

Ep 207. Sexual Relations in Marriage



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 207, Sexual Relations in Marriage.

This podcast is for people who know that living an extraordinary life is not easy or comfortable. It's so much better than that. This is *Better Than Happy*, and I'm your host, Jody Moore.

Hey everyone, how's it going? What a week. I have had an amazing week. I've had some great coaching calls, been doing some webinars with y'all. I got to go up and speak at Girl's Camp. It's a good time. It's a good week.

I'm going to talk about sex today, so if you have little ones in the car, I'm not going to talk about anything graphic, but this may not be the episode that you want to play for them. Nothing inappropriate here. In fact, I highly recommend this episode for engaged couple or young adults, single young adults.

I think that we need to be talking more about this subject, especially within LDS culture where we have the law of chastity that sort of changes the dynamics of our sexual relationships once we do get married. But just be warned, if you have little ones around that are going to ask questions you don't want to answer, put in your AirPods or your earbuds, okay. Also, if you're my mom and dad and you're going to be uncomfortable, I gave you a fair warning, okay, just saying.

This is a topic that I coach a lot on. I have coached some couples on their sex life. I have coached lots of individuals. I've coached men. I've coached mostly though women. And I've learned a lot as I've coached a lot of individuals. I've also studied it. You guys know I'm a big fan of Doctor Finlayson-Fife, who we're going to bringing back on the podcast pretty soon. But I also did some research in preparation for this podcast.

So I do not claim to be a sex therapist or an expert on sex itself, but I do have a lot of experience in just the interactions and dynamics between a husband and wife when it comes to their sex life, and that's what I'm going to be sharing with you today, so take it or leave it.

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This is a topic also that we're studying in Be Bold this month, in July. So if you're in Be Bold, you have an entire course on this that is going to take what I teach you here today to the next level, and it's going to give you the tools that you need to apply this in your own life and your own marriage. So make sure that you check that out.

I wanted to do this podcast episode as kind of a supplement to that course and to put some tools out there at a little bit of a higher level to everybody who listens to the podcast.

So, the first thing I want to say about sexual relations in a marriage – I want to be very clear that while sexual relations are an amazing part of a marriage, they're an important part. They are certainly part of a healthy marriage and it is a gift that Heavenly Father gave us that we get to experience this and share this with one another. And, of course, it's an important part of how we multiply and replenish the earth, right?

So, I'm all for it for all those reasons, but I want you to know, in your marriage, that nobody owes anyone anything sexually. Nobody is under any kind of obligation to be intimate with someone. And this is true not just sexually, but even emotionally.

Now, of course, the stereotype is that men want women to be more sexually available and women want men to be more emotionally available. And that's not always the case, but certainly that is probably more common than the other way around. It can go both ways, but notice that if, as a woman, I wish my husband was more emotionally available and I'm kind of resenting him and I'm sort of upset with him for not being more available, that's no different than my husband resenting me for not being more sexually or physically or intimately available.

So nobody owes anything to their spouse. I want to begin with that. I also want you to know that your spouse is not responsible for your experience sexually. So, sometimes I coach women who say, "Well my husband just doesn't fulfill me in the bedroom. And he wants to, it's not that he doesn't desire to, but he just doesn't or can't for whatever reason."

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Of course he can't, because your experience, sexually and otherwise, of anything doesn't come from your spouse. It comes from you and what you're thinking. And certainly, intimacy and arousal, of course, there's a physical component to it, but it's so much more mental than anything else. Your husband can't control your brain and he doesn't even know what's happening in your body as well as you do.

So you are responsible for your own experience, for your own level of desire. Your spouse's body shape or size has nothing to do with whether or not you find pleasure in sex. It is 100% coming from your thinking. So I just want to begin with all of us owning our own experience sexually. Nobody owes us anything. We don't own one another's body parts. We own our own bodies and our own experience and we have to begin there to keep us in the driver's seat of our life, to keep us in the driver's seat of our experiences, even sexually in our relationships.

