**RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX**

Having sex in the back of a car or in some strange bedroom with a guy or girl at a party whom you have known for either two hours or two months, might have a hint of excitement about it, but it will almost certainly not give both people involved the ‘best sex’. In hastily construed situations where you are sharing your most intimate naked (or semi-naked) self, the experience will be less than what you hope and someone will inevitably get hurt if there is not a loving appreciation of each other and a deep sense of care and generosity.

The best sex takes place in a mutually open, warm and accepting relationship in which you are not required to ‘perform sexually’, but in which you can nurture and encourage the development of your sex relationship. It also does not see sex as one-off occasions but as a process of discovery and learning because the more sex you have and the more you get to know the other person, the more sensitively and with greater freedom you can build on the techniques to which each person responds. Even a casual asking around amongst friends will tell you this, and the literature on the subject agrees with this opinion. It’s what many people have told me over the years and its certainly my experience after 38 happy years of marriage.

The best sex does not take place in a vacuum, but is highlighted and enhanced by the relationship which it expresses and shares. It also involves the discovery that you have far better sex when the focus is not on MY sexual experience, but on the relationship with the other person which is expressed through sharing sex together in far more meaningful and mature ways. This type of sharing requires an attitude that sees the need of your partner and has a sense of the longer term nature of the relationship. It also discovers the enjoyment of knowing the other person so well so that you can make their experience of sex the best that they can have as well.

I hope that the following ideas might help you to rethink the place of sex in your life and to enhance your sexual enjoyment in a committed and loving relationship.

Sex is a positive and important part of what it means to be a created human being. But it is not the ‘be-all and end-all”, as seems to be the case in many parts of the Western world. In the Western world sex is often only seen in a narrow way with the physical being the focus. Too often men see women only physically, and in turn, women become embroiled in an attempt to define themselves by their physical body

and sexual rating or attractiveness. Everyone can be affected by this, including

single people, people who are dating, as well as couples who have been married for a life time. I believe that sex is a wonderful gift from God, which, if expressed in a warm, caring, loving and trusting environment, is the best way of expressing and receiving love, and is the best place for both partners to enhance and appreciate sex in greater and deeper ways. This caring and trusting marriage relationship also forms the best place into which the children (born from this expression of loving and respectful sex) can grow up and in turn become the next loving generation.

**The positive reasons for expressing love through sex in a warm, welcoming, committed marriage relationship are as follows:**

1. The partners do not feel as though they need to ‘perform’ sexually in certain ways, much of which is expressed through the unreal hype of the current media and culture.

2. It is important to grow together physically, allowing for the different pace of each partner’s growth in this area. Time is needed to grow and explore with each other, both personally as well as physically.

3. Sex never need be ‘boring’ with the same partner if both people are committed to the relationship and prepared to creatively meet the personal and sexual needs of each other. The relationship will constantly be changing and so sex will never be the same if each person sensitively meets the personal and sexual needs of their partner at each new encounter.

4. Mistakes and inadequacies can be addressed sensitively and with forgiveness.

5. Each person can encourage and love the other person to find their own individual and couple sexual identities without feeling that they have to conform to the ‘current trend’ or sexual views of society/ media, etc.

6. Sex is not a matter of what gratification I can get out of it, but the extent to which I can satisfy the sexual needs of my spouse/ life-long lover. The focus is on the other person rather than my needs. If both are working at the relationship together then there is a far greater possibility that the needs of both partners will be satisfied. It is not the ‘number of times you have sex’ but the quality and enjoyment of sex for both partners.

7. Sex is then an expression of where the couple are at personally and relationally. But if there are issues and differences, these need to be worked through for sex to be truly a wholistic expression of the long-term marriage relationship. Often the frequency and quality of sex can be a gauge of other areas of the couple’s lives together which are not functioning in a positive and healthy way.

