

NAKED AND UNASHAMED

A Marriage Course on Sexual Intimacy

Naked and Unashamed

“They were both naked and were not ashamed.” – Genesis 2:25

What God designed for the marriage bed is not what the church has been willing to say.

COURSE MODULES

Module 1	The Theology of Sexual Intimacy
Module 2	The Frequency Problem
Module 3	His Needs, Her Needs: The Design Difference
Module 4	When She Has Shut Down
Module 5	When He Has Checked Out
Module 6	Low Male Libido
Module 7	The Conversation You Have Never Had
Module 8	Frequency, Initiation, and the Power Dynamic
Module 9	After the Wound: Rebuilding After Betrayal, Pornography, or Rejection
Module 10	Physical Intimacy Across the Seasons of Marriage
Module 11	Building a Permanent Intimacy Culture

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INTRODUCTION

What the Church Has Been Afraid to Say

This course exists because the church has been largely silent about sex in marriage – and the silence has been expensive.

Not silent about sex before marriage. The church has been willing to address that at length, with considerable clarity and conviction. What it has been unwilling to address is sex within marriage – what it is for, what it means, what it looks like when it is working, what it reveals when it is not, and what God actually intended when He designed it. The result is a generation of married Christian couples who received a clear theology of sexual abstinence and almost no theology of sexual intimacy.

“Most Christian married adults report that their primary sexual education from the church was a list of prohibitions. What was prohibited before marriage was never reframed as celebrated within it.”

This course attempts to correct that absence. It is written for married couples who want more from their sexual relationship than they currently have – not more in merely physical terms, but more in the terms that actually matter: more honesty, more safety, more connection, more of the covenant expression that God designed sexual intimacy to provide.

It is also written for couples who are in pain. Couples where one spouse has shut down. Couples carrying the weight of betrayal, pornography, chronic refusal, or a sexual relationship that has quietly died over years of neglect and silence. This course does not promise that reading it will fix what is broken. It promises to name what is broken clearly enough that the couple who is willing to do the work has a framework to work from.

The eleven modules cover the full arc of married sexual intimacy – from theology to diagnosis to healing to culture. They begin where every honest conversation about sex in marriage must begin: with what God actually said, and what He actually designed. They move through the specific dynamics that most commonly produce suffering in the sexual dimension of marriage. They end where every marriage must end if it is to last: with a culture that makes sustained intimacy not just possible but normal.

HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

How to Use This Course

1. Watch the videos.

Each module has a companion video teaching. Watch the video for the module first. It sets the context, names the dynamics, and prepares you for the written content and the worksheet.

2. Read each module.

The module content in this ebook expands and deepens the video teaching. Reading it after watching the video reinforces the framework and prepares both spouses for the worksheet.

3. Download the worksheet.

Each module has a companion worksheet available for download at MrMarriage.com. Print two copies — one for each spouse. The worksheet is where the real work happens.

4. Complete worksheets privately before sharing.

Both spouses complete their answers individually before reading them to each other. The private completion produces honest answers. The sharing produces connection.

5. Do not rush.

Work through one module at a time. A couple who completes one module per week will finish the course in eleven weeks having done more honest relational work than most couples do in eleven years.

6. Return to the worksheets.

The commitments made at the end of each worksheet are worth returning to. Date them. Review them. Hold each other to them. The practices built here are meant to outlast the curriculum.

7. Get professional support where needed.

Several modules address dynamics – betrayal trauma, sexual shutdown, pornography, chronic low libido – that may require professional therapeutic support. Where a module raises something that exceeds what a worksheet can address, pursue help.

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Module One

The Theology of Sexual Intimacy

Why sex in marriage is not a concession to the flesh – it is a covenant act designed by God to mirror the union between Christ and the Church.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 The church has historically communicated shame around sexuality rather than the robust theology Scripture actually provides – leaving married couples without a framework for healthy, guilt-free intimacy. Most Christian married adults report that their primary sexual education from the church was a list of prohibitions. What was prohibited before marriage was never reframed as celebrated within it. The result is a generation of married couples carrying guilt into the one domain where God intended none.**
- 2 Song of Solomon is not an allegory about God and Israel – it is an explicit celebration of erotic love between a husband and wife, and its presence in the canon is itself a theological statement. Its language is sensory, physical, and unambiguous. God did not include it by accident. He included it to demonstrate that the erotic dimension of marriage is not something He tolerates – it is something He authored, celebrated, and chose to preserve in His Word.**

3 Sex in marriage serves three distinct biblical purposes: procreation, pleasure, and covenant renewal — most Christian couples have been taught only the first. Procreation is the purpose the church has been willing to name. Pleasure is the purpose most Christians privately hope is legitimate but have never heard affirmed from a pulpit. Covenant renewal is the purpose almost no one has been taught — that every act of sexual intimacy between husband and wife is a re-enactment and re-ratification of the covenant made before God at the altar.

