



JOYCE J. PENNER, M.N., R.N. & CLIFFORD L. PENNER, Ph.D.

# ENJOY!

THE GIFT OF  
SEXUAL PLEASURE  
FOR WOMEN

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY® | FOCUS ON MARRIAGE™

## Endorsements

Joyce and Cliff Penner have done it again! After decades of pioneering work in sexuality and after counseling thousands of couples, they get to the naked truth about sex like nobody else. Every woman—along with her husband—should read this insightful book. It will positively transform your love life.

**DRS. LES AND LESLIE PARROTT**

#1 *New York Times* best-selling authors of *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

Joyce and Cliff Penner are two of the best thinkers and clinicians we know when it comes to the wonders of sexuality and intimacy. They are thoughtful, informed, biblical, straightforward, and compassionate. And the topic is inspired and much-needed. This book will bring joy, delight, help, and wisdom to everybody who reads it.

**JOHN ORTBERG**

Senior pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church; author of *All The Places to Go*

**NANCY ORTBERG**

Author of *Seeing in the Dark: Finding God's Light in the Most Unexpected Places*

When I needed practical assistance to overcome the damage of childhood sexual molestation, Joyce and Cliff Penner were a godsend, and for more than twenty years, they have been mentors, models, and friends. *Enjoy!: The Gift of Sexual Pleasure for Women* elevates the needs, desires, and experiences of women as they embrace their sexuality in marriage. No one writes about sex with more passion, expertise, and wisdom than they do!

**KAY WARREN**

Cofounder of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA

For any woman who is dissatisfied and discouraged with the physical intimacy in her marriage, *Enjoy!* contains a wealth of wisdom and practical advice that is sure to be helpful. The Penners understand the

challenges common to wives, and I'm confident their latest book will help many couples experience a newfound joy and closeness as they follow this roadmap for mutual sexual fulfillment.

**JIM DALY**

President of Focus on the Family

JOYCE J. PENNER, M.N., R.N. & CLIFFORD L. PENNER, Ph.D.

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FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

FOCUS ON MARRIAGE™

*Enjoy! The Gift of Sexual Pleasure for Women*

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# Introduction

OVER OUR MORE THAN forty years as sex therapists and educators, we've come to realize that many assumptions about women and sex simply are not spot-on. And what's worse, they do not work well for a lasting, mutually enjoyable sex life in marriage.

There are plenty of ways to end up with these beliefs and practices, which do more harm than good. Personal history, culture, experience, and confusion regarding Scripture—all of these influences can lead to false assumptions about women and sex. While many of these ideas do contain a germ of truth, we've learned that often they are applied incorrectly.

Throughout this book, we'll share our observations and findings about women and sex. What we've learned and taught has made a positive difference in the sexual relationships between many husbands and wives. These findings have evolved over the years from the stories of thousands of individuals and couples who have come to us with disappointments or frustrations and have found relief and mutual fulfillment. It's our hope that you, too, can find that fulfillment.

Just as our goal in writing *The Married Guy's Guide to Great Sex* was to help men understand, accept, and fulfill their roles for sex in marriage, *Enjoy!* is meant to help women discover total acceptance and expression of their God-given sexuality as wives. We'll share how you, as a woman, can learn to embrace your sexual role in marriage and find more enjoyment with your husband.

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In *The Married Guy's Guide to Great Sex*, we dispelled myths about men and sex, and shared how the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves us—unconditionally.

In *Enjoy!*, we'll clear up false assumptions about women and sex and empower you to embrace your unique sexuality and share all of who you are with your husband.

After you read this book, we encourage you and your husband to read it out loud together. As you read, stop to explain what describes you and what does not fit for you.

We trust there will be many deeply rewarding moments as you discover who you are as a sexual person and as you pursue full acceptance and expression of your God-given sexuality in your marriage.



## CHAPTER I

# ENJOY

MAGGIE MADE CLEAR during her first session with us that she was willing to engage in sexual therapy only to save her marriage. She adamantly declared, “I have zero interest and don’t care if we ever have sex again!”

Six months later, she couldn’t imagine life without sex.

What brought on this dramatic change? Through the sexual therapy process, Maggie learned to take in pleasure for herself, allow arousal, and have regular orgasmic release. She was now communicating with her husband about her sexual likes and dislikes.

