



FACILITATOR GUIDE

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WELCOME TO THE *INTIMACY COLLECTIVE*!

Thank you for taking this time to walk alongside your group as an *Intimacy Collective* Facilitator! The following information will assist you in facilitating your group over the next few weeks. Every week has components that are just for you (written in this color), and aren't listed in the Participant Guide.

THE TANGIBLES

- Facilitator Guide
- Whiteboard or something to write on
- Dry erase markers

TOPICS TO TABLE

Questions will come up during class that can't be immediately addressed. With your group, assign a place for these questions and come back to them when the group is ready.

Many of the questions in this course may take time to answer. Be respectful of your group's needs and record them in a place where they can be acknowledged and discussed in a timely manner.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Homework is assigned at the end of each group to be completed before the next meeting. At the beginning of each meeting, your group will share highlights from their homework.

NOTES FOR FACILITATORS ON HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEX

OK. Take a Deep breath. This may be one of the most unlikely studies you'll ever do in a group! You'll be talking about super personal things, which may feel kind of awkward.

Here's the good news: the aim of this study is to address the way people **think** about sex and the way people **prioritize** sex. This is not the time to talk about technique, practice or anything that would be considered X-rated. So, if there are certain words you just can't say – that's OK!

Your role is to facilitate discussion. This study is organized to help you ask the questions that will challenge the attitudes of the women in your group. The facilitator notes will help you when dealing with difficult topics and they will serve as guidelines for keeping the conversation on track.

Even though talking about sex may seem awkward, it shouldn't be off limits. Sex is a huge part of our lives and we all desperately need safe places where we can talk about it. This stuff matters.

HOW TO MAKE THE CONVERSATION EASIER

Explain to your group that while they are encouraged to engage in discussion, they do not have to talk about anything specific. Laugh about it! Tell them: *We don't need a mental picture!*

Remind the women in your group: *This is important and it isn't anything shameful to talk about. This is an awesome part of our lives!*

What you will likely find is that women are not as scared to talk about sex as you think. People are eager to share their stories in a safe place. Remember that the women in your group will take their cues from you. If you laugh and joke a lot, so will they. If you're comfortable, they will be too!

We hope you laugh. We hope you have fun. We hope you and the women in your group finish this study with a renewed love and enthusiasm for your spouses!



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WEEK 1: CHALLENGING OUR PERSPECTIVES ON SEX

AGENDA



Introductions
Group Expectations
Facts About Sex and Marriage
Sex and Culture
Putting It Into Practice

INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome to Week 1!

This week will help women recognize the lies they've been told about sex. What we believe about sex will impact how we experience it, and therefore we need to start replacing the lies we hear from our culture with the truth that we know from God. The goal of this session is to help women challenge the lies they've believed, so they can start experiencing sex as the beautiful gift it was meant to be!

Begin the meeting with an introduction exercise. Introduce yourself first by answering the questions below, and then ask the other women to do the same.

- *What is your name?*
- *Why are you here?*
- *What is one interesting fact about you?*

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR FACILITATOR EACH WEEK?

Your group can expect you to be reliable, empathic, respectful and trustworthy. Also, try to have fun!

GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Review Group Expectations together. Ask a volunteer to read the Group Expectations aloud and discuss each one, if necessary. It is important for every woman in your group to understand what is expected of her and to know that this is a safe place for sharing.

Have each Member sign this page agreeing to abide by the expectations. If someone violates the terms of the agreement, you may address it by reviewing the Group Expectations again.

1. I will keep everything shared in this group confidential.
This is a safe place to be yourself and share your story.
2. I will not judge other women in this group.
There is no condemnation in this place. (Romans 8)
3. I will not compare myself to other women in this group.
We are here to care for and support each other, not to compete.
4. I will respect myself and those around me.
5. I will not give advice or try to "counsel" other Members.
We are committed to offering a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on.
6. I will keep my phone turned off during group.
7. I will show my commitment to my group by attending every session and doing my homework.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

FACTS ABOUT SEX AND MARRIAGE

Read through the following information with your group. You can read each statistic aloud or ask a volunteer to help you read it. The purpose of this exercise is to normalize the struggles of married couples and sex.

- The vast majority of people do have sex before they're married. In fact, only about 3% of the population waits until marriage. Even in surveys of highly religious women, only 29% were virgins on their wedding nights.
- 18% of women report using pornography once a week (it's not just a man's issue!).

