

## Blog Posts by Benj and Erica Miller

### WARNING:

This post and the others I'll be writing for this blog are specifically for Christian husbands. If you don't fit those two criteria, feel free to read, but please know that this may not resonate with you.

### Part I

Lying in bed next to my wife, staring at the ceiling and desiring a sexual connection with her may be the loneliest place in the world. I crave being wanted by her and her alone . . . yes, sexually. I KNOW there is nothing physically amazing about me as a sexual specimen. In fact, I would argue that the male gender got screwed when God was divvying out attractive body parts. I want to feel like my wife's hero . . . the arms she wants to run to and never leave . . . the guy that captivates her heart and melts away the worries of the world . . . the one she desperately desires to express this to sexually.

So here's where I'm perplexed . . .

Marriage is hard work. Sex in a marriage can sometimes seem impossible.

But why is that? Marriage is a gift. A prize. A highlight.

Why is it such a struggle?

And sex . . . well sex is awesome, right? Mmmmm . . . sometimes.

*I don't believe sex within marriage should be a struggle. I sure wish it wasn't. I think most of us guys are on the same page here.*

So, I'd like to share with you a glimpse into my sex life. I want to let you into my mental bedroom for a few reasons:

- I've taken the time to try to explore and understand some of my emotions and issues around the subject. Emotions I believe most men have but do not understand.
- The second reason is most people simply don't talk about this stuff... and the ones who do often don't have the grounding of a healthy marriage.
- The conversation is worth the wrestling. It is an area of deep need, hurt, and opportunity for most people.

I have a hunch that what I experience is not unique but rather a plague. Maybe my feeble attempt at expressing my thoughts and discoveries can help your journey.

My prayer is that you would be encouraged about your normal-ness, better understand yourself, and have some tools that can create some positive momentum.

*"Things that matter most are a fight."  
– Jen Hatmaker*

LIFE OR DEATH . . . BUT WAY MORE IMPORTANT

It has been almost a week since my wife and I had anything resembling a sexual moment. I've hinted a few times, but they fly by or get shrugged off as the least important thing on the never-ending list of to-do's.

There is a ticking sound in the back of my skull. The timer on the bomb is set to detonate. I'm not sure *what* will happen when it times-out. I'm not sure *when* it will actually time-out. 10 minutes? A few days? It creeps in like the desperation of claustrophobia. *I have to fix this* before something goes horribly wrong.

I can distract myself but am frequently reminded of the impending doom. This void can be all-consuming. This is one of the few areas of my being that only my wife can breath life into. My thoughts aren't rational, but they are real. It feels like life or death . . . except more important.

Besides the unproductive nature of the mental cycles being burned, if these emotions go unresolved for too long, we as Christian husbands face three very dangerous temptations.

*Temptation One: Building Emotional Walls*

When we are empty sexually, we cannot be open emotionally. Because this is (stereotypically) opposite for our wives, it creates a nasty negative cycle where husband and wife continue to starve each other while waiting on the other to reverse the cycle.

Without really knowing what we are doing, we erect emotional walls that protect us from the pain of these situations. I subconsciously decide I am not going to open up, converse, give, love, and so on because truly I can't take any more pain. With the walls up, it is impossible to feel connected or loved.

In one of our sexual droughts, the ticking in my brain was blaring at me about the pain of the neglect. I remember standing at the top of our stairs crying out to God to give me the strength to go downstairs and be near my wife. The woman I love. Who I want to show love. Who had done no wrong. But it took more willpower than I had at the moment to not show my bitterness. God came through big that night . . . but it's a battle that can easily get the best of us.

*Temptation Two: Turning to Distractions*

The second thing that happens is we turn to distractions. Some distractions aren't bad by nature, but they only numb the pain. It may be work, television, a book, a game, a hobby. In true confession, I subconsciously run to my phone as an escape. It doesn't matter if it's work, social apps, or games. We search for anything that draws us away from the emotion of the physical desperation. While these diversions aren't inherently bad, it is important to take note of what is happening, mostly because these behaviors will only build bigger emotional walls and take us deeper into this darkness.

