done within the context of being accountable to God, not His intermediaries.

“Find Your Passions”

I know, I know; it’s a rather trite line and everyone and their idiot second cousin quotes it on FaceBook to justify their every bad decision in life. But I actually have a reason behind using this phrase. While often used as grist in dewy, gauzy, sentimental tripe on Facebook and Instagram, the idea behind it isn’t all that wrong: find your true self in God.

When we marry, we change. It’s just the nature of the decision. In an early blogpost [see link below], I used the image of the convergence of two rivers, the Monongahela and the Allegheny to form a new river, the Ohio. Yes, in marriage man and woman join and form one flesh, but they are still two people, with differing personalities.

All too often, it happens that one spouse allows the other to dominate and, over time, allows his/her distinctives to be squelched for the sake of the marriage. When I say that being a godly husband does not mean losing yourself in your wife, I mean that you are not called to become merely an accessory to your wife’s lifestyle. Yes, we are servants to our wife and family. Guess what? Your wife is also called to be a servant – to you and your family!

So, guys, here’s what I’m saying when I tell you to “follow your passion”:

Find the guy you lost.

And, yes, I mean “lost”. Many times, a husband will give up activities and avocations that he enjoyed for the sake of creating peace and harmony in a marriage. It might be for safety concerns or for family concerns, but whatever the activity, it is sacrificed for the well-being of the marriage. Some examples I know of include:

- the guy who quits cycling because of car accidents altering their family
- the guy who quits flying ultralights, not wanting to commit an Icarus
- the guy who quits chess because studying takes hours a day, because it took away from family time.

I think you get what I’m saying. Yes, many times we guys will allow our interests to be subsumed into the marriage because they have the potential to pull us away from the marriage. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as the marriage now becomes the focus of our lives. But the person who cycled or flew or studied the Benko Gambit until 1:00 in the morning should still be there, and not have been transmogrified into a mere marital factotum.

“Lift Up Your Eyes....”

While you are in this Interim Period, in this watch-and-wait holding pattern, have a look around your community and see if there aren't things that you can do that will be an assist to you as you go through this Clear and Cleanse phase.

If you haven't done so already, join a gym or your local Y and start getting some exercise. Check out a local community college and see if there aren't any courses being offered that might be intriguing or might help you develop a new skill set. Are there any church or recreation league sports programs operating? The Salvation Army could use some volunteers, as could Habitat For Humanity. Food banks always need volunteers. Little League or Scouting program that could use volunteers? Literacy programs? You get my drift – lift up your eyes off of your own bad self/situation, and find things that you can do, either for yourself or for others.

I want to include something that one of my readers wrote, in a comment to a post. In addressing another guy who was experiencing a tough time due to his sexless marriage, this man wrote:

I can feel the pressure & pain you're currently facing through your words. There is only one thing I'd like to add, please also take time to have some laughter in your life! Two years ago I was in a very bad place agonising over my situation but slowly I have managed to enjoy parts of my life to the point where I am now much more content with my lot. This has helped me look at my marriage in a much clearer light.

What can I say but “Amen!” This is the goal for working through your Interim Period. Yes, we are called, as Christians, to live for others. But the reality is that we can't live for others if we aren't the Us that God made us to be.

“These Things You Ought To Have Done....”

Bible reading? Check.

Prayer? Check.

Outside activities? Check.

I'm sure that you are wondering “Uh, CSL, you do realize that these things take up time, don't you?”

Yeah, I do. So?

Sorry, not meaning to be flippant, but really, what's the big deal? It's not like this is going to diminish your love life, right? Okay, I realize that what I am presenting will require time to yourself and for yourself.

“Is that going to take away from my family time, my husband time?” I’m not saying that you forgo obligations to your family; do your dadly duties and live your Dad Life [video link below]. Go to the games, recitals, etc., and continue to love on your kids like you should. But after the kids go down for the night, and you know that your wife won’t, find your time to be with God and His word. Find your night(s) to work with the volunteer rescue squad or the foodbank.

Fulfill your husbandly duties, as well. I’ve described in the past what I feel a husband’s obligations are to support his wife in her activities. If, however, those activities abet sin against the marriage, I would say no. Seriously study your interaction and relationship dynamics. Examine your patterns of interaction and see if there are any patterns of dysfunction in the ways that the two of you communicate or even live together.

One resource I would recommend is going back and reading *A Wife’s Heart* and the following Colloquies. Read the Q&A between Chris and I, and see if some of the things that she talks about are applicable in your marriage. If they are, if you can see where you have caused hurt in your wife’s heart, then confess it, seek forgiveness and live repentance. Repentance, by the way, is NOT synonymous with prostrating yourself in a perpetual state of contrition.

Final Note

This Interim Period, btw? To borrow from my beloved Porkypine, “it ain’t no how permanent.” You are not called to live in a state of indecision and wondering for the duration of your marriage. By definition, “interim” means “in-between”, and waiting on your wife to **** or get off the pot is not a life-time occupation.

Referencing Chris’s original question concerning waiting and watching during a period in which your wife “is making genuine effort to work through” the issues that make it hard to engage in a normal sex life in your marriage. There are two points that factor into this, the first being, “genuine effort.” I can’t define this for you; I can’t observe this. This is for you and your wife to discuss. If there are real and valid issues, these need to be identified. A simple “I’m working on my issues” is not enough. “How are you doing it, and what strides are you making” is a valid response. [More about this in later chapters.]

Second, this Interim Period is not open-ended, and is not a time where your wife gets to declare the marriage bed dead for an indefinite length of time. Both Chris and I know of a couple in which, with the blessings and decree of the marriage counselor, no sex was engaged for a year and a half. It wasn’t supposed to be a year and a half, but as long as the wife kept saying, “I’m uncomfortable,” intimacy kept getting pushed back. So, yes, work on yourself during this period, and let your wife work on herself. If she wants your help, help. But remember that this period, while she is supposed to be working on herself, you are to be working on yourself.

CSL

Links:

CSL, *Bad Teachings #2:*

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/08/05/bad-teaching-like-christ-loved-the-church-pt-2/>

CSL, *Hard Things to Hear #7:*

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/03/13/hard-things-to-hear-7-the-end-of-the-matter/>

Dad Life Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOKuSQIJlog>

CSL/Forgiven Wife Colloquy, *A Wife's Heart #1:* [https://](https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/07/08/a-wifes-heart/)

curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/07/08/a-wifes-heart/

Chapter 7: What is ‘Better’, Anyway?, pt. 1

When I started the *Curmudgeonly Librarian* blog, I was told that I needed to have a CSL presence on social media, so I signed up for a Twitter account. However, other than to announce a new post, I’ve never really gotten much out of it. I do check it, though, to see what other bloggers are writing, and recently I noticed a trend among marriage/sexuality bloggers to tweet links to their archived posts. One tweet led me to an old post from Chris Taylor/*Forgiven Wife* that I felt needed to be brought to the attention of the refused husbands who read my blog.

For those of you not familiar with the *Forgiven Wife* blog, it is written by a wife who tells of being a gatekeeper and refuser in the past, but has been on a journey of marital reconciliation and restoration for ten years now. Her blog is a ministry to wives who are wanting to make this same journey. She does write for women, and freely admits that her posts are not for husbands.

However, Chris’s old post is one that I think husbands should read and think about.

Past Appeals

Husbands who are long-time Gate-kept or Refused know the drill. Frustration builds, as it has been 2 or 3 weeks, or 2 or 3 months. You’ve tried to initiate, but there’s always been something or other to hinder the two of you (Hey, *Seinfeld* reruns are important, dude!). Finally, your frustration boils over and you complain about the absence of sex in your marriage; maybe you get angry, maybe you plead, but whatever you do, you say that you aren’t happy and things need to change. You tell her of your misery and discomfort. And, if your wife is good-willed**, this is what you hear: “*I promise I’ll do better.*”

Amirite?

I’ve read these words many, many times over, and more often than not (by a long shot), the husband usually finishes with one of two statements. Either the husband writes, “But nothing came of it,” or “Things improved for a few weeks/months, but we slipped back into old habits.”

And this is where Chris’s post comes in. Please, go read it before continuing on in this article [link is at the end of this chapter], and then come back. Be prepared to take notes.