*In the surveys of several thousand women for *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex* (many respondents were from MOPS groups), here are some quick facts:*

- About 59% of women usually or always reach climax when they make love with their husband. But that means that 41% don't.
- Roughly, 10% of women never reach climax.
- 44% of women report making love less than once a week.
- 40% of husbands ages 25-44 think that they don't have sex enough, and it really bothers them.
- 24-30% of wives have a higher sex drive than their husbands – and that really bothers them, too.
- The best years for sex in marriage tend to be between the years 16-24, after you've been married for over a decade and a half, the kids are sleeping through the night, and you're really vulnerable and close with your spouse!

*Ask your group for their thoughts on these statistics: **What stands out to you?***

"4 Cool Statistics About Abstinence in the USA", November 30, 2012, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/30/women-addicted-to-porn-stats>

Luke Gilkerson, "How Many Women Are Hooked on Porn? 10 Stats That May Shock You." August 30, 2013. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/30/women-addicted-to-porn-stats>

All statistics taken from Sheila Wray Gregoire, *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex: And you thought bad girls have all the fun*. Zondervan, 2012.

SEX AND CULTURE

Our culture worships sex. Stand in line at any grocery store, and you'll be greeted by rows of magazines with all the newest sex tips. On each cover, a nearly naked woman stares back at us in condemnation. She's beautiful. She's alluring. She's confident in her sexuality. She doesn't have banana mash on her yoga pants, and if she had less than six hours of sleep last night because babies were crying, we can't see it. She has it all together.

How does our culture's view of sex affect our expectations?

Discuss this question with your group. Point out that many of us don't feel like we have it all together. Many of us battle exhaustion, constant chaos and endless to-do lists. Ask your group: How are we supposed to find time and energy for sex?

Combine that with the pressure we feel because we're constantly told that marriages need sex or that our spouse will eventually feel disconnected, and it's almost overwhelming.

Obligation sex, you see, isn't sexy.

OBLIGATION SEX

Obligation sex isn't sexy.

How do expectations and obligations take the fun out of sex?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers. Discuss this idea of obligation sex, and how it can steal the joy of sex. Ask the women in your group: Do you ever feel that sex is a problem in your marriage?

At some point in a marriage, many women may feel that sex is the thing driving their marriage apart. Ask the women in your group if they have ever felt this way.

There may be women in your group that have not felt this way. Maybe they just miss the connection, and they long for the days when sex was easy and when their spouses seemed interested. Some of the women may be worried that their marriages could be headed for trouble if this keeps up.

NOTES FOR FACILITATOR: Be cautious during this discussion, as it may be dominated by women complaining about their problems in the bedroom. The best way to handle this is to turn it into a question: *That sounds rough and I can understand why you feel that way. What truth can you tell yourself about sex instead to help combat that feeling?* If she's stumped, or if she continues to explain how awful things are, ask other group Members to come up with truths about sex.

While most women are the ones with the lower libido in marriage, in some marriages the man has the lower libido. Make it a point to acknowledge this (it's also acknowledged in the material), so that any woman in that situation will not feel as if she's a freak or her marriage is strange.

Ask your group to answer the following questions in their guidebooks and then discuss with the group:

When you hear the phrase, "obligation sex," what do you think of? How does it make you feel?

SEX IS NOT THE PROBLEM

Ask for volunteers to answer the following question:

How can sex seem like more of a problem than a solution?

Pornography and infidelity plague marriages. Abuse in our backgrounds, shame and insecurity also play a huge role in how we view sex. God intended sex to be a beautiful promise, not a heavy obligation. The only way we can start seeing sex as a promise is to stop seeing sex as the problem!

If you're someone who finds that sex strongly binds you and your spouse together, share this with the group to encourage them!

We need to stop seeing sex as the problem and start seeing sex as the promise.

Ask your group to answer the following question in their workbooks. Ask for volunteers to share and write their answers on the whiteboard.

What have you found to be some of the benefits of making love?

- If you're really tired, sex will help you get to sleep faster and sleep deeper.
- If you're anxious, making love will help calm you down.
- Making love boosts your immunity.
- Sex makes you less depressed.
- Sex makes you feel more connected to your spouse.
- Women are capable of deeper and more intense sexual pleasure than men!

SEX IS A GIFT

Sex is not just something that wives do for their spouse. Sex is for us, too.

*Ask your group what they think about this statement: **Sex is not something that wives do for their spouse. Sex is for us, too.***

Sex is the ultimate "knowing" of someone else, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually, too.

God created us as physical beings so we can actually lose control and feel the height of human pleasure with one single person. There is nothing as beautiful on this earth as feeling totally physically and spiritually connected to another human being who loves you and cherishes you.

SEX IS A SOLUTION

The more negatively we think about sex, the worse our experience will be. The benefits of sex will only come if we stop seeing sex as the source of our problems, and start seeing sex as the solution to many of them.

