

YOUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

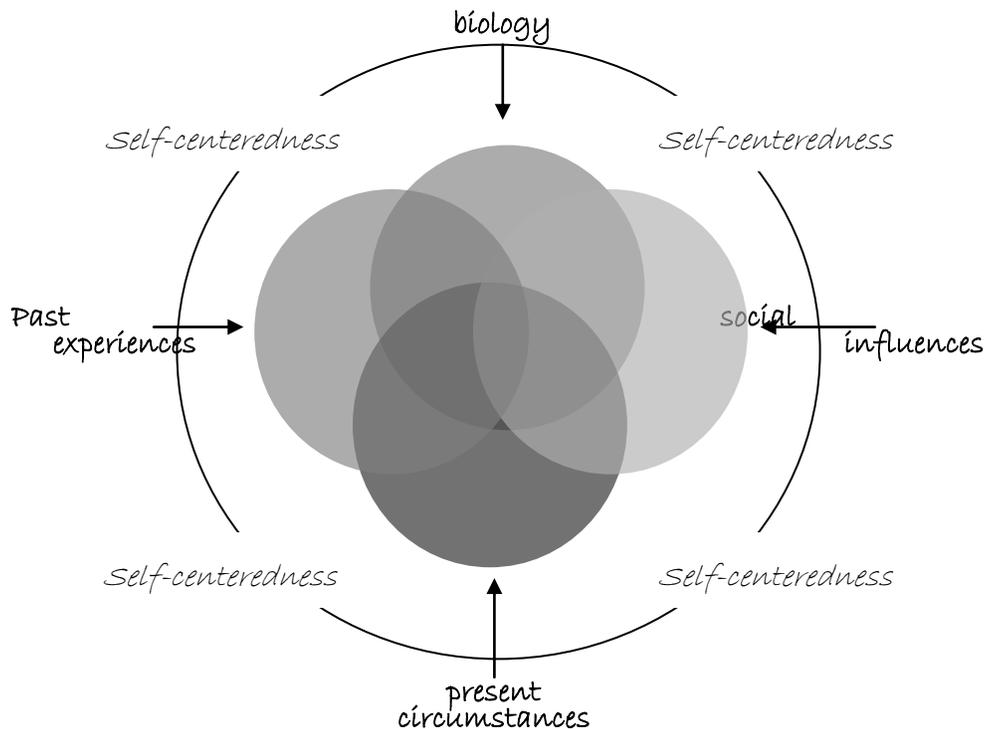
FALLEN SEXUALITY

If I were to ask, “How’s your sex life?” your response would reveal two things:

1. An idea you have in your mind about what ‘good sex’ means and
2. How your life matches it.¹

The first thing is the most important of all. If we are mistaken about what ‘good sex’ is, then we can end up frustrated, alienated and in some cases profoundly messed up.

Where does this ‘good sex standard’ come from? Well, it is stitched together from many things: our biology, our past experiences, social influences and our ever changing circumstances



Beyond all this is a relentless self-focus woven into the heart of every person that hears and answers the question, “How’s your sex life?” in terms of “How’s my sex life?” rather than “How’s our sex life?”

This self-centeredness is the biggest barrier to a rich and fulfilling sex life and the one requiring God’s complete intervention.

¹ We’re all over the map here. Let’s not get distracted with comparisons or speculation about how everybody else is doing. Everybody is messed up here to one extent or another and everybody has or will hit tough sledding from time to time.

Biology

Sex involves bodies with physically rooted differences structure, desire, arousal and consummation.²

- Personality

Beyond this, sex involves people with hardwired differences in personality.

The more active³ have views that differ from the more reflective.⁴

The more functional person has different perspectives than the more emotional.

A functional wife may want to get to it...not 'waste' a lot of time ramping up and may resist talking about sexual things.

A relational wife may find non-sexual but physically intimate time very important and want to talk about things.

Variations in attachment style: 50% secure; 25% anxious; 20% avoidant; 5% anxious/avoidant.