Three Questions

Guys, guess what: all too often, when your wife says “I’ll try to do better,” she really means what she says, but doesn’t *have a clue* as to what ‘Better’ looks like. For her, ‘Better’ is just some amorphous mist-thing, without form or substance. And guess what? The same goes for you! You can’t tell her what ‘Better’ looks like because you don’t know what it looks like, either! So here’s the deal: before you sit down to have The Talk with your wife, you are going to re-read Chris’s post and be prepared to present specifics for what ‘Better’ will look like in your marriage bed, if your wife expresses a desire to do “better.”

Chris’s three questions are good for a wife who is serious about “doing better”. I believe that husbands would do well to go into The Talk having thought about these questions and to be able to articulate the why’s of their answers. Guys, you should be ready to share (in love, mind you) with your wife specific, actionable solutions that will make ‘Better’ seeable and achievable.

Question 1: Frequency

Notice that the first of her three questions deals with the 500 lb. gorilla in the room, the matter of frequency. If your wife IS good-willed** and seriously means it when she says she wants to do better, then you need to be ready with suggestions. All too often, the nebulous “Two or three times a week would be good” puts in an appearance right about here, and while there is nothing wrong with 2-3x a week, the question needs to be asked “HOW are we going to make sure that this is put in place?” After all, ‘the devil is in the details,’ right?

One of the first things I am going to recommend is that you begin to plan for times of intimacy in your schedule. Yeah, it doesn’t sound ‘sexy’ to think “Oh, it’s Wednesday, 10:00 pm, gotta get busy.” Sorry, but that’s not the real problem. The real problem is that the marriage is hurting; the relationship is hurting with at least one of the two being miserable and frustrated. So a little feeling of routine can be endured while things get righted. I wrote a post about this last year, and I recommend that you go back and check out my blog post *Refused? A New Tool To Help, Part 2* [again, link below.]

I’m going to make a second suggestion not found in my post. Go to bed together, to be together, alone. And I don’t mean at the fag-end of the day, either. All too often (*again!*), I read where one partner goes to bed and waits for the other who is doing Facebook, or the news, or Jimmy Fallon, etc. In fact, I’ve read testimony from former refusers about staying up in order to wait out the other.

When Wife and I turned ourselves around, back in Jan., ‘11, we went to bed together, and not to go to sleep. We would talk, make-out, listen to music, whatever. And we’ve done this for nine years now. Were we intimate every night? Well, it depends on your definition, I guess. We talked every night. We kissed every night. We listened to music

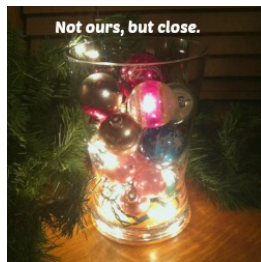
every night. We only “made love” two nights a week (per our agreed scheduling), but we connected every night.

Question 2: Sexual Activity

Chris is absolutely correct, here; this isn't a bucket list. And this isn't the time to pull out your Wild-And-Wookiee fantasies, either. This is about finding a sense of normalcy in your marriage bed, and establishing a baseline of positions, practices, and procedures that will be the new norm. Yes, there might be room, down the road, for that French Maid costume, but this question isn't about that. It's all about setting up a mutually satisfying marriage bed. (And I hope you caught that *mutually satisfying!* This is for establishing a marriage bed for the two of you.)

I see this as having mainly to do with the restrictions that a gatekeeping spouse has used to throttle down a sex life. The “*Not In My Bedroom*” List can have many prohibitions, but ‘Better’ will demand that Prohibition be repealed in your bedroom.

It is possible that the refuser may have valid concerns amid the overblown fears and irrational restrictions. If, after discussion, some of these concerns are valid, then work together to deal with them reasonably. If there is concern about children coming into



the bedroom, then be sure to install locks on doors. If your wife is fearful of the thought that “the children might hear”, invest in a sound machine or a CD player and a collection of music for the bedroom, to cover any Tarzan yells. If there is resistance to the idea of making love with the lights on, then be willing to go with candles, or a smaller, dimmer, lamp. In our bedroom, after I developed an allergy to Yankee candle scents, we brought in a glass vase with Christmas ornaments and lights, looking something like this.

Also, one set of restrictions I commonly see is limitations the wife sets on her pleasure. Believing that sex, if it be unavoidable must be endured because it is just for men, many wives restrict activity in the bedroom to a bare minimum: “Get on, get in, get out and get off!” With such restrictions as no kissing and no foreplay, a wife makes sex as unappealing as possible to her husband, and continues in whatever shame or teaching robs her husband of being able to serve her as lover. Since the issues that have led to this may be deeply personal, it is possible that marital counseling may be required. But if not dealt with, any progress that may occur from your talks will be of the proverbial ‘Better’ that has faded before in the mists.

Question 3: Progress

If you're wandering in the desert, you might not have an idea of how to answer this one. But spend some time thinking about it. One of the reasons why “I promise I'll do better” sounds so good to the refused ear is that it offers the siren song of hope. Just as a wife may be clueless as to what ‘doing better’ looks like, a husband can be just as clueless because he doesn't know what a sex life is supposed to look like.

The answer to this question will be different for every marriage, because the causes for the gatekeeping/refusal will be different for each couple. If the problem is merely a lack of practice due to a 'season of life' issue, then it won't be too hard to get back on track. If, however, the issues are more deep-rooted, there will need to be discussion on progress, whether it be increased frequency, initiation, reading or counseling. But on this one, realize that effort itself may be progress. The old cliché "Rome wasn't built in a day" applies here; it took time for things to go bad, it will take time for things to be set aright. In your efforts to improve, be willing to extend grace.

To Be Continued....

In her article, Chris's first action step was about asking the above questions. Her next section dealt with Planning, Communicating and Doing, and so I will address her comments and add some suggestions of my own in the next chapter.

CSL

** oh, yeah, footnote. If what you receive in response to your "We need to talk" is snarling, then I'm going to take the liberty to say your wife is NOT good-willed. Now, I'm sure that I am going to get pushback on that, but "Perv!", "All you think about is sex", and "You're the one with the problem" are not signs of good-will, but rather, are signs of distrust, disrespect, and/or deep-seated issues. Jes' sayin'.....

Links:

Chris Taylor, *Forgiven Wife* blog. "I Promise I'll Do Better": <http://forgivenwife.com/i-promise-ill-do-better/>

CSL, *Refused: A New Tool To Help, part 2*: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/05/28/refused-a-new-tool-to-help-part-2/>

Chapter 8: What Is Better, Anyway? pt. 2

In the previous chapter, I commented on how refused husbands could relate to and apply the wisdom and knowledge that Chris Taylor, of *Forgiven Wife*, poured into her blogpost, *I Promise, I'll Do Better*.

The first part of her post dealt with questions she recommended that a recovering refuser think about asking her husband in order to be intentional in rebuilding their marriage. She told how after discussions or fights about intimacy, she would say to her husband, "I promise, I'll do better," but not know what 'Better' looked like. I suggested that when refused spouses are given that amorphous promise, they start thinking about what 'Better' would actually look like. So, in this chapter I want to present some thoughts and additional suggestions for a husband to consider as he goes about planning and communicating with his wife after the discussion.

Plan . . .

Do not let yourself fall into the "It'll all work out" trap. See my *Mr. Natural* post, linked below, to see why "It'll work itself out" doesn't work. If you don't plan for change, you won't get any. Change, that is. I know that there is a saying that says "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Well, that's a crock! The truth is "if you keep things the same, they'll stay the same, Numby!"

So you need to plan for change in order to achieve 'Better.'

Read Books

How do you learn what's in your Bible? You read the Bible.

How do you learn to operate your new car? You read the manual.

How do you learn to use your new device (iPhone, iPad)? You read the manual.

Anything that you choose to do today, you read up on, you study. For example, your career; did you fall into it or did you go through a course of study to learn how to function in your field? How do you keep up with changes that today's fast-changing technology brings to your field, if not by reading? Even in our recreation, we devote time to study and learn. Whether it be chess, fantasy football, cycling, or what-have-you, we have our media for our hobbies, don't we? The same goes for marriage and relationship, including the physical aspect of your marriage. Nothing comes "naturally", so you have to make it your business to learn.

So, now that I've told you to read, the next question is "Okay, CSL, just what am I supposed to read?" Good question. Now, I could put you off for a year or two while I begin to build up a library of go-to books, but I'm going to let you in on a little professional secret: the *Clip File*. The clip file is a personal resource that librarians build

for reference questions. We compile lists of resources, and sometimes, lists of lists of resources. One thing we learn in library classes is to steal heavily and frequently.