Not only had their sex life become positive for both of them, but all aspects of their relationship had improved. And much to Maggie’s surprise, the anxiety that had often zapped her energy for life had disappeared.

Whether you have zero interest in sex as Maggie did, or you simply want to improve this aspect of your relationship with your husband, realizing the wide-ranging benefits of sex is a good place to start. Envisioning these benefits can heighten your anticipation and enjoyment of sex.

## Realize the Benefits

Just as Maggie did, when women discover who they are as sexual persons, pursue their sexuality with their husbands, and experience sexual fulfillment, they find new and increased vitality in *all* aspects of life, not just in bed.

Sex does more than make you feel good. It improves your health, helps you communicate more effectively, and raises your self-esteem. Sex enhances your immune system and cardiac functioning, reduces stress and pain, and keeps you connected, and emotionally balanced.

There is growing evidence that good sex, particularly sex in a loving, committed marriage, has the power to promote both physical and emotional health.<sup>1</sup>

Sex can relieve symptoms of arthritis, insomnia, chronic pain, muscular tension, and mood swings, according to Judith Sachs's study of the research on the benefits of sex. Keeping active in a healthy sexual relationship can help you communicate your desires. Healthy sexual behavior and intimacy is a way to experience a greater sense of wholeness and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

When women experience the benefits of sex for themselves, their expectations shift from sex as a duty that benefits the man to mutual pleasure. That shift is vital to women's *and* men's sexual enjoyment.

## Seek Enjoyment

Sex is not a gift women give to their husbands, but rather one they enjoy for themselves and share freely with their husbands. When the woman pursues and learns to enjoy sex, both spouses will be pleased with their sex life. We encourage you to pursue enjoyment rather than "do your duty."

When Joyce speaks to Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) groups, she finds that so many of the women have lost the enjoyment of sex and have fallen into a routine of "doing their duty." It takes sex to make children, yet children sap our energy for sex.

Here's the question she often hears: "How do you get in the mood when you're not in the mood, and don't even want to be in the mood?"

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Her answer? “You don’t have to be in the mood or even want to be in the mood; you can decide to have sex because you know it is good for you, not because it is your duty to do it for him.”

Duty sex *won’t* work for either of you for long; pursuing sex for you whether or not you are in the mood *will* work.

One mom expressed it so clearly: “Last time you were here, you talked about making time for sex even if I didn’t feel like it. Since then, we have had ‘regular’ times and it has *completely* changed my heart and feelings and drawn us closer together as a couple. Thank you!”

Pursue  
enjoyment  
rather than  
“do your duty.”

Instead of “doing her duty,” the woman’s role for sex in marriage is to pursue all of who she is sexually and share her sexuality with her husband. The prerequisite to fulfilling her role is for her to enjoy sex.

As Kathy so aptly expressed when we interviewed her and Pastor Joey for our *Magic and Mystery of Sex* videos: “I love it! What can I say?”

Do you love it? You may not love it, but is sex enjoyable for you? Is it good for you? If you are enjoying sex, we encourage you to continue fully embracing your sexuality with gusto. If you are not enjoying sex with your husband, it’s important to understand why that might be true and how to find enjoyment.

Sex doesn’t have to be ecstatic to be enjoyed. Many times women will think it should feel like it did when it was new and so exciting. As one woman asked in an e-mail to us: “I don’t enjoy sex as much as I used to. How can I start feeling the ‘spark’ again?”

We encourage you to think about enjoyment this way: Consider “0” as neutral, “+10” as ecstasy (you can’t imagine more enjoyable sex), and “-10” as misery (you’d like to run out of the room screaming). It’s okay to engage in sex with your husband as long as it is neutral or above, but never let a sexual experience go below “0.”

If you start having negative feelings, stop and invite any touch or activity that you have enjoyed or think you might enjoy—anything that replaces the negative sensations. As you learn to take responsibility to

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avoid negative feelings and increase positive sensations, you will experience greater enjoyment and even add a little spark now and then!

### **Look Back to Move Ahead**

To begin your journey to find or increase your enjoyment of sex with your husband, it's helpful to explore your perceptions of sex and what contributed to them. Your answers to the following questions can help you pinpoint any obstacles in your path to enjoyment.

#### **WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK OF SEX?**

Women come to marriage with a mind-set toward sex based on the family and culture they grew up in—the “messages” they received from their mother, siblings, friends, community, church, the media—as well as their unique set of exposures and experiences.