- Body Structure/Function

- Gender differences/similarities

Similarities – homologous genital development; bladder

Differences – focal brain activity in males; diffuse brain activity in females

- Health

Genetics of body form – differences in size/shape/function

Stewardship of the body & reactions to your partner's stewardship of their body.⁵

Pregnancy/Post-partum – changes in pelvis, vagina, hormonal shifts

Aging

Injury/Disease

- Desire – Mismatches in desire are very common.

Low libido is the most common sexual complaint in American women, affecting an estimated 22 to 43 percent of the female population.⁶

For some time after the birth of a child some women's sexual desire may extinguish entirely owing to lowered testosterone, sleep deprivation and tactile oversaturation.

Your wife may be physically aroused and lack sexual desire at the same time.

Typically, men are very simple. If the hardware is ready, the software is ready.

² This could range from testosterone levels to prolactin/oxytocin release at orgasm; to central neural processing; to hard wired aspects of personality; to the whole neurophysiological axis related directly to sexual activity; to the affects of olfactory cues on emotions and reproductive physiology. Add the physical effects of aging, illness or injury to this and biological realities can be challenging opportunities for creativity.

³ If an active person is more motivated, they will more likely to take initiative. This can be great for their spouse because it helps them feel desired. On the down side, they may be more demanding & unwilling to take, "No" for an answer. If active and less sexually motivated, they may engage in sex as a functional act, like changing a diaper or feeding the dog or they may keep saying, "No", feeling like the time is never right.

⁴ If a reflective person is more motivated, they will more likely be sensitive (i.e. observant & responsive). This can be great for their spouse because they are often highly motivated to make sex a great experience for their partner. On the down side, they tend to wait and watch, hoping for the less motivated partner to get in the mood & unwilling to take, "yes" for an answer if they sense that their partner is not that into it. They can be as self-centered as the active demanding partner but it shows up as self-pity and resentment rather than pushing and demanding. If reflective and less sexually motivated, they 'just lay there' or they may find ways of making it very inconvenient to get sexual time with their partner (e.g. beginning a big job right before bedtime, so they can wait for their partner to fall asleep; the headache, making themselves unappealing, etc.).

⁵ In one survey, 50% of men interviewed said they'd ditch a partner for gaining weight (20% of the women agreed). 70,000 participants in a survey conducted by AskMen, conducted jointly with Cosmopolitan. www.askmen.com/specials/great_male_survey and at www.askmen.com/specials/great_female_survey

⁶ *Reclaiming Desire*, Goldstein and Brandon; I wonder who's complaining?

Study after study shows, however, that a physically aroused woman may not be sexually motivated.⁷ This can be puzzling for guys:

- He thinks – If she really, really enjoyed our sexual time together on Saturday, why isn't she thinking, "When can I have some more of that!?"
It's like her sex memories are stored in RAM (written in sand) - wiped after each encounter.
- She thinks – If he really, really enjoyed our sexual time together on Saturday, why is he trying to repeat the experience the next day?
It's like he's addicted or something – more requires more
- Arousal – the physiological changes needed for intercourse:

It may take longer for her to get aroused.

The relational context is very important for her (A sexually aroused female brain is very diffusely activated; a male brain is very focally activated)

Some need lots of non-sexual touching before sexual touch feels right.

The lower the frequency the longer the time needed for arousal.

It may be more difficult for her to stay aroused.

Distracting thoughts or environments.

a diffusely activated brain is more distractible; there's a kind of blindness to distractions with a focused brain

The kind and intensity of physical stimulation needed to stay aroused and progress toward orgasm fluctuates from one time to the next and within each sexual experience.⁸

A highly aroused spouse may feel confused, even hurt to realize that their partner somehow lost their way - distracted right out of sex.

- Consummation (orgasm) - What it takes for one spouse to reach orgasm will often not correspond to what it takes for the other.

Over 40% of women cannot have an orgasm by intercourse alone.

These biological differences, for a self-focused couple, can be frustrating.

Past experiences

General issues

Some had very critical homes and/or currently live in perfectionistic family situations.⁹ This can really create reluctance toward vulnerability in general and sexual vulnerability especially.

If your own heart or home is full of negativity and critique this just exacerbates the problem of desire, arousal and consummation.