Now, I could ask other marriage bloggers or conduct surveys to create a list of recommended books, but when someone has already done the work, I should reinvent the wheel? No way; I'll just refer you to the right source and let you choose. And I've got the best source for you in my clip file. Lori Byerly, of *Generous Wife*, has compiled *The Marriage Book Library* [see link below], one of the best annotated, categorized lists of helpful books dealing with marriage and sexuality I've found, so go – read and learn.

Just to let you know, I have read books from her list, and found that she is spot-on in including the titles that I have read on her list. (I encourage you to purchase through GW's list, because by doing so, you help to support the Byerlys in their ministry, and I'm all in favor of that!)

There are two specific titles that merit immediate reading, *Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman, and *Passion Principles*, by Shannon Etheridge. Ever since I began reading and studying marriage sites and blogs, and looking for resources, Chapman's *Five Love Languages* has been a go-to resource, **everywhere!** If this book is so universally recommended then I say "Go get it." I do know that you can take his Love Languages tests online and discover how you and your spouse best receive love. Shannon Etheridge is an excellent writer and is a very passionate advocate for Christian marriage. So, with those two books as a start, I don't think you can go wrong.

Read Blogs...

My sidebar of my blog has three that I am going to recommend that you dig deeply into. I read them often, and when they cross my Twitter feed with new posts, I am there!

For you guys, Paul Byerly's *The Generous Husband* [see link below.] Yes, he can be tough, but in my *Working* series, I recommend plenty of self-examination. Consider his blog a guided tour into "You, The Dude." Paul is biblical and sound, and while some say he is too hard on men, he's never off.

For your wife, another Paul B. blog, *The XY Code* [again, link below.] One thing that you can be sure of in your marriage is that your wife is operating under bad information about men. Whether it be that your wife thinks sex is nothing, or that men just need to learn self-control, *The XY Code* is a tour of Men for wives who really don't know anything about men at all, even though they married one.

Lastly, Chris Taylor's *Forgiven Wife* is for the both of you. Chris is a prolific writer, and has actually made the journey to 'Better,' and is writing to help other wives make the same journey. There are many obstacles on this road, and Chris will testify that she has stumbled over everyone of them. The reason that I recommend that you read her stuff together is because she analyzes marital and emotional issues deeply and fluently. Things that your wife may not be able to articulate, Chris does. If there is emotional and relational healing that needs to take place, I can't think of a better guide than Chris.

And that leads me to the second step:

... and Communicate

I'm thinking that this is going to be the biggest challenge of all. I can't even begin to estimate the number of times I've read "Whenever I try to talk to my wife about our sex life, she

- Gets angry"
- Clams up"
- Accuses me of being addicted"
- Says I only want her for sex...."

Okay, I'm starting to ramble, but you get the point: you and your wife don't talk about your sex life, and when you do bring it up, it turns into an ugly brouhaha.

But just as you aren't going to learn anything about improving marital intimacy without reading, you aren't going to learn how the reading is being received without talking about it. The two of you are going to have to learn to put aside ingrained reticence and find time to share about what you feel, like or dislike about aspects of sensuality and sexuality. If you and your wife, after an "I'll do better" promise, just go back to what you've done in the past,... [shakes head].

After all, *if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got.*

The key is connection. According to Emerson Eggerichs' *Love & Respect* (and only about a million other writers), wives want to connect emotionally with their husbands, and they do with words. Guys, I know that the four most dreaded words in the English language are "We need to talk." **

But guess what? You need to talk! If so many people are hitting you over the head with the fact that the two of you need to talk, maybe there's a reason for it! So you're going to talk (maybe not about her favorite subject..., see cynical footnote). And guess what, when you find that you put down your game controller and she puts down her iPhone and the two of you start talking, you will connect. After all, as a very wise woman once said, "You aren't gonna want to have sex with someone you're not talking to."

So, yes, two-way communication is needed between the two of you, but in this discussion about your intimacy and sexuality, remember that it's not **your** intimacy, it's **y'all's** intimacy. Be very sure that you communicate reassurance to your wife about wanting the 'Better', not only for yourself, but for her as well. This sex, this intimacy, is about expressing your love to her, that you think she's beautiful, that you want to express love for her, and you are concerned for her pleasure, as well. You will need to get around the idea that sex is just one-sided, that while you are miserable, you are also miserable for her, as well.

Chris's Final Step and My Final Word

Chris encouraged wives to take the Nike Challenge: Do it! All well and good, but please go back one more time and read her article. And pay particularly close attention to her last comments on her progress. Guys, remember what she said. Your marriage going off the rails didn't happen immediately, and restoration of a sex life won't happen immediately, either. Realize that there will be fits and starts as the two of you try to get back on track, that there will be hiccups along the way.

I'm going to quote from Lori Byerly's go-to marriage book, *The Grace-Filled Marriage*. In it, Kimmel describes a couple "settling" in their relationship and says of them,

What they need in their marriage isn't more love– they've loved each other through the ups and downs of three decades. Their love is strong and proven.

What they need is *grace*.

As you and your wife look for 'Better', know that fits and starts will be a part of the journey, and learn to extend grace to each other.

CSL

** The cynic in me feels that I have just discovered the cure for "We Need To Talk". I'm thinking that all you need to do is reply, "We sure do! We need to talk about our sex life", and any talks will be tables.

Links:

Laura Byerly, *Marriage Book Library*:
<http://www.the-generous-wife.com/marriage-book-library/>

Paul Byerly's *Generous Husband* blog: <http://www.the-generous-husband.com/>

Paul Byerly's *XY Code*: <http://thexycode.com/>

Chris Taylor's *Forgiven Wife* blog: <http://forgivenwife.com/>

Emerson Eggerichs, *Love & Respect*: <http://www.the-generous-wife.com/marriage-book-library/>

Chapter 9: “I’m TAG-ged, But You’re Out!”

(Just a warning: lots of links. I mean, LOTS of links.)

I know that football is supposedly America’s favorite sport but not for me. Nossir, I love to watch baseball! Everything about the game appeals to me.

Baseball fans know that when a baserunner is tagged, he is out. But it occurred to me that for many who find themselves in sexless marriages, it happens that when one spouse is TAG-ged, it is the other one who is out. As in, “out of luck.”

In my reading, whether it be other blogs or other forums, or even comments in response here on my blog, I see situations in which spouses are suffering in their marriage because of the attitudes, behaviors, and choices of their spouses. This goes both ways, with both husbands and wives being recipients of being TAG-ged.

“TAG-ged?!? CSL, have you been hitting the BBQ sauce again?”

No. That’s just my acronym for a common marital affliction. In my readings, it seems that there are three common problems one spouse may bring into the marriage and it ends up wreaking havoc in the relationship.

T-A-G

I realize that I am in danger of oversimplifying matters, but from what I am reading from other writers and bloggers, these three biggies seem to account for the majority of marital stress and conflict, and they can be summed up by the acronym, TAG.

Teaching:

Years ago, I heard a minister speak of the uncanny ability that teen-agers have to reason logically to the wrong conclusion. My reading and observation tells me that this isn’t a talent that is specific to teens. When it comes to the area of sexuality, the church has done a marvelous job of collectively leaving the rails.

To get Biblical about sex, we need to realize that God created man and woman as sexual beings, and gave each the ability to respond to it in a mutually pleasing, inviting manner, specific to their gender. Men, you can’t do multiples. Women, you have NO clue about testosterone. Women, you have a clitoris whose only purpose is pleasure! Men, you want; I mean, seriously NEED! It’s all good because this is God’s design. We are different, but mutual. And the plain fact is that the teaching of the Old Testament reflects this. The Song of Solomon is a paean to godly sex, and sexual refusal was given as a valid reason for divorce at the very same time the Ten Commandments were given. Proverbs has warnings against adultery, but also advises husbands to get drunk on their wives’ physical love. (Prov. 5:19 – *shagah* means to reel as if drunk.)

But the Church has, down through history, screwed things up so royally that I think it's a very rare couple that can come into a marriage without being swayed by some aspect of bad teaching that the Church has managed to instill. If you've done any reading around, you've come across different lowlights about Sex In The Church, including *avoidance* (breasts in Song of Solomon representing the Old and New Testaments), *denigration* (celibates are "more spiritual" than married folk) and outright *denial* (Origen castrated himself.) All of this bad teaching has taken its toll.