*Ask the women in your group: **How can sex be a solution to some of our problems?***

Learning to think differently about sex is what this study is all about. Tell your group that the next time they think of sex as an obligation, replace the thought with Sex helps ME. I was created to enjoy this. Sex was designed to help us feel closer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Tell your group to answer the following questions in their guidebooks and then discuss with the group.

Does my view of sex steal the joy from sex? If so, in what ways?

What can I do to combat that?

Explain to your group that they will be challenged with a homework assignment each week, as well as a journaling prompt. You will share highlights from these homework assignments at the beginning of each session.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Choose three positive things to tell yourself about sex and intimacy throughout the day and write them below. Choose a specific prompt, such as stopping at a stop sign or opening the fridge, to say them out loud. Practice filling your mind with truth!

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

JOURNALING PROMPTS

1. *What are some of the lies that I believe about sex?*

2. *What are the promises about sex I want to believe instead?*

A dark, moody photograph of a bed with white linens. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the folds of the fabric and deep shadows elsewhere. The word "mood" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

mood

WEEK 2: OUR BRAIN AND OUR LIBIDO

AGENDA



Week 1 Reflections
Our Brain and Our Libido
Sex in the Media
Multitasking and Sex
Getting “In the Mood”
Putting It Into Practice

The aim in this session is to help women understand that feeling “in the mood” doesn’t come as easily for all of us as it does for women in the movies. If we wait for our bodies to get warmed up before we make love, we might be waiting a long time.

Men are microwaves. Women are ovens.

Instead of asking our bodies how they feel, encourage the women that they should be telling their bodies how to feel! Talk about how you can give yourself positive messages that can make sex seem much more alluring.

Again, acknowledge that there may be some women in the group who have higher libidos than their spouses, and are frustrated that their spouses don’t desire sex more often. Brainstorm some ideas to help.

NOTE FOR FACILITATOR: In our society, one of the biggest suggestions for boosting libido is to watch porn together. Someone may bring this up as a potential solution. If so, you can point them to: tolovehonorandvacuum.com/2015/11/reader-question-watching-porn-together-okay-agree which explains why that’s a bad idea.

Remember, it’s OK to laugh – it helps take the pressure off and brings some light-heartedness into the discussion!

WEEK 1 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group to share highlights from their homework assignment.

OUR BRAIN AND OUR LIBIDO

According to a study by the University of British Columbia, men tend to be aroused before making love and most women are not aroused until they start making love.

Ask your group what they think about the statement above. You may even ask them about the microwave and oven comment. Remember that not all men and women fall into these categories. You may have some women in your group who have higher sex drives. Acknowledge this and affirm all responses from your group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does the entertainment industry portray the sex drives of men and women?

Ask your group: Have you ever noticed that movies and TV shows make both women and men’s sex drives look just the same?

What does the media get wrong? What does the media get right?

Many women may worry when their bodies don’t respond like the women on TV that they are just “not in the mood,” so they go back to playing on their phones or making a cup of tea.

But what if that portrayal of a woman’s sex drive is wrong?

If you’re not “in the mood” before you start making love, there’s nothing wrong with you! You just take longer to get warmed up!

For women, our sex drives are primarily in our heads. If our heads aren’t engaged, our bodies won’t follow.

About 30% of wives are in marriages where they’re the ones with the higher sex drive. They’re the ones panting and their husbands don’t seem to notice. If that’s the case for you, there are some resources at the end to help you.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following questions:

Have you ever been the spouse with the higher libido?

If so, how does that feel?

We have a great deal of power when it comes to our libidos! Instead of waiting to feel “in the mood,” we can tell ourselves positive things about sex: *I am going to enjoy this tonight, I am going to sleep so well after this, or I am going to rock my spouse's world!*

MULTITASKING AND SEX

Multitasking can be a sex killer. Unfortunately, many of us don't quite understand this. We assume that our bodies will kick in as long as our spouse is “doing the right thing.”

So as multitaskers, we start making love, but while we're doing that we're also composing shopping lists in our heads and trying to plan for the next day. Sex ends up feeling lousy. And it must be his fault, because he's just not doing it correctly.

It's not about what he's doing; it's about what you're thinking!

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the questions below and write them on the whiteboard.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does my brain keep me from enjoying sex?

What kinds of things do I think about when I'm having sex?

How can we combat this?

Great sex isn't just about our libidos and it isn't just about him doing the right thing. It's also about us concentrating and putting our brains to work for us.

We have to make the decision that we want to make love. We even have to make the decision that we're going to have a good time!

