God’s Plan Is Still Best

It all started in the Garden of Eden. It was there, in that earthly paradise, that God’s plan for human sexuality was set in place with the first command He gave to humanity, “Be fruitful and multiply.”1 With those words, God laid out His plan for humanity, that one man and one woman, married and committed to each other, would be joined physically, emotionally, and spiritually, in order to populate the earth and bring up children who would also be His children.

As we remember, when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, immediately their eyes were opened. As the serpent had promised, they had a knowledge they did not previously possess. Berlin, Brettler and Fishbane (2004) explain, “But with the new knowledge comes the shame of nudity that they had lacked in their childlike innocence (vv. 10–11; cf. 2:25), a symbol of a much more encompassing sense of guilt and an ominous estrangement between God and the primal couple.”2 What was once pure, enjoyable, and satisfying intimacy became shameful, corrupt, and, for many, an enslaving passion.

As the human family began to grow, Lamech married two wives, the first bigamist or polygamist mentioned in the Bible.3 As sin continued to spread, so did the wrong views of marriage and sexuality so that, as the Israelites were about to enter the land of promise, God had to give very detailed instructions as to what constituted inappropriate sexual relations.4

Even in the early Christian church sexual passion threatened to destroy the fledgling Christian faith so that the apostle Paul had to address the problem in one of his letters to the church in Corinth: “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife!”5

Addressing other sexual practices that were not in accordance with God’s original plan, Paul wrote to the members of the church in Rome: “Even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”6

Distorted views of God’s original plan are not limited to sexual relations. Actor Jason Patric testified before a California legislative committee to push for parental rights for sperm donors. The “Lost Boys” actor won an appeal7 in a heated battle with ex-girlfriend Danielle Schreiber with whom he has a 4-year-old son, Gus—who was conceived using in vitro fertilization. After splitting up, the never-married couple had different ideas about what role Patric should play in the boy’s life. Schreiber maintains that the pair agreed that Patric’s donation would remain anonymous and that he would not have any rights as the father. Patric insisted, however, that he had always intended to act as a father to Gus.

God’s plan for sexual intimacy, for marriage and family, and for parenting continues to be distorted, challenged, and attacked.

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Distorted Sexuality

In the classic book by C. S. Lewis, the older devil, Screwtape, writes to his inexperienced nephew, Wormwood, and informs him that, “Everything has to be twisted before it’s any use to us.” In other words, the younger devil is told to take what is essentially good, and bend and twist and distort it just enough to make it deadly, but not enough to make it repulsive. This is what the arch enemy has succeeded in doing with sex. He has perversely taken what God intended to be a great blessing and turned it into a snare and a curse for millions.

Here are some of the sexual aberrations that are recognized by secular clinicians to be so noxious and potentially harmful that many of them are classed as criminal offenses.

- **Pairing pain and suffering with pleasure as in Sexual Sadism Disorder and Sexual Masochism Disorder**
- **Distorting courtship behaviors as in Voyeuristic Disorder, Exhibitionistic Disorder, and Frotteuristic Disorder**
- **Misdirecting sexual interest as in Pedophilic Disorder, Fetishistic Disorder, Transvestic Disorder, Zoophilia, Necrophilia, etc.**

More importantly, the Bible declares that certain sexual practices are perversions of God’s original intent for sexual expression. Jesus describes that plan for sexual intimacy this way: “Haven’t you read in your Bible that the Creator originally made man and woman for each other, male and female? And because of this, a man leaves father and mother and is firmly bonded to his wife, becoming one flesh - no longer two bodies but one.” "Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together.”

To emphasize the seriousness with which God views aberrations from His original plan He assigned serious consequences to those who engaged in sexually deviant behaviors.

**Adultery:** You must not be guilty of adultery. A man who commits adultery doesn’t have any sense. He is just destroying himself. He will be dishonored and beaten up; he will be permanently disgraced. Adultery is a brainless act, soul-destroying, self-destructive. If a man has sexual relations with his neighbor’s wife, both the man and the woman are guilty of adultery and must be put to death.

