

An illustration of a person's legs and feet in a garden. The legs are shown from the knees down, wearing orange leggings. The feet are also orange, with one foot slightly ahead of the other. The background is a dark teal color with various stylized plants and leaves in shades of light blue, white, and dark green. The overall style is modern and artistic.

# SEX

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT IN MARRIAGE, AND HOW  
TO WORK THROUGH COMMON PROBLEMS.

MONTHLY MARRIAGE WORKSHOP  
MONTH 3

**JEFF & ALYSSA BETHKE**

## THE 'WHY'

This month's theme is all about sex. It's a deeply important part of marriage. It's something that affects every area of the marriage and is commonly said to be the source of the most arguments in marriage. More than almost any other topic in marriage, understanding the WHY behind sex can greatly unlock its power and beauty. It can also help breakdown many of the roadblocks in your marriage where sex has become a pain point. Because let's be honest, the idealized expectations of sex filled marriage that we all envisioned before marriage is hardly the reality. But guess what? It can be. Sex is weighty and beautiful and one of the most intimate glue bonding powers to marriage. A healthy sex life in marriage lights up and eases everything else. While an unhealthy sex life, or one where bitterness and rejection have taken hold, burdens down everything else in the marriage.

## THE 'HOW'

After doing this month's action plan, you will walk away with:

1. Tools and helpful tips to allow your sex life to flourish, not flounder.
2. A deeper understanding of God's design for sex and sexuality.
3. Helpful language and frameworks to work through the common pain points in your sex life.

# WEEK 1

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SEX STORY

*\*Join us May 6th at 4:30 PT for our live webcast on our private Facebook page.\**

I'd say Jeff, and I have a really good sex life as of late. It's healthy, free, intimate, and most of all safe and mutually agreed upon. But this wasn't always the case. In fact, when we first got married, the hardest part of our marriage was, no doubt, sex.

As many of you know from following us or reading our books, Jeff and I have very different pasts. Jeff wasn't a virgin when we got married, and I hadn't even held a guy's hand until Jeff. Thankfully, because of the Lord's grace and goodness, there never was deep-seated hurt or resentment from our differing backgrounds though. I knew Jesus forgave Jeff, Jeff apologized to me, Jeff was a new creation, and I was SO excited to marry him and share that part of life together as a married couple.

But it's funny how Satan works. Of course, while we were dating, we wanted to jump on each other! We fought hard for purity and lived in community, but it was clear we couldn't wait.

Then all of a sudden, we got married and sex started to get hard to do.

I wanted to have sex way more than Jeff. He wanted to too, but when it would come time to, he was exhausted and just said he'd rather go to bed. I remember being deeply hurt and feeling rejected. I couldn't wait to give myself to him, and most of the time it was a no.

It took us a long time to work through it and unpack it but looking back there were two big factors. One, Jeff started a new job right when we got married, and it was deeply taxing. He was overworked, and it was grinding on our marriage. He'd fall asleep at random times throughout the day and come home with barely any mental, emotional, or spiritual energy left. After going through this, we strongly counsel younger couples to do everything in their power to make the first year of marriage as restful as possible. There's plenty of wisdom in the fact that some cultures take the entire year off of work and vocation, to start the marriage out on the right foot.

And secondly, while Jeff and I were so close and intimate in regards to forgiving the past and living in the light, we weren't expecting his past to affect us as much as it did. It's funny how Satan works, isn't it? I know this now looking back and having unpacked it with Jeff, but right when we got married Jeff started to get hit hard again with shame and that mixed

with exhaustion made him turn inward and not outward towards me.

And we didn't find freedom overnight, but we certainly are in a place of this no longer being a problem in this regard. And you know the main thing that helped? Us talking about it. The thing Satan wants more than anything is for you not to share how you feel with your spouse. He wants you not to share your inner thoughts and hurts and frustrations. Or for us, when we started unpacking and connecting the dots to Jeff's past and Satan's renewed attack on that, we were able to call it out, pray for it, and live in freedom. I was able to look at Jeff and say you're a new man. You're a new creation. And let's have sex right now in Jesus' name (nothing better than that right? :D).

So for this week's homework, start to get the wheels spinning by recounting to each other your sexual story. I know it's a weird question or way to phrase it, but try to summarize your thoughts and feelings and personal journey with sex, sexuality, and everything in between. The good and the bad.

Our story is not the only story.

Maybe you have been abused when you were a child, or recently.

Maybe you both were virgins when you got married, but had a "sex is bad" mentality.

Maybe you were excited for sex, but it causes constant pain and it's hard and not easy.

Maybe you don't particularly like physical touch.

Maybe you have carried the burdens of sexual shame for years and brought it into your marriage.