8. The Song of Songs is a fantastic love poem of two utterly committed lovers who romantically share their lives together. Likewise the book of Proverbs has various angles on the sex relationship. One of the better ones is:

There are three things that are too amazing for me,

four that I do not understand:

The way of an eagle in the sky,

the way of a snake on a rock,

The way of a ship on the high seas,

and the way of a man with a maiden. (Prov. 30:18, 19)

Very beautifully and in detail Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the ‘ideal’ wife. She is presented as an astute business woman who knows the real estate market. She is a clever merchant and vigneron. She is an able community worker helping the poor and she speaks with wisdom and teaches people faithfully. She is certainly not just a stereotypical ‘stay-at-home-mum’. And this is not to denigrate women who focus on their family, but it is to show that we should not be limited in our understanding of the ‘roles’ of husband and wife.

9. For the above reasons the best sex occurs within the committed married relationship whereby each partner can freely explore and discover together their own sexual expression of their relationship in the loving environment that they give to each other.

**The ‘ideal’ couple or marriage**

We all probably have in our mind what would be our ‘ideal’ marriage. Some indications of what this might look like have been described in this paper. Whatever this ideal might be it does not mean that the relationship will always be ‘sweetness and light’. Where human beings are involved there will inevitably be disappointment and short-comings, all of which need a good dose of forgiveness and understanding that prevents both parties resorting to legalistic criticism or unreal expectations of their own marriage, marriage partner or even other married couples. The diagram below presents what I consider the most respectful and loving way for couples to relate to each other both before the marriage ceremony and within marriage. It takes into account the full person in the relationship, allowing each to get to know and move toward each other at their own pace. The level of physical contact and intimacy should reflect and keep pace with the level of personal and emotional involvement and sexual expression.

l

a

c

i

s

y

h

P

-------------------------------------------------

Emotional/ personal

This can be contrasted with the next diagram below which skews the physical

sexual expression so that it races ahead of the couple’s level of intimacy and trust.

**Ways in which this positive, life-giving expression of love in sex can be lost or compromised and limited:**

1. Proverbs tell us that the prostitute reduces the man to being a loaf of bread when the relationship is just one of physical gratification for money (bread).

“Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes,

For the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys on your very life,

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?

So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished” (Prov 6:25-29)

2. Shallowness results when men and women see each other primarily as means to a personal end of self-gratification. This means that either one in particular, or in the long run, both, are ripped off and are possibly just using each other as a means to a selfish end.

3. Many sexually transmitted diseases are due to treating sex in a casual manner.

4. Sequential monogamy may seem ethical, but it means that people cannot give themselves to each other fully, because they do not know if this really is the one that I fully love, nor whether the person might walk out on them the next week, next month or in a year’s time. Inevitably one of the partners becomes hurt and damaged: in the short term through comparisons being made overtly or covertly with respect to previous or idealised future partners; or in the long term through breaking, up which is usually initiated by one of the partners and results in much pain for the one who is left rejected.

5. I believe that much of the attitude and expectations of men, women and society is still very much controlled by men. These include male expectations of the shape of the female body (including young girls), the pornographic availability on the net and elsewhere, the idea that you must or should be having sex and the narrow understanding of sex just being a physical sensual encounter. Most of these things are to the advantage of males. See Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of this issue. The following diagram shows how individuals and couples can personally become skewed in their own person and recognition of the other. The physical relationship races ahead of their personal and emotional commitment. When this occurs one or both partner’s needs are squashed and a selfish, destructive element enters the relationship.

l

a

c

i

s

y

h

P

-------------------------------------------

Emotional/ personal

**Appendix A The servanthood model of marriage**

This model essentially comes out of the statement by Paul who said in reference to marriage in Ephesians 5:21: ‘Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.’ This is said to both husbands and wives and I believe springs from the wider and deeper understanding of human relationships which Jesus presented for all human beings. Paul’s explanation of this submission is then further defined in Ephesians 5:22ff. This radical statement that husbands are to submit to their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands, comes out of the new way in which God in Christ relates to all his children. Paul also speaks about this mutuality in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

With the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, a new and radical depth is given to the relationship between God and his people. Some of these radical aspects are found in the fact that God himself became a human being. Not only that, but God allowed human beings to kill him in an effort to get rid of this radical new ‘prophet’ or ‘teacher’ who was both calling them to account and repentance as well as a deeper lifestyle of love and service. Humble incarnation and voluntary death are the main two extremities of the depth that Jesus was ushering in through the Kingdom of God and are expressed profoundly in the Christ hymn of Philip 2:5-11, in which the attitude of the Christian is to be one of humility, submission and sacrifice.