Sexual issues

Childhood experiences

What the family 'said' about sex

⁷ This is why erectile dysfunction drugs don't work very well for women.

⁸ A fuller bladder has a different impact than a freshly emptied bladder; A stone sober brain may be more inhibited than a glass of wine brain; her genitals may be more easily irritated one time than the next. BTW if you make it difficult for her to talk about her needs (b/c your ego's at stake) then this is going to be difficult to change.

⁹ Great sex requires letting down your guard to experience the relational intimacy it's intended to provide. Similarly, perfectionism in marriage is a strong predictor of sexual dissatisfaction (citation).

Some were raised in environments where sexuality was kept hidden or repressed and it left them feeling awkward & uncomfortable about it.

Others were taught that sex was merely biology

Others were taught healthy biblical views

Sexual abuse.¹⁰

Some can be left feeling they can't get free of the pain & shame of it.

Some may be left with cravings that scare, anger & confuse.¹¹

Things don't have to stay this way. There is healing and wholeness with God.

The problem of 'sticky sex'

Sexualized idolatries

Social Influences

We live in a sex drenched culture that sends many insane messages:

- Because sex is used to sell nearly everything¹² we may feel that nothing matters more than sex.
- Nothing matters less than sex

We are coached endlessly that sex is about personal entertainment.¹³

Because it's regarded as simply a matter of taste we believe that it's nobody's business.¹⁴

- When nearly all of our public messages suggest that great sex is about being carried away with passion, we conclude that novelty, risk and beauty are required to experience it.¹⁵

These myths are wrong and chasing after them will leave us frustrated and empty.

Think about this - If there is more knowledge about, access to and therapies for sex than ever in human history, why do people self-report more sexual frustration and emptiness than ever before?

Frustration because these myths promise things they can never deliver.

Like narcotic addiction, when people pursue this kind of 'good sex' standard, they throw away more and more of their life on ever diminishing results.

¹⁰ 90,000 reported cases of child abuse/year in U.S.; Child abuse is the most rapidly growing crime in America; 700,000 cases of female sex abuse/year; 1 in 4 female; 1:6 male report having been sexually abused btw. the ages of 4-18 years old; most abuse starts around 6 for females & 10 for males; 1 in 5 women report being raped

¹¹ Beyond all these examples, because sexual pleasure is so intrinsically rewarding, it can be attached to nearly anything: to self-sooth; to feel desired/admired; to stay distracted; to celebrate success; to procrastinate work

¹² "Sex sells everything and sex kills" Joni Mitchell, from her song, *Sex Kills*; Pirelli Tires (w/ its calendar); Rigid Tools (w/ it's calendar); Herbal Essence Shampoo ("organic experience" commercials); alcohol, tobacco, firearms; clothing (A&F; American Apparel; etc.); cologne (Bod, FCUK, etc.); bill boards; television shows (House's breast fetish which peaks every year during sweeps week). Philosopher Peter Kreeft says that, "...sex is the effective religion of our culture." (Winning the Culture Wars)

¹³ Porn/Sex industry revenues are bigger in the U.S. than the NFL, NBA & Major League Baseball combined (12 billion up from 10 billion 5 years ago; 57 billion worldwide; Microsoft made less than this in 2004 (37 billion)). The porn industry has driven internet technological advances for decades). Pamala Paul in her book, *Pornified* says that use of internet pornography is now becoming one of the main causes of divorce in the USA.

¹⁴ "As long as nobody's hurt," is the umbrella disclaimer that people throw in; though how such a conclusion is reached is pretty vague.

¹⁵ Every possible form of sexual expression is glorified except marital (i.e. on TV 24x more sex between unmarried partners than married). Cartoon heroines have 20 inch waists and 44 inch chests; the 'ideal woman' has a height and weight that less than 5% possess in the U.S.. The top 4 plastic surgeries are liposuction, breast augmentation, eyelid surgery and face lifts. Hair replacement is a \$1 billion/year industry.

It's in the interest of the entertainment and advertising worlds to perpetuate these lies because they create cravings that cannot be satisfied - virtually ensuring customer commitment.

What if the multibillion dollar sex industry actually satisfied people? There would be no sex business.