### *Temptation Three: The False Solution*

Even more dangerous is when the distractions go to dark places. The *other* places we feel can actually fill those needs. We start letting our internet browsing go a little deeper down the rabbit hole. We start letting our casual conversations with other women go a little too far. We start getting bitter and seeing “greener grass” everywhere we look. These temptations lead to bad decisions and, in the end, scars, hurt, shame and guilt.

All of these temptations work against us. They become roadblocks to creating a healthy environment of participation.

In Part III I’ll cover the four options you have and how you can react to the temptations and situations we’ve discussed so far.

***God, every day we are faced with decision after decision. Temptation after temptation. It can often seem as though life never gets any easier, but our resolve and strength is found in you alone. Help us as men to not succumb to the snares set before us in our marriages. Help us carve out a setting of protection and health for ourselves, our families, and our marriages. Let us keep our eyes straight and focused, leaning on you, the author and perfecter of our faith. Amen.***

Part 3 – by Erica Miller

My husband told me he had been working on writing some thoughts, organizing some things he had been learning to try to get clarity for himself and maybe to share with other Christian husbands. He asked if I would glance at it and maybe help edit. Of course! Then I saw the topic of sex...

Oh, no!

This is not an area of life or our relationship in which I feel super comfortable, knowledgeable, or especially confident. But it wasn't my document or about my side of things, so a little editing and a few suggestions couldn't be too hard to offer.

As I read his words, I was deeply moved. I received the gift of a new glimpse into his heart. He wrote to you all in such an honest and vulnerable way, exposing some feelings that we have talked about before, but I didn't truly understand. He thinks his processing on all this and sharing it is for his personal growth and then to spur on some thoughts for you husbands.

I think that God first wanted to use my husband's written words to speak to my heart and to allow me to understand my sweet man more intimately. I care enough to respond to what he has written because I would guess that your wife's thoughts have some similarities to mine (but maybe not, so please let these posts be conversation starters for the two of you)!

While sex in our relationship has been an ongoing area of up's and down's over these past 15 years of marriage, my husband's words bring new clarity in a few areas.

1. The experience of sexual intimacy runs deep in a man. Deep in his heart...not just in his junk. Without meaning to, I (like many wives) had chalked up his desire for sexual experience and release as purely a physical need. Like a garbage can that needs to be emptied...and, embarrassingly, but honestly, with that much respect and care at times. I certainly did not look at his desire as his heart wanting to give and share a connecting physical experience.
2. My husband is after my heart not my lady parts. He desires I trust him, believe his good intentions, prioritize him. Sex is not the end goal. ***The end goal is openness, closeness, connection.*** I choose to lean into the idea that my man is safe and longs for all of me to be available to him because that is a place of freedom for both of us. As a result, I am much more open to frequent and rich sex.
3. My guy loves me as I am. *He is not my mirror image.* He does not see me as I see me. I am so blessed to have a man who does not look at me with eyes that criticize every extra pound I think I need to lose, is somehow blind to my body parts too large or too small, chooses not to complain about the callouses on my hands, and the list goes on and on. We women are so stinking critical of ourselves, and we think certainly everyone else must see us this way too. God has used my husband to encourage me in areas where I am ridiculously hard on myself. I can "come as I am" with him and he loves me the same. No matter what.

**I wonder how your wife would respond if you shared the pieces of Benj's posts that resonate with you. What would she realize that she presently isn't seeing? How would she see you differently if she saw more clearly into your heart?**

## FOUR OPTIONS

During the dry spell where life was happening and we were not spending intimate time together, one night we were able to work in a quickie. You know the quickie, right? No time for foreplay. She's just allowing me to have sex with her.

Afterwards, I was struck with anger. I was hurt. I didn't really understand why I was hurt. I had received what I "needed." As I thought about it longer, I realized that what I needed wasn't sex, *it was the emotional connection through the sharing of the act of sex.*

I tried for the next week to shake off my anger. I knew it was my issue, not my wife's. I didn't want to put this on her, but it was affecting my ability to treat her well. I'd put up emotional walls to protect myself.

Finally, in a meeting with my older, wiser (and well-sexed) coach, I laid it all out there, "we need to talk about my sex life today!"