4 The husband's body belongs to his wife and the wife's body belongs to her husband (1 Corinthians 7:4) — mutual ownership is the design, not a concession to weakness. Paul's language here is deliberately reciprocal and remarkably egalitarian for his cultural context. Neither spouse holds unilateral authority over the sexual domain. The body of each belongs to the other. This is not a negotiation. It is a covenant transfer that happened at the wedding.

5 Withholding sex from a spouse is a spiritual act, not merely a relational one — it breaks covenant in a domain God specifically designated for bonding and protection. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:5 frames sexual deprivation as an opening for satanic attack — language reserved for serious covenant violations. This is not hyperbole. It is a warning that the sexual domain of marriage carries spiritual weight that most couples have not been taught to recognize.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research consistently shows that sexual satisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of overall marital satisfaction – and that couples with a healthy theological framework for sex report significantly less shame, greater frequency, and deeper emotional connection than those operating from a shame-based model. The Gottman Institute’s longitudinal research identifies sexual dissatisfaction as one of the top three predictors of divorce. Crucially, the issue is rarely physical incompatibility – it is almost always the accumulated weight of shame, silence, and unmet expectation. Couples who are given permission to regard sexual intimacy as sacred rather than suspect consistently report better outcomes across every dimension of marital health.

THEOLOGICAL

Genesis 2:24-25 establishes nakedness without shame as the original design. The Hebrew word translated ‘naked’ denotes full exposure – physical, emotional, and relational. Adam and Eve stood before each other and before God in complete transparency and experienced no shame. That was not a pre-Fall anomaly. That was the design. The Fall introduced shame into the sexual domain. The covenant of marriage is the only institution God designated as the place where that shame is fully and appropriately removed – not managed, not minimized, not tolerated, but designed out. Every act of married sexual intimacy is, at its deepest level, a reclamation of Eden.

Module Two

The Frequency Problem

Why couples stop having sex is rarely about sex — it is about everything that sex requires that has quietly broken down.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

1 Frequency decline is almost never about physical attraction — it is almost always about unresolved emotional distance, accumulated resentment, and the unspoken conclusion that vulnerability is no longer safe with this person. The body does not lie. When a spouse consistently avoids sexual intimacy, they are making a statement about the emotional state of the marriage. The tragedy is that the statement is almost never spoken out loud, so the other spouse is left to interpret it in the worst possible way.

2 Exhaustion is real but it is also a symptom — couples who are highly connected emotionally find time and energy for sex; couples who are disconnected find reasons not to. This is not a condemnation of genuinely tired spouses. It is an observation about priority. What we make time for reveals what we believe matters. A marriage where sex has quietly stopped is a marriage that has decided — consciously or not — that the covenant bond is less urgent than everything competing for the same hours.

3 Body image is one of the most underreported drivers of low-frequency marriages, particularly among wives — shame about physical changes after pregnancy, aging, or weight produces withdrawal that looks like low desire but is actually fear of being seen. A wife who has withdrawn because she is ashamed of her body does not need her husband to initiate more aggressively. She needs him to make her feel safe enough to be seen. Those are completely different responses requiring completely different actions.

4 The spouse with higher desire almost always personalizes the decline — interpreting their partner’s withdrawal as rejection, unattractiveness, or evidence of a failing marriage. This interpretation is almost never accurate and almost always devastating. The higher-desire spouse begins to suppress their own desire as a form of self-protection. Over time, what began as one spouse’s withdrawal becomes both spouses’ withdrawal — and the marriage loses the one domain designed to keep them bonded through everything else.

5 Most couples never have a direct, honest conversation about their sexual frequency — they negotiate it silently through pursuit, avoidance, and resentment, which guarantees the problem deepens. The silence is not neutral. Every week that passes without the conversation is a week in which both spouses are drawing increasingly inaccurate conclusions about what the other person’s behavior means.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Gottman's research identifies sexual dissatisfaction as one of the top three predictors of divorce. The couples most at risk are not those who fight about sex — they are the ones who stopped talking about it entirely. Research on sexual communication consistently shows that the ability to speak directly and kindly about sexual needs is a stronger predictor of satisfaction than frequency, compatibility, or physical attraction. The problem is almost never biological. It is almost always relational — and relational problems respond to relational interventions, which begin with honest conversation.

THEOLOGICAL

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 does not suggest that spouses meet each other's needs — it commands it, using the language of debt and obligation. Paul's framework is not romantic — it is covenantal. Frequency is not a preference to be negotiated; it is a covenant responsibility to be honored. His specific warning about deprivation giving Satan an opportunity is a theological claim that the sexual domain of marriage carries spiritual vulnerability, and that neglecting it has consequences that extend well beyond the bedroom and into the spiritual health of both spouses.