On several occasions Jesus also put human relationships into quite a different perspective. He said that the primary relationship a person now had was to God and to himself. The human relationships of father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, servant/ master, Jew/ Gentile (nationality and religion), male/ female (sexuality), even teacher/ pupil, clean/ unclean, etc were all of a secondary nature to our relationship to God and the new community of human beings that he was creating. Thus these secondary relationships were always subservient (or secondary) to our relationship with God and our new brothers and sisters that we discover in the family of God, the body of Christ, the church.

The new ways of the Kingdom are clearly spelled out by Jesus in both his teaching and his actions. Just prior to instituting the Lord’s Supper, Jesus washes the disciples’ feet (John 13:3-17), and then In the midst of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus scolds the disciples for trying to take the worldly response of leadership and domination (Luke 22:24-30). By contrast they are to be servants of one another. His own life and action demonstrate the life of a humble servant, who gave up his power and authority to show that as humans there is a new framework for mending relations and then living together. He was called the ultimate of servants which he expressed by giving up everything out of love for all people (Mark 10:45). Jesus evens talk about himself continuing to serve us even at his second coming (Luke 12:37).

Therefore when we consider these human relationships, we are not to reject them in themselves, but to live in them in the new way of the Kingdom of God. A good example is that of the master (Philemon) and slave (Onesimus) whom Paul asks that each treat each other first and foremost as brothers in Christ, placing into a

secondary position their slave/ master relationship. In verses 15 and 16 Paul exhorts Philemon saying: ‘Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever---no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother’. The new relationship with Christ provides a new and deeper basis in which to live in human relationship, be it slave and master or husband and wife.

**1. Traditional:** God

husband

wife

**2. Humanistic ‘liberation’:** Power and decision making is 50 % /50 %

husband (partner) wife (partner)

**3. Servants of one another:** 100% / 100% servants of one another because of Jesus

husband wife

(served by Christ and his wife) (served by Christ and her husband)

serves (and submits serves (and submits

to) his wife to) her husband

Jesus (the ultimate servant)

serves both wife and husband

This third model (the servant model) is most fully informed by the ways in which Jesus described and lived the Kingdom of God.

**Appendix B Pornography from a male perspective**

In the Guardian Weekly Newspaper (26/11/10) an article on this matter was written by Kira Cochrane, which outlines the social and relationship implications of pornography. Some of these thoughts are expressed in the following quotes from the article.

Mention porn to people who came of age in the 60s and 70s, and it’s often a byword for big-brushed centrefolds or videos of awkward encounters with unusually attentive plumbers. But more recently, porn “features”--- films that at least nod to a plot---have been joined by “gonzo” material, which only depicts sex. Many of the most popular films have become harder and angrier…Even ardent fans have acknowledged modern porn’s brutal trajectory….One obvious problem for many porn users is the conflict between their stated belief in equality and respect for women, and the material they are watching in private. McCormack Evans says he used to exist in a “kind of double consciousness. For that half-hour when I was watching porn I thought, ‘This is separate from my life, it won’t affect how I view the world.’ But then I realised it did.”

Dr Andrew Durham, a social worker who counsels children who have problems with their sexual behaviour says:…“Pornography reinforces the wider media-led messages about the roles of men and women and can also reinforce a particular attitude toward sex, an attitude that is devoid of trust, caring and, in the worst cases, consent.”