After a few minutes of me telling stories and spilling emotions, he starting jotting down four words:

- **Refusing**
- **Allowing**
- **Participating**
- **Initiating**

Clarity dripped out as he used those four buckets. It became so obvious when spelled:

- Refusing: Husband, "can we?" Wife, "no."
- Allowing: Husband, "can we?" Wife, "sure, here you go (lays silently)."
- Participating: Husband, "can we?" Wife, "let's do this!"
- Initiating: Wife, "want to . . . ?" Husband, "Am I DREAMING?!?!?"

Husbands . . . *you know*. It's like this:

### REFUSING

Refusing is the ultimate rejection for a man. When we initiate sex, it exposes us to a fully vulnerable place where we most deeply desire to be received. It is our desire to be close and connected with our spouse. When we are denied, it is a painful rejection of our manhood. It just plain sucks!

It sucks because the act of sex is more than physical to us (even though some of us don't want to admit it). We can't explain why or how, but it's true. We all wish we could explain to our spouse the true level on which we experience it, but most of us lack the words or even understanding to properly communicate these feelings.

We men are created this way. We want to be wanted and desired. I recently heard a TED talk where I learned that rejection is the only emotion that registers in the body as PHYSICAL pain. Not just emotional, relational or

intellectual, but the body actually responds as if there is physical pain. This triggers our fight or flight mechanisms and increases stress.

While we feel refusal as rejection . . . it isn't always. Sometimes it's just necessary due to circumstances. If you are able to have a healthy conversation about how this goes down, consider asking your wife:

*"Please handle with care. Show compassion, understanding, and set a time in the very near future where you can make it happen – then own making it happen. The thought of rejection two times in a row is scary and will lead to bitterness and reluctance to continue to approach you."*

## **ALLOWING**

Allowing is what my coach referred to as "pin-cushion sex." Allowing is simply when the sex happens, but my wife isn't very involved. For me, most of the time it is more mental than physical. My wife's mind is simply somewhere else and I know it. Apparently, my junk isn't as mind-fixing to her as her breasts are to me.

This is a pretty broad category. I used to think this was a "quickie," but it's not true. A "quickie" could be allowing, but it could also be participating (with not too much effort ;-)).

Here's the main thing – a quickie can be a very important stop-gap measure. It can satiate a physical desire for some amount of time until you can get to one of the next steps, but it is not a well-rounded diet.

The mistake here is that our wives think, "we've had sex." Yes, we have . . . kind of. I had sex, you got sexed. It was not really a "we" thing. We satiated the physical need but just gave some fumes to the emotional need. None of us can run on fumes for too long. Your wife will never understand this unless you get courageous enough to let her into your heart and explain it.

## **PARTICIPATING**

I believe this should be the goal for the majority of the relationship. Participating is where both parties are actively present, interested and involved. This is deeply important. There is a connection that happens here that is satisfying on every level: physical, emotional, even spiritual. *Participating happens when sex becomes a WE experience and not a ME experience.*

## **INITIATING**

Initiating would be where the wife requests and leads the physical activity. Too often marital conversations get stuck here. We men want the wives to initiate because we are so broken over the repeated rejections. As a result, we retreat and beg or wait for the wife to initiate. While her initiating is extremely flattering, it isn't what we genuinely crave.

If a marriage contained a regular amount of "participating" with the occasional "allowing" and healthy "refusing," then the desire for the wife to be the initiator would fade to the background. It wouldn't be an emotional need but rather a flattering nice-to-have.

In my next post, I'll show you the key that will unlock this entire puzzle. You won't want to miss it.

***Heavenly Father, help us to be intentional with this struggle. Hope is not a strategy and we can't will things to get better. We have to actively, purposefully refuse, allow, participate and initiate. Help us as men to communicate clearly and effectively with our spouses and pray that the way we love her would always glorify you. Amen.***

So why is this whole sexual struggle such a big deal? To us as women, why is a sexual connection so hard sometimes? I don't have a definitive answer to that question, but I do have some ideas:

1. God designed us differently in the need for and think about it all the time department. See, you men aren't "right" in the frequency, type, intensity, whatever of how sex should be happening in your marriage. And women aren't "wrong" if we desire less of all that or something different. Likewise, you are not "bad" because of what you want and we aren't "good." There are no definitive lines in this area of marriage. We are just straight up different. In some areas, it's acceptable to agree to disagree, but this isn't one of them. We, husbands and wives, have to stay in the game of figuring this out. Accept that we are different.