Module Three

His Needs, Her Needs: The Design Difference

The most common source of sexual frustration in marriage is not incompatibility – it is the failure to understand that men and women were designed with fundamentally different pathways to intimacy.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Men are primarily aroused visually and physically – desire often precedes emotional connection and can exist independently of relational health; for most husbands, sex is how he gets close. This is not immaturity or shallowness. It is design. The husband who pursues his wife sexually is, in most cases, pursuing emotional connection through the only language his body knows how to speak first. When his wife interprets that pursuit as evidence that he only wants her body, she has misread the signal entirely. He is not saying he wants her body instead of her. He is saying he wants her – and his body is the part of him that reached first.**
- 2 Women are primarily aroused contextually and emotionally – desire follows safety, emotional attunement, and felt appreciation; for most wives, closeness is what makes sex possible. A wife whose emotional needs are consistently met – who feels known, valued, and safe with her husband – will almost always find desire accessible. A wife who feels unseen, criticized, or emotionally alone will almost always find desire elusive, regardless of how physically attracted she is to her husband.**

3 This design difference creates a predictable and destructive cycle: he pursues sex to feel connected; she needs connection before sex is possible; he feels rejected; she feels used; both withdraw. Neither spouse is wrong. Neither is being unreasonable. They are simply operating from different designs without a shared understanding of what the other person actually needs. The cycle continues not because either spouse is selfish but because both are speaking a language the other was not taught to hear.

4 The husband who understands his wife's design stops treating foreplay as a five-minute event before sex and starts treating the entire day — how he speaks to her, serves her, and sees her — as the actual foreplay. The husband who sends a kind message during the day, who notices what she is carrying and names it, who does something without being asked — that husband is building the emotional conditions that make his wife's desire possible. The bedroom is not where the work happens. It is where the work pays off.

5 The wife who understands her husband's design stops interpreting his sexual pursuit as shallow and starts receiving it as his primary language of love, vulnerability, and desire for closeness. This does not mean she is obligated to respond on his timeline. It means she receives his pursuit as the expression of longing it actually is — and responds to the longing, even when she cannot immediately respond to the request.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Rosemary Basson's research on female sexual response demonstrates that women frequently experience responsive rather than spontaneous desire — meaning arousal follows stimulation and safety rather than preceding it. This is not dysfunction. It is design. Husbands who understand this stop waiting for their wives to initiate and start creating the conditions that make desire possible. The research also shows that when wives feel emotionally safe and relationally connected, their sexual responsiveness increases dramatically — not because they forced themselves, but because the conditions for their design were met.

THEOLOGICAL

The husband is commanded to dwell with his wife according to knowledge (1 Peter 3:7) — the word translated 'knowledge' carries the same root used for sexual intimacy throughout the Old Testament. To know your wife sexually is inseparable from knowing her as a person. The design difference is not a problem to be solved — it is an invitation to the kind of knowing that honors the covenant. A husband who refuses to understand how his wife's desire works is not only failing her relationally. He is failing the specific biblical command to know her.

Module Four

When She Has Shut Down

Female sexual shutdown is not stubbornness, low drive, or withholding – it is a protection response, and it will not reverse until its causes are addressed directly.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Sexual shutdown in women is almost always a symptom of something upstream – emotional disconnection, unresolved conflict, feeling unseen or undervalued, or a history of feeling that sex is something done to her rather than with her. The shutdown is not the problem. It is the signal. A wife in shutdown is not withholding sex. She is telling the truth about the emotional state of the marriage in the only language that finally got heard.**
- 2 Contempt is the single most reliable predictor of female sexual shutdown – when a wife feels criticized, dismissed, or disrespected by her husband consistently, her body will eventually refuse what her mind has not yet named. The connection between emotional contempt and sexual shutdown is not metaphorical. It is neurological. The same nervous system that processes emotional threat also governs sexual availability. A wife who feels safe opens. A wife who feels threatened closes. It is not a decision. It is a physiological response.**

3 Unaddressed sexual trauma — from before or within the marriage — is far more prevalent than either spouse typically acknowledges, and it shapes the sexual response in ways that require specific, patient, and informed care. One in four women has experienced sexual trauma before marriage. A significant number have experienced sexual coercion within marriage without naming it as such. These experiences do not disappear at the altar. They arrive in the marriage bed and operate silently until they are named, addressed, and healed through appropriate care.

4 Many wives in shutdown have tried to communicate what they need and been dismissed, minimized, or met with frustration — the shutdown is often the result of concluding that words will not work. This matters enormously for the husband who wants to understand what happened. In most cases, she told him. She told him differently, or earlier, or less clearly than he could hear — but she told him. The shutdown was not her first response. It was her last one.