So, sex is a beautiful thing when both people come together of their own desire and their own wishes and share themselves with one another in this way. Okay, so I'm going to speak to first the higher desire partner, and then I'm going to speak to the lower desire partner.

This terminology I learned from Doctor Jennifer Finlayson-Fife and so I don't know where it came from originally, but it made sense to me when she talked about a higher and lower desire partner. And most of the time, when I talk to somebody else, they're like, yep, we know right away, I'm the lower or I'm the higher.

So I think it's helpful to recognize that in most marriages, in most relationships, there is a higher desire and a lower desire partner. That doesn't mean something's wrong. That doesn't mean you're not compatible. It's just the nature of most relationships, for whatever reason.

Okay, so first, I want to speak to the higher desire. Again, this can be a man or a woman. I'm probably going to refer to the man because that is what I see most commonly. But it certainly is women in many cases. I've coached many women who are the higher desire partner.

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So if you are the higher desire partner, here's what I want you to know; your spouse's lack of desire is not about you. It's not about you. It's not about how much they love you. It says nothing about how much they love you. It says nothing about your level of attractiveness or lack thereof. It says nothing about whether you're good enough or lovable enough. It is not even a rejection of you when they say, "I'm just not interested in sex tonight, honey."

So you have to wrap your head around that idea, because if you don't, what I see commonly is the higher desire partner thinks, "Well, if they really loved me they would show up more in this way in our marriage," or, "If I were more attractive or more lovable or better in some way, then they would want to have sex with me more often." And I'm telling you, that's just not the case.

A person's level of desire comes from their own thinking. It doesn't come from you. You are the circumstance in their model, if you know the model. So their thoughts about you, or even more so, their thoughts about themselves are what create their level of desire.

Now, for the higher desire partner, what I see pretty commonly – not always, but commonly – is that the higher desire partner gets really frustrated with their spouse for not being more available, and maybe, they start trying some manipulation tactics or some guilt tactics. They start saying things to their spouse like, "I don't understand why this is a problem. I don't understand why you can't solve this."

They want to make it the lower desire partner's problem in some cases because they're like, "Hey, look at me, I have a healthy sex drive. When you get married, you should have sex. You don't. Clearly, you're the one with the problem."

So, here's what I want you to know; trying to offer your partner guilt or manipulation of some sort is not attractive. It's not very arousing to your spouse. Now, again, you're not in charge of their arousal. You're not in

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charge of them feeling attracted. But I just want you to know that they're likely headed the opposite direction when you offer them that.

Other times, what I see the higher desire partner do is they become needy and clingy. That is also not very attractive. It can be, if someone wants to manage their mind around it, but if they don't or they aren't paying attention, typically that is going to send them the opposite direction. So none of that is useful. All it does is punish you because you're becoming this version of you that's manipulative or kind of creepy or kind of needy; not very fun to be that person and not very hot to be married to that person, right?

So notice that while your brain will tell you this is necessary and useful and justified, and you can talk to friends who will say, "Yeah, that makes sense." You can justify it all day long. It doesn't change the fact that you're not helping the situation. You're only punishing you, and likely sending your spouse the opposite direction.

Now, again, I've coached people who are the higher desire partner, and sometimes, when I suggest that maybe they let go of needing anything more from their spouse – because the truth is, when we want to have sex, when we want more sex – and again, I'm not saying it's wrong. Please don't hear me say that you shouldn't want to have as much sex as possible. Do it. But if your spouse isn't willing and you really want it, there's two things you're trying to fulfill, two of your needs you're trying to have met.

Number one is the answering of the urge or the desire. So you have a desire, you have some arousal, something physiological, let's just say, hormonal happening in the body that causes you to want to have sex, to answer that desire. Unanswered desire is uncomfortable. I get it. So that's the first thing we're trying to fulfill.