Jackson Katz…suggests the porn industry has an obvious interest in undermining intimacy between men and women---if couples were to find sexual fulfilment together, the market would plummet. And this opposition to intimacy, says Jensen, helps explain why porn has become so cruel, degrading and humiliating---why, to quote Martin Amis, it has become “a parody of love” addressing itself “to love’s opposites, which are hate and death”.

The truth is, says Jensen, that because pornography consists of the same repetitive sexual acts, it needs some form of emotional content to succeed commercially. It’s the content that staves off the boredom. “Now, if pornography went towards emotion that was about mutuality, respect and egalitarian relationships, then men wouldn’t buy it, because they are using porn to avoid those aspects of sexuality. So the route to maximising market share involves including emotions that men are more willing to accept in a commercial sex relationship---anger, aggression and domination.”

**APPENDIX C**

**VARYING DEGREES OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ‘MARRIED’.**

The following thoughts come from a student discussion group which is attempted to explore different ‘types’ of marriage in our society, exploring the plusses and minuses of each. The following thoughts are not complete and any of your thoughts and suggestions are most welcome.

There seems to be no essential difference between de facto marriage, civil marriage or faith marriage (abbreviated to ‘farriage’). They are all essentially varying depths of the human nature and desire for intimate, personal and sexual companionship between two people with the possibility of nurturing a family. This is what God gave to humans when the world was created. They do however offer varying degrees of depth and support for the two human beings who choose to live together in this most intimate, demanding and rewarding of relationships.

Before we explore the various intimate sexual relationships, the other alternatives will be briefly addressed. The alternative possibilities to an intimate couple is that of a threesome or foursome and also polygamy. These have been tried and generally found to be wanting, limited or shallow. They are more likely to create damage for one or more of the people involved. We reflected on the sexual experimentation of the 60s and 70s in this respect. There are very few (if any) human relationships in which the complexity of more than two people can be honestly, fully and emotionally shared at the deepest level. Anything more than two tends to dissipate and reduce the level of intimacy and trust and love. Consider the ever present dilemmas of the ‘eternal triangle’ in which you have two males and one female or two females and one male. Invariably one member of the triangle misses out. Some parents may say that they can have as much love for all their children (whatever the number) but these are not a relationship of equals, nor a relationship at every human level, including the sexual.

So assuming that most (if not all) people would like to have an intimate and sexual relationship with one other person and excluding the superficial idea of considering the shallow sexual encounters (one night stands, etc), the following options are available to people. They are listed in order of their depth and the value placed on the relationship.

It should be noted that as the following options are being considered, each member of whichever couple type inevitably goes into the relationship with varying degrees of commitment, idealism and realism, both in terms of the type of the ‘marriage’ and in terms of the fact that each individual in each couple will see it in different ways. So, for example, in one couple the one partner might be operating more from a state marriage level whereas the other partner might see the relationship additionally from a religious perspective.

1. **De facto ‘marriage’**

Even within these relationships there are the unwritten commitments of the two people that ‘we want this to work’ and ‘we are in love with each other to the exclusion of other people’. The limitation of this relationship is that it can have limited support from either of the two people and it is also naively seen as just between the two of them. It is sometimes seen as a ‘trial’ marriage, but this has its limits as there is less commitment (and more caution) by either of the individuals in a relationship in which they will always be assessing each other and the relationship. Each partner is assumed to be keeping their options open in case someone else who is more preferable is discovered or in case there are difficulties encountered, at which point it is thought there would be an easier break up of the relationship. The state (or government of the day) has in recent years stepped in and formally ‘legalised’ these de facto ‘marriages, by bringing them under ‘de facto law’ which treats them as legal marriages after 12 or 24 months of duration. Issues such as Centrelink, wills, pensions, separation (‘divorce’), children, property ownership, etc. all become joint concerns, as in a state marriage. This is attempting to force the couple to be somewhat more realistic about justice and responsibility matters including property ownership and children. It also effectively means that the state makes the decision about whether or not this is a ‘marriage’, ‘piece of paper’ or not.