5 Recovery from shutdown requires the husband to lead with sustained, non-sexual affection — physical warmth with no agenda, over a long enough period, that the wife’s nervous system begins to relearn safety. The word sustained is doing essential work in that sentence. One good week does not undo two years of emotional distance. The nervous system requires consistent evidence over time before it will update its assessment of the environment.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Peter Levine’s trauma research and Emily Nagoski’s work on sexual brakes and accelerators both point to the same reality – the female sexual response is exquisitely sensitive to threat cues, real or perceived. The sexual accelerator responds to safety, connection, and positive sensation. The brake responds to stress, threat, shame, and emotional disconnection. In a marriage where the brake has been consistently engaged over time, the accelerator becomes increasingly difficult to activate – not because desire is gone, but because the nervous system has learned to protect itself. Recovery requires removing the brake conditions far more than pressing the accelerator.

THEOLOGICAL

Ephesians 5:25–29 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church – sacrificially, consistently, and without coercion. Christ did not pressure, guilt, or withdraw from the church when she was unresponsive. He pursued her at cost to himself, created conditions of safety, and waited for her response. A husband whose primary response to his wife’s shutdown is pressure or withdrawal is operating outside his covenant calling. His calling is not to demand the response he wants. It is to create the conditions that make her flourishing – including her sexual flourishing – genuinely possible.

Module Five

When He Has Checked Out

Male sexual withdrawal is one of the most confusing and damaging dynamics a wife can experience – and one of the least talked about in Christian marriage spaces.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Male sexual withdrawal is not always about pornography – it can be driven by performance anxiety, fear of rejection, emotional disconnection, depression, or the accumulated weight of feeling like a failure as a husband. The cultural script says men always want sex. When a husband does not, neither spouse has language for what is happening. He cannot name it without feeling like he has failed at being male. She cannot name it without feeling like she has failed at being desirable.**
- 2 Pornography rewires the brain’s reward system away from real intimacy and toward a frictionless, consequence-free substitute – a husband who has used pornography extensively often finds real-sex with his wife emotionally demanding in ways that make avoidance easier than engagement. Pornography delivers dopamine without vulnerability, without the risk of rejection, without the emotional labor that real intimacy requires. Over time, the brain recalibrates toward the easier reward. The husband does not stop wanting sex. He stops wanting the kind that costs something.**

3 The wife of a checked-out husband almost universally concludes she is the problem — that she is unattractive, undesirable, or that he is getting his needs met elsewhere. This conclusion is devastating and almost always wrong. The wife who has drawn this conclusion is applying the only logic available to her. If her husband is not pursuing her, and she has been told her whole life that men always want sex, the only explanation that fits is that something is wrong with her. Correcting this conclusion requires her husband to name what is actually happening — which almost none of them do.

4 Performance anxiety creates a self-reinforcing cycle — the more a husband fears failure, the more he avoids, the more distance grows, the higher the stakes become, the more he avoids. What began as one failed encounter becomes a pattern of avoidance that eventually looks, from the outside, like disinterest. It is not disinterest. It is a man who has convinced himself that attempting and failing is worse than not attempting at all.

5 Restoration requires the husband to name what is happening rather than disappear into silence — and requires the wife to create a response environment that makes honesty feel safer than avoidance. He must break the silence, which requires more courage than most men have been asked to demonstrate in this domain. She must receive what he shares without weaponizing it, which requires more restraint than the situation naturally invites. Both are hard. Both are necessary.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on male sexual avoidance identifies shame as the primary driver — not low desire. Men who check out are rarely uninterested in sex. They are managing a shame spiral in which the risks of engagement feel greater than the rewards. Gottman’s work identifies emotional withdrawal — stonewalling — as one of the four primary predictors of marital collapse. Sexual stonewalling operates by the same mechanism and produces the same outcome: a marriage in which one spouse has stopped believing that showing up will produce anything other than pain.

THEOLOGICAL

The husband’s covenantal responsibility is not contingent on his emotional comfort or readiness. 1 Corinthians 7 places the obligation of meeting a spouse’s sexual needs on both partners without exception. Silence and avoidance are not neutral postures — they are covenant failures requiring the same repentance and repair as any other form of marital neglect. A husband who has checked out has not simply become less sexual. He has withdrawn from a covenant obligation — and the first step toward restoration is naming it honestly, to himself and to his wife.