The second thing we're trying to fulfill is some kind of an emotional need that we have. It's wanting to feel wanted. It's wanting to feel connected. It's wanting to feel close to our spouse. So there's nothing wrong with either of

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those things, but I want you to know that meeting those needs is actually not your spouse's responsibility. So, if you want to feel connected to your spouse and you want to feel close to your spouse, that's not going to come from you manipulating them and getting them to change and become someone different than they are. It's going to come from you loving and appreciating them exactly where they're at.

And as far as the unanswered urge or unanswered desire, yes, it's uncomfortable, but it's not intolerable. When you drop the resentment part and you drop the self-pity part and you just allow yourself to love and accept your spouse exactly as they are, you can handle an unanswered urge, I promise you.

What would you tell someone who was single who wanted to live the law of chastity? They would have unanswered urges and desires. Can they tolerate it? Can they handle it? What do they do with those urges or desires? I don't know, that's up to you, but it's yours to manage, as opposed to resenting your spouse or trying to guilt your spouse into something. That really doesn't create connection. It might get your urge or desire answered, but then you create disconnection and resentment in your marriage.

So, our sense of self matters more to us than us being sexual. In other words, our wanting to feel like we belong to ourselves and we have authority and jurisdiction over ourselves and we have the ability to make decisions and manage ourselves and to show up the way we want to and not have to do things we don't want to do, that is basic innate human need and it matters more to us than being sexual.

So, as soon as – this is why maybe some of you can relate to this, like, especially in the Mormon Church, where we refrain from sexual activity until we're married. So there's you dating or you being engaged and you're like, "I just want to have sex with that person so bad," and the arousal and the desire is strong and the hormones are strong and it feels like, "Man, how am I going to ever make it to marriage?"

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And then you get married and literally, overnight, it changes. Literally, the next day you're like, "Why do I not feel any of that arousal anymore?" Now, that doesn't happen for everybody. It's not that extreme for everyone. But for some people, it is that extreme and some version of that is very common, and here's why; when you're dating or engaged and you're not really supposed to be intimate, like you're trying not to because you believe that it's in your best interest not to, you believe in the law of chastity, then it feels like someone telling us what to do. So it feels more expansive of ourselves and more in control and in authority of ourselves and our lives to be able to actually be intimate.

This is all just thinking in our heads, but that's what is happening on a somewhat subconscious level. And then as soon as we get married and we think now not only can I have sex whenever I want, but I should as often as possible, especially if your spouse is the higher desire partner, you're like, "If I don't, he or she is going to feel bad or be upset with me or be grumpy and now I need to show up for this person in this way, they're expecting it of me..." that is not arousing at all because it encroaches on your sense of self. It feels like someone taking away your own authority over yourself. Are you with me? So that's important to know so that you can manage your brain around all of that. None of this is arousing, right?

Okay, now I want to talk to the lower desire partner for a moment. Are you ready? Here's what I want you to know if you're the lower desire partner; your spouse is not wrong or dirty or just using you or just wanting your body to fulfill their own desire and pleasure. That line of thinking, first of all, is not going to be very arousing to you, but it's not even true.

It's a very normal natural healthy human desire that your spouse has. Now, I'm not saying that you have to make there be anything wrong with you, but there's also nothing wrong with your spouse. And when you keep telling yourself that story of, "They just want me so that they can fulfill their own sexual desire," that is first of all not a great way to think about your spouse, but certainly not a great way to think about yourself either.

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Now, this doesn't mean you have to comply. This doesn't mean you have to have sex if you don't want to, but you've got to begin with owning that you're telling yourself a story that's not serving you, okay.

So I find that for my clients in this situation who are the lower desire partner, I like to explore with them, well who do you want to be? Because here's the thing, many people, especially, there's so many things that affect our arousal level. Obviously, our thoughts are, I think, 80% of it. But then there's that 20% that's like hormonally what's happening in the body and how tired am I and do I have children pecking at me all day and do I feel good in my clothes? Do my clothes fit or are they too tight? That's impacting how I'm feeling and thinking about my body.

