How to **RESPOND WHEN YOUR HUSBAND DOESN'T WANT SEX**

I want him to want me

by **SHERI MUELLER**

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

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Author's Note

OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE PRIVACY of clients and others who have shared their stories and entrusted me with their experiences, all stories in this book are composites—fictional accounts based on the experiences of many individuals. Similarities to any real person are coincidental and unintentional. However, my personal experiences shared within these pages are accurate and truthful, and they are fully approved by my loving and supportive husband.

This book is not intended as a therapy manual, nor is it intended to replace the advice of physicians or other licensed health professionals. Individual readers are solely responsible for their own physical or mental health care decisions and should consult a licensed professional in such matters. Neither the publisher nor I accept responsibility for any adverse effects individuals claim to experience, whether directly or indirectly, from the information contained in this book.

Introduction

THIS BOOK STARTED WITH ONE WOMAN—one woman who was brave and bold enough to contact me in response to an article called "Going Sexless." Her words were raw, direct, and filled with pain. She seemed astonished that there were other women like her with a husband who seldom participates in sex. She signed her email, "Needs Help."

Needs Help contacted me through the nonprofit ministry my husband and I founded in 2004 called Marriagetrac—an organization dedicated to transforming ordinary marriages into great marriages. The "Going Sexless" article had appeared in our Marriagetrac monthly e-newsletter, and it had apparently struck a nerve.

This is what Needs Help wrote:

Oh wow! I thought I was the only woman who feels this way! I get sick of reading or hearing from other women how much their men think about sex constantly and how much they want it because my husband is the total opposite. I have found pornography on his laptop, and he lies about it and shrugs it off as no big deal. I was blamed for looking at his

history. We even went to counseling over this with our pastor and it was completely looked over! It's so frustrating that my husband gets to be this way, and I'm the one who hurts deeply. I am a wife who is neglected sexually. He doesn't even kiss me anymore.

Her email was dated June 11, 2014. I had recently graduated with a master's degree in professional counseling. I'd been running a nonprofit by day and attending grad school at night. (Crazy, I know!) I didn't know it at the time, but that was the day the seed was planted for this book—and not just for this book, but also for how God would teach, challenge, and grow me in the process of working on it.

Today I am a full-time licensed counselor in private practice, and I still serve part-time with Marriagetrac. The more I worked with men and women daily in private practice, the more God opened my eyes to the sexual-desire differences in almost every marriage. As male and female, or even as husband and wife, we are *not* wired to be completely in sync sexually. In fact, we are rarely in sync—if ever. And that's okay. Men and women have differing sex drives that God orchestrated as normal and beautiful, but our world tends to twist and distort those differences into knots, an issue that Needs Help made quite clear.

Needs Help is not alone. And if you resonate with her words, neither are you. Since that initial email arrived in 2014, countless other women—ranging in age from twenty-one to eighty-one—have written to me begging for more Christians to talk about how often husbands can and do refuse sex and reject their wives. Furthermore, they want those who do address sexual-desire differences to please stop making blanket statements about how women are always the ones to say no to sex and are somehow responsible for almost every sexual issue in marriage. It's simply not accurate.

Many Christian women today suffer in silence. They endure virtually sexless marriages and desperately want someone to address this issue from their point of view—to provide another perspective. There is a recurring theme from the Christian women who dare to share their stories: *no more silence*. They are tired of being perceived as strange or abnormal just because they have a higher sex drive or because their husbands have virtually no sex drive at all. Why, they ask, is it so wrong for women to want more sex when it's entirely acceptable for men to feel this way?

I pray over every note or comment I receive. I've asked God numerous times, *What do you want me to do with this topic? Do you want me to tell these women's stories?* (God and I play a lot of tug-of-war!) The book you are holding is the answer to that question, and I hope the words you are about to read will honor the struggles of so many women who've been drowning in relationship pain for much too long.

In part 1 of this book, we'll address wives who wonder, *Why am I always the one to blame?* We'll look at why husbands aren't interested in or won't have sex, why some husbands don't "get it" and fail to understand their wives' higher libido, the mistaken notion that *wives* must be the problem, and the lies and assumptions we believe about sexual desire in men and women.

In part 2, we'll address what I call the real culprits, including physical or mental health, the issue of neurodiversity, husbands who meet their needs elsewhere, male insecurities, potential victimization, tendencies and interests that lie elsewhere, issues of control or abuse, and reasons a husband might not live up to expectations.

In part 3, we'll tackle potential solutions, such as making adjustments to previously unsuccessful strategies, considering how sexual differences are not *his* issue but perhaps *our* issue, and redefining intimacy.

In part 4, we'll consider where we go from here by embracing healthy sexuality, redefining intimacy, noticing our husbands' goodness, and no longer feeling alone as women who experience higher sexual desire. Finally, I've included an appendix, "A Message to Husbands"—a note of encouragement from my husband, Jim, to the men who want to hear a husband's perspective on the topic.

