

An Understanding and Experience of Human Sexuality - One Man's Journey

The main motivation in writing this reflection is to share the good news about human sexuality that I have personally experienced in my own marriage of 34 years. The culture I grew up in had always depicted sex as suited to the young, in fact something to be enjoyed as much as possible **before** marriage, because after marriage, well, it would become monotonous, routine, and, from what I could gather from the insinuations in movies and on TV, it would pretty much peter out. In fact, my own sexual encounters before marriage did seem to support this idea - thrilling at first but they grew stale fairly quickly. But once married I found the exact opposite - marital intimacy actually gets better and better and better. I have come to realize that sex was designed to last for a lifetime, and to improve as the years pass. And I don't mean in some emotional sense - I mean in every way. I would shout this from the rooftops if I could!

So this reflection is in two parts: My understanding and experiences of sex before marriage, then my experience after marriage and the new ideas it led me to develop regarding human sexuality.

PART ONE: Wandering in the wilderness

Growing up I had no instruction about sex, and had to find my own way. Like many parents, my mother and father did not want to discuss the topic. They did not even give me "the talk." I only recall my mother handing me a thin book and saying I needed to read it and ask her if I had any questions. "Sure Mom!" Yeah, right, like a 10-year-old boy is going to discuss a sex book with his mother!

I recall a few drawings of anatomy, and mention of love between a man and woman, but all I really retained was that when a couple had sex, they lay together, and a tiny seed passed from the man's penis into the woman. Was this what all the excitement was about?! I imagined how it happened: the couple lay side by side, motionless, and this single, tiny seed somehow wiggled across to the woman. And they would look at each other after a while, and say "time to get up!" and off they would go. Hmpf. I could do without that. Adults were strange people!

Needless to say, this was not a solid grounding in the topic. So parents — talk more openly with your young children!

In the years from 10 - 14 I recall being fascinated by girls, but they inhabited a world I never dared to enter. Unfortunately, the only sex education I received was from men's magazines, and a pornographic "novel" that was circulating at school. I was a bit nauseated by the stories, but strangely attracted too.

My first "girlfriend" came at the age of 14, when she was only 13. From my side it was a romantic and noble relationship. I enjoyed weaving a fantasy in which my girlfriend was wounded in a futuristic battle and I was the hero, saving my beloved from near death, taking tender care of her, foraging for food and helping to heal her wounds. It was all very chivalrous

and tender and chaste. I find it telling that despite my exposure to only bestial views of sex from magazines and peers, my inner instincts regarding the opposite sex remained chivalrous and pure.

This girl, at a mere 13 years of age, clearly had moved way beyond fantasy before she met me. One night, she bluntly asked, "Do you want to F*** me?" Wow. What was a tender boy to say to that? So I gallantly replied, probably in a register about an octave above my normal high voice at that age: "What? Uh, I don't know. I mean, uh, what do you mean? Uh, yeah, I guess so."

So she initiated me into real sex, at her home, on her mother's bed. I don't recall it very well, except that it was awkward, and not exactly a peak human experience. I again had the thought, "Is this what all the fuss is about?"

But rather inexplicably, I also had another thought: "Sex is something special." In fact, I recall thinking the word "sacred." Even though I had never been to a church in my life, nor considered spiritual topics in general, nor could I have given a very precise idea of what I was talking about. But I knew I did not want to be with that girl again, or any such girl for the foreseeable future.

I kept that resolve until the middle of my college years. At that time I started reading D.H. Lawrence, and in his writings he raised sexual encounters to an exalted, almost spiritual state. That vision spoke to me, and I decided it was time for me to try that out - to sally forth and unite the sexual and the spiritual. This was a "theory" of human sexuality that I could put into "practice" and embrace enthusiastically. I thought I had the best of both worlds.