So there's tons of factors involved, but it's very easy for some people, I will say most commonly women, but it's very easy for some people to just kind of ignore this part of themselves altogether, to kind of just silence any sexual arousal that they may have had in the name of it's just too hard. Because you know what sex is – it's the ultimate in vulnerability.

If we think about vulnerability being us exposing ourselves, our true selves, without hiding, without covering up something we don't want people to see, us being really real and authentic and putting ourselves out there in a way that is dangerous to our brains because we may be judged, we may be rejected, we may be hurt in certain situations. And so sex is the ultimate in vulnerability. It's really, literally exposing yourself and connecting with another human being and letting go of any kind of pretending, at its best, right? Really, really good, the best, healthiest sexual relations are a lack of pretending, just an honest real experience that we have with one another. And that's challenging to do.

So, it's much easier to just ignore this part of us, to be too tired, to be too wrapped up in our lives and all the other things that we have going on and not work on it. And I'm not telling you that you have to, but that's the easy way. That's the easy way out; to say, "Never mind, I don't need to have sex. It's not a need that I really feel."

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What's harder is to pause and understand, "Hey, there is this part of being a human that Heavenly Father gave me, that we know, according to all the experts and all the research and all the studies, really is part of the healthiest of marriages, and let me understand it and let me work on cultivating that desire within me." If nothing else, just because it's part of the human experience. It's part of having a body.

Remember in the pre-existence when Heavenly Father said, "It's time to go to Earth and you're going to get a body," and we all shouted for joy and we couldn't wait to get a body? I wonder if sexual pleasure is the part of having a body that we couldn't wait for. Why do you want to not experience it? Just get curious with yourself, okay. Work on cultivating that desire by choosing how you want to think about your spouse, about yourself, about your body, and about sex in general. That's the way that you cultivate more desire.

Now, maybe you want to have sex on a certain amount of frequency and you need to find a reason why that doesn't generate more resentment. That's what I recommend many times for the lower desire partner is let's find a reason that feels better to you. And it doesn't have to be the same reason that your spouse has. Maybe your reason is something like that's just the kind of wife you want to be; the kind of wife that when your husband says, "Hey, are you up for a little sex tonight?" You're like, "Yeah, let's do it."

Again, not to try to control your spouse's emotions, not to try to prevent him from getting mad – he still might. He might say that wasn't enough or it wasn't exciting enough or it didn't last long enough or you're not into it enough. He still may. Or she still may. But if you're just like, "That's the kind of spouse I want to be," that might be a good enough reason.

Maybe it's because that you know that your spouse has a higher desire and you want to be there for him or her in that way. There's nothing wrong with that being your reason. Again, don't try to manage your spouse's emotions, but I've seen some clients just think, "You know what, I want to be there for my husband when he wants to be sexual, and so I will every time he asks,"

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or, “I will 50% of the time,” or whatever you decide is the amount you want to.

Maybe it’s because you love them. There’s a novel idea. What if we just had sex with them because we love them? That’s not going to generate resentment and guilt and whatever, but you’re going to have to clean up your whole story about, “He’s just using me for my body and blah, blah, blah,” right?

Maybe you want to share yourself with your spouse in this way. And maybe you do want to experience the pleasure of being intimate with your spouse. Any of these are reasons I’ve seen my clients move to, to become more sexually active and to engage in sex more often with their spouse, which I think can be healthy. Make sure again that it’s not to control your spouse’s emotions and make sure that you’re not doing it for a reason that’s going to build resentment for you.

Okay, now, here’s how I want to wrap up this episode. I want to give you a really simple metaphor that every time I coach people on their sex lives, I see this dynamic happening. We have the higher desire and lower desire partner and we have one person chasing and one person running.