Whatever view of sex you brought to marriage, it's important to counteract any negative perspective with the positive anticipation of sex and its benefits, which were mentioned earlier. As you intentionally replace negative views with positive attitudes, you will increase your enjoyment of sex.

#### **WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT SEX GROWING UP?**

Pause just a moment and think. Pay close attention to both the verbal and nonverbal messages you received.

If there was no discussion or exposure to sexual viewpoints, you may have come to marriage with a fairly neutral perspective. If you heard healthy messages about God's wonderful design of sex and the joy it brings to marriage, you received a wonderful blessing. If the messages were negative, hopefully you were able to counter them before you were married. If not, you may have to undo and reprogram your mind-set.

Pay attention to the messages you received.

Women who come to us for sexual therapy report having heard

messages such as: “It’s your job to keep your knees together,” “Never let anything in there,” or “Never touch down there except to wash with a cloth.” These messages were likely crafted to keep you from self-stimulation or from having sex before marriage.

If the warnings were not accompanied by teaching about the joy of sex in marriage, a woman isn’t likely to differentiate between sex outside of marriage and sex within marriage. Sometimes these women come to us with unconsummated marriages. They still “haven’t let anything in there.”

Another teaching that negatively affects sex in marriage is that it is the woman’s responsibility to set sexual limits before marriage, rather than the mutual responsibility of both partners. You may have felt responsible for getting the guy aroused by what you did or what you wore, so you never could enjoy your body and how it looked or felt. Women who took on the gatekeeper role in dating often continue to be the gatekeepers in marriage.

Subtle messages will also have influenced you. If there was a passionate kiss in a television show you were watching, how was that handled in your home? If your mother and father mutually enjoyed affection with each other, you likely will also. However, if your father was cold and distant or your mother pulled away if he was affectionate, you will have to be intentional in giving and receiving affection freely.

We hope you were raised with the teaching that sex is a good and wonderful gift to be enjoyed. If so, by the time you were a young adolescent you may have learned these five healthy attitudes:

- Sex is good and of God.
- Sexual curiosity is natural.
- Sexual responses are automatic.
- Responsibility for decisions about sexual actions belongs to both people in the relationship.
- Biblical standards and mutual respect are the guiding principles for all sexual choices.

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### **WHAT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S VIEW OF SEX? WAS YOUR MOTHER A SEXUAL PERSON?**

How you perceived your mother sexually will affect how you view yourself sexually. How your mother felt about herself as a woman and as a sexual person will have been communicated to you directly by what she taught you and indirectly as you observed the interaction between her and your father. As one woman expressed it: "After having kids I feel more like a mother than a wife. I struggle with switching from mother to lover." For her, motherhood was disconnected from being a wife and lover, which is likely what she sensed from her mother.

A woman will both actively reject what she heard from her mother and practice a different approach, or she will unconsciously accept what she heard and incorporate her mother's perspective as her own. What is true for you?

### **WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF SEXUAL AWARENESS? SELF-DISCOVERY? EXPLORATORY PLAY? QUESTION ASKING?**

You may have engaged in some exploratory play. You may have a memory of walking in on your parents making love, hearing something from a friend, or coming across some sexually explicit material even if it wasn't pornographic. Do you recall asking questions about sex, babies, or body parts? Do you remember any self-exploration when you tried to figure out your genitals?

### **HOW WAS YOUR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT HANDLED?**

Every girl experiences the shift from having a girl's body to a developed body. For some the changes happen gradually, while others change quickly. How was that for you? Were you adequately prepared for your body shape changing, your feelings changing, your breasts developing, and obviously your first menstrual period? Or were you left on your own with those experiences? Maybe information about these changes came from your friends.

Were you one of the early ones in your group to develop, or were you behind your peers? Did you feel self-conscious, comfortable, inadequate,

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or different? If you developed early, before all the rest of your peers, you may have tried to hide your developing breasts by wearing baggy sweat-shirts or slouching your shoulders. You may have been teased, made fun of, or been embarrassed.

Starting menstruation may also have been a positive or negative experience. If you were early or late to get your period, you may have felt different from your peers. If you had severe abdominal pain, headaches, or irritability, you may still have negativity and dread associated with your period. If you were well prepared and menstruation was expected as a positive sign of your maturation, you will likely have a better appreciation for being a woman.