Looking back, I had been frosting my sexual cake with merely spiritual sprinkles. The abstract theory was all very nice, but there remained physical realities with which to deal. The biological fundamentals of sex had not changed, and in my senior year of college, my girlfriend of the time became pregnant. By then I had experience with all the various forms of birth control, the plugs and drugs and latex, but effectiveness hinges on user compliance, and perfect compliance among teenagers and college students is notoriously low. Passion and planning have never been good bed-mates.

Perhaps surprisingly, rather than being angry or negative, my honest reaction was of deep joy. The thought that I was a father was utterly exhilarating. I walked around on cloud nine for a time. Joy was like an instinctive light that broke through, for a time, even the darkest circumstantial clouds.

Of course after just a couple of days I came down to earth and had to confront the very harsh realities of how unprepared both my girlfriend and I were to become parents, and marriage was out of the question. With abortion as the quickest and seemingly easiest option, we decided together to terminate the pregnancy. I took her to the clinic, helped pay for it, held her hand in the waiting room and in the outpatient room afterwards, and...it was over. We were quiet, sad, and somber, but both thought this would put the experience behind us.

I learned another truth first hand - one reason abortion is often chosen is to keep a relationship together, to get things back to the way they were before - but this very often does not happen. You cannot go back. My relationship with the girl was never the same.

For my part this was not a great hardship. I did not feel guilt about our decision, and in fact did not give it a great deal of thought. Graduation was not far ahead, and it was time for both of us to move on.

After graduation I decided to hitch-hike around the world, to see and experience cultures outside the familiar. In Europe I had a number of sexual relationships, and I like to think I always treated women with respect, and there were relationships of real tenderness, and yes, sexual ecstasy. At the same time, I could not deny that sexual desire often over-rode other considerations or justified decisions I regretted later. There were times when I felt used, times when I knew I was being manipulative, times when we both knew the relationship was a sham. I was "sowing my wild oats" as it is euphemistically called, but sowing other seeds as well, seeds of doubt that I was really maturing as a person or that these brief relationships were leading anywhere.

It was in Europe that I happened upon a book that explained the details of the suction curettage abortion my girlfriend had undergone. Although I had graduated Summa Cum Laude from an Ivy League school, I did not know anything about abortion - I had just heard it removed a clump of tissue. But as I learned the details, it began to dawn on me the magnitude of what I had done.

And the magnitude of what I was doing, because at that moment I was traveling through Switzerland with a young woman. We had met while I worked at a hotel in Germany, and she had a wealthy German uncle who was willing to loan her his BMW for a couple of weeks. She invited me to tour Switzerland with her. We were not very close, but who could turn down such an offer?

What I had read lead me to reject abortion as an option, but what would I do now if the woman I was traveling with became pregnant? As I saw it, there were only four inescapable options: 1) Marry a woman with whom I had little in common; 2) be the ultimate coward and simply abandon her to deal with the problem alone; 3) leave her but somehow offer to help pay for the child's upbringing or support her in putting the child up for adoption, or 4) abort the child.

It also dawned on me that the only thing that had prevented one of those four options from become a horrifying reality with any of the relationships I had had was faith that birth control would never fail. But it had already failed, at least as user error, and I had already consented to terminate the life one child.

This led me to reflect on the bill of goods that I had been sold by the modern culture, which from all sides seemed to promote the idea of "sex without consequences." I had accepted the idea that waiting for marriage was a completely outdated idea, thanks to birth control. Now you could find a good sex partner before you married, and have all kinds of sexual highs before settling down. But in that culture of sexual freedom, a child was not a thing to celebrate but to fear; children were not a gift, but a danger; they were not the fruit of sex but its enemy. This whole approach to "free" sex, which up until that time I had accepted as progressive, now struck me as deeply flawed.

I continued to travel, and I even continued to be sexually active for a time, but I was absolutely certain that for me abortion could not be an option, and my faith in modern society, which embraced abortion so passionately, was collapsing. And I was beginning to confront the obvious option no one likes to mention that would prevent any of those four options from coming into play: stop having sex until I was married and ready to welcome a child.