Both husbands and wives have an incentive to work on feeling intimate outside of the bedroom, too. We have to build goodwill toward each other even to want to make love in the first place. If our sexual response was always automatic, then our relationship could be quite shallow.

Instead, when things work well, we get the best of both worlds. We feel close to our spouse and we feel great in the bedroom.

Ask your group to answer the following questions in their guidebooks and then discuss with the group.

Why do you think women often take longer to get “in the mood”?

Ask your group what they think about the following statement:

Men make love to feel loved, whereas women need to feel loved in order to make love.

Ask your group: ***Do you think that's true? How does this impact libido in your marriage?***

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- If you make love this week, keep your head engaged! Ask yourself: What feels good right now? That makes your brain cut off that shopping list and concentrate instead on your body. And you just may find that it does feel good, after all!
- If you do not make love this week, ask yourself: Are my thoughts keeping me from wanting to be intimate with my spouse? If so, ask yourself how your brain is keeping you from being able to take pleasure in sex.

JOURNALING PROMPTS

Am I using my brain and my thought patterns to grow or to hinder my sexual relationship with my spouse?

*letting
go*



WEEK 3: SEX AND CONTROL

AGENDA



Week 2 Reflections
Letting Go
Trust
Embracing Your Sexual Side
Being Naked
Putting It Into Practice

We're getting into some difficult material now. Letting go of control is an integral part of great sex, but it is also threatening to many women. We will talk more about sexual baggage in subsequent lessons; so if any women in your group bring up issues of abuse or shame, let them know that we will save these discussions for a future lesson. It is important to acknowledge their struggles, but let them know that these are important concerns that deserve their own week and you will return to that subject soon.

Another big issue that women may be dealing with is trust. It's difficult to trust your husband if he watches porn (since trust must be earned, it can actually be quite smart to not trust him if he's watching porn). Point these women to some of the suggested resources in the back of their books, including Celebrate Recovery groups or accountability groups in your area that she can direct her husband to.

While these are heavy problems, the main message here is PASSION versus CONTROL. If you can return to the idea of passion as often as possible, you'll be able to keep the conversation on track!

WEEK 2 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group to share highlights from their homework assignment.

WHY WE CAN'T BE CONTROL FREAKS AND HAVE GREAT SEX

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following question:

Do I have trouble being vulnerable and letting people help me?

If we are trying to be in control, then sex will never be great. Sex, at its essence, is the opposite of control. You have to be willing to let yourself go in order for sex to feel good.

Sex was designed so that we would be totally vulnerable with our spouses, forming a bond that we would get with no one else.

Ask your group what they think about this statement.

Great sex, at its essence, is the opposite of feeling in control.

GREAT SEX REQUIRES LETTING GO

We care what others think of us. We train ourselves to be conscious of our every move. But great sex means throwing caution to the wind and letting yourself be primitive, not proper.

There is nothing "improper" with sex in marriage; on the contrary, God created us so that our most basic and instinctual need to be connected to another human being mimics the deep need we have for intimacy with God. And that intimacy isn't quite proper, either. It's passionate! And passion isn't proper.

Sex isn't something you can put a lid on and keep tidy and organized. It spills over. It revels. It even screams.

Ask for volunteers to answer the following questions:

Why do some women have a hard time feeling "out of control" and letting go?

GREAT SEX REQUIRES TRUST

The opposite of control is trust. When we're in control, we have no need to trust anyone. We're safe. We're vigilant, so nothing can touch us.

In order to enjoy sex completely, we must stop being vigilant and start letting go. To do that, we have to be able to trust. When we trust, we can turn off our brains and let ourselves feel.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following questions:

What makes it hard for me to trust my spouse?

What boundaries can I put in place to build trust?

For example, some women may not trust their spouses because of their use of pornography. They may be able to draw a boundary where their spouse must stop watching porn, so they can move forward in building back the trust in their relationship.

GREAT SEX REQUIRES EMBRACING YOUR SEXUAL SIDE

Feeling sexual is scary to many women, because it feels shameful. There is nothing shameful about making love to your spouse. There is nothing wrong with feeling overwhelmed in the moment. There is nothing wrong with desperately wanting to touch or to be touched. There is nothing wrong with feeling as if you're on fire!

When we grow up feeling that these things are wrong – that only “bad girls” feel that way – then we work hard to turn them off.

Great sex means giving into these feelings and embracing our sexual side. We were made to be with our spouses and this is a good thing.

Ask volunteers to share their answers to the following question:

How can I embrace my sexual side and initiate sex when it doesn't feel like “me”?

GREAT SEX REQUIRES BEING NAKED

Great sex means you're naked. You can't hide. He sees all of you – and he still accepts you and wants you.