**2. State or civil marriage**

These marriages willingly and publicly express their intention that this is the ‘one and only person’ with whom I want to live (certainly more so than de facto) and it is done before a representative of the political or social group of the country or region. Family and friends are usually included in a variety of public ways through celebrations prior to the wedding eg. an engagement party, bucks’ night, hens’ night, and also the whole planning of a very elaborate event on the day (or days) of the wedding (even if it is a ‘low-key’ wedding, it can be still quite complex).

**3. Faith marriage (farriage)**

These involve all the aspects of the state marriage, but they also place God at the centre of their relationship and so call on God as a witness to their public declaration and commitment and ask for God’s help in keeping their promises. It is usually in a religious building, but not necessarily. They can be a couple (or one of the couple) from any religion, eg Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, etc and Christian (although see the final category below). These marriages are given various types of support (including faith community, rites, rituals, counselling, etc) in order to strengthen and make the marriage strong and viable, both on the wedding day and throughout the life of the marriage

**4. Christian Servanthood Marriage**

I have included this as a final example of types of marriage, even though it is also included in the farriage. The reason for adding it is that it provides another depth to support a marriage, and I believe offers a uniquely Christian dimension to the relationship. The following significant factors can be found in this relationship which are central to Christian marriage, although some of these features might be found in other faiths.

Firstly, Christian farriage acknowledges and affirms that even though the partners are both created in the image of God, neither are perfect and each partner lives out of forgiveness and unconditional love of the other person. This means that there will be no farriage in which you can find the ‘ideal’ partner. Partners accept each other with their flaws. This does not mean that both partners do not attempt with all that they have to improve themselves and their relationship, but they come to the marriage relationship with more realistic expectations. They are more realistic in that they acknowledge that there may be many difficulties that come from either inside or outside of the marriage (from life itself).

Secondly, a Christian marriage is based on the servant hood of Christ, who is the servant of each of the partners and who in turn calls each partner to be the servant of the other. So the husband becomes the servant of the wife and the wife the servant of her husband. This servant model is quite specific to Christianity and if confessed and lived out adds a great deal of strength and depth to the relationship. (For further details about this type of marriage, see Appendix A above.)

**A concluding rider:**

There are no perfect marriages and so we need to be sensitive in the way we might be seen to be judging another relationship or type of marriage. However, we can and should affirm and share what we find helpful in nurturing healthy and loving marriages, whether they are de facto or Christian. However, we can affirm the strengths of the fourth type of marriage as expressed above, and the positive values in the other marriages as listed. Equally, when people divorce or separate (Christian or otherwise), our response is not to be one of accusation or blame, but to acknowledge that relationships are very complex and can fall apart for many reasons as we are all sinful human beings. We are called by Christ to be as supportive as possible of the person who is dealing with what is almost invariably a very painful experience.

Optimism or pessimism about potential, current or future marriage can be significant factors in the commitment of each of the partners in the relationship. The person’s experience of marriage (in their own family or amongst friends and acquaintances) can be a major factor in determining their attitude. However, for a person of faith (and hopefully a couple of faith), there is the dimension of being prepared to step out in faith that God will assist them in creating a strong and lasting relationship.

**APPENDIX D**

**Reasons why people perceive the church as not having much, if anything, positive to say about sex.** Some of these are as follows:

1.St Paul’s views on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. These if read out of context, and without awareness of Paul’s and the church’s situation at that time, can sound quite a-sexual or even anti-sexual. The main reason for Paul writing in this way was partly due to the priority of spreading the Gospel. Additionally, the church was highly expectant that Jesus would return any day, so everyday matters of life such as marriage and children, etc were put on the ‘back-burner’.