I know very few women who have more sexual desire/drive than their husband. We know God doesn't make mistakes. In making us such different creatures, He must have had (and still has) a plan for making this high desire (attention) – low desire (attention) thing work. ***Maybe it's in the wrestling out of our differences, learning one another, giving to one another out of love, and putting the other first.... Maybe in all of that, we understand and experience God and our spouse more richly.***

- What each woman does desire is connection. A deep connection with her man. What so many of us women miss though is how deeply important sexual connection is for you. We truly are not wired like that. We enjoy it when it happens, but the need for such a connection is not a daily thing. Hear me. We do not have sex on the brain 24/7. My husband and I have joked that if it's getting close to bedtime and we haven't had sex, then he thinks I have probably chosen that I am not interested in having sex that night. When the reality is that I just haven't thought about sex at all. It's not that I chose not to; it just hasn't even shown up on my list of thoughts. We are so different.

2. Women do not realize the man's heart-need for sexual connection. Honestly, we don't get it. We don't have it the same way as you. It's not that we don't love you any less than you love us. In an effort to understand, we say it's hormones or a "man need/thing" because just like you don't get how we don't think about sex all the time, we women don't understand how or why you do. More so, I don't think most women understand this "man need" is truly a heart's desire for connection and closeness.

3. ***We do not treasure ourselves well.*** We feel inadequate, awkward, insecure. You know how critical we are of ourselves as women, and all you are hearing are the lies, the voices that are actually escaping our mouths. There are many more where those few came from. We work to be good at all we do, and with this overly condemning mindset, how could we possibly compare to that beautiful woman flaunting herself half-dressed in the primetime TV commercial? So, how do we women love another well when we aren't even loving ourselves well? Doesn't happen and you husbands are neglected and pushed aside as a result.

4. Most women connect through talking, quality time together, or an act of helpfulness from you. THEN we are more open to having sex. Men have sex then are more open to having sex....oops! I mean, men have sex then are more open to the talking, time together and so on.

5. **The long list of to-do's.** Truly, many women cannot or choose not to turn off the demands of the to-do list long enough to engage well with you. Guess there is truth to the stereotypes of a man's ability to compartmentalize and focus quickly (like a microwave oven) as compared to the woman's need for things to move slowly with an environment that is just right (like a CrockPot). *No matter the absolute reason, choosing the list over the connection is a frustrating reality for so many couples.*

6. If your wife is a mom, perhaps especially to young kids or babies, being touched for the umpteenth time by yet another person in a single day can be overwhelming. So much touch can lead to a woman feeling like she is not her own person but rather just an extension of everyone else. She can lose herself in this mom role. Then along you come, touching and getting close, and unfortunately, the timing just doesn't work and the bomb may go off.

I am not trying to give you a list of excuses for why things may be tough in this area of your marriage. I want to give a voice to a few of the variables that may be playing into the tension you and your wife are having. **Talk about it.** Create safe space for her to speak truthfully. Receive humbly what she may share. Ask her why the sex connection is so hard for her sometimes. She may not exactly know why so see if any of the reasons offered here resonate with her. Chances are she has some other reasons that are bogging her down.

***Father, help us to step into this tension instead of avoiding it altogether. To resolve these conflicts in a healthy and faithful way. Allow us wives to step out of our own shoes and into those of our husbands and vice versa. None of this happens without you and you are using it all to refine us in your image. Thank you for marriage and for the things we are learning here. Amen.***



## I Dream of Hot

I saw her shower and dress this morning. So glorious! Would it be okay if I took a picture and made it my screensaver at work? Probably not. Don't worry, I'll hold that image tight in my mind. My mind wanders. Sometimes to past memories of special moments, places or positions we've had together. Sometimes to places in the future, territories unexplored.

I have been exploring why my mind goes to these places. What I've found is while some of these thoughts are from negative influences from over the years, the root desire is openness. We want to be open to our wives, and we long for our wives to be open to us. Our sexual intimacy is a reflection of this openness. Remember, for us men, this physical act is a reflection of an emotional connection and desire. So if our wives are closed off physically in some area, we subconsciously translate this to an area where she is closed off emotionally. Although this may not be logical, there is often some relevance of truth. Remember a wife's openness in the bedroom is driven by her level of emotional connectedness to you! As a result it is very hard for our wives to just flip a switch and open up 100% to us sexually.

