

The Secret to Holy Sexuality

No words in the English language could possibly describe the look of panic on my mom's face as she pulled into the driveway to witness 5-year-old me standing barefoot in the dew-covered grass, holding a fallen electrical line in my tiny hand. I'd been watching *Sesame Street* when suddenly the TV went dead, along with all of the lights in the house. I went outside to ask my dad to investigate but stumbled upon a potential explanation when I saw the severed black cord lying limp on the front lawn. So I picked it up, as if somehow I could reconnect it to its power source and restore everything to the way it was supposed to be—and amazingly, I lived to tell about it.

In many ways this article is my attempt to do something similar—to reconnect us, the body of Christ, to our original Power Source, particularly to restore energy, passion and creative freedom in the marriage bed. Hopefully I'll get better results this time (and avoid any shocked facial expressions in the process!).

Is there any real connection between our sexuality and spirituality? Is there a direct connection between our bodies and our spirits? What happens if we sever the connection God intended through addiction or ignorance, or if it's severed through abuse or trauma inflicted upon us?

The Energy Equation

First, let's think of our spirit as being the energy we're given as humans who are made in the image of God. Let's think of our bodies as the conduit through which that energy flows. Without the conduit (the body), there would be no way for us to experience that energy and let it flow from ourselves to another human being. But without the energy (the spirit), our bodies alone can't muster the deep human connection we

naturally crave.

Oh, many try. They find human outlets for their warped physical sexual desires, which can lead to manipulative seduction, child molestation, sexual abuse, sexual addiction, prostitution and human trafficking, to name just a few. It wears all kinds of ugly masks.

But sharing a physical connection with someone with whom we also share a strong spiritual and emotional bond—that's something else entirely. That's pure love, romance, passion, intimacy, ecstasy. When we're expressing our sexuality in the way our Designer intended, there is an enormous and undeniably powerful connection between our sexuality and our spirituality. Like two sides of the same coin, body and spirit are intertwined.

So, since we can't separate body from spirit or sexuality from spirituality, how about looking to see what we can learn from fully integrating and celebrating the synergy between the two?

A Most Shocking Question

"How is our relationship with God *sexual*?"

This was the question a professor posed to our small group in a human sexuality class at Liberty University. Translation: What does our spiritual relationship with God have in common with our sexual relationship with our mate?

Here are just a few answers that surfaced during this lively discussion, as we discovered both relationships have deep levels of:

- Trust
- Full acceptance
- Closeness
- Openness
- Risk

- Purpose
- Euphoria
- Vulnerability
- Connection
- Honesty
- Intimacy
- Pleasure
- Completion
- Genuine interest
- True communion
- Life-giving transference
- Humility
- Passion
- Transcendence
- Synergy

Given that there are so many more possible answers to the question, perhaps there's a greater connection between spirituality and sexuality that we've ever fathomed!

When we pause to really ponder it, we have to admit it's quite fascinating that God would create us both in His image *and* as sexual beings—simultaneously. It's easy to wonder why God made us this way. Did He design sexuality as a burden or a blessing?

You be the judge. What else in all of creation can:

- Comfort you when you're sad?
- Calm you when you're anxious?
- Provide an outlet for expression when you're excited?
- Relieve boredom?
- Help you forget your current trials and tribulations?
- Make you sleep better?
- Provide intense, guilt-free pleasure?
- Help you feel deeply connected to another human being *and* to God?
- Erase feelings of loneliness and isolation?

- Give you an interesting break from your daily routine?
- Relieve stress and even certain aches and pains?
- Enhance your overall health and vitality?
- Fulfill your hopes and dreams of parenthood?
- Rev your engine, float your boat and light your fire?
- Send sparks through your brain and shivers down your spine?
- Make you feel so giddy, so special, so cherished and so celebrated?

Only sex can do all that—and it does all that quite well!

So, what was God thinking when He created sex? I believe He was thinking, “I’m going to make their day ... and their nights too!”

Seeing and Celebrating God

I also think God created sexual intimacy to provide us with a peek into His own character and nature. As we understand our sexuality more fully, we understand God more fully and vice versa. Here are a couple things we learn about God through our sexuality:

1) He gets giddy when He has our attention. A coaching client once asked me, “Why did God create us in such a way that we have physiological responses to our emotions? When I’m attracted to someone, why do I get butterflies in my stomach, sweaty palms and a racing heart? Why do I get all giddy?”

At first I responded, “I have no idea!” But then it was like God opened my brain and poured the answer in, like liquid Drano to unclog my thoughts. He said, “Shannon, I created humans to respond to love like that so they’d know how I feel when they turn their hearts and attention toward Me.”

I sat there, blown away, for a few seconds. When I shared the epiphany with my client, she was blown away too. The God of the universe gets giddy over us when we turn toward Him? Yes, He does. And He’s given you a glimpse into that fact through

the thoughts and feelings you have toward the object of your affection (your spouse).

2) He's giving us a foretaste of heaven. One day I was contemplating why God designed the human body to feel such intense pleasure when we experience the height of the sexual experience. Seriously, sex feels plenty good while it's happening, and it creates beautiful babies and bonds a couple in extraordinary ways. So why give us such a stunningly ripe cherry on top?

Just like a fun game of peek-a-boo, our heavenly Father gives us through this peak of pleasure just a glimpse of the "big finale" we face ahead in heaven.

I mean, let's think about it. Is there any moment in existence when we feel a more primordial delight, a greater loss of control (in a good way) or a greater sense of absolute euphoria than in those sacred moments of extreme, intense pleasure? I can't help but believe when Christ returns for us someday and ushers us into our heavenly home, the intensity of the heavenly pleasure we encounter is going to be even more mind-blowing and soul-stirring than the most amazing orgasmic experience we've ever had. The joy and delight of sexual intimacy is merely a foretaste of the intimacies and ecstasies that await us there!