Many of the women in your group may hate their bodies. If we hate our bodies, how are we suppose to enjoy them? Ask your group this question:

How can I find a way to think more positively about my body, even if I don't like all of it?

No woman wants to worry about what others think. No woman wants to feel shamed or judged. We all want to be able to turn off our internal critic, relax and enjoy being in the moment. This kind of sex is God's gift for marriage. But it means giving up control.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Embrace your sexual side! Find a way to flirt with your spouse or initiate something fun.

If you are having a hard time embracing your entire body, work on being kind to yourself. Think of five things that you like about your body, and tell them to yourself every day.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

JOURNALING PROMPTS

I don't like feeling out of control in these situations ...

When I start to fear not being in control, I will tell myself this instead ...



truth

WEEK 4: UNPACKING OUR SEXUAL BAGGAGE

AGENDA



Week 3 Reflections
Unpacking Our Sexual Baggage
Sexual Hurts
Replacing Negative Thoughts With Truth
Putting It Into Practice

This week helps women understand that they must take control of the negative thought patterns they have about their marriage and sex. There is no other way to find healing than to make the decision to stop feeding negative thoughts, and start deliberately thinking about truth.

Make it a point in the discussion to return to the question: What can you choose to think about instead? It's likely that some women will launch into a laundry list of all the bad things they have to deal with, and that it's impossible to eradicate. Acknowledge their feelings, but return to what strategy they will use to stop thinking like that.

Finally, it is a good idea to come prepared with a list of local therapy resources. Some women in your group may have abuse in their past, and they may not want to talk about it in the group (which is likely a good choice). The women may not speak up, but if you volunteer the information, they may be glad to have it.

Please note that there's a high likelihood that at least one or more of the women in your group have experienced some form of sexual abuse. (Assume there are women in the group who this applies to, even if it's not apparent.)

WEEK 3 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group to share highlights from their homework assignment.

UNPACKING OUR SEXUAL BAGGAGE

Most of us have heard the phrase, "Sex is a beautiful thing," but not all of us grew up with that message. For some of the women in your group, the words "beautiful" and "sex" don't go together in their minds.

We have learned how to think more positively about sex. We have also talked about how to let go of control and enjoy being in the moment. But these things are especially difficult when sex seems scary, shameful or dangerous.

Ask for volunteers to answer this question:

What sexual messages did you grow up with?

For example, some of the women in your group may have heard "good girls don't like sex" or "sex is only for making babies!"

Even if our families are healthy, our culture is not. Ask the women in your group: How can our cultural messages of what it means to be sexy make sex seem awkward or degrading?

For these next questions, poll your group. Ask the women to raise their hands to answer "yes" to the following questions:

- 1. Do you find it hard to talk about sex?**
- 2. Is this discussion making you nervous?**
- 3. Can you talk about sex with your spouse?**

Ask for volunteers to answer the following question and write their answers on the white board:

How can I give my children a healthy message about sex?

Our sexuality and our sense of identity are intricately linked. When we share a sexual experience with someone else, he “knows” us in a way that is totally unique and personal. When someone hurts us sexually, it affects us deeper than any other hurt. It pierces us to the core.

Tragically, far too many of us have been abused or assaulted. Ask the women in your group:

If sex has been used as a weapon against you, how can it be something “beautiful” now?

You will need to tread lightly here. It is not your job to counsel anyone, but you can remind everyone that there is freedom from sexual hurt. Encourage your group to seek counseling if they are suffering from sexual wounds.

If someone stole your childhood or your teenage years, do not give them the power to steal your marriage now.

Many of us have sexual pasts that we’re not proud of and we wish we could wipe certain memories from our minds.

Some of the women may have waited until marriage to have sex, but their spouses did not. Our thoughts and imaginations of the past may haunt our marriages. Ask the women in your group for their reflections on this topic.

LEAVING THE BAGGAGE BEHIND AND MOVING FORWARD

When our culture and past experiences have made sex shallow, cheap and degrading, sexuality is broken. Encourage your group to put the baggage and the lies they’ve believed about sex behind them. We can do this by replacing the lies with truth.

Ask for a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

*Ask your group for their reflections. **What do they see in this verse?***

Verbally acknowledge it’s OK if there are women who do not read the Bible or do not have a relationship with Jesus. Invite them to open their minds to the possibility of the words they are reading. (Always assume there are women in the group who this applies to, even if it’s not apparent.)

In order to experience freedom from the lies we have been told about sex, we must replace the lies with truth.