**Fornication:** From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God. If a man comes upon a virgin in town, a girl who is engaged to another man, and sleeps with her, take both of them to the town gate and stone them until they die - the girl because she didn’t yell out for help in the town and the man because he raped her, violating the fiancée of his neighbor. You must purge the evil from among you. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

**Homosexual Actions:** If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. The males in the same way also left natural sexual intercourse with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty for their perversion.

**Bestiality:** A man who has sexual intercourse with an animal must be put to death. You must kill the animal, too. If a woman has sex with an animal, you must kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death.

While God obviously takes very seriously any deviations from His plan for the sacredness of marital intimacy, The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. All His warnings are the breathing of unutterable love. The Lord does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away.

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Our Sexuality, Our Responsibility

As a Family Life Educator, I teach a course on Human Sexuality in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary as well as a course on Marriage and Family. In each of these classes I ask students to tell me if they learned about sex from their parents or legal guardians. Uniformly, the responses I receive indicate that only approximately 10% of our students received solid instruction about the topic of sexuality from their parents. The rest learned about it from a class in school, from their peers or friends, from reading books, or even by trial and error. If we assume that seminary students represent a cross-section of the Adventist Christian community, we are failing our children miserably when it comes to this all-important topic.

If parents are not comfortable embracing their own sexuality, it will be difficult for them to comfortably speak about it with their children. Many Christians labor under the misconception that sex is dirty, something to done in the dark, and certainly not talked about openly. When many parents get up the courage to give “the talk” to their children, they do so with great discomfort because they are burdened with their own sexual shame. While many in the world have swung to the opposite extreme of sexual permissiveness where anything goes, our enemy, Satan, is happy to lead us to either extreme as long as we do not see God’s beautiful plan for human sexuality.

As Adventist Christian Family Life Educators, we are in a unique position to present God’s perspective on human sexuality. First of all, God created humans as sexual beings. That makes sex good in God’s eyes. Sex is intimately connected with both marriage and the Sabbath, the twin institutions established at creation.

Sexuality as a Form of Worship

The marriage aspect of sexuality addresses first God’s command, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.” The use of sex to join God as co-creators in His work of reproduction is one of the highest honors that God bestowed on His children. God also places sexual intimacy within the context of human relationships. That implies that sexuality is essential to the maintenance of the relationship itself. Sexual expression is a potential source of intimate connection between two human beings, male and female, who long to know and be known by another. This longing mirrors that of God Himself as expressed in Jesus’ final prayer before His passion and death “that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

The Sabbath aspect of human sexuality recognizes that it was intended by God to be a form of worship. While we, in our fallen humanity, tend to look at sex primarily from a pleasure perspective, and this was certainly one of God’s intentions, sexual expression recognizes the headship of God in the marital relationship. This perspective challenges us to see sexual expression as a holy act where we can not only connect with one another as humans, but also connect with God during sexual intimacy. Recognizing that God and His angels are with us during times of intimacy, and that He is rejoicing with us when we reach orgasmic pleasure, can be a great antidote to sexual shame. Why should we be sexually intimate only with the lights out and with clothes on when our Creator delights in our pleasure? When God created Adam and Eve, “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.”

As God invites us to rest on the Sabbath and to commune with Him in worship on the day He set apart as holy, God invites us to worship Him while having intercourse. Have you thought about praying in worship before, during, and after sexual intimacy? If God is truly head of your marriage, and this is an essential aspect of your marriage, giving Him praise during times of intimacy is not only appropriate but essential. It is appropriate not only to praise God, but to ask Him to bless your sexual expression and to make it as
If God’s plan is still best, why is there so much misinformation and incorrect, even sinful practices? I believe that, in great part, it has to do with ignorance. I’ve asked the question in many places, “How did you learn about human sexuality? Was it from your parents? Was it from friends? Was it from books, magazines, television, or movies?” For the greatest majority of us, the answer is not from our parents or from the most reliable sources.