Maybe you both waited until marriage, but feel confused or uncomfortable.

Go through the multiple stages of your life as a single person and married life when talking about this. An example could be, "When I was a kid I found myself seeped in a lot of sexual shame because of porn, then I started to heal and found Jesus around college, and then when we got married it was exciting and good, but a few years in our sex life started to regress. It was more of a priority early on."

Because here's the truth -- sex is primarily about intimacy. About truly seeing the other person. And to have really good and awesome sex, you need to know that person. On a level that no one else does. And it takes vulnerability. So do you know your own sexual journey? Have you ever tried to summarize it? Do you know what your common temptations are, your common pain points of sex are, things in your past that sometimes creep up? And could you answer those same questions about your spouse? Start a conversation this week with your spouse on this topic.

# WEEK 2

## THE HEART OF SEX

One thing that is commonly misunderstood about sex is that it is in its own compartment. But that's a lie. Sex is just an overflow of how your marriage is doing, and it reflects that day or that season. If you are communicating well, loving each other well, being kind to one another well, guess what? You'll probably have great sex that night. But you didn't talk to each other, didn't check in on each other's hearts that day, and then expect sex that night? It can and should still happen. But it's harder to get to the depth, apex, and fullness of it.

And here's why -- because God created sex as a reflection of the marital relationship. In a marriage God ordained mysteriously that his male + female relationship would come together in a covenant with God, to live and love and work together as two distinct and separate people yet as one unit. One team. One flesh.

That two people would become one.

What better picture of that than sex? Where literally two people, become one. But here's the reality - that doesn't just mean physically.

True sex. The awesome sex God promises, is sex where you feel one not only physically at that moment but also spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. It's a place and moment of ecstasy and intimacy that nothing else on this earth can match. I think I heard Tim Keller once say that sex is a physical act of renewing your vows. All that stuff you said on your wedding day? 'Til death do us part, I will love you forever, I will serve you forever, and we are one forever? You can literally show that with your body.

And it goes even farther. Sex at its heart is about nakedness. Not just physical nakedness, but the nakedness of the soul. Does your spouse truly see you? Have you taken off the mask?

There's not a more beautiful feeling than feeling free and vulnerable and safe all at once during sex with your spouse. Knowing they see all that you are, all the hard parts, scars, wounds, misfit pieces of you, and look you right in the eye and say I still want you. I am not going anywhere.

But it takes work to get there. Tenderness. Mutual service. Gentleness. Slowly but surely you will find sex begins to become this unbelievable gift and connection. The intimacy and

vulnerability can be so exhilarating and beautiful that it's both the best thing in the world and simultaneously terrifying all in one moment. Because there truly is no more vulnerable moment on earth. But to be that vulnerable and still loved is the center of a marriage on fire. To be fully known and fully loved at the same time is essentially the pursuit of every human on earth, and no more moment to feel those two collide with power than in a covenantal marriage during sex.

So this week's homework is digging deeper into the above.

Would you describe your sex life like the above paragraph? If not, how come do you think?

Don't be afraid to practice this week. Literally have sex. With the lights on. Looking at each other square in the eye. Telling each other how much you love the other and things you appreciate about them. While having sex. Awkward a little? Sure. But that's usually because of a fear of intimacy. It feels weird to be that close. But it can happen. And it should happen.

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# WEEK 3

## OVERCOMING ALL THE THINGS THAT STOP US

OK, week 3 is when we dig our heels in. This week might potentially be the hardest in regards to the ground we want to go into, so make sure you take extra care and sensitivity with how you talk to your spouse about these things and this topic. Take a date night, or simply put the kids down and grab a bottle of wine or two La Croix's (anyone else love those?) and work through the questions below one night, or multiple nights this week. And before you start, both of you look at each other and declare that this is a safe place and we will be honest and vulnerable.

What would you say is the hardest part about our sex life (we never have it, it hurts, I don't enjoy it, I want it way more usually, etc)?

What does an ideal sex life look like to you (frequency, spontaneous, etc)?

What do you really enjoy that I or we do that you've never really told me explicitly?

What's one way I can serve you better in sex or to prepare our time better? (True sex is best when about mutual service, instead of mutual taking.)

Do you think there are any wounds in our marriage, or from your past, that are affecting our sex life and intimacy?

What would you say is the biggest roadblock that keeps us from having sex (exhaustion, work schedule, no motivation, etc)?

What's one way we could incrementally take away or minimize the road block above?

Talk about this week's answers. Feel free to revisit them a few times this week to give yourselves time to pray for them and reflect on them. But most of all commit to a safe place where you will only listen and affirm your spouse in their answers. Remind your spouse that you hear them and appreciate them sharing. Conversations on sex can be so hard because it's so intimate, so pain points hit sharper and deeper. But resist the temptation to defend yourself. Simply listen. Both of you being honest is providing an atmosphere to grow and learn and take your sex life farther.