Please note that this book is *not* primarily addressed to those who are dealing with what I would call a normal desire discrepancy. Individual sex drives don't remain constant throughout the life of a marriage, and these fluctuations can become more pronounced the longer a couple is together. In other words, it's extremely rare for couples to desire equal amounts of sex at any given time.

Many couples seek counseling to help them work through these differences, and that's wonderful. Understanding what your spouse is thinking and feeling about sex—and how to communicate your thoughts and feelings—is a great skill to develop in marriage. So if you desire sex three times a week and your husband only wants it once a week, that's an important topic of discussion, but it's not the same as enduring weeks, months, or even years without any physical intimacy in your marriage. You can certainly benefit from the information in this book, but it was not written primarily for you.

This book is written especially for women like Needs Help—wives who feel neglected or even ignored by their husbands sexually. Yet none of what you'll read is intended to "bash" the lower-desire partner. My aim is to validate and illuminate the often-underrepresented challenges faced by women who are the higher-desire partner. I want to help you find God's best for *your* marriage—to help you learn to work together, lovingly and sacrificially, to attain the best sex life for you and your spouse. I won't tell you that it's easy, but I'll do my best to help you.

I want us to set aside any "battle of the sexes" mentality in

pursuit of something far more beautiful—that is, the intimate knowing and listening to and learning from each other. Relying on outdated stereotypes, more than likely, will result in a losing battle. Instead, work to see your spouse as the one-of-a-kind individual you married. In other words, your mindset plays a vital role in fostering a kind and growing marriage.

Some chapters in this book are full of compassionate understanding, while others are about soul-searching and potentially uncomfortable challenges. One book obviously can't address every possible issue regarding desire differences, but what it can do is start the discussion—a discussion that's been long suppressed and seemingly off-limits for many (if not most) Christian wives. I've also included a bit about my own marriage experience.

So are you ready to get started? I view life as an adventure with God, and I expect He might take you on one while you read this book. Do not fear, for God is holding your hand. My prayers are with you as we journey on the healing road ahead.

PART ONE

The Problem:

"WHY AM I ALWAYS THE ONE TO BLAME?"

1

He Won't Have Sex with Me

TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT, YOU THINK. The kids are in bed, you've put away the evening's dinner dishes, and now you've set your sights on *dessert*. You've dabbed a bit of perfume on your pulse points and slipped into some alluring lingerie. The scented candles will provide just the right environment. In fact, you've done everything the so-called experts have suggested to help create a night of romance and passion.

You nestle in next to your sweetheart on the couch as he watches television. You quietly wait until commercial time, then you slide your hand over his arm and gently massage it.

With barely a look in your direction, he pulls back his arm, moves closer to the dog, and readjusts his position.

Not to be deterred, you take a breath and go in for a less subtle second attempt. "Hey, babe, the kids are asleep," you whisper. "What do you say we go upstairs and mess around?"

"Not tonight," he says, still not looking your way.

You can feel the tension in your shoulders as you sense this night ending as so many others have before. But still you press on, hoping that *this time* you'll get him to change his mind.

"Come on, babe. We haven't had sex in a while. I promise you'll enjoy it. Look what I'm wearing—just for you."

He finally glances your way and then back toward the television. If he noticed the lingerie, he's not letting on.

"I don't feel like it," he responds. "I just want to watch my show."

And there it hangs. Rejection. Again. You get up off the couch and head to your bedroom, where you blow out the candles and throw your lingerie in the garbage, telling yourself that this is the last time you want to feel this way. Then you sit on the bed, alone, as disappointment, frustration, anger, hurt, and a deep ache all flow over you.

Why doesn't he want me? you wonder. *What's wrong with me?* And the tears come again—as they have so many times before.

Since the dawn of recorded history, it feels like the predominant belief in the culture at large has been that men are the virile, testosterone-filled pursuers whose sex-switch is forever in the on position. Women, meanwhile, are portrayed as the ones who play hard to get, have an innately lower sex drive, and rarely have a need for their own sexual pleasure. But for many married women—as many as 30 percent of them—that perception isn't reality.[1] These women desire to be loved and cared for sexually and to have a healthy and passionate intimate relationship, yet they enter marriage and discover—either early on or later in the relationship—that their husband isn't all that interested.

These women aren't asking for anything outrageous or even out of the ordinary. They represent all ages, all seasons of marriage, and all backgrounds. They include devout Christian women and

women who aren't quite sure about their faith. Some are newly wedded; others have been married for decades. The spectrum is wide indeed.

But these women all have this in common: They yearn to be loved intimately, to experience affection both in and outside the bedroom. They long for their husbands to notice them.

THE SECRET SHAME

From what I've learned about these women, most of them suffer in silence. A fear of being judged or misunderstood compels them to keep their secret hidden deep in their souls. For some, their situation feels so shameful that they don't share it even with their closest friends. How do you admit, "My husband has no sexual desire for me"? It certainly isn't something they announce on social media.

Why doesn't *he desire me?* they wonder.