In the eyes of the world, the Church is like Calvin Coolidge's minister. When asked what the Sunday sermon was about, Coolidge replied, "Sin." Then, when asked what the minister said about sin, Coolidge reported, "He was against it." Contrary to the perception of the Church being against sex, we have the correct teaching in the Bible. The antidote is to see that sex is God's creation and God's provision. One of my spiritual heroes got this. In a letter to a married friend, Martin Luther wrote:

"Kiss and rekiss your wife. Let her love and be loved. You are fortunate in having overcome, by an honorable marriage, that celibacy in which one is a prey to devouring fires and to unclean ideas. That unhappy state of a single person, male or female, reveals to me each hour of the day so many horrors, that nothing sounds in my ear as bad as the name of monk or nun or priest. A married life is a paradise, even where all else is wanting."

Yes, I know that many scoff at that last, that married life is a paradise, but that is God's intention. That the Church has played a mighty strong part in screwing that up is an undeniable fact.

Abuse (childhood, pre-marital, etc.):

When someone comes to my CL blog, the first thing they see is a big picture of one of our cats, Older Kitty, glaring at them from under the sheets of a bed. (Older Kitty would wait for my daughter to get out of bed and then snuggle under the covers for the warmth.)

I know that I should try to create a more "professional" graphic for my blog, but I'm quirky and I have got a soft spot for the old dame. In 2004, she appeared on our doorstep; a weak little kitten, so scared, so skittish and so skinny you could see her ribs under her fur. Wife, being the soft-touch that she is, started feeding her, and eventually, my girls asked if we could keep her. Yeah, even your humble Curmudgeon was no match for three pairs of pleading eyes, and so we took her in.

But here's the thing about Older Kitty: she avoided me like the plague, dashing away if I should enter any room she was in. Wife says that she is positive that she had an owner who was male who abused her horribly; recently, she told me that she had found out that the guy had tried to burn her. Mind you, I've never done a thing to Older Kitty; I am a cat person and always have been. But there was nothing I could do to ameliorate the

fear and anxiety she felt whenever I was in the same room with her. Her past abuse conditioned her to fear all men and so, due to her fear of all men, I was avoided. It was this way for 14 years, until a couple of months before she died.

I could continue to flog this, but I think the point I'm driving at is pretty obvious. It's quite possible that your spouse brings issues into your marriage from his/her past that cripples them, emotionally, and despite no ill will or bad action on your part, motivate them to push you away from intimacy. I know that your spouse isn't on a par with a pet cat or dog, but who can deny that past abuses leave their marks on a person's psyche? Is it right that you should suffer because s/he was abused in the past? No, but it would be unrealistic to expect someone who experienced abuse to NOT be conditioned by it.

Author and abuse survivor Dawn Scott Jones has written a book entitled *When a Woman You Love Was Abused: A Husband's Guide to Helping Her Overcome Childhood Sexual Molestation*, and the info blurb on Amazon's website has this:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 80 percent of childhood abuse victims later suffer from at least one abuse-induced psychological disorder. It's proven that the effects of childhood abuse follow women into adulthood. Yet few men are prepared to deal with those effects, even when their own wife is the one who is suffering. And their wife's suffering becomes their own suffering as their needs aren't being met by a wife who is powerless to control her inner turmoil.

As I said, I've been reading around and communicating with guys who tell of different ways in which abuse has affected their marriages, and none of them tell of anything good. In fact, I've recently learned that Secondary Abuse Survivor syndrome is a real thing. That's where someone married to an abused spouse is psychically (and sometimes physically) damaged by the abuse survivor that they married. Suffice to say, many marriages are hamstrung from the very beginning by the sexual abuse one or both bring with them to the altar.

Guilt (over past behavior, whether sinful or not):

I don't mean to get all preachy on you, but the fact is that we are all guilty of something. One of the tenets of Garrison Keilor's *A Prairie Home Companion* was that guilt is what makes the world go 'round. Pick your trope: Jewish guilt, Catholic confessional, karma; we all know guilt. Guilt is simply an inescapable fact of our fallen nature.

But all too often, guilt isn't just a fact of life, it is allowed to define our life. Guilt that is not dealt with defines not only who we are but how we live, interact, and react to others. And, unfortunately, that includes our spouses who often catch the brunt of our guilt. Now, I could try to expound on how guilt impacts our relationships, but being a librarian, I'm not into reinventing the wheel if someone else has created a much better wheel than I ever could.

As I've said in previous posts, I read a goodly number of other marriage and sexuality bloggers who have been at this longer than I have. One of the things that we bloggers do, to help our material to be found on the internet, is label our posts with tags which describe the subjects of our posts. Just to give you an idea of what guilt can do in a marriage, I did "Baggage" searches on the webpages of several bloggers that I regard highly and have copied the links to these searches at the end of this chapter. This list of bloggers includes Chris Taylor (*Forgiven Wife*), J. Parker (*Hot, Holy & Humorous*), Julie Sibert (*Intimacy in Marriage*), Beth Steffaniak (*Messy Marriage*) and Tony and Alisa Di Lorenzo (*One Extraordinary Marriage*.)

The gist of all these posts is that husbands and wives bring loads and loads of guilt into their marriages, which in turn impact how they interact with their spouses. It could be guilt over a promiscuous past, it could be guilt over sexual sin prior to marriage, it could be guilt over violation of religious norms. Whatever the source of the guilt, it's not going to go away by wishful thinking.

Which brings me to this imperative:

Get Help!

Okay, for bad teaching, you might not need to hire your own personal theologian. If your spouse is laboring under the weight of the bad teaching of his/her childhood, family or church, the solution might be as simple as starting to ask "Why do you say that? Where does the Bible say that *x*, *y*, or *z* is wrong?" As a Christian, the Bible should trump Brother Itoldyouso or Sister Knowsitall.

If, on the other hand, it turns out a wife has internalized the "Good Girls Don't" message, it may be time to pull in such Christian women writers as J. Parker (*Hot, Holy and Humorous*) or Shannon Ethridge (*The Sexually Confident Wife*).

For abuse and/or guilt, if your wife/husband is throttling/killing any chance for a normal marital sex life, outside professional help and counseling is probably needed. You just don't have the skills to provide the help, insight and healing that s/he needs. Some time ago, I put up an extremely short post on my blog, and was surprised at how it generated the most feedback of anything I've ever written. Due to a couple of comments, I asked a woman named Robin, from another forum, (who is considered by all to be THE go-to source for all matters concerning abuse) to come and put in her 2¢ worth. As I expected, her 2¢ was the equivalent of anyone else's \$100; here is just part of one paragraph she wrote to husbands:

Your role in this process is to be her physical therapist. [Robin was being metaphorical.] You can support and guide her in rebuilding but you CANNOT do any of the work for her. At times you will be standing at a distance watching her form to make sure she doesn't take any shortcuts that could lead to weakness in the future, other times you will be right at her SIDE modeling how to do the exercises properly.

That means YOU need to recognize the difference between healthy and unhealthy and what will build strength or breed weakness and that my friend is what makes counseling VITAL for BOTH of you.

I value Robin's opinions and advice so much that I have attached her comments to the end of this .pdf as an appendix. Guys, if you know or suspect that you wife is a survivor of sexual abuse, read her advice; trust me, if your wife is a survivor of sexual abuse, you will find Robin's input to be pure gold and you will need to heed it! I freely confess that this topic is not in my wheelhouse, that I pretty much am flying blind. I will say that Robin, in the past, has graciously told me that I had no idea what I was talking about. :)

But that doesn't mean that I think it's okay to just tell you, "You're on your own, good luck!" A librarian is NEVER without resources or the ability to track them down. In addition to the Dawn Scott Jones book I mentioned above, I've discovered a website for husbands/wives of survivors of child abuse, *Support For Partners* [see link below]. They have a private forum for mutual support that is not accessible unless you register to join.

Being TAG-ged Sucks....

... but it doesn't have to be your final out. Yeah, you and your spouse have a harder row to hoe than most. But hoe it you must. I agree it's a shame you can't just polevault over the whole mess and land in clover, but it's going to take hard, hard work to achieve healing.

