

A photograph of a man and a woman in profile, facing each other and kissing. Both are wearing light blue surgical face masks. The woman has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a light pink long-sleeved top. The man has short dark hair and a beard, and is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a plain, light grey color.

J. PARKER

# SEX

*In the Time of Pandemic*

A RESOURCE FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

# A Guide to This Resource

While discussing sensitive subjects can help us connect with one another in ways that deepen every kind of intimacy in our marriage, there is potential for these discussions to backfire, leading to emotional hurt and conflict. Without guidelines, you might find yourselves misreading one another, feeling tense or misunderstood, breaking into arguments.

**So before you read on, let's establish some ground rules!**

## First, choose a good time and place.

Find a location that is neutral or—better yet—positive for both of you. Also, as much as possible, choose someplace where you won't be unnecessarily interrupted.

Set aside time and do your best to find which part of the day is most likely to result in calm conversation. If you start the conversation, and you can tell it's not going well due to timing, be willing to reschedule.

## When it's your turn to answer.

**Be honest and vulnerable.** It's tough to share what you really think and feel, even with your spouse. It's a risk to share our hearts with another. Yet there is no great gain in intimacy without vulnerability and authenticity.

**Consider how you express your concerns.** Even so, we have an obligation to watch our words. Proverbs 12:18 says, "The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Talking to your spouse should not feel to them like getting poked in the ribs with a rapier. Tell the truth, but watch how you phrase your message.

**Keep your requests reasonable.** Change takes time. Being married has the distinct advantage of allowing a long period in which to make huge strides in fostering intimacy—but they're made step by step.

## When it's your spouse's turn to answer.

**Listen.** Do not interrupt, do not correct, do not contradict, do not defend, do not criticize. Whether you agree with or understand your spouse's responses, validate their feelings by listening and believing what they say. Even if your spouse is wrong about something, showing respect and acceptance creates a safe space for your spouse to reveal themselves more fully to you.

**Stay calm.** If you experience physiological changes signaling sadness, fear, or anger—such as blood rushing to your head, pounding of your heart, tension in your muscles—make an effort to

calm yourself. If you need to, ask for a break from the conversation, with a definite time that you will return, cooler-headed and ready to proceed.

**Seek clarification.** Once your spouse has answered the question completely, if you take issue with something they said, ask for clarification. Use this opportunity to learn as much as possible about how your spouse views the topic.

**Accept their feelings.** One of the worst things to say is "You shouldn't feel like that." Feelings just happen. They can be based on truths or errors or lies, but feelings themselves won't simply leave by willing them away. So stop arguing about how the other feels. Instead, find out why they feel that way.

**Think through their answers.** If your spouse shared their heart with you, honor that by letting their words sink in, mulling over where they're coming from, acknowledging where they made good points and how you can address them, and responding to their reasonable requests.

# How Anxiety Impacts Sex

The COVID-19 global pandemic has brought many changes to our lives, including a wave of anxiety. Crisis activates our flight-fight-freeze response—and, for some, a tend-and-befriend instinct—but maintaining heightened alertness can exhaust our system. The uncertainty of when this will all end, or what long-term consequences may come as a result, can keep us on edge and impact our relationship and sexual intimacy.

## Ask and Listen

1. What has caused you additional anxiety during recent events?
2. Does anxiety tend to increase or decrease your desire for sexual intimacy? Why?
3. How can I help you address your anxiety in a way that strengthens our relationship and maintains our intimacy?

## Read and Consider

Read together Philippians 4:13.

*I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.*

You're likely familiar with that first verse, but did you know the verse that followed?

Even though it is Christ who can get us through crisis, we benefit so much from having someone to share our troubles. It's one of the perks of marriage to have someone on your "team" to help get through tough times.

But all too often, we don't feel like we're on the same team, because we don't process crisis or anxiety in the same way. When it comes to physical intimacy, one spouse may desire continued or additional sexual intimacy as distraction, comfort, or reassurance of love, while the other may struggle to engage in sexual intimacy while steeped in stress or fatigue.

Both reactions are understandable, but how we can best share the troubles of our spouse? What would speak love to them in this difficult time?

It could be that you have less sex and it could be that you have more. It could be that you must get creative on where, when, and how it happens (especially if you have young'uns at home 24/7 now). It could be that you invest in more romance and cuddling. It could be that you use this downtime to try out new positions or activities to foster arousal and interest.

What your sexual intimacy looks like right now depends on a number of factors, but what matters most is acknowledging your spouse's struggles, sharing one another's troubles, and remembering you're on the same team. Talk through your differences and concerns and work together to find solutions.