2. Some also find it hard to identify with a Jesus who was not married or obviously sexually active and hence arises the false spiritual/ physical dichotomy which sees sex as only physical and not as spiritual. All of life is spiritual including sex. We need to have God and the message of the Gospel as central and then all the other aspects of our life in this world radiating out from that central hub. This is a matter of priorities. There are some texts in the Gospels in which Jesus seems to be advocating a more non-sexual life-style. But most of these references are essentially talking about priorities, ie that the Kingdom of God is central and these other matters are to be seen as secondary in relation to the Kingdom. But there are other texts which are positively affirmative of marriage, such as the wedding at Cana and Jesus’ advice on divorce (Matt 19). Equally, he does not forbid his disciples to discontinue their marriage relationships (eg Peter, James and ‘the other apostles’ who took their wives with them on their various pastoral ministries I Cor 9:5).

3. The early church desert monks and Fathers emphasised to an extreme extent Paul’s and Jesus’ comments on marriage and sex and so came to be seen as pious examples for whom sex was no part of their lives at all. This has also been the case in more recent centuries in the Lutheran church with the influence of Pietism (as particularly influenced by Zinzendorf, etc). The Pietists saw sex and any physical enjoyment as ‘worldly matters’ which distracted the Christian from their ‘true spiritual values’.

4. The fact that the Western church (Roman Catholic) no longer allow its priests to be married (by contrast with the Orthodox and Protestant churches). However, even parts of the Roman Catholic church allow their priests to be married such as in the Ukranian Catholic Church and the Maronites, as well as priests who convert to the Roman church when they are already married in the priesthood in their former denomination. It must be also remembered that originally the Western Church (from which the Roman Catholic Church comes) had married priests. The first Pope, St Peter, was married. Despite all these discrepancies, the Roman Church currently holds a strong line on their priests not being married.

5. Some parts of the church which publicly express insensitive comments about sexual matters such as masturbation, homosexuality, and sex in general.

6. The fact that the church generally does not publicly affirm the positives of a wholesome, balanced loving relationship in which sex is an integral part. This is partly due to the fact that the church rightly believes that sex is one of the most intimate human expressions. To talk publicly about an intimate issue is not always easy and so it gets little public discussion. Yet it is necessary to address this issue openly and publicly, especially in the light of the many shallow and negative ways that sex is conveyed in the public through the media and current secular culture. But the limited public discussion of the church about sex is also due to the fact that the secular press is more interested in publicising the critical views of the church about sex rather than the more balanced and ‘ordinary’ statements by the church about healthy and wholesome marriages which are serious and honest and not just pious and stereo-typed.

**Some of the positives which the church can point to are as follows:**

1. God is the creator of sex as related in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. In these verses we hear the first ‘love song’ of a man for a woman: (Genesis 2:23)

“This is now bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh,

She shall be called ‘woman’

For she was taken out of man”

2. The nakedness of this man and woman is affirmed and seen as part of the good of God’s creation (Genesis 2:25).

3. This affirmation of sexuality is seen in that the first commandment of the 613 commandments in the books of Moses is ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28). God is into sex and blesses us to be in to it as well.

4. Jewish Rabbis are expected to be married and part of this sex and procreation process which God has given to us. This view is also expressed by the Orthodox Church where the parish priest is usually expected to be married.

5. Jesus in the New Testament affirms the importance of a faithful and committed relationship in marriage (Matt 19:1-9)

6. Paul also has much to say about marriage assuming that most people are in a married relationship. The most profound and radical advice he has for a married couple is: ‘Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.’ Ephesians 5:21.

The following give three models of marriage:

**Resources:**

Movies: ‘Mixed Blessings’ and ‘He’s just not that into you’;

Books: ‘‘God and Sex: What the Bible really says’ by Michael Coogan (available in the ALC library).

Pastor Mike Pietsch [mikepietsch25@gmail.com](mailto:mikepietsch25@gmail.com) 0416 738 631

February 2014

Your thoughts and insights into any of the comments you have read will be appreciated.

Mike has celebrated 38 years of marriage with Helen his wife. They have three adult children. He has served as a Lutheran pastor in a parish and then as a government high school chaplain. He has been a Lutheran university chaplain for the past 19 years. In 2013 he served as the interim pastor at Zion Lutheran Church, Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada and currently he is the pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church, Morphett Vale, Adelaide, Australia.