Recently, while watching the BBC's Songs of Praise program, I learned of a new (to me) hymn, *We Cannot Measure How You Heal*, and it really spoke to my heart; I hope it will speak to yours, as you face having to deal with the healing process. I know that many of you will find yourself in the second stanza, but as the third tells us, our Father is able to disentangle peace from pain and make broken people whole again.

We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds
are present as if meant to last.
But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside

the memories that haunt the mind.

So some have come who need your help,
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

CSL

Books:

Dawn Scott Jones, *When a Woman You Love Was Abused: A Husband's Guide to Helping Her Overcome Childhood Sexual Molestation*:
<https://www.amazon.com/When-Woman-You-Love-Abused/dp/0825429757>

J. Parker, *Hot, Holy and Humorous*:

https://www.amazon.com/Hot-Holy-Humorous-Marriage-Design-ebook/dp/B01FZU1JCC/ref=sr_1_3?crid=8VHORoBTIHT9&keywords=hot+holy+and+humorous&qid=1584632295&prefixed=hot%2C+holy+%2Caps%2C290&sr=8-3

Shannon Ethridge *The Sexually Confident Wife*: https://www.amazon.com/Sexually-Confident-Wife-Connecting-Husband/dp/0767926064/ref=sr_1_7?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1470240026&sr=1-7&keywords=shannon+ethridge

Links:

Chris Taylor/*Forgiven Wife* on “Baggage”: <http://forgivenwife.com/tag/baggage/>

J. Parker/*Hot, Holy & Humorous* on “Sexual Baggages”:
<http://hotholyhumorous.com/tag/sexual-baggage/>

Julie Sibert/*Intimacy In Marriage* on “Baggage”: <http://intimacyinmarriage.com/?s=baggage>

Beth Steffaniak/*Messy Marriage* on “Toxic Baggage”: <http://www.messymarriage.com/topics/toxic-baggage/>

The Di Lorenzos/*One Extraordinary Marriage* on “Baggage”: <https://oneextraordinarymarriage.com/?s=baggage>

Support For Partners: <http://www.supportforpartners.org/>

Chapter 10: Of Resets, Resolutions and Reality: part 1

Two years after I wrote the two posts that are chapters 7 and 8, I had occasion to go back and re-read them and the comments that they engendered. As I did so, I remembered the old Bob Jones aphorism that said, *I don't care how high a man jumps when he gets saved; I'm more concerned with how straight he walks when he comes down.* It occurred to me that the Bob Jones line about how straight someone walks might relate to sexless marriages. After all, like someone at an altar, we are all capable of making multitudes of promises. The question is whether we keep those promises.

And, of course, I knew I had to re-address the “I’ll do better” promise. In chapter 7, I discussed the need to get down to specifics when having The Talk, to not speak in broad, amorphous generalities, and in chapter 8 I wrote about ways to start defining “better.”

But at the time I wrote them, I hadn’t come upon the concept of Reset Sex.

Reset Sex?

When I wrote those two Better posts, I hadn’t yet run up against the concept of “Reset Sex.” However, after I learned of the term and its meaning, I realized that I had read about the phenomenon many times over in the testimonies of refused husbands and wives.

What is *Reset Sex*? *Reset Sex* is sexual activity that occurs after a spouse has had The Talk with his/her spouse, telling the gatekeeping/refusing spouse of the pain that they are feeling due to lack of intimacy. And *voila*, sex begins to happen. The question, however, is this: does this represent a true sea change in the marriage, or is it merely a well-intentioned resolution, or even worse, *Reset Sex*?

A regimen of sexual activity might be undertaken in sincerity by a husband/wife, who hears what their spouse tells them and truly wants to do right by the marriage—this isn’t *Reset Sex*; (I refer to it as *Resolution Sex*.) Conversely, this same course of sex might be engaged in by a less-than-caring spouse in order to placate the complaining partner. This latter activity is *Reset Sex*.

The defining factor of *Reset Sex* is that it is only temporary, **by design**; the temporary revival of the marriage bed is a staged placation, in which the well-known “intermittent reinforcement theory” is observed. As has oft been noted before, refusers/gatekeepers know how to give just enough intermittent reinforcement in order to boost hope. And after enough intimacy has been introduced in order to create hope in the heart of the refused, the old ways are re-instituted. In essence, the marital clock has been reset to zero and the counting starts all over again—until the next time another booster shot of hope is needed. In essence, nothing has changed; instead, you’ve just been reset and your sentence has been extended.

Resolution Sex?

A good-willed spouse promises to do better, and fully intends to do so but after a bit, routine and ingrained habits come back, and the newly-undertaken sexual revival begins to peter out. This isn't *Reset Sex*, as it lacks Machiavellian intent; however, it is the equivalent of a well-intended New Year's Resolution—"I'm going to start going to the gym," "I'm going to lose weight," "I'm going to quit smoking," etc. This is a well-intentioned attempt to revive the marriage bed and is not begun with a nefarious intention to merely reset the hurting spouse. Unfortunately, it is merely a promise without a plan.

Failure to plan is planning to fail.

This is a well-known business adage, and I like it. I realize that it comes from the business world, but there is real wisdom behind it that is applicable to all areas of our lives, and is an explanation of why *Resolution Sex* fails.

The Bridge Between Resolution Sex and Reality

When Wife and I began attending the Methodist church that we are now members of, the pastor applied a word to the Christian faith that I had never heard before:

Intentionality.

The concept that he presented was that we don't achieve the things that we want in our lives by being slipshod in how we approach our desires. We intentionally work for them. And if we want to be good disciples of Jesus, we need to be intentional in our walk with Him. We will do the things that bring about the growth of Christian graces in our lives.

And this is absolutely applicable to marriage, as well. While a resolution is an attempt to find ways to break out of old habits and complacencies that had led to marital stagnation in the first place, failure to define real, achievable goals, to visualize just what will be involved in turning a couple's intimacy around, just means that they, through misplaced deference and sensibilities, are going to try to blindly grope toward a goal that they can't even describe. They, in essence, plan to fail because they fail to plan.

Intentionality In Marriage

Intentionality is the purposeful determination and planning to work through a problem toward a solution. If we truly desire to achieve a goal, we become intentional in working towards that goal. Yes, this applies to other aspects of our lives, such as our careers and avocations, but this applies in marriage, as well. We don't simply wait for things to "work out."

Above, I contrasted intentionality with the common practice of making New Year's resolutions. We all know the drill: make a resolution to improve some aspect of your life on Jan 1, and by Jan. 10, it's history. One of the most common resolutions in America is dieting, to lose weight.

And here is where I have to drop another fig leaf. As you might guess from a picture or two that has surfaced of me on other blogs, I cannot be described as anything close to *svelte*. I have always had a problem with weight (in fact, I joined the Navy in '68 weighing 276 lb. – hey, during that part of the Vietnam war the Navy took anything breathing.)

Like half of America, I have been on and off different diets and weight-loss plans over the years; you name it, I've probably done it: Metrical, Slim Fast, Richard Simmons' Sweating to the Oldies, Overeaters Victorious, Adkins Diet, etc. I would go with a plan, lose weight, get tired of the diet and go back up. And up. And up.

“Gonna Change My Way of Livin’”

This past year, I have changed many things about my food and nutrition, with the result that I have lost 80 lbs. in a year's time. Mind you, as I said above, I have been on diets before and have lost weight with varying degrees of success. But this past year, there have also been changes in mindset and intentions that were not present before.

The fact that I saw myself on diets is one major mindset. After all, a diet is a regimen of restricted eating for a period of time in order to achieve a goal. The unspoken thought behind that is that once the goal is achieved, the diet is over, and regular eating can be restored. Instead of *reset sex*, I replaced it with *reset eating*.

The change this year? After being “pre-diabetic” for several years, finally being diagnosed with full-blown type 2 diabetes and the doctor putting me on insulin last year prompted many changes.

Wife and I had to confront an ugly truth, one that we could no longer ignore, and so we began to look for help and assistance with this situation. There is a great number of resources for people with diabetes, quite bewildering and overwhelming at times, even. But one thing that helped to turn us around was that Wife and I began attending workshops conducted by a nutritionist that provided us with knowledge and resources we had no idea existed (Well, if I'm going to be honest, resources and stuff I couldn't have cared less about before the diagnosis.)