What you experienced in the process of your physical development will have clearly affected your comfort with your body, as well as your view of sex. If you felt good about your sexual development, you are more likely to feel good about yourself as a sexual person.

Can you be proud that you are a sexual person?

Can you be proud that you are a sexual person? Is sex for you? If you believe being a sexual person is good and sex is for you, sex will be better for you and your husband.

**DO YOU THINK WOMEN ENJOY SEX AS MUCH AS, MORE THAN, OR LESS THAN MEN? DO YOU ENJOY SEX AS MUCH AS, MORE THAN, OR LESS THAN YOUR HUSBAND?**

**IF YOU COULD REDO YOUR SEXUAL HISTORY, HOW WOULD IT BE DIFFERENT?**

Would you ask more questions? Would you share more with your mother? Would you avoid engaging in certain activities? Would you talk more with your peers? Would you be more flirty and flamboyant, or less flirtatious? How would you like to have changed your life up to this point? If something had been different, would you feel better about yourself as a woman? What would that difference be?

Even though your history is what it is and is not in your control, you

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*can* take control of your adult sex life now by recognizing the positive and the negative impact of your history. You can maximize the positives and reframe the negatives, accepting that as an adult you are no longer a victim of your past.

Given the insights you have gained through this reflection, what are you hoping to find in this book? How do you hope the information will make a difference for you?

### **Characteristics That Increase Enjoyment of Sex**

Now that you've taken time to reflect on your ideas about sex and what may have contributed to those ideas, you can take steps to find more pleasure.

Let's start by looking at the characteristics that we've found increase women's enjoyment of sex. Do you have realistic expectations? How connected are your sexuality and spirituality? Are you able to receive pleasure? Are you content with your body? Are you able to experiment with new ideas and allow flexibility? Are you free to say no to sex so that you can freely say yes to sex? Can you let go sexually?

#### *Realistic Expectations*

Couples preparing for marriage will make a much smoother transition to married life if they have clarified their expectations for sex with each other. Our book *Getting Your Sex Life Off to a Great Start*<sup>3</sup> is a great resource for helping premarital and newly married couples with that process.

Early in marriage, couples typically enjoy the excitement of a new relationship; the desire to be together sexually is spontaneous and frequent. As marriages age, children come along and other responsibilities tend to dominate. That's when expectations must change. It is essential that both spouses accept the need to make—and actually do make—the transition from newness, excitement, and infatuation to committed, lifelong intimacy.

Married love is a deeper, connected love. A 1987 study compared married love to the attachment process that happens in childhood. This study explored “the possibility that romantic love is an attachment

process—a biosocial process by which affectional bonds are formed between adult lovers, just as affectional bonds are formed earlier in life between human infants and their parents.”<sup>4</sup>

Married sex is not what we call “zap” sex, the kind you find in romance novels, movie sex scenes, or pornography. After being married for a while, you are not likely to feel like tearing his clothes off and making mad, passionate love when you meet at the end of the day.

Make the transition  
from infatuation to  
lifelong intimacy.

A Yale study on love found that intense, initial passion dissipates six to thirty months after a new romantic relationship begins.<sup>5</sup> Those initial high-drive desires are fueled by

the brain chemical dopamine, which is a powerful motivator or driving energy. As the brain production of dopamine decreases, the couple needs to shift to an attachment fueled more by the brain chemical oxytocin.

Oxytocin, which is associated with bonding, is released during hugging and pleasant physical touch, and plays a part in the human sexual response cycle. This oxytocin-fueled attachment is a deeper, binding love that lasts a lifetime. Yet the shift from large doses of dopamine to this oxytocin-fueled connection can feel like a loss.

Be assured: Desire isn't gone, it is just different. Nor have you lost your attraction to or love for each other. That also is just different! Embrace and enjoy the shift to a softer, more subtle urge for closeness and touch. After fifty-three years of marriage, we can promise you it is wonderful!

### *Spiritual Affirmation*

When sexuality and spirituality affirm each other in your marriage, your enjoyment of sex will increase. But you may have difficulty enjoying sex in marriage if you learned to split your belief system from your sexual actions while you dated. Couples who allow this split find it's not as easy later on to integrate their sexuality with their spirituality.

We've seen many couples whose sexuality and spirituality were not aligned. They've come to us in preparation for marriage, saying they

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believe in waiting until marriage to consummate their sexual relationship. In fact, they will tell us they are saving sexual intercourse for marriage.