Emptiness because these secular lies are almost totally focused on the physical rather than the more significant relational aspects that God built right into our sexuality.

When something designed to take us to profound closeness with another person is used merely for personal entertainment we lose. This is why the Bible teaches that chasing after this kind of sex violates our very nature.¹⁶

"In real life, the unheralded, seldom discussed world of married sex is actually one that satisfies people the most."

Michael, Gagnon, Laumann and Kolta; *Sex in America* p.127

Religious traditions send many messages

If your family was pretty embarrassed about sex it can often be traced to some religious heritage.

The trend is always that Christian opinion leaders either react against or imitate the culture.

Circumstances¹⁷

Parenthood is a time, energy & focus thief.

Career demands and challenges typically increase around the same time as parenthood.

Most families need more than one income to sustain the household.

Emotional disconnection = sexual disconnection¹⁸

Life regularly 'roadblocks' intimate times.

Self-focus

This is the real stinker problem in marriage without which our bodily inclinations, past history, cultural myths and present problems could be effectively handled.

Self-focus is by nature an enemy of marriage. To be committed to 'us' requires two people to relinquish their strong commitment to self. This is hard to do.

¹⁶ Like using a butter knife as a pry bar violates the nature of the butter knife; that idling a car in the driveway is the purpose of a car...

¹⁷ *Great Sex for Moms*, unpacks a lot of this in the section on 4 Roadblocks.

¹⁸ Whether married a long time or unmarried: Byers, E. Sandra, *Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction: A Longitudinal Study of Individuals in Long-Term Relationships*, *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (May, 2005), pp. 113-118; Sprecher, Susan; *Sexual Satisfaction in Premarital Relationships: Associations with Satisfaction, Love, Commitment, and Stability*; *The Journal of Sex Research*; Vol. 39, No. 3 (Aug., 2002), pp. 190-196; Galinsky & Sonenstein, *The Association Between Developmental Assets and Sexual Enjoyment Among Emerging Adults*, June 3, 2011, *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

We all have a sort of street kid mentality, that we'd be stupid to not prioritize our own interests. Who else will care about us, if not ourselves? Nobody spends much time thinking about us, including our closest relationships. We need a way out of this trap.

"The essence of all immorality and sin is making ourselves the center around which we subordinate all interest."

C. J. Sharpe¹⁹

Taken together these factors can lead to a few faulty views:

1. Sex is about my recreation²⁰

...when a man, in the grip of lust, says he wants a woman, that is really the last thing he wants. He does not want a woman, but rather a particular sensation for which a woman is the necessary apparatus... The man under the control of lust simply wants a sexual partner who is willing to pretend that she is not mentally and emotionally a woman. C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves

2. Sex is about my validation

For many, sex is less about recreation than self esteem.

If someone 'wants' me, then I must be 'want-able' or desirable and so:

Some pursue or respond to sex to feel cherished/loved²¹

(If a girl has)...a need for masculine attention...when she enters adolescence, she will suddenly discover that she now has a commodity with which she can bargain and she will be tempted to use it...Now...men are voluntarily paying attention to her...Of course they are after one thing, and she is after another. They consequently make an exchange that makes neither one of them truly happy.

Reforming Marriage, Wilson

Once married they may lose interest in sex OR

Use sex to keep the feelings of being cherished going OR

Flip the order, instead of using sex to feel cherished, they withholding sex until they feel cherished.

Others pursue or respond to sex to feel significant/respected²²

Many compete and strive for success sexually like they do everywhere else. They have to walk out with the prettiest woman at the end of the night. They have to get women's attention whenever they can.

After marriage (i.e. they've gotten the woman) they may find that their sexual interest wanes OR shifts to other women.

The immoral woman (Prov.7:8ff) uses flattery but what's flattery? It's making someone feel that they are important.

Others take a 'safer' route by chasing porn. The emotional content of pornography is obvious once you think about it. All the camera angles, facial expressions and

¹⁹ Cecil James Sharp (1859 – 1924) was the founding father of the folklore revival in England in the early 20th century

²⁰ Sex is about two whole persons, their bodies, their minds, their feelings, their motivations and their spirits. To settle for nothing more than biology is reducing sex to blowing your nose. This is so selfish and superficial; it leaves us hungry driving us deeper & deeper into perversion and away from relationships, especially with God, according to Ro.1.