Attending the nutritionist's workshops, I was initially skeptical that anything she would have to say was something I would like, and I did exhibit some of my customary curmudgeonly grumpiness (albeit in a constrained form) during early sessions. But I did learn about just how much certain foods were damaging to me, and over the course of time, I learned of replacements that, surprise!, I actually came to enjoy!

As a result, my eating habits have undergone a complete makeover. Potatoes, rice, and corn are a very rare occurrence in my nutritional lineup, along with the rich gravies and sauces that Wife is so adept at creating. As well, pies, cakes and ice cream aren't making appearances, at least in forms that previously gave me a blood sugar average of 178, back in March 2017.

Gonna Change My Way of Eatin'

Other foods made their appearances, much to my initial consternation and skepticism. Things like riced cauliflower and veggie tots, protein drinks and greek yogurt became regular staples. All beef is gone, but I have found that turkey is a protein-packed, lo-cal alternative, and so am enjoying many different turkey meals.

Two great electronic finds also made a huge difference in this year's changes. The first was an app for recording my blood sugar readings, and I was able to see quantifiable information about my diabetes, not just guesstimates. When I started recording my readings, I was shocked at what I was seeing. As I said above, my sugar readings for March 2017 was 178. That doesn't report the day in which my daily average of three readings was 250+. That's downright unhealthy, and it was a true wakeup call.

The second app that was recommended to me by the nutritionist was MyFitnessPal, an app for tracking my eating and exercise. Given my arthritis, my age, and my sedentary lifestyle, I was skeptical (what else is new?) of this app's ability to help me.

However, using this app helped me to get a handle on what I was eating, and just how bad my food choices were. Using the app, I track/log everything I eat, and get an instant report on the calories, carbs, fat and protein I am consuming at each meal. As a result, I can make decisions on the foods that I will eat and what I will avoid.

But here's the thing—**having the app would be useless to me if I didn't have the intention to use it** and abide by the strictures of the good choices that would help me.

Making the Right Choice

I realize that, in this chapter, I am taking a big detour away from the purpose of the CSL blog and these downloadable .pdfs, which is dealing with marriage and marital problems. But the whole process of what Wife and I did this year, for me to lose weight, can be applied to addressing marriage problems. We were forced to comprehend the actual magnitude of my problem, and then to be intentional in finding and implementing real knowledge and practices that turned everything around for me. I believe that the same intentionality brought to a sexless marriage can help to heal that marriage.

In the next chapter, I want to share about three possible root causes for sexlessness in a marriage, and suggest solutions for these root causes. Keep reading.

CSL

ps – For those of you concerned over the health info I shared, here's the good news: The result is that I have lost over 100 lbs., my A1C score has dropped from 9.0 in March '17 to 5.1 in Feb. '20. And I no longer have to use insulin or Metformin.

Intentional change works.

Chapter 11: Of Resets, Resolutions and Reality, part 2

In the previous chapter, I began an elaboration on trying to define what better looks like when your spouse promises that s/he will “try to do better.” As I mentioned, I learned after my Better series (chapters 7 & 8) that there is a difference between *Reset Sex*, *Resolution Sex* and *Real Sex*. In that series, I wrote about looking for better for guys, and I want to reiterate the need to look for more after the “I’m sorry, I’ll try to do better.”

In my last chapter, I took a major detour and spoke about the drastic and wonderful weight loss that I have experienced in the past 2 year. I’m not gloating, mind you, (at least I hope not), but this is just to illustrate my point of the difference between *Reset*, *Resolution* and *Reality*.

As I said, I have been on and off a plethora of diets in my life. With varying degrees of success. But ultimately, always failure. This is because I merely made resolutions but didn’t plan on how to follow through to achieve the result I wanted.

Making a Resolution a Reality

But can a *Reset* be more than a *Resolution*? Yes, but only if it is the real thing and is accompanied by actionable goals and mile-markers and planning on how to get there; without these it remains merely a well-intentioned but infirm resolution.

Mind you, a good-willed spouse truly means to make things better in the marriage. However, despite good-will and good intentions, a temporary uptick in sexual frequency that tapers off into the old normal is all too often the only outcome of just such good-willed intention. Why? Because desire for change was not transformed into the resolve that empowers change.

So, with a good-willed spouse, the problem isn’t necessarily the desire to change, but with converting well-meant intentions into sustained action. I believe that a sex life that pans out as merely a *resolution* comes about because one of three reasons. I further believe that there are ways to deal with these reasons in order to help the marriage to turn around.

Knowledge:

A spouse, while good-willed, may simply be, erm, well..., to be blunt, ignorant. I know, that’s harsh, and I certainly wouldn’t suggest that you tell your husband/wife that they are ignorant. But when it comes down to it, many people are operating their sex lives off of stinkin’ information. Whether it be the idea that sex is just for youngsters, or just for husbands, or that sex is simply an optional accessory to a marriage, etc., someone has

bought into lies that they have heard or read or (unfortunately!) had drummed into them by the Church.

Pure and simple, they don't know that sex in marriage is good and right, that it is God-ordained, and that it is a loving act that both husband and wife do for and with the other, and that it is an integral part of a godly marriage.

With that in mind, the goal is to increase y'all's (I include both of you, 'cause we all have room to grow) knowledge about married sexuality. Fortunately, there is a plethora of resources available, which offer more than the standard pablum that you will probably get from a local pastor. (Not really knocking preachers, but we all know that pastors, above all, want to keep peace in the congregation, and thus can't afford to get too explicit.)

If your spouse has made a resolution to try to make your marriage bed better, then accessing good marriage and sexuality resources together is an excellent way to begin. In the sidebar of my blog, I link to several good bloggers from the Christian Marriage Bloggers Association, and they represent some wonderful founts of knowledge.

As to books, I can't do any better than to direct you to the excellent *Marriage Library* [listed in chapter 8] that Lori Byerly has amassed over at her *Generous Wife* page. I confess that I have not read every book in her library, but I've read a number of them, and they will be helpful to a good-willed spouse who wants to turn a resolution into reality.

I will add two other resources, hosted by four Christian women bloggers. Chris Taylor (*Forgiven Wife*), Bonny Burns (*Bonny's Oysterbed*), J. Parker (*Hot, Holy & Humorous*) and Gaye Christmus (*Calm. Health. Sexy.*) have created a podcast for christian wives, simply titled *Sex Chat For Christian Wives*. Their About Page has this simple statement:

We are four Christian wives who want to encourage other Christian wives to enjoy God's gift of sex in all of its awesomeness by presenting a biblical view, practical tips, and engaging discussion about godly sexual intimacy.

So guys, if your wife has made a promise to do better, this is a resource that will give her knowledge and help her turn her resolution into reality.

And knowing that husbands can clueless gits, as well, Chris Taylor and J. Parker have created a resource for you, as well. *Knowing Her Sexually* is a ministry to christian husbands with blog, podcast and an online community, with this mission statement:

Our mission is to help Christian husbands who want to better understand their wife sexually so they can know and love her more deeply.

This is going to be a must for christian husbands.

Skill:

You know the old saw, “*I stopped a guy on the street and asked he how to get to Carnegie Hall and he told me ‘Practice.’*”

First, skills can’t improve if you don’t practice them, so opportunities for practice have to be created, which means actually engaging in sexual intimacy. To create this time, if an *I’ll try to do better spouse* actually means it, push for more opportunities; if necessary, resort to scheduling sex (see my *New Tool* [see link below] post for scheduling information.)

As well, several resolutions that you need to put in place in order make this happen would be:

- Commit to going to bed together at the same time.
- Commit to going to bed at a reasonable time!
- Commit to prioritizing bed over screentime.

There shouldn’t be a need to explicate these three helper resolutions, but as a mental aid, imagine this scenario:

You get up off the couch and say, “Hon, I’m going to go to bed now”, and Hon responds, “Okay, I’ll be right up, after watching the next three *Matlock* reruns.”

Uh-uh, nothing’s gonna happen. Point out to your supposed good-willed spouse that relationship takes precedence over Facebook, *if you really meant that you want to do better.*

Skills for Him:

Guys, I’m going to clue you in on something: maybe you’re not all that and a bag of chips, as they used to say back in the dark ages. Maybe, just maybe, your two-move repertoire could use a little infusion of skill and technique. With that in mind, I’m going to recommend the most explicit site I have in my librarian’s bag o’ references, *Give Her An Orgasm* [see link below]. This isn’t a safe-for-work site, but neither is it porn. Using a plastic model of a female vulva, a woman demonstrates, in 20-30 second videos, different techniques for stimulating your wife. This isn’t a Christian site, but I think it useful. I do know that I have had more than a couple of “Thank you!”s for this recommendation.