Module Six

Low Male Libido

Low male libido is the most underaddressed sexual dynamic in Christian marriage – partly because men will not name it, and partly because the church has no framework for a husband who wants sex less than his wife.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Low male libido is far more common than reported – testosterone levels in men have declined significantly across the last three decades, and the majority of affected men have never had a medical conversation about it. Average testosterone levels in men today are measurably lower than they were in men of the same age a generation ago. The causes are multiple – sedentary lifestyle, obesity, environmental factors, chronic stress – and most of them are addressable. What is not addressed cannot be treated. And what is not named cannot be addressed.**
- 2 The causes are often physiological – low testosterone, thyroid dysfunction, sleep deprivation, obesity, chronic stress, and medication side effects, particularly SSRIs – and are frequently addressable once identified. SSRIs, prescribed to an enormous percentage of the adult population, list reduced libido as one of their most common side effects. Most men on SSRIs have never connected the medication to the symptom. Most doctors prescribing SSRIs have never asked about its sexual impact. This is a treatable problem going untreated because the conversation is not happening.**

3 The psychological dimension is equally significant — depression, low self-worth, unresolved trauma, and the chronic stress of financial pressure or vocational dissatisfaction suppress male desire in ways that are real, measurable, and rarely named. A man who is failing at work, who feels inadequate as a provider, who is carrying unaddressed depression — that man's body will often respond by withdrawing desire. The suppression is not a choice. It is a symptom. Treating the symptom without addressing its source produces at best temporary improvement.

4 A wife married to a low-libido husband experiences a specific and brutal form of rejection — she does not feel unattractive in the conventional sense, she feels unwanted, which is worse. There is a distinction between feeling your spouse does not find you attractive enough and feeling your spouse does not want you at all. The first is painful. The second is devastating. Many wives carry this wound in silence because the cultural script offers them no permission to name it.

5 A husband's covenantal responsibility does not disappear when desire is absent — he is called to pursue medical answers, communicate honestly with his wife, and engage her needs even in seasons when his own drive is diminished. Low libido is not a permission slip to opt out of the sexual dimension of the covenant. It is a medical condition requiring medical attention and honest communication. A husband who passively accepts diminished desire without seeking answers is not at peace with his body. He is abandoning his wife in a domain she has no power to address alone.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on hypoactive sexual desire disorder in men reveals that the condition is significantly underdiagnosed and undertreated, in part because male low libido contradicts cultural assumptions about male sexuality. The shame men carry around low desire is arguably heavier than the shame women carry — because it violates the script men have been handed about what masculinity requires. That shame produces silence, which produces continued suffering, which the wife interprets as evidence about her own desirability. The cycle is broken only when the husband names what is actually happening and takes medical and relational responsibility for addressing it.

THEOLOGICAL

Headship in marriage includes leading in the sexual domain — not performing on demand, but pursuing the health, honesty, and engagement that the covenant requires. A husband who passively accepts diminished libido without seeking medical help, without communicating with his wife, and without engaging her needs is not exercising headship. He is exercising absence. The biblical model of headship is Christlike sacrifice — not comfort-seeking passivity. Christ did not withdraw from the church because engagement was costly. He pursued her at the highest possible cost.

Module Seven

The Conversation You Have Never Had

Most couples have never had a direct, honest conversation about sex – what they want, what has hurt them, what is not working, and what they are hoping for. The absence of that conversation is doing more damage than most couples realize.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 The majority of married couples negotiate their sexual relationship entirely through behavior – pursuit, avoidance, compliance, and withdrawal – and never through direct language. This means the most important domain of the marriage is being managed by inference and assumption. Both spouses are making decisions based on what they believe the other person means – and those beliefs are almost always partially wrong and sometimes catastrophically wrong.**
- 2 Most spouses have sexual preferences, unmet needs, and past hurts they have never named – not because they do not want to, but because they have no framework and fear that naming a need will be received as a criticism or a demand. This fear is not irrational. Most couples have enough history with difficult conversations to know that the wrong framing at the wrong moment produces defensiveness rather than connection. So the need goes unspoken. And unspoken needs accumulate as resentment – whether or not either spouse intends them to.**

3 The language of desire is different from the language of complaint — ‘I miss being close to you that way’ opens a door that ‘we never have sex anymore’ locks permanently. This is not a minor stylistic distinction. It is the difference between an invitation and an indictment. The same underlying need — more sexual intimacy — expressed as longing invites the spouse into something. Expressed as accusation, it puts them on trial. The framing determines whether the conversation produces connection or defensiveness.

4 Timing and environment are not trivial — a conversation about sexual needs attempted in the middle of an argument, immediately before or after sex, or in a state of emotional exhaustion will almost certainly produce defensiveness rather than connection. The conversation about sex deserves the same intentionality you would give to any conversation about something that matters. A walk. A meal with no phones. A moment where both spouses are genuinely present and not already activated by conflict or fatigue.

5 Both spouses carry sexual history — previous relationships, formative experiences, and wounds — that shape their current responses in ways their partner cannot see. Naming that history is not optional for couples who want genuine intimacy. The way she tenses at a particular touch. The reason he disconnects at a particular moment. These responses have histories. Those histories can be told. And telling them is one of the most intimate acts available in a marriage.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on sexual communication consistently identifies it as one of the strongest predictors of sexual satisfaction – stronger than frequency, compatibility, or physical attraction. Couples who can speak directly and kindly about their sexual needs report dramatically higher satisfaction than couples who cannot, regardless of how often they have sex. The conversation is the intimacy. Partners who know what the other person needs, what the other person fears, and what the other person is hoping for are not just better sexual partners. They are fundamentally closer – because they have chosen to be known in the domain where most people remain most hidden.