## HELPFUL ACTION PLAN & TIPS FOR COMMON OBSTACLES

### FREQUENCY

One common problem we hear from couples is that one spouse desires sex maybe once or so a week; when the other person desires and expects sex five times a week. If you constantly try to battle towards the two, it leaves people both unhappy, unsatisfied, and resentful. This sounds ridiculously simple, but a very good solution is for both of you to write on a piece of paper without telling the other person how often you expect/desire sex per week. And then once you've written it, then both of you show each other and talk about it. Then, agree to the number that's exactly in the middle of the two. So if one says 5 and the other says 1, then agree to try and have sex three times a week. Of course, you aren't creating laws for your marriage, but an objective agreed upon number is incredibly useful and helpful to take out the guesswork and minimize the opportunity for the common cycle of pursuit and rejection. I know multiple marriages who have instituted this simple trick, and it's been life-changing for them.

## FORGETFULNESS OR LACK OF PLANNING

Another big one, especially with kids involved, is you forget. You get to bed, and you're both exhausted and want to go to bed. One simple trick for this common problem is to schedule it. Like literally. Write on your calendar "have sex tonight." And what's funny is a lot of folks say, "that's not romantic!" But it only takes about five seconds into sex before you forget about that and it's romantic and intimate, and you are connecting. The scheduling of it helps get you there. And again, it takes away the guesswork. Alyssa and I do this all the time. We will bring it up earlier in the day and agree on having sex that night, and it solves a million issues before they happen. What's funny is no one takes the 'spontaneous' attitude with other things in the marriage. If we want to go on a date night, because we know we need to and want to connect, we schedule it. If we want a family sabbath to happen every week, we schedule it. Same with sex. For it to be front and center it's OK to plan it and schedule it and put it at the forefront.

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# WEEK 4

We have a surprise for this week, where we are going to bring in some older couples with very specific advice and questions that I think will bless us all enormously. For this one stay tuned. It's going to be awesome :D!

# GUY'S CORNER

(FROM JEFF)

Guys,

If we could read the minds of our wives, I bet most of them would say they would love for us just to step up and take a little more initiative in all areas. To pursue her. To go after her heart. To initiate conversations and moments. I think sex is no different. What does it look like to lead to sex? In my opinion, it means to do the dishes, and lead with service. What do I mean by doing the dishes? I once heard someone say foreplay starts at 7 am by taking out the trash and doing the dishes. This is just a funny way of saying, what we do during the day has a big impact on our wives throughout the day and their ability to be intimate later. So what would it look like to lead in this area throughout the day? Do an honest self-assessment and ask do you serve your wife throughout the day, because you love her, or don't think of little ways to serve her and hope magically at 9 pm your wife will be in the mood? Now trust me, we all can grow at this! No shame and no burden. The cool part is it's a joy to lead in service to our wives. To look for tiny microscopic things throughout the day, we can do to serve them or make them feel loved. And in fact, I bet most would take 3-4 minutes in a day. Who doesn't have 3-4 extra minutes to give in service of your wife today? Try it for a week or two every day and see if you notice a difference.

Jeff

# GIRL'S CORNER

(FROM ALYSSA)

Ladies,

Let's talk about hurts. I know for me, I can feel the sting of rejection in a much more sensitive way than Jeff. I feel small things sometimes in a big way, and then I begin telling myself lies in my head that turn into a spiral.

But one thing that has helped me, and our sex life, is to take the micro hurts and pain points, and constantly recenter them on the Lord. It's an easy way to stop the cycle of pain and rejection sex. By not letting it fester, turn into resentment, and then spill back out. But by taking it to the Lord and saying "Lord, this hurt. But remind me of your truth. Remind me YOU are my worth and identity." It re-energizes you and keeps the fire in your tank to keep pursuing your husband and getting in the right frame of mind. Too many times we build up one moment, especially in sex, and go all out trying to make it special, and that night he's tired. So then we quit and crawl into a hole. But in reality, it was one time, and we are all humans and creatures, and we all get tired. Grace is key here ladies. At that moment though you can remind yourself, "OK that hurt, I'm going to try again in a few days." Or you can even tell him, "Hey babe, that was hard for me to put out this effort and be rejected. I'm going to try again soon, and can you try to take notice and reciprocate? I'd feel appreciated."

And ladies, this is just one example of how easily hurt can creep into the marriage! But in all of it make sure to take it to the Lord. He is for you, and He can give you the strength and grace to sustain a sex life of love, mutual respect, and grace.

Alyssa