Yet when we ask more specifically if they have ever had intercourse, they will say, “Well, not really.” As we ask more questions, we discover that this might mean that they aren’t *intending* to have sex. Even so, it’s happening “by accident” and regularly. Or they may be withdrawing before he ejaculates. Or they may have promised not to kiss before marriage, so they have never kissed but are having intercourse.

Pray with your  
husband about  
your sex life.

There are many versions of the way the split between beliefs and actions can happen and disrupt the integrated growth of sexuality and spirituality.

Whatever your situation, we encourage you to actively integrate your sexuality with your spirituality. Thank God for creating you as a sexual person; thank Him for sexual feelings and responses; pray with your husband about your sex life. Invite God into your sexual experiences with your husband. Read the Song of Solomon in the Bible and read a book, such as our *Gift of Sex*, out loud together to connect Scripture’s affirmation of sexual enjoyment in marriage with your sexual experiences.

### *Ability to Receive Pleasure*

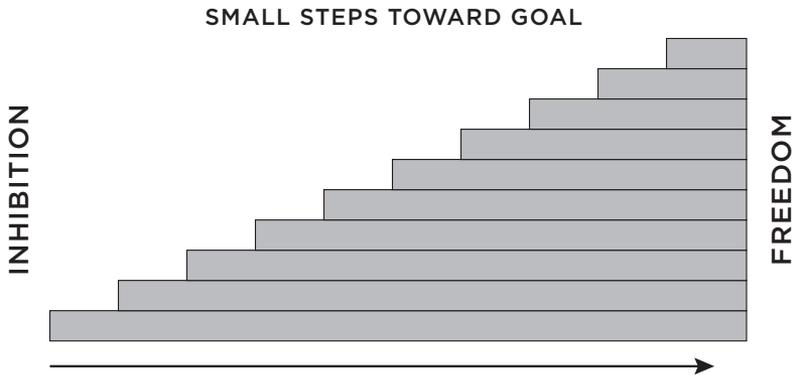
Many times women are givers and haven’t learned or allowed themselves to accept compliments, to soak in touch, or to receive sexual stimulation. A woman’s ability to receive pleasure depends on how she feels about herself. Good self-esteem helps women feel worthy of receiving good things. How do you feel about yourself? Are you able to receive? What would help you to receive sexually?

Use our “Inhibition to Freedom” chart to help you grow in this area. On the left side of the diagram, write your difficulty with receiving pleasure; on the right side of the diagram, describe true freedom to receive pleasure as you would like to experience it.

Next, fill in the steps, breaking down your desired actions and necessary changes into “just noticeable differences.” Practice the first step

until you feel totally free receiving at that level. Then move to the next step. It's like pouring concrete steps; it's necessary to let the concrete cure before pouring the next one. If you can't take a step as you defined it—if it is too big—break it down until it's manageable for you.

### *Inhibition to Freedom*



Here's how one woman in counseling used this system to gain freedom. Because she was not receiving pleasure, her husband felt more pressure to please her sexually. The pressure was making it difficult for him to respond sexually. She was focused on how he was doing, rather than on her own enjoyment. This was a lose-lose situation.

Her “inhibition” on the left of the chart was her discomfort or inexperience with accepting pleasure. To reach “freedom,” she would take the first step on the chart—allowing her husband to caress her foot. Her task was to focus only on what felt good to her. She found that difficult at first; she kept wondering if he was enjoying it. So they were assigned that first step a number of times until she was able to trust him to take responsibility for himself and allow her to receive his caressing of her feet for her pleasure only.

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Once she mastered the foot caress, other body touching was added. Her ability to relax and soak up the good feelings of being touched freed him to enjoy her body for his pleasure and lowered his performance pressure. It was a win-win!

### *Body Acceptance*

Women are more likely to feel good about themselves when they like their bodies. And they are more likely to enjoy sex when they feel good about themselves. It is also important that how we look is in sync with who we are—our outside is representative of our inside.

Genesis 2:25 says, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (NASB). Before sin, man and woman were totally open with God and with each other’s bodies. When they disobeyed God, they were estranged from Him and covered their genitals. For the first time they felt shame. Now through Christ’s redemption, we can connect with God and freely give our bodies to each other in marriage *without* shame.