THEOLOGICAL

Proverbs 31 describes a wife whose husband fully trusts her – the Hebrew word for trust implies safe vulnerability without fear of exploitation. The marriage bed is the one place in human experience where that kind of trust should be most fully expressed. A couple who cannot speak honestly about their sexual needs has not yet built the covenant safety that marriage was designed to produce. The conversation is not just a communication skill. It is an act of covenant faithfulness – choosing to be known, choosing to know, choosing to trust that the person you married can be trusted with the most vulnerable parts of who you are.

Module Eight

Frequency, Initiation, and the Power Dynamic

Who initiates, who declines, and who carries the weight of desire are not trivial logistics – they are the architecture of the sexual relationship, and the asymmetry almost always produces resentment in both directions.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 In most marriages one spouse carries the weight of initiation consistently – and the other spouse, regardless of their own desire level, comes to associate sex with obligation, pressure, or the need to manage their partner’s emotional state. The spouse who receives initiation consistently begins to experience it as a demand rather than an invitation. They develop an internal response to their partner’s approach – a brace, a calculation – that is the opposite of desire. And the initiating spouse, sensing that response, begins to feel that their desire is a burden rather than a gift.**
- 2 The spouse who initiates more frequently does not only experience rejection when declined – they experience a gradual erosion of desire itself, as the repeated vulnerability of initiation without reciprocation becomes psychologically unsustainable. Initiation is an act of vulnerability. Every approach is an exposure – I want you, I am reaching for you, I am making myself available to be received or turned away. When that exposure is turned away consistently, the psyche begins to protect itself by suppressing the desire that created the vulnerability.**

3 The spouse who declines more frequently is rarely indifferent — they are often managing their own shame about the gap, their own unmet emotional needs, or their body’s failure to produce desire on someone else’s timeline. The declining spouse is almost never in a position of power, despite appearing to be. They are managing the gap between what their partner needs and what they can currently provide. That gap produces its own shame — a quiet awareness that they are consistently disappointing the person they love in one of the most intimate domains of the marriage.

4 Refusal — particularly chronic refusal — is one of the most damaging relational acts in a marriage, not because sex is owed on demand, but because repeated rejection communicates to the initiating spouse that their desire is a burden rather than a gift. The damage is cumulative. The first refusal is a disappointment. The fifth is a pattern. The twentieth is a conclusion — about the marriage, about oneself, about whether desire itself is welcome here.

5 A shared initiation culture requires an explicit agreement — not a romantic one but a practical one — about frequency expectations, about how each spouse prefers to be approached, and about what a decline means and does not mean. The agreement is not unromantic. It is protective. It tells the initiating spouse that a no is information about the decliner’s current state, not a verdict on the initiating spouse’s desirability.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on initiation asymmetry identifies it as a primary driver of long-term sexual dissatisfaction — more predictive than physical compatibility or frequency. The initiating spouse gradually develops desire fatigue — a protective suppression of their own desire to avoid the pain of rejection. Once established, desire fatigue is difficult to reverse. The declining spouse, unaware of the cumulative damage, continues declining without understanding what each refusal is building toward. Couples who establish a shared initiation culture report dramatically higher satisfaction and longer sustained intimacy.

THEOLOGICAL

1 Corinthians 7:4-5 places the responsibility of meeting a spouse's sexual needs on both partners — not only on the one with higher desire. The command is mutual, active, and explicit. Paul frames sexual deprivation as creating an opportunity for spiritual attack — which means the power dynamic in sexual initiation carries spiritual weight that most couples have not been taught to recognize. A marriage in which one spouse consistently carries the entire weight of initiation is not operating within the covenant framework Paul describes. Both spouses are responsible. Both spouses are called to reach.

Module Nine

After the Wound: Rebuilding After Betrayal, Pornography, or Rejection

Sexual betrayal – whether through infidelity, pornography, or chronic refusal – leaves a specific kind of damage that ordinary marriage advice does not reach. Rebuilding requires more than forgiveness. It requires rebuilding the entire relational architecture.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 Sexual betrayal is distinct from other marital wounds because it attacks the one domain where a spouse was most vulnerable – the place where they were most naked, most exposed, and most trusting; the damage is therefore not merely relational but identity-level. When a spouse betrays within the sexual domain, they do not simply break a rule. They reach into the place where their spouse was most undefended and do damage there. The wound does not feel like betrayal of a contract. It feels like betrayal of a person.**
- 2 Pornography use by a husband is experienced by most wives not as a moral failure but as a personal rejection – she was available, she was willing, and he chose a screen. The logic is brutal and almost impossible to argue with from inside the wound. She offered herself and he chose something else. The fact that what he chose was a two-dimensional image rather than a person does not diminish the rejection. It deepens it – because it means he was not even choosing a real rival. He was choosing unreality over her reality.**

3 Chronic sexual refusal — sustained over months or years — constitutes a form of marital wound that is rarely named as such; the refused spouse carries the damage of repeated rejection without the cultural permission to call it what it is. There is no language for this wound in most churches. No support group. No category. The refused spouse is told to be patient, to pray, to try not to make it about themselves. What they are not told is that what is happening to them is a real wound, producing real damage, that deserves to be named.