So what's my point? What am I advocating?

The answer is simply this: ***openness***

I don't know what that looks like in your bedroom, but there is an extremely high probability that there is work to be done outside of the bedroom first.

All I know is that openness between a husband and wife is the fullness of intimacy. To know and be fully known. That is beautiful.

***The biggest thing we can do as husbands to foster this openness is stop thinking about sex for a minute.***

Start focusing on your wife in a new way. Begin a search to discover your wife's emotional equivalent of sex. What is it that opens her heart and creates that connection? You must work to go deeper. Find the specific activities that speak directly to her heart. Think about what "refusing, allowing, participating, and initiating" look like in her area of connection and intimacy.

*My wife loves to take walks at the end of the day.* I hated the idea and would let her go out on her own or with a kid-filled stroller (refusing). It took me far too long to realize that she was asking me to walk with her as a way to get rid of distractions and be able to just talk. She talks, thinks, and shares more effectively when she's active and separated from the mess of the house. When I finally got wise to this, I would jump at the chance to join her (participating). When I sensed she needed to talk, I would encourage us to take a walk together (initiating). It's been a game changer.

Here are some next steps you can take to get there with your wife. ***Take it slow; you are on fragile ground!***

Get honest with yourself about YOUR emotions and feelings about your sexual intimacy with your wife.

Study your wife. Find her love language. Find the keys to her heart that open the door of intimacy. Pray with and for her! Don't rush past this step. The longer you can hang out here the more effective you will be moving into the next few steps.

Then take a giant risk of vulnerability and create a conversation with her about some of the thoughts we've talked about that resonate with your heart. If you can't find the words, maybe you ask her to read some of what I've written here. Feel free to make use of the parts that resonate!

If you can have a positive conversation about sexual intimacy in your home, it can open the door for you to challenge yourself as a couple. When you are ready, here's something I've seen work more than once. The challenge is this: Ask your wife to say "yes" every time you makes a pass at her for one month. A few "allowings" are fine but ask her to try her best to "participate."

The first time we tried this, we misunderstood the challenge. We thought we were supposed to have sex everyday for one month. Sounds awesome – nah. Was good for a few days, then even I wanted a break. Just be real with your desire for one month. Don't force it and don't hold back.

That's it. I'm not going to tell you the results. I'm not going to promise anything. I simply think this is an experiment worth doing. Most wives find out that a few "yes's" go a long way. After the first few days of excitement, the desire likely isn't nearly as often as she fears.

Do it. Say "yes" for a month!

Figuring out how to have an amazing, consistent, healthy sexual relationship can be super overwhelming. Especially if you are in a current state of refusal, drought or closedness. Just take a step. One step in the direction you desire to go. Be courageous. It's worth it. Your wife is the biggest gift outside of life and salvation. Your relationship is a gift.

I believe that the kingdom needs to raise up some strong men, and strong men have amazing support in their own kingdom, their household.

I am praying for you.

***God, thank you for these lessons. Thank you for constantly guiding us through the tough times when it feels like nothing matters but the pains and hardships we face. Thank you for bringing us through those circumstances and for the lessons learned. Help us as men to grasp these concepts at an integral level. That we wouldn't merely just read this, but absorb it and allow ourselves to grow from it and from you. Amen.***

Part 7 by Erica Miller

My husband's explanation of the four buckets of refusing, allowing, participating, and initiating was heart-changing for me. Make SO much sense! If you missed [that post](#), you have to go back and read it!

These buckets definitely apply in how a woman receives love too. Knowing your spouse's love language is so helpful to taking first steps in connecting with her.

Consider these examples of the buckets in your wife's love language . . .

