

P r e f a c e

This book is about intimacy and sexuality within Christian marriage. If you have purchased it in preparation for marriage or in the hope of healing or enhancing what you already share within marriage, you are to be commended. There is perhaps no other blessing our Lord gives that is as bonding for couples and yet has so much potential for pain and brokenness as sexuality. You are wise to do some reading and discussion with your spouse on such a powerful and volatile subject. When you do, you stand to gain immeasurably in your intimacy and oneness as a couple, as well as to avoid or turn back waves of devastation that many marriages never survive.

Since this is not an ordinary subject, this is no ordinary book. As you read these pages, you will likely find yourself uncomfortable at various points. If you and your spouse are reading aloud to each other, as we recommend strongly, you will find yourself a bit embarrassed as we address certain subjects. It is also likely that you will disagree with us at times, feeling we have taken too conservative an approach on a subject, only to find later that you feel we have been too liberal with another. Such is the nature of writing on sexuality.

We encourage you to approach this book in a prayerful attitude, asking the Lord to speak directly to you about this delicate part of his creation. We are not so much offering a definitive statement

on God's gift of sexuality as we are hoping to foster a thoughtful examination to spur more dialogue in general. It is high time we wrestled through these issues more aggressively as a church, however awkward and difficult the discussion may be.

We challenge you to read this book not only for yourself and your marriage but also for your children, your church, your community, and our world. Satan has had a field day with our sexuality. Much of his success is due to the relative silence, until recently, of the church on this subject. Several prominent Christian leaders have insisted that sexuality is the *number one issue* with which the church must wrestle in the next decade. The erosion of our sexual values is destroying marriages, families, communities, and whole denominations, leaving us ill equipped to battle the destruction it is bringing on our country and the world. Reexamining God's intentions for sexuality, we must recommit ourselves to the faithful stewardship of his design in our marriages and among those with whom we have influence.

May your reading of this book be a step in that direction. May the Lord speak to you as you examine this most private and powerful gift.

Introduction

Rachel and I have grown accustomed to the surprised looks and nervous laughter of friends and acquaintances when they learn of my work as a Christian sex therapist. The idea strikes many as oxymoronic, as if you can be a Christian *or* a sex therapist but not a Christian sex therapist. We joke along with them and enjoy the instant reactions our revelation engenders—from immediate interest and a litany of questions to an awkward, “Oh, really?” as they look for the nearest exit. Few topics have proven to be such great conversation starters or stoppers!

Admittedly there are not many Christians practicing sex therapy, and it was not exactly my life’s ambition when I went into the field of psychotherapy. I had taken only one course in human sexuality in my professional training before I felt called to it more than a decade ago. Wrongly assuming that I would only occasionally talk with people about their sex lives, I had been entirely unprepared for the level of pain and problems that would be revealed by simply asking, “How is the sexual part of your life?”

When I opened my private practice in Clearwater, Florida, my caseload became filled with persons wrestling with sexual abuse, sexual addiction, sexual aversion, sexual dysfunctions, homosexual orientation, sexual pain disorders, and any other sexual problem you can imagine. Quickly I discovered that Christians had few

places to turn when they were struggling sexually, but they were hungry for answers and for healing.

My wife, Rachel, has made this journey with me, reading the books I have read, helping me process the magnitude of the problems, and wrestling through our own theology of sexuality. She has been my constant supporter, encourager, and prayer warrior. As a result of her work in this area, we have grown tremendously in the intimacy we share within our own marriage. Rachel has done extensive research into sexual norms and practices of various cultures throughout history and on the development of doctrine around sexuality within the church. Her work on covenanting and on the connection between sexuality and worship are critical themes in this book, and many of the insights are hers, although some sections are written in the first person singular for readability's sake.

This is a book about intimacy and sexuality within Christian marriage. We separate those two concepts because it is important that husbands and wives enjoy intimacy without necessarily needing to be sexual, and because (unfortunately) husbands and wives are often sexual without really being intimate. It is our conviction that God intends our sexual intimacy to be the deepest expression of the marital intimacy we share on every other plane of the relationship.

It is our hope that this book will help couples catch a bigger vision of what God intended when he designed and blessed sexual union. We believe there is a world of difference between simply having sex and truly making love. The world uses these phrases interchangeably and, indeed, the acts themselves are the same. But the spirit of *making love* is entirely different from simply *having sex*.

The first part of this book is an examination of the struggle the church has had historically in helping couples understand God's intentions for sex—the *spirit of making love*. It also examines the fallout from the sexual revolution and how the latter half of

the twentieth century impacted sexuality in Christian marriage. By looking first at the origins of many of our struggles, we are better equipped to contrast a picture of health and wholeness in sexual intimacy.

The second part of the book details a schematic model called the Lovemaking Cycle. It offers a vision of lovemaking that encourages a continually deepening experience of intimacy, rather than simply offering tips on how to have better sex. Using the model, couples are able to examine each phase of their lovemaking. It provides a framework for immediate application of points in the text and for identifying problems and solutions. We suggest that couples read these sections aloud to each other to facilitate more immediate application. Each chapter concludes with several questions for couples to ponder and discuss together.

In the final part I make practical application of the model as I answer questions Christians ask most often about sex. This section illustrates how couples can apply the model to a wide range of sexual struggles. In the final chapter we issue a challenge to take these insights and not only apply them in the reader's own marriage but share them in any number of arenas in which the Lord may give him or her influence. The world desperately needs a clearer vision of God's intentions for sexuality.

We have written this book to appeal to couples at any stage of their relationship, from premarried couples and newlyweds to those married fifty years or more. We believe that sexual intimacy should be continually maturing and deepening, just as our intimacy with the Father should always be maturing and deepening. The process of being known and fully knowing (see 1 Cor. 13:12) should never stop until we leave this world and see him face to face.

Case examples throughout the book are drawn from real couples I have worked with through the years, though names and significant details have been changed to guard their privacy. These examples are used to put a face on the issues addressed and to emphasize the

range of problems that can plague couples. It is likely that you will see struggles of your own in some of these vignettes.

It is our prayer that this book will accomplish at least three major objectives:

1. Readers will gain a clearer perspective on God's great gift of sexuality and create more dialogue within the church, gradually developing a far more comprehensive theology of sexuality.
2. Readers will wrestle through a greater ownership of their sexuality, enabling them to experience a continually deepening sense of intimacy and connectedness with their husband or wife.
3. This vision of sexuality will inspire readers to be more proactive in shaping the sexuality of the next generation, enabling them to finally launch a counteroffensive to the sexual revolution of the past century.

May God yet be glorified through our sexuality!