Also not a Christian resource is the book *She Comes First: The Thinking Man’s Guide to Pleasuring a Woman*. Guys, we aren’t the only ones who enjoy oral sex. If done properly and lovingly, oral sex brings pleasure to our wives. Written by Dr. Ian Kerner, this book is considered the gold-standard for learning how to bring oral pleasure to your wife.

Skills for Her:
Wives.... Hmm. Um.

What to say, what to say, what to say... (Hey, cut me some slack; after all, talking to wives isn't exactly in my wheelhouse.)

First, know thyself! If you have not been someone who has been into sex, as in "Meh, I can take or leave it, and leaving it is no sacrifice for me," then start learning about your body and what WOULD make it a sacrifice to leave it. Like I said above, "Practice, practice, practice." If that means creating time for yourself to explore your body and what makes it feel good, then do so. You're married, 'taint no sin. (Just be sure you share with the Hubs what you've discovered, btw. After all, he's dying to know, too.)

After that, I'm gonna pull an old librarian's trick and hand you off to an expert. Chris Taylor, over at *Forgiven Wife*, has a portion of her blog dedicated to articles for helping wives learn to "dance with desire", as her tagline goes. In addition to dealing with emotional blockages, Chris has a *Spicy Extras* page [see link below] where she and guest writers have written a goodly number of articles on sexual techniques, and I recommend them highly to any wife wanting to learn how to up her game in the bedroom.

And, of course, wives, hie thee over to *Sex Chat For Christian Wives* [see link below], a podcast just for you.

Finally, Emotionally Able:

A spouse, while good-willed, may simply not be emotionally-enabled, at this time, to truly engage sexually. (The "at this time" is intentional, on my part, and I will come to that shortly.) In posts on my blog (like *TAG-ged*, in chapter 9), I have addressed the fact that all too often, one or both spouses come into a marriage with emotional baggage, and quite often, this baggage is centered on sex.

It may be feelings of inferiority, it may be bad teachings from church or parents, it may be bad sexual history (promiscuity or abuse can both come into play, here.) The problem isn't that the baggage was brought into the house; after all, as Paul Byerly, over at *The Generous Husband*, is wont to say, "Everyone comes into marriage with baggage." The problem is that the baggage took up residence, even to the point of being enshrined in the relationship, so to speak.

If your spouse, either husband or wife, does carry emotional baggage concerning their sexuality, as a couple you have two goals:

- You – to support and encourage your spouse as they deal with clearing up this baggage that is interfering with your marriage.
- Spouse – to actually do the heavy-lifting in dealing with the personal baggage. If that means meeting with a pastor or counselor, so be it. If it means researching and finding solutions, so be it.

But the standard is that, while sex may be difficult, or even not yet on the table, the “afflicted” (sorry for that term, but I’m open to a more appropriate descriptor) spouse is actively seeking out help in putting said baggage to rest and restoring the marriage to what it should be. For the assisting spouse, that may mean that you join him/her in working with the counselor/mentor that you have sought out.

How Long Should I Wait? Months? Years?

The answer to that is “It depends,” for good reason. After all, different spouses will have different emotional baggage and damage that they are going to have to fight through. But what I think it comes down to is true effort.

In my readings over the past years, I have come across many different stories, ranging from one who said that she was working on her “issues”, but never went to counseling, never did any reading, and never did any changing, to another who (having to overcome major trauma) tore up the book that was assigned by her counselor, not once, but twice, and yet powered through a third copy to come out on the other side.

Just a quick aside on counselors; like any other field, there are good ones and bad ones. There are any number of horror stories about counselors who side with refusers, but on the other hand, there are just as many stories of counselors who are willing to confront refusers and make them see reality. I don’t say that it is a crapshoot, but I do have one piece of advice in selecting counselors: *Make sure that the counselor is willing to keep the main thing the main thing.*

I have read many times of situations where counselors have pushed aside the sexless state of a marriage, saying it would be dealt with later when other things are taken care of first. I’m sorry, but that’s just wrong. Sexlessness is part and parcel of the whole marital problem, and needs to be addressed as part of the whole, not an add-on item to be considered down the road.

So, my rule of thumb about how long? Depending on if actual good-willed efforts are being made and real progress in intimacy is coming along, I would say stick with it for the long haul. But that is only if real progress and effort is continuous.

I have heard it said that it takes 45 days for an action to become ingrained as a habit. I believe that any permanent habit takes longer, and so to be on the safe side, I would say double it. I believe that if steps in intimacy are to become a habit it will be 90 days. Intentional kissing (make-out sessions, not pecks), sexual touch, etc., if they are to become a real part of the marriage, will have to be a part of the marriage routine for at least 90 days, I believe. Basically, from all I’m reading, *Resets* don’t last three months because of the emotional strength that real change requires, so progress that continues over that period of time can be, I believe, accepted as being the turning of a new leaf.

Bottom Line

On my blog, I did a couple of posts entitled *Aphorisms For Marriage* in which I spoke about the need to live out repentance. As that old evangelist I referenced said, “I don’t care how high a man jumps when he gets saved, I’m more concerned with how straight he walks when he comes down.” I can tell you that there are an awful lot of “snot and slobber” repentances made at church altars. But as the line from Habakkuk says in the Hebrew, “The just shall live by *faithfulness*.”

I know that today we have changed the idea of a life of faithfulness to a mere moment of confession and professed faith, but in actuality, it is the choice made daily to live in the covenant that we have made that demonstrates the sincerity of our confession. The same thing holds true for those who promise to “do better” in marital intimacy.

It comes down to this: if a spouse makes a promise to “do better”, s/he will be willing to do the work required to learn, develop skills and/or become emotionally capable for improving intimacy in marriage. Otherwise, it’s just another *Resolution* that isn’t *Real*.

CSL

Resources:

Laura Byerly, *Marriage Book Library*:

<http://www.the-generous-wife.com/marriage-book-library/>

Sex Chat For Christian Wives: <https://forchristianwives.com/>

Knowing Her Sexually: <https://khsministry.com/>

CSL, *Refused? A New Tool To Help, part 2*:

<https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2015/05/28/refused-a-new-tool-to-help-part-2/>

Give Her An Orgasm: <http://giveheranorgasm.com./>

Chris Taylor, *Spicy Extras* page: <https://forgivenwife.com/new-to-this-blog-start-here/have-fun/>

Paul Byerly, *Generous Husband*: <https://www.the-generous-husband.com/>

CSL, *Aphorisms For Marriage*: <https://curmudgeonlylibrarian.wordpress.com/2018/05/01/aphorisms-for-marriage-part-1/>

Chapter 12: “Expectations,” A Final Word

As I read around, I come across stories of wives who seems puzzled, even flummoxed, by their husbands’ need for sex. It’s as if having a libido, a desire (or even need) is an alien concept. We all know the mantra, don’t we?

“What’s the big deal? It’s only sex.”

And with that statement, with that attitude, a great chasm is opened that seems as great as Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra. (My favorite *Next Gen* episode, scene linked below.)

Friends AND Lovers, Not OR

If asked to distill the essence of what a husband or wife is, to define the role of husband and wife, I think I would have to say that s/he is “friend and lover.” Yes, we can have many friends, but only one is brought to my side to live together as my partner for life. And, yes, there are so many different aspects of husband and wife, but I believe that distilled down to the essence, “friend and lover” describes all these aspects.

“But I AM my husband’s friend! He’s my best friend!”

To the refusing, gatekeeping wife, I say this as nicely as this old coot can say it: “If you are not your husband’s lover, you are not your husband’s friend.” I’m sorry, but the complete definition of a husband and wife is “friend AND lover.”

Close companionship is a wonderful blessing in marriage, but is not the defining act of marriage; sex is. After all, monks and nuns will tell you that their fellows, in their different cloisters, are wonderful companions as well. Instead, marriage is more than companionship; it incorporates spirit, soul and body. And that last one, “body”, means shared bodies, not merely shared living spaces.

It comes down to this: if you choose, unilaterally, to end sexual relations with your spouse, you stop being a wife or husband and break the expectations of the marriage covenant. Optioning for a sexless relationship in marriage means that you are refusing to be your spouse’s lover.