- **Gifts**
  - Refusing: Give her nothing.
  - Allowing: Give her a gift on her birthday and other major holidays.
  - Participating: Buy something with her. Ask her what she would like and get it for her.
  - Initiating: Surprise her with something.
    - "I was thinking of you" written on a cup of coffee, mani/ pedi gift certificate, or new shirt could go a long way. Doesn't have to be expensive . . . show her you were thinking of her.
- **Words**
  - R: Say nothing. Remain distant, quiet, reserved with your words.
  - A: Wait until she asks then say something nice. (Note: if she is asking, she isn't hearing it from you!)
  - P: Say something general. "I love you." "You are special to me." Be attentive and make sincere eye contact.
  - I: Say or write something specific with examples of traits you love about her or pointing out special things you see her doing.
- **Quality Time**
  - R: Do not make time to spend together without distractions or undivided attention. Choose your hobbies, job, friends, the game, etc over her.
  - A: Say yes begrudgingly to doing something and being together. Let your phone interrupt you as much as it wants.
  - P: Be intentional about being together. Listen to her, ask questions, and share yourself. Do things you both enjoy.
  - I: Plan times of being together. Pre-answer all the questions about where you are going, what you are doing, how the time will go. Take the decision-making off your wife's plate or make a fun game of giving her options. Take lead in having face-to-face time for talking connection and shoulder-to-shoulder time for shared experience, which you will probably talk about after!
- **Acts of service**
  - R: Forget or be unavailable to help her with tasks. No checkmarks on the "honey-do" list for you.
  - A: Require a weekly "honey-do" list and give her an attitude about actually doing it. Require that she manage you in completing the tasks on the list in a timely manner.
  - P: Openly receive the list. Embrace the tasks and do them well by the time she has asked you finish them. Partner with your wife on projects and work alongside her.
  - I: Ask for ways you can help her. Watch what she does and step in to help her. Without being asked, fold a basket of laundry, unload the dishwasher, clean her car . . .

- **Touch** — whoa?!?! Are you a lucky guy or what?! I don't know many women who have Touch as a top love language but if your woman does, you may want to keep quiet about it! Just kidding! It is likely that her desire for touch is for non-sexual touch . . .
  - R: Be cold and keep your hands to yourself. Turn away from her attempts at snuggling, kissing, holding hands.
  - A: Receive her physical closeness annoyingly and without reciprocation.
  - P: Respond to her physical contact. Hug back. Put your arm around her lovingly as she leans into you. Say yes to a massage request.
  - I: Reach for her. Kiss her hand, her cheek. Snuggle first. Offer a massage. Greet her with a hug and kiss. Lead in affectionate, non-sexual touch.

My dear husband says that I have all of these love languages. Sometimes that isn't easy for him because there isn't a go-to that always works. Sometimes it is easier because he can show me love, value and his desire for connection by making me a coffee when I didn't ask, by leaving me a note or telling me something great he sees in me, by planning a date night or a time of being together at home more focused and connecting than just crashing in front of the TV, by unloading the dishwasher when I haven't mentioned it, or by giving me a massage. Choices. All of which say to me that he cares for me and wants to connect with me in my world, in my way. Granted, I have to be open to seeing his efforts at showing me love . . .

You know, I am convinced that the night Benj wrote about standing at the top of the stairs frustrated with our lack of sexual connection and desiring for us to be intimate with one another was the night that I very clearly remember him walking into the ridiculous mess of our kitchen at the end of a busy day and going straight for the dishwasher. While I was sitting on the couch taking care of the baby, he unloaded that thing so lovingly, talking all the while and asking questions about my day. In our house, I am the one who doesn't like to shut down for the night until the kitchen is clean, so I tend to own the job of unloading the dishwasher. But that night, he chose to reach for me, to take a burden off of me, to create space for me to breathe a little more easily . . . all by unloading the dishwasher without being asked to! And it was so sexy!

I know that many of you men are discouraged and have stopped trying in the area of sexual connection. Heck, y'all may have stopped trying in many areas. We women have hurt you. We have refused you so many times. You have reached out and we have rolled over. We have treated sex and, ultimately, you as a burden. We have not held your hearts gently in our hands. We have walled up and closed you out. We don't see your efforts to show us love, or we see them as manipulation to get something from us. We hurt you. We are broken women. We need to confess this to you. We need to repent of our role in your pain. We need you to forgive us. We need to forgive you for what you aren't, have done, haven't done, and accept you for who you are. And we need you to do the same for us. And since you, man of God, are the one reading this, be the one to step forward and start. Forgive her. Confess to her. Repent and change. Extend yourself to your woman in love. Try. Please try.

***Prayer: Thank you, God, for these conversations. Let them continue with your glory as our aim.***