I decided to return to the States, and felt the need to find my college girlfriend and tell her I was deeply sorry for supporting the idea of putting her through an abortion. And I learned she was not advancing nicely in a career somewhere, but instead was in a mental institution, having had an emotional break-down shortly after our relationship in college. I will forever remember that long train ride to see her and the brief time we spent together. She did not see the abortion as a factor in her breakdown, but the last words she said to me I cannot forget: "A piece of me has been missing ever since we were together, and I don't know how to get it back."

Less than a year after that experience, I was to meet the woman who was to become my wife, and a whole new chapter in life was to begin.

Looking back over those couple of years of relationships, I found it hard to discover much good that had been gained.

Some would say, as I did for a time, that I needed to experiment for a while and "get it out of my system" before settling down. But I did not see how feeding the sexual appetite was succeeding in calming it down. Quite the contrary. How exactly does experiencing 10 or 20 different sexual styles help you to be content for life with just one? Nor did I see in myself or those around me a growing attraction to or appreciation for permanent commitment or having children. Quite the contrary.

Had I at least learned about the type of person with whom I was sexually compatible? First, I do not remember a single relationship in which sexual relations were difficult because we were in some mysterious way "incompatible." Sexual attraction is not that complicated, and nearly universal. There were differences of course, but none that seemed relevant in deciding who might be worth marrying. What I did experience was that sexual experimentation created more problems than it seemed to solve. Many of the women I dated were dealing with various sexual dysfunctions or phobias due to previous negative experiences. Sex is powerful, and all it takes is one painful or traumatic encounter to create a deep and long-lasting wound, and the chances for such a negative encounter grow with every new sexual relationship.

The same applies to the idea of accumulating sexual "skills." My experience suggested that emotional and sexual phobias are likely to accumulate much faster than "skills" that will somehow be of use in a marriage. Nor do the variety of techniques one might have tried with someone else in any way translate into useful knowledge with one's spouse.

Of course there are cases when the partner is not so much personally incompatible as chronically insensitive, or perhaps even in need of professional help. But superficial relationships are likely to perpetuate poor behavior, as there is no one to hold the dysfunctional partner accountable, thus there is little motivation to change, and the damage continues on to the next partner.

Because I have been blessed with a happy marriage, some might be tempted to think one can have the best of both worlds - sexual adventures for a couple of years and then settle into matrimonial bliss. This would be a fatal miscalculation. I learned that events of the past **do not stay** in the past. I will briefly enumerate just four things I brought into the marriage:

1) Memories. Memories of what I have done, and with whom, remain, and haunted me for many years. This applies to the best and the worst experiences. The worst we can hope to quietly forget, but suppose a particular experience or attribute is superior to what you have with your wife? We will inevitably compare, and remember, and dissatisfaction can begin to simmer. It is a fools bargain: The sexual encounter may have been an exciting fling of a weekend, but the temptations to seek it again can eat away at you years later. And with the internet we can now relocate those “memories” all too easily.

2) Habits. You do not wake up on your marriage day and find it easy to be faithful for life. Old habits die hard, and someone used to trying new partners is much more susceptible to falling into the catastrophe of an affair. At best the marriage may survive, but the emotional wound to one’s partner is irreparable.

3) Pornography. Being exposed to pornography at an early age, I can attest to its power and addictive nature. The worst part is it is almost certain to follow you even into a wonderful marriage. I know the gnawing attraction, the virtually unstoppable urge to just click that button on the computer and view those images or videos. In no way did I find it, as current culture tries to say, a healthy and even helpful addition to one’s sexual life. Porn is gasoline on the fire of disordered passions, disrupting normal relations between men and women, and disintegrating marriages.