²¹ We don't work for love from others but from God's love to others. Some are sexual b4 marriage & not afterward

²² Our significance doesn't come from how we affect people but from God. He says that we are significant enough to die for. He says that he has significant things for us to do. He promises that He will honor us for doing those things. To chase significance sexually is reducing sex to an ego trip. This is so selfish and superficial; it leaves us hungry, driving us deeper & deeper into perversion and away from relationships, especially with God, according to Ro.1. Our real significance comes from God

poses are intended to say, "You turn me on. I must have you." YOU ARE IMPORTANT

Both kinds of behavior: skirt chasing & porn – have much to do with lust for impact.

In marital sex, "No" feels like rejection when significance is at stake.

In marital sex, "I don't like that..." feels like rejection when significance is at stake – can't take negative feedback. Pretty rough b/c great sex requires exploration and learning.

When this lust is linked to neuro-reward-system through sex it can become a disastrous addiction.

3. Sex doesn't matter

Some have no interest in sex and so conclude it doesn't matter as a justification for their disinterest.

Others are only interested NSA sex and so claim it's just body parts slammin' together; like a more interesting version of basketball.

You're married to someone with her own, biology, life history, cultural views and circumstances. Of course you have problems!

This seems overwhelming. Two points of encouragement:

God is very motivated to help you & His ways are remarkably healing

Great sex takes time and practice.

BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

1. The purpose of sex is "oneness"

Genesis 2:24-25 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become²³ one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

1 Corinthians 6:16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body *with her*? For He says, "the two will become one flesh."

There are many effects of sex: pleasure, fun, comfort, children, feelings of acceptance and a sense of having an impact upon her that is only for you.

If these *effects* of sex become your *purpose* in sex, many problems will follow because you will begin to view her as a means to an end or an impediment to it. For example:

→ Pleasure/fun operates on the law of diminishing returns; if that's your purpose in sex then you keep pressing for the new and novel experiences; or pressure her to go along with what pleases you most.

→ If she isn't enthusiastic enough then you pout, push or pursue your real goal (pleasure, comfort, fun, acceptance, impact) apart from her

→ You may keep waiting for her to feel motivated; refusing to sexually engage her until she is motivated and resenting her for not being motivated if you need sex for the wrong purpose.

²³ lit. 'keep becoming'

→ Nearly all men are happiest when they can lead their wife to an orgasm in part because they are happy giving pleasure and in part because they are most satisfied sexually when they have a positive IMPACT on her.

Nothing wrong with this but if the need to have impact becomes the purpose for pursuing sex, then you might spend a lot of time pushing for sex and expecting positive feedback OR searching for some magical sex techniques that will leave her breathless about your sexual mastery²⁴

When you recognize and pursue sex for its intended purpose then many of your sexual issues get really clarified and forward progress becomes much easier.

→ The more motivated spouse is a blessing from God in the relationship; urging you both toward oneness

→ Gourmet sex, meat & potatoes sex and fast-food sex are all good in their own way.

→ Sex problems²⁵ are attended to in order to enhance unity NOT to get what you want out of your sex life (i.e. it's impossible to deal with sex problems in a unifying way if your purpose is anything other than oneness).

2. The context of sex is "us"

"Us" in the sense of commitment (in marriage)

Ephesians 5:28-31 So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of His body. for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.

"Us in the sense of exclusivity

Proverbs 5:1-23 (after warning against adultery the author says)...5:15 Drink water from your own cistern, And fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone, And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, And embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths. His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.

"Us" in the sense of mutual submission

1Corinthians 7:2-5 ...let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

3. The responsibility to mature the relationship is yours.

Christ-centered

- Remember that your sexual relationship matters to God.
 - Ask him to help you lead in this area
 - Get help and support as needed, in order to reclaim your sexual relationship

²⁴ It's not wrong to experiment creatively if the purpose is to enhance your oneness; but it get's twisted if the purpose is to enhance your status in her eyes or to increase her motivation so that you get more pleasure.