Family life professionals have a duty, a responsibility, but also a great opportunity to educate parents so that they will become the primary educators of their children in all aspects of their life, including human sexuality. If parents correctly understand God’s plan for sexual intimacy and identity, and they can teach the correct view to their children, they will be helping them to live in a way that will more closely follow the pattern established by God and will live more satisfying, safer, healthier lives and relationships. I’m pleased that in this issue of Family Life we discuss this very important aspect of our life.

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4 Lev. 18.
5 Gen. 4:19
6 Gen. 4:19
8 Gen. 4:19
9 1 Corinthians 5:1, NKJV.
10 Lev. 20:13 Today’s New International Version
11 Romans 1:24 New Living Translation
12 Romans 1:26 New Living Translation
13 Romans 1:27 Holman Christian Standard
14 Leviticus 20:15 God’s Word Translation
15 Leviticus 20:16 God’s The Message
20 Peter 3:9 Good News Translation
21 Peter 3:9 Good News Translation
22 Peter 3:9 Good News Translation
The Pastor’s Response to Sexual Challenges

Christians are often afraid to identify sexual problems. In fact, it is only within the recent past, since a greater emphasis has been placed on family life in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, that many members are able to address issues of sexuality. While there are many reasons for these inhibitions, they leave members in the pew guarded and reluctant to disclose sexual problems. One common problem that spouses face is that of “sexual dysfunction.” Understandably, this is not something people may choose to share with family members; neither are they likely to share it with the general public, so they frequently suffer in silence.

Unfortunately, rather than seeking professional help, some individuals will resort to “self-help” strategies, such as, extramarital affairs, prostitution, masturbation, X-rated videos, sex-hotlines, etc. However, these self-induced pleasures will not provide a cure for the dysfunction, neither will they improve the quality of the marital relationship. They may provide temporary satisfaction, but in the end feelings of guilt, shame, and frustration will likely emerge. And these practices may ultimately lead to separation or divorce.

Couples who are guided by Christian principles should avoid any thoughts or behaviors that would violate and desecrate their body-temple.

There may be church members who are reluctant to seek professional help who may be willing to counsel with their pastors about their intimacy issues. Most pastors have not received the essential training required to make clinical assessments and should therefore encourage these individuals to consult with qualified Christian therapists for evaluation and treatment. However, it is helpful for pastors to have basic knowledge about the major sexual dysfunctions so that they can minister to those who want to discuss these problems with them. The most frequently occurring clinical diagnoses are:

- **Lack of desire for sexual activity.** Spouses who lack sexual desire complain that they have little or no motivation to seek sexual intimacy. Rather than being frustrated about this, they may seem quite content. Individuals experiencing this problem generally complain of low sexual arousal or problems in reaching orgasm.

- **Avoidance of sexual contact.** Persons suffering from this disorder claim that they feel fearful, anxious, or disgusted whenever they are confronted with the notion of sex. Strategies they use to avoid sex vary from pretending to be asleep, feeling sick, staying up to watch television, avoiding coming home early, and they often engage in diversionary activities.

- **Inability to maintain or attain sexual arousal (Female).** Females experiencing this disorder frequently complain of their inability to produce adequate vaginal lubrication. As a result, their experience of sex can be very painful. The thought of having painful sex creates the inability to maintain or attain arousal.

- **The inability to attain or maintain sexual arousal (Male).** This is an erectile disorder. Men are not able to maintain an erection through the duration of the sexual act. Others fail to attain an erection. Hence, they may experience intense fear of sexual failure. Distracting sounds like an alarm clock, the horn of a car, barking of the dog can cause them to lose their erection during intercourse.

- **Premature ejaculation.** This is the inability of the male to prevent reaching a climax before the desired moment. This may occur with minimal sexual stimulation before, during, or shortly after penetration. Whenever this happens, both spouses experience frustration. However, the level of frustration is generally greater for the man.