Some men sit around with each other and complain, perhaps jokingly, that "my wife doesn't give me any." But you rarely catch a woman telling her friends, "My husband doesn't give me any." Why is that? I believe it speaks to our perception of our worth, our beauty, and who we are as women.

When these women *do* gather the courage to share, too often they receive uninformed responses that put the responsibility for the sexual success or failure of their marriages back on them: *Light some candles. Lose some weight. Seduce your husband. Be more submissive. Be more daring.* Many of these advice-givers mean well, but the message is little more than *If you just do x, y, and z, you'll please your husband and he will want to have sex with you.*

So these women obediently follow the advice . . . only to fail. They pray desperately for God to change their circumstances, but when their prayers aren't answered, the shame digs deeper and they

determine to never again share the truth of their situation. Because they have no one to turn to, the cycle of shame continues and eats away at their self-esteem. Their marriages, their value as women, even their faith—all are at risk of becoming collateral damage.

In my work as a clinical counselor, as a marriage mentor for more than two decades, and through the marriage ministry at Marriagetrac.com, the number of women I've met who are struggling to be heard and wanted by their husbands is stunning. I've seen the devastating effects that sexual issues in marriage can have on a couple. Nowadays, more and more of those issues are related to differences in sexual desire.

I've received email after email and letter after letter from desperate women who are earnestly seeking a last chance at hope and help. When Marriagetrac tested the waters with a new article titled "I Want More Sex Than My Husband Does," it quickly became one of our most responded-to articles. It turned out that we'd given hurting women another invitation to share their stories, heartache, and pain.

Emails like these poured in:

I've begged and pleaded with my husband for twenty years. I've tried to understand from his perspective why he doesn't want me. I've finally given up, because the "hope" that something would change has destroyed me.

My husband and I have been married nine years and we have two daughters. But several years ago, he stopped wanting to have sex with me. I can't go on. I live like a virgin. I feel frustrated, hurt, disappointed, and starved. I thought I heard God tell me to marry this man, but why would God do this to me?

I've been married two years now and my husband's sex drive isn't there. We're both in our twenties! It hurts when other women say how much their husband wants sex, because that isn't the case with mine.

I'm ashamed to admit that my husband doesn't want to have sex with me. I don't know what I've done to turn him away, and he won't tell me. I feel so alone and ashamed. And to make matters worse, he's a pastor! So I feel even more alone—I certainly can't go to anyone in our church and say, "Help me. My husband won't have sex with me."

I was a virgin when I got married at the age of thirty-two. I dreamed of being intimate with my husband and experiencing sex the way God intended. Although we had sex on our wedding night, my husband has barely touched me since. We celebrate our twentieth anniversary next year. I love my husband, but I feel as though I've gotten ripped off. I waited—and for what?

I've heard from women who wonder why this is happening and how they can get through it. How can they love their husbands who reject them sexually? "Why is this my fault?" they ask, often immediately followed by the terrifying question "*Is* it my fault?" That's the shame they live with.

My heart broke for these women and what they were experiencing, but it wasn't until I found myself in a situation where I was the one with greater sexual desire than my husband that I truly understood the depth of frustration these women endure. I'll share more of my story in a later chapter, but I can personally attest to the discouragement, rejection, and loneliness that these women feel.

As for the experts' advice to just relax, take a bubble bath, light candles, make his favorite meal, lose a few pounds, wear lingerie, and give him pleasure first, it does nothing more than cement the message of *I'm to blame; obviously I'm flawed*. Not only is this misguided advice insulting, but it also damages women's souls.

YOU AREN'T ALONE

I'm assuming that if you've read this far, then you, too, have struggled with desire differences—or you know someone who has. By picking up this book, you've taken a step of faith, even if you feel like this is your last hope for any sort of change.

Right now I want to reassure you, to encourage you. As we journey through the following pages, take comfort in knowing that you are in a safe place. You will find no blame or judgments from me. As we explore the problems and the possible root causes, I hope you find the freedom to be open and transparent. I want you to recognize your worth as we discover together how to proceed with potential solutions that are about more than lighting candles and wearing alluring lingerie.

I realize that I'm repeating myself here, but it's vital for you to recognize that you aren't alone. The shame you've experienced may make you think you are, but many, many women—kind, God-honoring, Christian women—have dealt with or are dealing with the same desire differences as you. While the issues are all different to a degree, virtually all of these women have battled the blame-and-shame game. They get what you're feeling, and they get *you*. You're among friends here.

My heart aches that you and I and so many others have been hurt because of the prevailing messages about sex and sexuality. But now it's time to put to rest those messages that we've heard—and often believed—about ourselves and about marriage and sex.

It's time to put away the shame. I'll help you.

> **Shame is that warm feeling that washes over us, making us feel small, flawed, and never good enough.**
>
> BRENÉ BROWN[2]

My dear reader, you also need to know something else, and it's extremely important: Your longing for touches, kisses, and hugs—and yes, sex with your husband—is a wonderful and natural thing. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be wanted. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be held and made love to. And you don't have to suffer in silence any longer.