Like all false promises, the damage done vastly outweighs those intense moments of excitement we think are so compelling at the time. Recovery is possible, but slow and rarely complete. So be compassionate and understanding of what I can only call a curse if your husband, or wife, is stuck in it. Attraction to porn is not a judgement on you as a sexual partner or on your marriage.

4) STDs. In my case I contracted Herpes before marriage, as well as HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). HPV usually remains latent and benign, but can, even after decades, resurface, usually causing cervical cancer in women and throat cancer in men.

I was, in fact, diagnosed with Stage IV throat cancer, and was told it was from the HPV infection picked up decades earlier. Because it was so advanced, for a time I was fairly certain it would be my last illness. By that point my wife and I had a large and thriving family, and the greatest pain of the entire experience, more than the intense radiation, the surgery, or the chemotherapy, was the thought that I would not be able to see my children as they grew up, married, and had children of their own. I would lose everything I most cherished, all because I had enjoyed, for a couple of years, the “sexual freedom” of modern life.

It is revealing to contrast all these experiences and consequences that I brought into the marriage against the experience of my wife, who came to the marriage as a virgin.

My wife has never had a painful or unpleasant or embarrassing sexual experience in her life. My wife has no regrets, no scars, no secrets, no inhibitions, no shame, no diseases, no temptations, no memories to suppress, no compulsions, and no dysfunctions in regards to her

sexual life. At least regarding the sexual landscape, she is completely at peace and happy, and has been since the day she married.

Whereas my wife entered the marriage completely at ease and without anxiety regarding a commitment for life, I had noticed that the sexual relations I had had with other women seemed to lose their luster fairly quickly. Based on the trajectory of my past experiences, life-long commitment to one person seemed to portend a dismal sexual future. I assumed sex would kind of wilt away, but I just hoped I wouldn't care as much as I got older.

I was in for the greatest surprise of my entire life....

PART TWO - Towards a New Understanding and Practice of Human Sexuality

That sexual relations within marriage did not become stale, or routine, over time was such a surprise to me that I have pondered it across our 34 years of marriage.

After all, how could the same physical act become stale in a matter of weeks or months on the one hand, as I had experienced before marriage, and only get better across decades on the other, after marriage?

I think most people would answer: "That's easy. It is because you married the person you really love, whereas the others were not "the one". I completely reject this view. It is not a sustained emotional high that undergirds the ecstasy inherent in sex, nor some kind of magical match with one particular person. We have not been one of those rare couples who seem to fall in love during courtship and stay that way into old age. Such emotional rapture and consistency is wonderful to behold but extremely rare (I would guess 5% or less of marriages). There is nothing unique about the emotional intensity or compatibility of my marriage.

Nor do my wife and I have some kind of special sexual chemistry. We have had to be patient with one another, to communicate, to learn, and to forgo having things just the way one of us might ideally want. Nor, as far as I can tell, do we possess higher sex drives than an average couple.

Well then, is it just physical attributes? Trying to remain physically attractive is important, and something we have worked to achieve, but as we age it is obviously absurd to say the joy of sex is grounded in our looks! Outward looks are not, and never have been, and never will be, the primary component of mature sexual attraction, expression, or enjoyment.

In short, I do not see anything unique or personal to our relationship that explains what I have experienced, not physical attributes or some special sexual or emotional chemistry. Therefore, what I have experienced is, I believe, available to most married couples.

So what is it?

The simplest way to put it would be to say that, after years of reflection, I realized that before marriage I was trying to make sex something it was not. And, strange to say, I came to the conclusion that sex was a much bigger deal than current society seems to make it.

I will try to explain those two ideas.

It seems to me now that my pre-marriage experiences were based on an up-side down approach to sex. I wanted the physical and emotional high, while rejecting permanent commitment and any possibility of having children. And yet I found that even the physical and emotional high seemed to fade easily, or at least did not give lasting satisfaction. My married experience has been dramatically different, and I believe our sexual relationship has flourished precisely because we embraced the ideas of permanent commitment and having children.

