

Marriage, Sex and Leadership

I have just returned from a 6 week break. Whilst it is great to begin the new term feeling so rested and refreshed, you do tend to return to 6 weeks' worth of news in one day. This year it included the tragic news about Todd Bentley in Florida separating from his wife, and also news of another pastor in a local church failing morally. That's 2 in just 6 weeks, one who is known to Christians around the world and another much closer to home. **In my view that's two too many** – and by the way, that's just the ones I've heard about!

King David seemed to have everything going for him. If you read the chapters leading up to when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, the scriptures record success after success – the conquering of Jerusalem, the defeat of the Philistines, God's promise to David. Victories and mighty men, it goes on and on. So how could a man, whose heart was committed to God, who had many wives to fulfil his sex drive, fall to temptation? What could lead a man such as David, at the peak of his ministry, to sleep with another man's wife, leading to further deception and the murder of Uriah?

Why do so many pastors and their wives fail morally? Why do we seem to be so vulnerable to sexual temptation? We cannot be complacent. If it can happen to King David and a seemingly endless number of others, it **could happen to any of us!**

At the Brighton Conference this year **Mark Driscoll** got many of us talking when he threw out the line that pastors should **be having sex with their wives every day!** You may also have heard of the '30 Day Sex Challenge' from the Relevant Church in Florida, aimed at challenging couples to increase the intimacy in their marriages. Apparently their congregation has increased by 15%!

The subject of sex in marriage is so important. Deb and I recently ran a Saturday morning seminar at Kings for married couples, entitled 'Sex, Romance and God'. It was part of a broader teaching series we had been running on Sundays, called 'Sex in the City', based on 1 Corinthians. The seminar was for married couples only and gave us the opportunity **to address the subject of sex and romance in marriage** far more openly than would be appropriate on a Sunday morning. The seminar was both challenging and fun and we were asked questions we have never been asked before! We had planned to hold the seminar on just one Saturday, but had to repeat it the following weekend to meet demand. How wonderful to have so many couples seeking to improve the sex and intimacy in their marriages.

As we all know, sex is just one aspect of marriage. But an observation we have made during our years in pastoral ministry is that the **quality of a couples' sex life is a good 'barometer' for the health of the marriage overall;** if a couple are not communicating or are having problems in one part of their relationship, you can almost guarantee that that will quickly be reflected in the bedroom.

As part of the 'Sex, Romance and God' seminar, Deb and I spent some time looking at the different needs of men and women when it comes to maintaining intimacy in marriage. Gary Rosberg, in his book '**The 5 Sex Needs of Men and Women**', sums it up well in the following quote:

He (God) calls on men to connect emotionally with their wives in order to have their physical needs met; he calls on women to connect physically with their husbands in order to have their emotional needs met.

As a broad generalisation (and there will always be exceptions), women need to feel emotionally connected in order to be physically intimate, whereas a man finds emotional connection through sex. Interestingly, men are wired in such a way that they are often more emotionally open after sex. Gary Rosberg says, 'Sometimes the best way to unlock a husband's emotions is through satisfying his physical need for sex.' H. Norman spells out these differences in this way:

"For women sex is only one means of intimacy out of many and not always the best one. For many men, sex is the only expression of intimacy. Men tend to compress the meaning of intimacy into the sex act, and when they don't have that outlet, they can become frustrated and upset. Why? Because they're cut off from the only source of closeness they know. Men are interested in closeness and intimacy, but they have different ways of defining and expressing it. (This) is an area where men and women need to talk, listen and understand the other person's language." (H. Norman, quoted in 'A Woman's Guide to Sexuality')

It is my belief that the strength of our marriage will have a direct impact on the effectiveness and potential of our ministry. For this reason, if no other, we should make a commitment to invest in our marriages.

It takes time to build a great marriage, and far too often other ministry priorities take precedence. However, I believe that one of the greatest limiting factors in ministry progress is that the marriage and home environment **are not strong enough to carry the pressures that come as ministry grows.** In our experience so far, every time we have seen ministry breakthrough, our marriage has had to strengthen correspondingly. This has involved a commitment to talking openly about the challenges involved and being clear about what it means **to continue to show love to each other.**

Christian psychologist Kevin Leman has this advice for couples wishing to improve the quality of their marriages:

'I spend a lot of time trying to help women get more active in the bedroom and trying to help men get active *everywhere* else'

I don't believe we will go far wrong if we apply this principle to our marriages.

A strong marriage is so important in ministry. **There is so much at stake** - if you fall morally, you can lose your wife, children, job and calling. Behind each story of a failed marriage there will be huge pain caused to families, churches and most importantly, to God. Why not make a commitment now to take some action to ensure you and your wife build a strong and healthy marriage? Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Take responsibility** for your sexuality and your marriage. Make time to talk about how you are doing. Ask your wife if you are meeting her emotional needs? Be honest with your wife if she is not meeting your sexual needs!

2. **Take responsibility** for your love life. Deb and I have agreed that we will read a book a year on marriage. We would recommend for starters 'The 5 Sex needs of Men and Women' by Gary and Barbara Rosberg.
3. **Invest time in your marriage.** Do not allow ministry opportunities to take vital time away from your wife and family. Prioritise them when planning your diary.
4. **Remember the biblical principle of example.** Whether we like it or not, we provide a role model for those we serve. I call this the 'goldfish bowl' of ministry; people are always going to be looking at you! Although this can be hard at times, we must not dodge the biblical exhortation for leaders to be an example to others. What you model in your marriage will be seen by those in your church; the strength of your marriage will have a direct impact on the strength of the marriages in your church. Challenging, but true!
5. **Teach regularly** on the subject of marriage.

In conclusion, **do I agree with Driscoll** on this one? In all honesty, I am always wary of being too prescriptive on these matters. I would prefer to talk principle and promote an attitude of generosity towards each other. If we apply the teaching of 1 Corinthians 7 - 'Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time' – then we will not go far wrong. Simply put, discover each other needs and, with sacrificial love, meet them. If all married couples did this, they would probably make love more often.

Steve Tibbert - September 2008.
King's Church, Catford

www.kingscentre.org.uk