Yet in our society, so much value is placed on women to have a culturally ideal body. The message is that a woman needs a certain type of body to be sexy. When there is a gap between how a woman views herself and the “ideal” body, it’s difficult for her to enjoy sex. To accept her body and freely enjoy sex, it is essential that she close this gap. She can do this by adjusting her ideal. She can also take steps to modify her body through exercise, changes in eating patterns, and grooming.

When you think about your body or look in the mirror, with or without clothes, how do you feel about yourself? Does your view of your body fit with that of your ideal? The greater the gap between how you see yourself and how you would like to look, the greater your body image dilemma.

How might you close the gap between your view of yourself and your ideal? A great resource is *The Body God Designed: How to Love the Body You’ve Got While You Get the Body You Want* by Gregory L. Jantz.<sup>6</sup>

You might also use the steps diagram on the previous page to define on the left how you view yourself and on the right your ideal. Then you can fill in the steps from left to right. But first, you may need to change

your ideal. So you might redefine your ideal on right side and not have so many steps to achieve to reach your goal.

The most common body image issue women in our culture fight is weight. A woman's ideal weight may not be realistic for her body structure, so we first help her define an achievable goal on the right side of the steps. She may need the help of a nutritionist or physician to determine what is realistic for her.

Once a reasonable goal is defined, we help her look at her lifestyle, habits, psychological issues, and other factors that might be preventing her from reaching her goal. We've discovered that women in this situation frequently get stuck because they hope to jump from where they are to their ultimate goal. We help them define small steps and find success at the first step before tackling the next.

Praying this prayer can also help you accept your body:

God, grant me  
the serenity to accept the things about my body I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can for the better, and  
the wisdom to know the difference and get on with my life.<sup>7</sup>

### *Embracing New Experiences and Allowing Flexibility*

Newness excites; flexibility brings freedom. Can you give yourself permission to experiment? You may need to solidify your ability to receive pleasure and the other previous characteristics before you attempt new experiences and push yourself to be flexible. Enjoy what is good for you right now. Many women want the comfort of their love play to include the expected activities they know they enjoy. When you can count on that solid base, you can nudge yourself to positively anticipate something new and creative if the steps to the newness are gradual. Keep your husband in the loop.

### *Ability to Say No*

Women who can energetically say yes to sex are those who are free to say no. To be free to give yourself sexually, you must be free to make that

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choice. God offers us a relationship with Him through Christ's death and resurrection. He gives Himself to us with open arms, but He never *demand*s that we accept His gift of love. It is freely our choice. It's a gift of ourselves to Him when we accept His gift to us. Likewise, when husbands love their wives as Christ loves us, they give themselves with open arms, but never demand a yes.

How a woman says no to sex with her husband is equally important. Men are human and can feel rejected. Be sure to be gracious in your response: Let your husband know that you recognize and understand his need. It is most helpful if both spouses are free to express their desire without demand that the other have the same level of interest. If you aren't interested, offer an alternative:

- “What if we get more rest tonight and plan a time for tomorrow?”
- “What if you get home a little earlier tomorrow and help with the kids (or dinner or something else)?”
- “I could enjoy some snuggle time and see where that leads, as long as there isn't pressure that it has to go all the way.”
- “I would love to pleasure you as long as I don't have to get into it for myself.”
- “I would love being pleased but don't have the energy to pleasure you. What if we plan for your turn next time?”

*The Power of a Positive No* by William Ury is a great resource that teaches how to extend respect to each other while standing up for your self-interest and building a mutual relationship. Ury's writing is engaging, his examples blend a wonderful variety of experiences, and he extends great warmth in his teaching about how to handle differences. He shares practical reminders of how to consider the other person's perspective while gracefully asserting your own position to create a clear path to a win-win situation.

### *Ability to Let Go*

Can you get into the moment—lose control and allow arousal, ecstasy, and orgasm? Can you let go of the minutiae of life, the tensions of the

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day, the pressures of the next day, the things you can't control? Can you savor the moment?

For passion in marriage,  
a woman needs to be able to take;  
she needs to believe she is worthy of his affirmation  
and  
has the right to be intensely sexual.<sup>8</sup>

She has to be able to enjoy her sexuality,  
her husband's sexuality, and  
her husband's enjoyment of her sexuality.  
Sex has to be as good for her as it is for him  
if it is going to be good for both for their lifetime.<sup>9</sup>

The best gift a woman can give herself, her marriage, her children, and her husband is her deep and real enjoyment of sexual times with him.