Even though pastors need to make it very clear to church members that they are not qualified to provide treatment, some individuals may adamantly resist being referred to mental health professionals. In these rare cases, it may be helpful for these persons to have conversations with their pastors about their sexual issues and about some of the causes of sexual dysfunction. In some instances, the couples’ candid conversations with their pastors may be

**Become Knowledgeable About Sexual Dysfunctions**

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Marital Intimacy After Baby Arrives

We know there is a strong tie between general relationship satisfaction and sexual intimacy in marriage. A recent post on the Adventist Family Ministries Facebook page attests to an on-going challenge for couples with a new baby in the family: Research typically shows that parents become less satisfied with their relationship pre- to postbirth.1 Doss et al.2 found that husbands and wives also became less dedicated to their spouse, and husbands also became less confident in their relationship’s future, pre- to postbirth. These findings suggest that the stress of parenting or the co-occurring stress that increases negative interactions between partners may erode positive aspects of the relationship, including both satisfaction and the personal side of commitment.3

Further contributing factors to declining sexual activity and satisfaction include the impact of fatigue, initial soreness from incisions or tears, infection, scar tissue or deep muscle tears, finding time for lovemaking, interruptions, feelings of jealousy that arise when the baby gets so much attention, a mother’s breasts leaking milk when she becomes sexually aroused, a mother feeling like a baby-feeding machine, difficulties relaxing when baby is close-by or it is anticipated the baby may need something, and lack of sexual desire, all make an impact.

Gottman and Gottman found that, “On average, three years after the blessed event, women … wanted to be touched sexually on average, once every two weeks, while men hungered for it two to three times a week.”4 These were couples who had described their sexual relationships as mirroring each other and appeared to be good to great before their baby arrived. “Certainly biology takes a toll … but sexual feelings mirror relationship satisfaction, too. When closeness dwindles, sexual desire evaporates.”5

Not all couples respond as mentioned above. Sometimes the wife desires more sex than her husband. Sometimes couples have a desire mismatch that was evident before pregnancy. For some the timeline differs. Others are eager and continue to be satisfied sexually.

When aware of a couple’s struggles, we may try to do their thinking and feeling for them, making suggestions, sharing admonitions, citing research, giving them lists of things to do and not do. However, most often people need reassurance that they are normal, acceptance of their fears or frustrations, and encouragement. If they are open to it, we can provide some added knowledge. For example:

- They accepted things had changed since baby arrived and were able to talk about it. They didn’t fault the relationship, they carved out new pathways to each other, and became a better team;
- They continued nonsexual affection, especially touch. “Touch helps us feel more desirable, more cherished, and more intimate emotionally. With touch we know we’re allies, not adversaries.”
- They accepted that they could feel close even during less-romantic and non-gourmet sexual encounters, with verbal and physical affection providing the needed spark. These couples took specific steps to enhance their relationships and meet one another’s needs.

In discussing the need for restoring romantic love in marital relationships, Harley7 shares that he has counseled many divorcing couples with excellent communication and problem-solving skills who claim to care for each other; but unless these skills trigger the feeling of romantic love, spouses feel cheated in their marriages and often want out.

Often couples are very disappointed when the needs they assumed would be met, are not. He says ignorance usually contributes to this failure because men and women have great difficulty understanding and appreciating the value of each other’s needs. We shouldn’t underestimate the power of one’s needs, because so often we see people go outside their marriage to satisfy them.

“The most important emotional needs of a husband and wife should be met by each other for two other reasons [besides the risk of an affair]. First, promises are made to allow a spouse to exclusive right to meet some of these important needs. When they are unmet, that is unfair to the spouse

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1 Doss et al.
2 Doss et al.
3 Doss et al.
4 Gottman and Gottman
5 Gottman and Gottman
6 Gottmans
7 Harley
who must go through life without ethical alternatives. But there is a second reason. When you meet each other’s most important emotional needs, you create and sustain a feeling of love for each other that is essential in a successful marriage. I call that feeling romantic love.