The image that comes to mind is reaching for a beautiful flower and pulling it out of the soil, away from the source of its nourishment, and expecting it to stay vibrant and fresh. It cannot. The joy of sex will increase as long as it is nourished in the soil of life (fertility) and committed love. The very things I had fled from in my youth, turned out to be the very things that were most needed.

There are many different types of love that I have experienced. Love between friends, love of my children, their love for me as parent, love of beauty, love for my country, love of rewarding work, affectionate love with my wife, and so on. But genital love is very different from all of these - it is a very unique, and restrictive, and exclusive expression of love. It might seem embarrassingly obvious, but just reflect on the mechanics of arousal for either male or female. Arousal is directed towards intercourse and potential procreation.

The advent of easy and effective birth control may allow me to derail the consequence of natural sex, but it could not change its nature and purpose, and attempting to do so came at a cost. To this day I remember the chemical stench of spermicides, or, if using a condom, the awkwardness of needing to cover my genitals in latex before what was supposed to be ultimate intimacy. Nor was asking the woman to take a very powerful hormone that would override her own complex hormonal system, trick her body into thinking it was pregnant, lower her libido, and bring a host of other side effects, any more attractive. Put simply, skin to skin sex, without any chemical or mechanical interference, takes the sexual experience to a whole new level, a level it is meant to be at all the time. This alone explains much of the power of what I have been experiencing within marriage.

If we accept the life giving nature of sex, then we easily see why it is inextricably bound up with its second essential quality - committed love. While conceiving a child is extremely rare (comparing the total acts of intercourse with the total number of children one is likely to have), the fact that it could happen means that the partners should be prepared to welcome and raise any child that might result. Children are permanent, so the bond must be permanent. In short, the love has to go beyond transitory feelings and include a total commitment. That this particular form of love should be forever, is natural, normal, and beautiful.

It is interesting that right up to today romantic love songs almost always seem to invoke words of permanence, of "forever" and "eternity." Have you ever wondered why this is? I recall the words of a rock song from my youth:

"If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you; When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and me."

Or, more recently, words from the song "Thousand Years" by Christina Perri:

“I have died everyday, waiting for you. Darling, don't be afraid, I have loved you for a thousand years - I'll love you for a thousand more.”

It is a proper human intuition that the highest expression of love between man and woman is meant to last forever.

Growing up, I remember being put off by the term “making love.” It seemed wildly off base - of course one cannot “make” or “manufacture” love. But now I see that there is a deep truth in the phrase: sexual intercourse is almost literally “making” love, and on two levels. First, openness to creating another life requires a total giving of oneself to another, which lies at the core of true love. Second, if that surrender to another actually leads to the conception of a child, then that child is a kind of incarnation of your love for each other, as that child is destined to be loved, and to love. So both the language of the sexual act AND its possible consequence, a living, loving child, is indeed “*making* love.”

It is interesting to note that another phrase is perhaps more common today, and indicative of the decline of proper understanding of sexual union - today we “*have* sex” a term that is vague and impersonal. Even worse is the passive and self-absorbed phrase to “get laid.”

One might suppose that the physical pleasure that is associated with sex would not need any discussion. It is obviously there, and it is obviously a good thing. But here too I have come to think it's true status is actually underappreciated in today's society.

We tend to take the profound physical pleasure of sex for granted - as if we invented it, or as if it appeared out of nowhere and is just there for our personal manipulation and enjoyment. But I came to realize that orgasm is not a toy of carnal delight in the sandbox of my personal pleasures. Rather, orgasm is the fitting celebration of the potential transfer, or reception, of human life. It is a kind of divine fireworks to commemorate something momentous, whether on the male's part, in giving the seed of life, or on the woman's part, in receiving it, and allowing possible union with her own egg. It is a kind of transcendent, “out of this world” experience because it is a physical act that has the power to engender a being that is indeed, partly “out of this world” - an astonishing mixture of spiritual and physical realities. It would seem that the Creator made the physical experience commensurate to its spiritual importance. The pleasure is suited to the purpose.