For example, a woman in your group may be struggling with thoughts of her spouse’s sexual past that bombard her thoughts. She can choose to take these thoughts captive by replacing them with truth: Yes, he does have that past, but he loves me and he chose me. I made a vow to him, knowing his past. So I will choose not to think of it, and today, will concentrate on how much he loves me.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following questions and write them on the whiteboard:

What is the difference between having a thought and feeding a thought?

How can you use truth to overcome bitterness, jealousy or pain in your background?

If your group is having a hard time replacing negative thoughts with truth, here are a few suggestions:

- *God created me to enjoy sex with my spouse.*
- *God is pleased when I enjoy myself.*
- *My spouse loves me and wants to please me.*
- *I was hurt in the past, but I choose to live victoriously today.*
- *I choose to be passionate, and not let my past define me.*
- *I choose to embrace wholeheartedly my partner who loves me.*
- *I choose to allow God to heal the parts of me that are wounded, and realize that he has created all things new.*

Your healing and identity are not based on what you do with your body. They're based on what Jesus already did with his.

Ask your group what they think about the statement above. Again, verbally acknowledge it's OK if there are women who do not read the Bible or do not have a relationship with Jesus. Invite them to open their minds to the possibility of the words they are reading. (Always assume there are women in the group who this applies to, even if it's not apparent.)

When Jesus died, he paid the price for everything that we ever did so we do not have to carry shame. He also paid for everything that was ever done to us so we do not have to carry bitterness either. When you follow Jesus, he makes all things new.

Jesus wants to carry the shame, guilt and grossness of our culture away, and leave us with joy, passion and purity.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following question:

What would it look like to have my identity and sex life made new?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- Replace negative messages with the truth. If there's a particular thought pattern that you're battling, write down your truths on a Post-it note or store on your phone. When a negative thought enters your head, pull out that truth, read it aloud and pray through it.

JOURNALING PROMPTS

I'm feeding and nurturing these negative thoughts, but I can take them captive and replace them with these thoughts instead ...

love



WEEK 5: MAKE LOVE, NOT SEX

AGENDA



Week 4 Reflections

How to Make Love, Not Just Have Sex
Intimacy

Putting It Into Practice

Our culture portrays sex as nothing more than a physical act. Sex is so much more and this week addresses that. When we keep sex strictly physical, we miss out on the best aphrodisiac – spiritual intimacy!

Many of the women in your group have no idea what the concept of “spiritual intimacy” would look like in a marriage. This is a great study to try to reinforce the Gospel message we heard last lesson about making all things new. Discuss why God wants to be intimate with us, and how intimacy is about a deep knowing. You can reference what it must have meant when David said, “Search me and know me, O God.” Ask your group what it means to know our spouses like that.

A challenge that many of us face is learning how to pray with our spouses. Encourage the women in your group to pray more with their spouses and talk about specific suggestions for making prayer easier. Remember that prayer does not have to be long to be profound. Keep things simple!

Remember to acknowledge verbally that it's OK if there are women who have never prayed before or might feel uncomfortable. Invite them to simply close their eyes and open their minds to the possibility of saying something that comes to mind. (Assume there are women in the group who this applies to, even if it's not apparent.)

WEEK 4 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group to share highlights from their homework assignment.

HOW TO MAKE LOVE, NOT JUST HAVE SEX

A recent poll of several thousand women, reveals that the best years for sex in marriage aren't the newlywed years. Married women report that the best sex happens between years 16-24!

*Share this statistic with the women in your group and discuss what they see in this statement. Ask them: **What surprises you about this statement? What does this reveal to us about sex in marriage?***

Certainly part of the reason is because children have grown older, babies are sleeping through the night, and couples are not as exhausted. But it is more than that. Couples who have been together over a decade and a half know each other better and are more secure.

The best years for sex in marriage are between years 16-24. There are good times ahead!

Having great sex is not just about the next great physical high. It is feeling connected on a deeply personal and intimate level. The more spiritually intimate we feel with our spouses, the better the physical part works.

The couples having the most fun in the bedroom aren't the celebrities on the magazine covers. They're the ones who have been cherishing and loving each other, year in and year out. They may be packing a few extra pounds. They may have stretch marks, cellulite and C-section scars, but they've discovered the secret of great sex: It's ultimately about connection.

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the following questions and discuss with your group.

In what ways can sex get better the longer we are married?

How does commitment and connection add to the pleasure of sexual intimacy?

Ask for a volunteer to read the following verse:

GENESIS 4:1

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord."

Ask your group what they see in this verse.

The Hebrew word for "knew" in this passage means "a deep, intimate longing." The same word is used when King David says, "Search me, and know me, O God. Know my inmost heart."

Sex is not just physical. Sex is about a deep, spiritual, intimate connection.