And when I say to the higher desire, “Hey, why don’t you stop chasing? Why don’t you just decide that what she’s doing right now is enough, even if you’re never having sex? What if just going out for ice cream is enough to connect and you’re going to manage the unanswered desire on your own? You can do it. What if you drop all the resentment? What if you just love her exactly where she’s at?” The fear is, if I stop chasing, I’m never going to catch her. What do you mean, stop chasing?

What I say to them is, “No, do you know what happens when you’re being chased? You run.” So every time you chase in whatever way you chase, she’s wanting to run, or he’s wanting to run. What if you stopped all of that?

And what I say to the lower desire partner is “What if you stopped running?” And they’ll say to me, “Well if I don’t run, I’m never going to be able to get

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up. He's just going to want to have sex all day every day. Or it's going to be non-stop if I don't run." I'm like, "No, because when you run away, guess what he does. He chases you. But if you stop running, he doesn't need to chase anymore."

Now, again, I'm not telling you what this should look like. I'm not telling you that you need to have sex with your spouse every time they want it and I'm not telling you, you should never request sex of your spouse. These are little nuances that have to come on a case by case basis. But I want you to consider the dynamic.

And, by the way, 99% of the coaching I've done on this, I've only been coaching one of the persons in the partnership. So I either coach the higher desire partner to stop chasing or I coach the lower desire partner to stop running. Because some of you are thinking, "Well great, but can you tell my spouse?" And, by the way, you can play this episode for your spouse.

But what I find is that if you stop chasing, the other person stops running. And if you stop running, the other person stops chasing. It really does just work that way.

And the last thing I want to tell you, because I was thinking to myself, you know, what is a normal amount of times to have sex? That's the question that comes up a lot and a lot of people use that against their spouse in various ways to say this is normal or this isn't normal. And of course, we don't need to compare ourselves to anyone else because what is normal is just a thought and you get to decide that.

But I did do some research. And you can find all kinds of statistics. But here's what I found most commonly. What the experts, who are the clinicians and the researchers, recommend is sex once per week in your marriage. Now, that doesn't mean you can't have sex more often and it doesn't mean you can't have sex less often and still have healthy thriving amazing marriages and sex lives.

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You have to take this on a case by case basis. But according to the studies, once per week is pretty ideal because less than that tends to not quite provide the level of connection and intimacy that seems to lead to the healthiest marriages, but more than that brings on what they call the law of diminishing returns.

So, I don't think this probably is true for both parties in every couple certainly. There may be one person who wants to have sex every day and finds it very pleasurable and that they feel more connected and close to their spouse. But typically, more than once per week means that at least one person in the couple is going to feel a little bit of resentment and is not going to experience the level of sexual pleasure available to them.

They're not going to be able to be as aroused. They may not be able to orgasm more than once per week, in other words. So I just put that out there because I coach a lot of people who say, "My husband talked to his friends and they all agree that their wives have sex with them every single day and he thinks something's wrong because we don't."

So I put that out there by just frame of reference for you guys that once per week is what is recommended and most common in the healthiest of marriages. Take that and use it however it serves you, or ignore it if it doesn't.

Alright, you guys, thank you for joining me on this topic today. I hope that there is some at least jumping-off point for discussion that you can have with your spouse or that you can start thinking about to really uplevel this part of your marriage. In the church, we talk so much about the law of chastity and we talk to our youth a lot about sex and then we get married and we don't talk about it ever again.

And I don't know what church is the place to talk about it, but I do think we have a lot of opportunity to create a safe place to talk about it and I hope that I've just opened up the doors for some discussion about it today and that you'll use that in the way that serves you best. Alright, thanks for

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joining me today. Have an amazing rest of your week and I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

If you have a question about something you've heard me talk about on this podcast or anything else going on in your life, I want to invite you to a free public call, Ask Jody Anything. I will teach you the main coaching tool I use with all of my clients and the way to solve any problem in your life, and we will plug in real life examples.

Come to the call and ask me a question anonymously or just listen in. Go to jodymoore.com/askjody and register before you miss it. I'll see you there.