4 Premature pressure to resume sexual intimacy after betrayal — before the wounded spouse has processed the violation — produces a compliance that looks like reconciliation but is actually a second wound layered on the first. The wounding spouse, desperate to believe the damage has been repaired, presses for a return to normalcy. The wounded spouse complies. What happens in that compliance is not healing. It is performance — and the performance deepens the original damage because it requires the wounded spouse to pretend they are somewhere they are not.

5 Genuine rebuilding requires transparent accountability, sustained non-sexual affection, honest naming of what happened and what it cost, and enough time for the wounded spouse's nervous system to relearn safety with this specific person. The timeline for that relearning is not set by the wounding spouse's guilt or their sense of having made sufficient effort. It is set by the wounded spouse's nervous system — which knows, at a level beneath language, whether the environment is genuinely safe or merely claiming to be.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Betrayal trauma research — particularly Jennifer Freyd’s work — identifies sexual betrayal as a distinct category of trauma whose severity correlates directly with the degree of dependence and trust in the relationship. The more intimate the bond, the more catastrophic the betrayal. Recovery is not linear, is not primarily cognitive, and cannot be rushed. What heals it is not time alone but the sustained presence of safety — demonstrated through consistent behavior over time, not declarations of remorse. The wounding spouse’s job is not to ask to be forgiven. It is to become, through sustained action, the kind of person it is safe to forgive.

THEOLOGICAL

Hosea’s covenant with Gomer is the most direct biblical picture of sexual betrayal and restoration within a covenant framework. God does not simply forgive Israel’s unfaithfulness. He pursues her, speaks tenderly to her, leads her back through the wilderness, and renews the covenant at great personal cost. The wounding spouse’s calling is not to manage their own guilt or wait for forgiveness to arrive. It is to do the sustained, costly work of pursuit and repair that makes the wounded spouse’s return feel safe rather than pressured — to become, in their conduct, the evidence that the covenant is worth returning to.

Module Ten

Physical Intimacy Across the Seasons of Marriage

Every marriage passes through seasons that reshape sexuality – and couples who navigate them well do not do so by accident. They share a framework that allows them to adapt without losing each other.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 The postpartum season is one of the most sexually disruptive in marriage – hormonal shifts, physical recovery, sleep deprivation, and the psychological transition to parenthood combine to produce a period where the wife’s body is temporarily inaccessible and the husband’s needs are unmet, often without either spouse having the language to navigate it. This season is almost entirely predictable and almost entirely unaddressed in premarital preparation. The couple who has been told this is coming, who has agreed in advance on how to navigate it with patience and honesty, is the couple who emerges from it intact.**

2 Perimenopause and menopause produce hormonal changes that directly affect female sexual response — vaginal dryness, reduced lubrication, physical discomfort, and altered desire — that are medical realities requiring medical attention, not evidence of lost desire or failed marriage. Most couples navigate this season without a doctor, without a conversation, and without a framework. The wife suffers in silence. The husband draws his own conclusions. Both accumulate unspoken assumptions about what the changes mean for the marriage. Almost all of those assumptions are wrong.

3 Aging reshapes male sexuality as well — slower arousal, changed refractory periods, and testosterone decline alter the mechanics of sex in ways that require adaptation rather than avoidance. Couples who adapt together remain intimate. Couples who avoid the conversation drift. The mechanics change. The desire does not have to. The couples who continue making love into their seventies and eighties are not biologically different from the couples who stopped. They made different decisions about what the changes meant.

4 Chronic illness — including depression, chronic pain, cancer treatment, and disability — does not eliminate the need for physical intimacy but requires a renegotiation of what intimacy looks like. Physical limitation is real. But the need for closeness, warmth, and the covenant expression of bodily belonging does not disappear when the body is limited. Couples who expand their definition of intimacy to include what is currently possible consistently report better marital satisfaction and better individual health outcomes.

5 The empty nest season is the most underrated sexual opportunity in marriage — freed from the relentless demands of parenting, couples who have maintained their connection often experience a second sexual flourishing that rivals the early years. This outcome is not guaranteed. It is built. The couple who arrives at the empty nest still curious about each other, still investing in the marriage, still choosing each other above every competing demand, finds a freedom in that season that younger marriages cannot access.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Longitudinal research on marital sexuality consistently shows that couples who maintain sexual intimacy into their sixties, seventies, and beyond share one common characteristic – they talked about it. They treated their sexual relationship as something to be actively tended rather than passively experienced. They adapted to physical changes rather than surrendering to them. The couples who stop are rarely those with insurmountable physical limitations. They are the ones who stopped regarding their sexual connection as worth the conversation, worth the medical attention, worth the vulnerability of continuing to reach for each other in a changing body.