Discuss the following questions with your group:

What does the word "intimacy" mean to you?

How does intimacy affect our responsiveness during sex?

Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the question below and write their responses on the whiteboard.

How can we make sex feel more intimate?

If your group is stuck, suggest the following with their spouse:

- Say each other's name aloud.
- Look into each other's eyes.
- Hold hands.
- Lie naked together a lot!
- Have deep conversations. The more intimate we feel, the more intimate we want to be!

God created us for unity, not just for a great physical high, but also to allow us to be totally vulnerable together. The more we can be vulnerable in different ways: emotionally, spiritually and physically, the better sex will feel and the closer we will feel.

What are the differences between physical intimacy, emotional intimacy and spiritual intimacy?

What do these look like in the bedroom?

Billions of people have had sex, but not all of them have made love. One requires your body. One requires all of you. That is what makes marriage so powerful.

Discuss the following questions with your group:

What is the difference between making love and having sex?

Have you ever experienced "make up sex" before? What do you think makes it feel so exciting?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

This week, focus on connecting spiritually with your spouse. When we feel like we know each other better, and we invite each other into our spiritual lives, we will feel far more intimate. Start by praying more together. If prayer seems intimidating to you, here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Pray about something very specific. Each of you pray two sentences.
- Use a book of prayers and read them aloud.
- Pray a blessing at the end of the day, hugging each other in bed. Keep it short. For example: God, help my husband to grow his client base at work, but help him also have the opportunity to encourage someone he meets. Let people see what a kind man he is.
- Before meals, try to pray a “thank you” for something other than the food. Take turns and include your kids.

JOURNALING PROMPTS

To me, making love means ...

I have a hard time being vulnerable because ...



priorities

WEEK 6: PRIORITIZING YOUR SEX LIFE

AGENDA



Week 5 Reflections
Finding the Time
Finding the Energy
Finding Your Sexual Self
Putting It Into Practice

Now that we have some practical tools and skills under our belt, it's time to make sex a priority!

As you talk with your group about making decisions to prioritize sex, it is important to keep the discussion focused on tangible ways to work within limits of time and energy. It is also important that you reinforce the idea that the way we think about sex will impact our sex life far more than anything else.

You may encounter a few roadblocks, such as opposite schedules and sleeping arrangements. Rather than trying to attack these issues, ask questions such as: How can we make sure that our relationship with our spouse takes priority? How can we arrange nighttime so that sex is easier?

If some women in your group co-sleep with their children, encourage them to think of creative ways to have sex outside of the bedroom. If some couples work opposite schedules, encourage them to prioritize ways to have sex at "unconventional" times.

WEEK 5 REFLECTIONS

Ask your group to share highlights from their homework assignment.

HOW TO PRIOTITIZE YOUR SEX LIFE

Now is the time to put everything we have learned into practice. We may want great sex, but without some planning on our part, it isn't just going to happen.

We have laid the framework for the mental, emotional and spiritual roadblocks we need to overcome in order to live a passionate life. But great sex also needs time, energy and priority.

How do I find the time?

Making love requires time when both spouses are awake, in the same room, and have a minimal threat of interruption. Young children make this harder, but it is possible.

Ask the women in your group to share their ideas for finding time to have sex and then write their answers on the whiteboard. If they need help, offer these suggestions:

- *Have the kids go to bed at a decent time.*
- *Implement an awesome bedtime routine so children go to sleep easier.*
- *Turn on a movie for the kids and sneak off for some "adult time."*
- *Implement a "no screens in bed" rule with your spouse.*
- *Try to go to bed with your spouse at the same time, as often as possible.*

Once you're parents, your marriage matters more (not less), because now other people are counting on you.

*This is a great opportunity for the women in your group to help each other find the time to prioritize their sex lives. Encourage them to share their own tips by asking them questions: **How do you help kids go to sleep at a decent time? How do you deal with shift work in your marriage? What are tips for finding couple time if you have different schedules?***

You are not Superwoman. And that's OK!

How do I find the energy?

The most exhausting years of your life will likely be when your children are young. Since arousal depends on our ability to stay focused, exhaustion becomes one of the biggest mood killers.

When we make sex a priority, we also have to put some things on the back burner. This means being realistic and not trying to be Superwoman! That email can wait until tomorrow and the laundry can sit in the basket another day. We need time to build relationships, have fun with our spouses, and laugh with our children.

Ask the women in your group to share their tips on how to save the extra energy needed for sex. They may have ideas on how to delegate household responsibilities and errands. Ask them how they find down time to rest or catch up on sleep with a power nap.