This is a key reason why sex is such a “big deal.” We are not animals mating by instinct, and what we are creating is, as far as we know to this point, the most remarkable creature in the known universe. Sex is complex because human person is complex so sex is complex. The human person is unity of the spiritual and the material, so sex is a unity of the spiritual (committed love) and the material (the physical pleasure as well as the potential for new life). It is an utterly unique, interpersonal dialogue, beautifully mirrored in a physical act, that is meant to express permanent commitment and total surrender. This can remain our “language” even when the couple is no longer fertile, whether that be days of the month, or after menopause, or, for some couples, when infertility is the condition for life.

Today, we have divorced orgasm from its procreative power, either by shutting down fertility (plugs, drugs, latex), or by having orgasm outside of sexual intercourse. Putting it more

bluntly, instead of the male depositing the seeds of life within the sanctuary of the woman's womb, it is dumped somewhere else — onto the skin, or an oral or even anal cavity. Is it really surprising that sex has lost much of its transcendent power?

Being consistent with this approach, my wife and I have never separated the gift of orgasm from the act of intercourse. This will seem inconceivable to many. To be clear, we embrace any and all forms of creative and passionate foreplay, but we do not allow final or complete climax to occur unless it is in relation to intercourse. In my case this should be self explanatory. For my wife, (since orgasm within intercourse is rare for most women) it means climaxing, before, during, or after intercourse, but not in isolation.

While this may seem an unnecessary restriction, I have come to see it as a profound insight. What it avoids is treating the peak of sexual pleasure as something that is unhinged from the peak sexual act. It avoids sexual acts and orgasm becoming what is essentially masturbation. It keeps sex in its proper proportion and meaning, and thereby it remains fresh and ever new. It ensures that the act of "making love" is just that.

Of course there is a need for responsible parenting, which means spacing of children as decided by the couple. Thus during our fertile years, if we chose to avoid pregnancy my wife and I abstained from sexual relations during the days of the month when conception could occur. At first this might seem the same as using artificial means, but I found the effect radically different. In one case you are simply not using that unique form of intimacy for a time, out of respect for its integrity and natural powers. In the other you are physically over-riding a core intention and meaning of the act. While analogies can be dangerous to use, it is not unlike the difference between eating a feast and vomiting it out afterwards (wanting the oral pleasure without restraint but rejecting self-control and the nutritional value) versus delaying the meal to a better time.

While I have covered the fundamentals of why I think my experience of marital intimacy has been so fulfilling for so many decades, there are other aspects worth sharing:

- 1) These exalted ideas about openness to life and committed love which lay the foundation for such sexual happiness, do not in any way mean being unrealistic or naive when it comes to day to day sexual relations. We need to accept our lack of perfection in living out our sexuality, even in the best of circumstances. Humans are not angels, and we all fall far short of even human ideals. My wife and I have sometimes used sex as simple stress release, as a sleep aid, as deliverance from inappropriate sexual longings, as a cure for a bad mood, and so on. The exalted reflections shared above do not obviate the reality that the gift has a host of simple benefits that are not always cosmic - in fact, take the s out of the word "cosmic" and sex can be sometimes just plain comic - and that's OK.

- 2) In our 34 years of marriage, neither of us has ever used sex as a weapon, or a tool of manipulation. Not a single time has either spouse imposed the gift upon the other, or withheld it to "score a point" or to bargain for something else. Spouses should not have to "earn" the right to have sex; we gave ourselves to each other unconditionally the day we married. As long as there is mutual respect and sensitivity, we believe the sexual gift is meant to be given generously and unselfishly.