THEOLOGICAL

The covenant of marriage is not seasonal – it is permanent. The commitment made at the altar does not include an expiration clause for the physical union. Song of Solomon portrays a sexuality that is fully embodied, fully joyful, and fully integrated with the couple's entire life together – not a phase of early marriage but a continuous expression of the covenant. Each season reshapes the expression. The covenant protects the commitment. The question for every couple in every season is not whether the body can do what it once did. It is whether they are still choosing to honor the covenant with whatever the body currently offers.

Module Eleven

Building a Permanent Intimacy Culture

Couples who maintain deep sexual intimacy for decades are not lucky. They are intentional. They have built a marriage culture that treats intimacy as something to be protected, tended, and returned to – not as a reward for a good week but as a foundation of the covenant itself.

MODULE FOUNDATIONS

- 1 A permanent intimacy culture begins with a shared theology – both spouses understanding and agreeing that sexual intimacy is a covenant responsibility, not a preference, and that its consistent neglect is a spiritual matter, not merely a relational inconvenience. The couples who sustain intimacy across decades are not the ones who feel most in love. They are the ones who decided that the covenant required it, and acted on that decision on days when feeling did not support it. Theology sustains what emotion cannot.**

2 Daily rituals — the six-second kiss, meaningful physical greeting and farewell, non-sexual touch without agenda — are not romantic gestures but neurological maintenance; they keep the body's bonding system activated between sexual encounters. Oxytocin — the primary bonding hormone — is released through sustained physical contact. It does not require sexual activity to release. Couples who maintain daily physical connection between sexual encounters are chemically bonding every day. Couples who do not are allowing the bond to gradually attenuate through disconnection.

3 A protected date culture is the structural foundation of sustained intimacy — couples who maintain a consistent, non-negotiable weekly date report dramatically higher sexual frequency and satisfaction than those who allow the date to be consumed by logistics and parenting. The date is not the destination. It is the container. It is the weekly protected space where the couple exists apart from every role they play for everyone else — where they are not parents, not employees, not family members managing competing demands. They are spouses.

4 Periodic honest conversation about the sexual relationship — what is working, what is not, what each spouse needs — prevents the silent accumulation of unmet needs that eventually produces the shutdown, withdrawal, and resentment that the earlier modules address. The conversations that sustain a marriage are not dramatic. They are regular. A ten-minute check-in once a month. A willingness to name something before it becomes a pattern. A commitment to stay in honest contact in the domain where silence does the most damage.

- 5 Couples who pray together, serve together, and maintain active spiritual connection report consistently higher sexual satisfaction – not because spirituality is a technique for better sex, but because the spiritual bond and the physical bond draw from the same relational well. When two people stand together before God – when they are honest with Him about who they are and what they need, when they pray for each other by name – they are practicing the same vulnerability that sexual intimacy requires.**

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research on long-term sexual satisfaction — including Gottman’s longitudinal studies and Esther Perel’s work on desire in long-term relationships — points to the same conclusion: couples who sustain desire over decades maintain novelty, prioritize the relationship above all other competing demands, and treat their partner as a person to be continually known rather than a role to be managed. The culture is not a program or a curriculum. It is the product of a thousand small decisions made consistently over time — the decision to reach, to show up, to notice, to name, to stay in contact with the person you married.

THEOLOGICAL

Ecclesiastes 9:9 commands a man to enjoy life with the wife he loves — the verb is active, present tense, and unqualified by season or circumstance. It is not a suggestion contingent on how the marriage is going. It is a command to choose enjoyment of this specific person as a sustained posture of life. What Module 1 establishes theologically, Module 11 sustains practically. The marriage that begins with a theology of nakedness without shame ends — decades later — with two people who have chosen, over and over, in every season, to be fully known and fully safe with one another. That is not luck. That is covenant kept.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Want to Learn More?

This ebook is your companion to the full Naked and Unashamed course. The complete course includes video teachings for all eleven modules, companion worksheets for each module, guided discussion tools for couples, and access to an ongoing community of marriages doing this work.

Check out the complete course at:

MrMarriage.com

Video Teachings • Module Worksheets • Couples Community • Coaching

lloydallen.org

One-on-one and couples coaching with Lloyd Allen

MarriagesSaved.com

Additional courses, ebooks, and tools for marriages in every season

“The marriage that begins with a theology of nakedness without shame ends – decades later – with two people who have learned to be fully known and fully safe with one another.”

Lloyd Allen

Marriage Therapist • Coach • Speaker