What’s Wrong With Expectations, Anyway?

Within the past several months, I’ve read a number of articles or comments in which a husband or wife is advised to “mourn the loss” of their expectations, and having given them up to God, to move on. Some even advise repenting of having expectations. When I come across these kinds of statements, I have to take a moment to look at them and consider asking:

Are you fresh outta your mind?

Let me present a situation to you. A wedding has taken place, and Mr. and Mrs. Wright drive away from the church to go on their honeymoon and to begin their married life together. They said their vows and the minister pronounced them man and wife. Should we begin to immediately offer counsel and let them know that it is not good and may even be harmful to bring expectations into their marriage?

- “Don’t expect loving kindness”
- “Don’t expect sexual faithfulness”
- “Don’t expect meaningful communication”
- “Don’t expect financial support”
- “Don’t expect emotional support”
- “Don’t expect physical safety”
- “Don’t expect sex”

Wait a minute; I may be wrong on that last one. Maybe we DO tell people that they can’t expect to have a sex life in their marriage. “*After all, your spouse may not like sex.*” (I know I’ve run across that one before.)

And I know we all have heard or read where one spouse is told, “Well, just mourn the loss of your sex life. Give up your expectations to God, and let Him have the disposal of it.” We’d never tell a wife, “Well, your husband won’t talk with you, won’t engage with you, won’t communicate with you. Just mourn the loss of connection with your husband, and give it to God; He’s got broad shoulders and can carry that.”

If we wouldn’t tell a wife to mourn the loss of emotional intimacy, why do we tell husbands to just mourn the loss of physical intimacy?

Legitimate Mourning

I do understand that the vagaries of life may dictate that changes come into a home. A spouse may suffer reversals in health, a family may experience loss of a loved one, a couple may undergo financial reversals that alter family standard of living. These are all possibilities, and as husband and wife, we help each other through the vicissitudes of life. After all, that is literally in the marriage vow! “For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health” ring a bell? Yes, there are times, seasons and events that drastically end our abilities to function as we could wish.

In all of these, and more, husband and wife are a bonded unity that live for each other and their relationship. In these times, when something is removed from your plate by the circumstances of life, yes, do mourn your loss and give those expectations to God. Remember, this is a loss to the two of you. If something happens to me that impacts my sex life, it impacts my wife’s sex life also and vice versa. You mourn what is lost, and the

two of you work to find out what is left to you, to continue to draw you close to each other.

However, unilateral ukases are not “circumstances of life,” and are not something that happens to the two of you. One person decides “*No mas*” and imposes their decision on the other. If and when something like that happens, that’s not a time of mourning; it’s a time for discussion and getting to the root problem and cause.

It may be a time to raise holy hell.

CSL

Resources:

Darmok and Jalad At Tanagra (an example of inability to communicate):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-wzr74d7TI>

Appendix

Straight Talk on Helping Abused Spouses

In chapter 9, I spoke about the advice of a contributor to a marriage forum who came to my blog to help answer questions and give advice to a couple of my readers whose wives were struggling with abuse in their pasts. I am including her long replies here for you and hope that she is able to provide help for you.

Reply #1:

[In this reply, Robin was responding to a reader whose wife begged off of sex because of past abuse and not wanting to deal with her past.]

From what I am reading it appears your wife was at the very least sexually used and at the worst abused and betrayed by someone she trusted which is causing a mental block in regard to sex with you that she is unwilling to deal with because she is afraid of what “might be” unearthed. Correct?

Here’s the thing, whether what happened to her was use or abuse is irrelevant, what matters is that it happened and cannot be changed and the fallout from it is affecting you, your wife and your marriage negatively which means it’s long past time to deal with it.

I am a survivor of sexual abuse and assault. I too was afraid to dig up all that garbage and deal with it because I knew it would be painful. But abuse touches everyone in the immediate radius of the survivor whether the survivor wants it to or not. My husband, our marriage and our sex life were touched by what happened to me so I finally chose to quit running from it, turn around and face it head on. The life I wanted meant FAR more to me than my fear. It was painful, expensive, time consuming and at the time it seriously sucked. It was also one of the best decisions I ever made. Now I live in complete victory over abuse with a thriving, healthy marriage and sex life and have for over 20 years.

[Y]our wife needs individual counseling. Not just for the sake of your marriage but for her own sake. If she will do the work and heal from her past, your sex life will improve as a natural by-product. But the only way to get her there is to disrupt the status quo. She has requested you not ask her for something she doesn’t have it in her to give and you have complied. That needs to end. It’s time to communicate clearly that you have done things her way long enough, it’s failed and you won’t (not can’t, WON’T) do it any longer. Let her know that you want more for HER, yourself and your marriage and that starts with her doing the work to heal from her past. Let her know you want her to be healthy and living in victory more than anything else and that you will support her in achieving that 100%, but you won’t continue with the status quo. Be loving about it, but firm.

You would benefit from individual counseling as well. The years of gatekeeping and refusal have taken their toll on you. Reading your wife's diary left you with insecurities that have no business in your marriage. Please, get the help that both of you need.

Reply #2:

[After starting to implement Robin's advice, the husband came back and told Robin that his wife was somewhat less than happy to his new approach to her emotional baggage. Robin wrote to encourage him:]

[B]acklash is completely normal. You can expect anything from fury to anger, resignation, denial, tears, avoidance, bargaining, minimizing, testing and so much more, especially since she didn't get much warning that things were headed for a 180 degree turnaround.

Allow me to run with an analogy for a minute here: Think of a survivor's coping mechanism(s) like a crutch that was helping to prop up a long-ago fractured leg that never got to heal properly. The crutch not only became your wife's habit, it became such a fundamental part of herself that she designed outfits around it for decades. You changing the status quo kicked her crutch out from under her, broke it in tiny pieces, shredded the rubber stopper on the bottom that minimized the impact of each step and no one can find the pad for the armpit. Even if you tried to piece it back together the crutch will never be the same, and in time the leg that the crutch was supporting will start to make its issues known. The bone structure is still fragile and the muscles are nowhere near strong enough to bear her full weight, much less walk without a significant limp. 100% recovery is possible but the leg has to be re-fractured, the muscles that adapted to walking with a crutch now have to be retrained, and it's going to be a long, painful process. Your wife isn't just healing from a freshly fractured leg without her favorite crutch, she has to heal from the original injury, and retrain her entire body and mind to do what it didn't learn the first time, and that's to walk a straight line using only her own strength. Your role in this process is to be her physical therapist. You can support and guide her in rebuilding but you CANNOT do any of the work for her. At times you will be standing at a distance watching her to make sure she doesn't take any shortcuts that could lead to weakness in the future, other times you will be right at her SIDE modeling how to do the exercises properly. That means YOU need to recognize the difference between healthy and unhealthy and what will [either] build strength or breed weakness, and that my friend is what makes counseling VITAL for BOTH of you.

In nearly 20 years of mentoring fellow abuse survivors in all phases of the healing process I've seen some survivors cling to their crutch like it's the last life raft on the Titanic while others are not only ready to ditch the crutch but are happy to burn it to ashes so they will never depend on it again. What a survivor has to not only dig up, [but also] acknowledge, process and eventually make their peace with, is ugly and filled with toxic baggage. It doesn't matter if the abuser(s) was a stranger who jumped out from the bushes, or someone we knew, trusted and maybe even loved – SURVIVORS WILL ALWAYS find a way to BLAME OURSELVES. Being abused was one thing, but I really couldn't forgive myself for needing help dealing with it and even more ticked at myself

when I saw the fruit of my poor coping mechanisms. I was convinced it was just more weakness and failure. Once I got healthy I realized that getting help and pursuing health actually took A LOT of strength. My point is that logic doesn't always come into play when dealing with past abuse and no one knows where your wife will land on the spectrum. She could be ready to let it all go or she could cling to the things that have gotten through it to this point, only time will reveal that answer. In the meantime you assume crash position and brace for impact. Make sure that you communicate clearly to your wife that you love her and you are invested in her healing and peace. If that's true, then let her know that what you want more than anything is health and healing for you, her and your marriage.

[P]lease hear me when I say this. Help and healing for YOU is every bit as important as your wife's healing. In fact, if you won't do the work necessary to heal from the hurts of the past there really isn't much point in holding any kind of mirror up to your wife. This is NOT the time to be myopic. You and your wife are in my prayers.

~Robin