3) As it should be clear by now, great sex usually has very little to do with techniques in the bedroom or particular positions - it has everything to do with using sex as it was designed and supporting it with the human qualities you bring to the relationship. There are some sexual dysfunctions that may require counseling or therapy, but normally most things can be worked out over time if both partners are patient, sensitive, communicative, and committed. Work at being a better person day after day, and I suspect your sexual intimacy will improve day after day.

4) Both sexes can tend to be somewhat insecure about their looks, especially when naked, as well as worried about their sexual "performance." Within a marriage total acceptance of the other only deepens with time, and seeing the other naked is a privilege and special intimacy that is cherished, no matter how one's spouse may rank on some scale of objective beauty. To be naked and totally accepted by another is a beautiful experience; it banishes sexual inhibitions and nourishes creativity.

As to "performance", a marriage is a lifetime to learn about the other, and develop physical interplay that is devoid of show, of sham, of pretense, or of ignorance. Marriage is not some kind of magic that ushers in perfect sexual harmony while somehow banishing all dysfunction, but it is the stable platform upon which a beautiful relationship can develop over time.

From the outside I realize people can think the same patterns of love-making with the same person is somehow monotonous. But the value of ever deepening trust, mutual understanding, and total acceptance is a gift that cannot possibly be overstated.

5) When, for any number of reasons, we decide we are not ready for "making" a child, then we do not "make love" during the few days of the month during which my wife is fertile.

Explaining natural family planning is beyond the scope of this reflection, but it is important to mention that modern techniques of fertility awareness the natural way are at least as effective as any chemical method of birth control, and more effective than most barrier methods. The method is virtually cost free, has no side effects, is completely natural, and can be used to achieve or delay pregnancy. I encourage you to research this for yourself.

However, natural family planning does require communication between spouses, and days of abstinence (no intercourse). The truth is, periodic abstinence is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your marriage, as it encourages a regular return to romance, tenderness, and non-genital expressions of love. And it fosters patience, and dialogue, and putting the needs of the other or the family ahead of immediate gratification - the very tools that are most likely to make a marriage successful. It is not terribly surprising that the divorce rate among couples who practice natural family planning is 1-3%. That says it all. In fact, I would say without hesitation that natural family planning is one of the best kept secrets of a happy and successful marriage, as well as a flourishing sex life.

Therefore, my wife and I have never used any artificial means to avoid pregnancy. No chemical or physical barrier has ever come between our bodies. The language our bodies speak to each other "I give myself totally and forever" has never been contradicted by our actions.

Conclusion

So can sexual relations with just one person be better when one is in their 30s than in their 20s? And better in their 40s than in their 30s? And better in their 50s than in their 40s? Really?

In a word, yes. And not because of any special effort or technique, but just by letting the power and goodness of natural sex shine forth. My initial intuition about sex after my first and very disappointing encounter was correct: there is something sacred in the sexual act. Sex is actually a bigger deal than the modern culture has made it. If you clip off its wings of fertility and commitment, it will be a shadow of what it was intended to be. At least this is what my own experience suggests.

This is not to say that every sexual relationship in marriage is going to be ideal. There are deep problems and sorrows in virtually every aspect of human life, and we all bear those burdens in different areas and different ratios. My own conviction is that living sexual intimacy in a way that will unlock its greatest potential is only likely to help rather than hinder our search for happiness.

Hopefully what I have shared has offered new ideas, some theoretical and some practical, about how human sexuality has the potential to be a life-long joy. My initial fear, before marriage, that sex would become routine or boring was based on a false understanding and false practice of sexuality. I have offered one approach I believe can avoid most of those errors.

I suppose one could view how my wife and I have lived out our sexual life as radical. But there is something radically wrong in the modern approach to sexuality. There is confusion and disappointment and bitterness, and the negative consequences are clear for us all to see.

My desire is to share a message of hope. There is good news, wonderful news about human sexuality, and I can say that finding and living sexuality in the counter-cultural way I have described has brought a joy and fulfillment I never would have guessed was possible.