Finding the fun and friendship in a relationship are important aspects of meeting one another’s emotional needs. If intimacy is important, you can and will find the time. “As you become parents, your potential for conflict increases. Make conflict and issues off-limits during sexual and sexual times together.” Gottman & Gottman suggest, “We can offer intimacy to our partners as a gift, like a delicious dessert.”

Compromising, comforting one another, keeping our promises, offering both emotional and physical intimacy, and seeking God’s guidance, all contribute to a baby’s well-being as well. “Parenting compromised by poor partner relationships nearly always has one effect. Compromised parenting will interfere with an infant’s ability to self-regulate and to stay calm. In the first three years of life, fundamental neural processes are being laid down that have to do with the infant’s ability to self-soothe, focus attention, trust in the love and nurturance of his parents, and emotionally attach to his mother and father.”

“When we savor each other, our babies rest in the cradle of our contentment.” John Gottman.

References
1 Belsky et al., 1983; Doss et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2008
2 Doss et al., 2009
4 Gottman & Gottman (2007, pp. 159, 160)
5 Gottman & Gottman (2007, p. 160)
6 Gottman & Gottman (2007, p. 164)
8 Harley (2011, pp. 15, 16)
11 John Gottman
12 John Gottman
13 John Gottman

Questions for Discussion
1. How can we present positive views about sexuality in ways that don’t offend members who grew up with distorted views about sex?
2. Where there is no evidence of clinical problems, how do we reassure people with low sex drives and those who have little interest in sex that that may very well be normal and healthy for them?

References
1 Genesis 1:28
2 John 17:3
3 Genesis 2:25
4 Isaiah 58:13
5 Hebrews 13:4
sufficient to help them understand how to make the needed adjustments, which may include medical interventions.

Though pastors should normally avoid using the following questions that therapists may raise during a clinical interview, an understanding of causative factors can help pastors guide the conversation with their members about their sexual adjustment issues.

**Personal Factors**
- Is there a physical disease or disability?
- Are there circulatory problems?
- Is there reported loss or stress in your life?
- Has your body image changed? (loss/gain of weight)
- Are you taking any medication that may affect your sexuality?
- Have you had any surgery? E.g., prostate gland removal, fibroids, etc.
- Is there an escalation of the aging process?

**Psychological Factors**
- What kinds of childhood memories might be affecting you?
- Has something happened to you that caused anxiety or guilt?
- Are you reacting to sexual trauma (past or present)?
- What kind of religious upbringing did you have?
- How might your religious views influence your view of sex?
- What is your attitude towards sex in general?

**Interpersonal Factors**
- Is there poor communication between you and your spouse?
- Are you both open to discuss sexual needs, desires, and wants?
- How do you resolve your conflicts?
- Are there pent-up emotions or unresolved issues between you?
- How do you show affection to each other?
- Are you experiencing fulfillment in your marital relationship?
- Are you committed to each other?
- What is your level of spiritual commitment?

**Systemic Factors**
- How hostile are you to each other?
- Is there a fear of intimacy by one spouse? If so, why?
- Is your spouse controlling or dominating?
- Is there a lack of attraction to one’s spouse?
- Is there fear of closeness?
- Are there recurring incidences of abuse?
- How is power shared in the family?
- Is there unfaithfulness in the relationship?

While pastors are usually not trained therapists, they are often the first responders to many marital conflicts. By being knowledgeable about sexual dysfunction and its causes, clergy can make appropriate referrals and thus assist many couples in obtaining help. Pastors will work within the scope of their training and expertise and use good judgment in the counsel they provide. The more they understand about sexual dysfunctions the more they will be able to help couples aptly identify some fundamental factors to their sexual challenges and marital discord.

Questions for Discussion

1. What needs to change so that people will feel that it is safe for them to discuss their intimacy issues with their pastors?
2. What steps do pastors need to take in order to ensure that it is safe for people to discuss intimacy issues with them?