Letting Go of Sexual Legalism

While God intended our sexuality to be fully enjoyed in the context He provided, it's unfortunate that the church has historically focused on fear-inducing sex-negative messages instead of empowering sex-positive messages. As a result, many walk on sexual eggshells. Some Christians have even opted out of sexual intimacy for the most part. They fear displeasing God with any sexual thought, feeling or action.

But does a married couple thoroughly enjoying sex without any guilt, shame or inhibition displease God? Does He roll His

eyes in disgust? Absolutely not! I believe a couple delighting in the gift of one another's bodies brings our heavenly Father great joy, like a parent watching a beloved child excitedly open presents on Christmas morning.

Do you know what *does* upset God? The same thing that upset Jesus: legalistic religious people putting words in God's mouth and spiritual burdens on people's backs that He never meant for them to carry.

While I can't speak directly for God or Jesus, I, too, get pretty upset when I hear things from within the Christian community that sound a little something like sexual legalism—things such as “Women shouldn't wear sexy lingerie for their husbands or else it will awaken their appetite to look at pornography” or “The missionary position is the only holy way for a married couple to have sex” or “Oral sex is animalistic behavior” or “A man shouldn't expect his wife to have sex more than once a week or else she'll feel put upon.” When I hear comments such as these, I can't help but think, *Wow! I don't recall reading that anywhere in my Bible!*

These views and sentiments may be well-intentioned and may come from very sincere Christians who deeply love the Lord, but one can be truly sincere yet still sincerely wrong. I believe this might be one of the reasons the world doesn't look to the church as a source of real wisdom when it comes to sexual matters.

If we are ever going to re-establish Christians as authorities on the topic of healthy sexuality, we must move beyond our sexual and religious baggage, study Scripture carefully and proclaim that a married couple's chosen sexual repertoire is entirely between the husband, the wife and God. Barring any sexual activities specifically forbidden in Scripture (such as adultery or prostitution), there is complete freedom in the marriage bed to mutually experiment, explore and enjoy all of the many wonders of human sexuality.

The Power of a Clean Slate

My guess is that some are reading this and thinking, *How can sex be a sacred activity when it's the motivation behind so much evil in the world?*

I can understand that concern. It's true that sex used for any purpose other than marital bonding is incredibly degrading and destructive. Some of us have been victims of rape or other forms of sexual abuse. Others of us have been harmed by the proliferation of pornography in our image-driven society, perhaps learning of a spouse's addiction and feeling at a loss and to blame for their addiction in some way.

Let me say this: *You are not to blame for someone else's sexual wrongdoing.* The other person is responsible before God for their actions, and they are also responsible for taking the appropriate actions to be made well. God's real heart toward you is to heal you for the ways another person's actions did you harm. I urge you to seek shelter in the comforting arms of the God who loves and cherishes everything about you and longs for you to experience your sexuality in the whole and fulfilling way He intended for you.

What about those of us who weren't victims of another person's cruelty but rather players in a story not reflective of God's best? Premarital sexual activity, for instance, can do a lot of relational damage, and that damage often doesn't surface until long after the honeymoon phase is over. Many Christians bemoan the fact that they still struggle with guilt over premarital sexual involvement years or even decades later or that they still hold a grudge against their spouse because they feel they were manipulated, coerced or taken advantage of while dating.

If that's you, you can begin the sexual healing process by initiating two small steps:

- 1) Take responsibility for your part in the dance of sexual

dysfunction.

2) Start with a clean slate by forgiving yourself and your mate completely.

During one of my Women at the Well intensive workshops, a wife was mourning the loss of her virginity prior to marriage. Eventually, I compassionately asked, "Did he hold a gun to your head?"

She was shocked at the question but sat with it just long enough for something to click in her brain. The hard lines on her face melted as she looked me and courageously declared, "No. No, he didn't."

I could tell it was a much-needed "Aha!" moment for her, as I thought she might stand up afterward and shout, "Hooray! I don't have to play the victim anymore!" In truth, the responsibility was on *both* their shoulders, not just his. She could have said no just as easily as he could have.

Unless we are being forcefully raped, we always have a say in the matter. Perhaps we said no with our words but our reciprocal and responsive actions spoke louder in the heat of the moment. We must own up to the power we willingly surrendered and give up the victim mentality. It serves no good purpose.

When we recognize we weren't victims but rather initially reluctant yet ultimately willing partners, forgiveness is no longer a one-way street. It becomes a two-lane highway.

It's amazing how much easier it is to forgive another person when we realize how much we ourselves are in need of forgiveness for the exact same infraction. Throwing a stone isn't something we're as eager to do when we realize just how much we belong in the middle of the stone-throwing circle.

The Power of Prayer

If there's such a powerful connection between our sexuality and our spirituality, perhaps investing a little more spiritual energy in preparing for sexual encounters is a wise move.

Would you like to guess what my husband and I have found to be the *best* aphrodisiac available? Prayer! When we snuggle up together and hold each other, then pour out our hearts to God on behalf of one another, it creates such an intense bond. In fact, it's sometimes impossible to just roll over and go to sleep. We can't help but want to follow the "Amen" with a whole lot of good lovin'!

Go ahead—give it a try tonight, and see if drawing closer to God doesn't draw you incredibly closer to one another!

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Watch Shannon Ethridge explain why God made you a sexual being and how to embrace His divine purpose for this at