*If your group needs more prompting, ask them: **Do we demand too much of ourselves as moms? What are some systems you've put in place to help you save time and energy?***

*Don't spread yourself
so thin that your
spouse just gets the
leftovers.*

The solution to finding the energy may be getting more organized or getting better systems in place. It may also mean cutting out some things in your life. Your marriage needs your energy and you only have so much of it to go around.

How do I find my sexual self?

Now that we have covered prioritizing our time and energy, there is one more area we need to cover. Your sexual self must be a large part of your self-image.

As moms, we wear many hats: caretaker, spouse, church member, employee, volunteer, etc. How are we supposed to feel sexy if sex is the last thing we ever consider?

Our sex life isn't only about our marriage; it is about our ability to be vulnerable, to be intimate and to allow ourselves to be seen.

When we open up like that, we not only open ourselves up for a great sex life, but we also open ourselves up for great healing. By allowing your spouse in and feeling his love and acceptance, you can begin to feel that I am a beautiful person. I am worth knowing. I am important.

Ask for volunteers to share their responses to the questions below.

How can sex be healing?

How does sex play a part in making us feel whole?

God made sex to be so intimate that when we give sex the priority it deserves, it helps us feel like whole, complete people. This can fuel us for all the other things we do in life.

It will only happen though, if we accept this about ourselves:

- I am a sexual being.
- I was created to be passionate.
- I was designed to know and to be known.
- My life is not only about work and tasks; it is also about love, feeling and intimacy.

When we feed this part of ourselves, everything else falls into place. When we starve this part of ourselves, we end up shrinking everything else, too.

Great sex is not automatic. Many of the women in your group may still need to learn how to make sex feel great, or how to overcome past sexual hurts.

As we learn to think differently about sex and realize how important it is to our marriages, we can move forward and make it the gift that it was always intended to be.

What have I learned in this study that I am going to put into practice?

Ask your group for their reflections from the past six weeks.

Take the time to thank the women in your group for the opportunity to walk beside them through this study!

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Make sex a priority! This week:

- Identify one practical thing you can do to give yourself more time to make love.
 - Identify one practical thing you can do to give yourself more energy to make love.
 - Identify one practical thing you can do to remind yourself that you are a sexual being.
-

JOURNALING PROMPTS

What is the biggest change that I can make to move the sexual side of my marriage forward?

Is my sexual self a part of my self-image? If I want to have a healthy sexuality, what words should I use to describe my sexual self?

RESOURCES

"4 Cool Statistics About Abstinence in the USA", November 30, 2012, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/30/women-addicted-to-porn-stats>

Luke Gilkerson, "How Many Women Are Hooked on Porn? 10 Stats That May Shock You." August 30, 2013. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/30/women-addicted-to-porn-stats>

All statistics taken from Sheila Wray Gregoire, *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex: And you thought bad girls have all the fun*. Zondervan, 2012.

- If your spouse is battling with pornography, check out Covenant Eyes - **covenanteyes.com**
- Website and blog on sex (Sheila Wray Gregoire): **tolovehonorandvacuum.com**

Post-abortive healing - **surrenderingthesecret.com**

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline - **800-656-HOPE**

RESOURCES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheila Wray Gregoire has been married for 25 years and happily married for 20! The first few years with her husband, Keith, were tough, but over the years they've discovered how precious a good marriage is. The mom to two young adult daughters, she spends most of her life on the road with her husband in their RV, speaking around North America. But you can usually find her blogging everyday at *To Love, Honor and Vacuum* – where she talks a ton about sex!

Sheila loves bringing her Girl Talk event about sex and marriage to churches and MOPS groups! Email her at sheila@sheilawraygregoire.com for more information.

The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex

Billions of people have had sex. But how many have truly made love?

Sex was meant to be awesome in every way – physically, sure, but also spiritually and emotionally. Find out how to make it great and how to have a marriage that thrives! tolovehonorandvacuum.com/books-2/the-good-girls-guide-to-great-sex

31 Days to Great Sex

1 Couple. 31 Challenges. 1 Great Marriage!

Embark on the most fun research project you'll ever do with your husband. Learn to flirt more, to emotionally connect more, and yes – to spice things up! Find the 31 day challenge here.

tolovehonorandvacuum.com/books-2/31-days-to-great-sex

Boost Your Libido Course

Are you tired of always being tired? Do you wish that you could want sex the way your husband does?

What if you can? This video-based online course takes you through all the things that contribute to a woman's libido, and shows how you actually can take control of your sex drive – and enjoy your husband again!

Take 25% off the course when you use the coupon: **MOPS!**
tolovehonorandvacuum.com/boost-libido-course