²⁵ e.g. limited sexual knowledge/skill, low libido, vaginismus, post-partum pain, sexual aversiveness, impotence, neural or genital damage, previous sexual abuse, etc.

- Take your recreation & validation needs from Him, not from her. He may use your wife to provide this but it's His prerogative, not yours. And, once you back off pursuing sex for these EFFECTS and pursue it for its intended PURPOSE you can let God take care of those needs in whatever way he wants – not just through sexuality.
- Play your role with God's power, trusting Him to work in her heart.
 - If you are the more motivated one → view your interest as God's provision for your unity (i.e. instead of demanding or resenting or whining)
Translate your biological desires into loving leadership
 - If you are the less motivated one → view your wife's interest as God's provision for your unity (i.e. instead of resisting and resenting).
Enthusiastically respond to her sexual interest AND
Take initiative at other times so she's not left feeling uninteresting & unappealing to you.
- Remember that biblical sex glorifies God
 - ...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Cor.6:19-20 (context is soliciting prostitutes)
 - Directly because it illustrates the image of God → oneness
 - Indirectly because it makes your marriage & family healthier and more hopeful

Delight

Adam delighted in and was grateful for Eve.

In the Song of Songs we see a huge expansion of what delight entails physically including kissing (1:2; 8:1); touching (1:8); cradling/embracing (2:6; 8:3; 8:5); hugging (3:4); visual flirtation (4:9; 6:5); fondling (2:17; 7:7-8); sexually arousing (8:2); intercourse (4:16; 5:1; 7:12-13); smelling (1:3) mouthing/licking or tasting (2:3-4, 16; 6:2; 7:9; 8:3); watching (4:5).

Song of Songs 7:1 "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your hips are like jewels; the work of the hands of an artist. "Your navel is like a round goblet which never lacks mixed wine; Your belly is like a heap of wheat fenced about with lilies. "Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle. "Your neck is like a tower of ivory, Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon By the gate of Bath-rabbim; Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, Which faces toward Damascus. "Your head crowns you like Carmel, And the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads; The king is captivated by your tresses. "How beautiful and how delightful you are, My love, with all your charms! "Your stature is like a palm tree, And your breasts are like its clusters. "I said, 'I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks.' Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, And the fragrance of your breath like apples, And your mouth like the best wine!" "It goes down smoothly for my beloved, Flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep.

Intimacy

As we've seen, an early term used for sexual intimacy is *yada* to know.

This is the most intimate of intimacies making it the toughest place to be honest with her and curious about her but you have to practice and experiment.

Not to find the right combination of buttons to push in order for you to get what you really want – personal entertainment or validation.

- Discover and meet her deepest needs
From, *His Needs, Her Needs*, Willard F. Harley, Jr. says that women want: affection; conversation; honesty and openness; financial security and family commitment.
Romantic feelings (the context for her sexuality) are killed by:
aloofness - angry outbursts – disrespect – thoughtless behavior – selfish demands – dishonesty/hiding – relational threats
If you think you can live for self and then have her hot for you – you're an idiot.
- Make time, consistently, to invest in her

- In general, the time should be private and undistracted
- The time should include affection, sex, conversation and recreation.

Commitment

Nothing says it better than, 'two becoming one'.

Sexuality creates, celebrates and deepens oneness.

"How often is normal?" is the wrong question.

If we are acting like roommates; failing to give each other the benefit of the doubt or feel generally alienated – we need to take the lead in having some sexual time together.

Leaving & cleaving is an ongoing process that you have to pursue. 'Letting her breasts satisfy you at all times' means that she is your standard for beauty and that you keep returning to her and turning from all others including porno-girls.

Helping her succeed means that she needs healthy sexuality whether it's a 'felt need' or not and that you have to sacrifice for her good. It may cost you and likely will but you have committed yourself to serving her in every way including in this way.

You should take the lead in resolving sexual problems

- Starting with your problems
Walking in the gospel of Christ for the glory of God rather than walking in lust
Not being sexually passive/resentful or sexually demanding/resentful
- (then) Help her with her problems