## Touch and Pray

*Dear God, this is an unprecedented time, with health, economic, and daily challenges our family and others are facing. We cast our anxiety on you, because we know You care for us. Although we can get through our difficulty with Your strength, we thank You that we also have one another to rely on. Help us to share one another's troubles and to display our love and commitment to one another. Help us to find ways to connect emotionally, physically, and relationally. In the name of Your Son Jesus, Amen.*

## Go and Do

1. Make a list of the three things you most need right now to engage in sexual intimacy. Trade lists and see how you can help each other meet those needs.
2. Build into your schedule 10-15 minutes each day to talk about anything and everything *except* your current anxious circumstances. Connect about who you are apart from the challenges you're going through, thus releasing some anxiety by simply enjoying one another's company.

# When Sex Isn't Possible

During this global pandemic, some couples simply cannot find a way to engage in sex. Healthcare and essential workers may need to distance themselves from a spouse to keep them safe, or one of you may have been infected and are self-isolating. Others have family members and children on top of each other 24/7, and realistically speaking, sex just isn't happening right now. How can you maintain intimacy during this time of hardship?

## Ask and Listen

1. How do you feel about our current lack of sexual intimacy?
2. What do you miss most about us being physically connected?
3. How do you think we can maintain our marital intimacy overall during this time?

## Read and Consider

Read together Deuteronomy 24:5.

*If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.*

This verse is often cited to show how important it is to foster intimacy in that first year of marriage, and it is. But the passage also implies that after that first year, the husband could, and likely would, have duties laid on him that required physical absence from the home.

It's not uncommon for couples to be separated due to work, military, or extended family responsibilities. For you, the current pandemic may be analogous to a war or other important duty in that it takes you away from normal home life.

Being apart can be difficult on both of you, but it is manageable. Find other ways to express love and support for one another. Talk, listen, flirt, imagine the future together, and perhaps even touch. Get creative about sexual activity and connection.

What works best depends on your marriage and the specific obstacles you face. Be honest with one another about where you are, what you need, and how you might continue intimacy in spite of the separation.

## Touch and Pray

*Lord, You blessed our marriage with the gift of sex, but right now it isn't happening. We feel the loss of physical connection, but know that You can connect us in other ways and carry us*

*through until we can be fully together again. Help us to engage if and when we can, but also to have patience and peace when we cannot. Show us how we can serve one another in love and keep our special intimacy alive. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Go and Do

1. Make a list of five nonsexual ways your spouse can express love and commitment, then trade lists.
2. Download an app to communicate more effectively and intimately with one another. Some suggestions: [Just Between Us](#), [Love Nudge](#), [Between](#).

# Commitment in Crisis

Did you know that after both the Oklahoma and 9/11 terrorist attacks, divorce rates in surrounding areas decreased? This is notable in part because natural disasters tend to have the opposite effect of increasing the number of couples calling it quits. One research study concluded that “terrorist attacks are more likely to produce acute stress that triggers increased striving for intimacy, whereas natural disasters are more likely to produce chronic stress that disrupts relationships.”<sup>1</sup> Although this global pandemic is not manmade, it has the potential to produce chronic stress that disrupts relationships.

## Ask and Listen

1. How do you feel our marriage is weathering this predicament?
2. How does our current level of intimacy, sexual or otherwise, make you feel more or less secure in our relationship?
3. What could I do to make you feel more reassured of my commitment to our marriage?

## Read and Consider

Read together Song of Song 8:6.

*Place me like a seal over your heart,  
like a seal on your arm;  
for love is as strong as death,  
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.  
It burns like blazing fire,  
like a mighty flame.*

In ancient times, a seal or signet ring was worn on a string around the neck, landing on the chest right over one’s heart. Or it could be worn on one’s finger or arm. This seal was pressed into clay, forming an unmistakable mark of identity, belonging, and authority. The seal itself carried the full promise of the person giving it.

In marriage, we vow a lifetime of love and care for one another. But during certain seasons, we must be even more intentional about displaying the kindness, connection, and commitment that our marriage should have.

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<sup>1</sup> Lowe, Sarah R, Jean E Rhodes, and Arielle A J Scoglio. “Changes in Marital and Partner Relationships in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: An Analysis with Low-Income Women.” *Psychology of women quarterly*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, September 2012. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3486647/>.

Whether this is a time of thriving or struggle for you, know that the future will hold different challenges as we get past this event and/or incorporate new challenges. In the face of such tension, our “seal” to one another should be restated, nurtured, and engraved into our daily lives.

Sexual intimacy can help both to express and foster that sense of you-and-me, no matter what, intimately connected for the rest of our lives. Make it a priority.

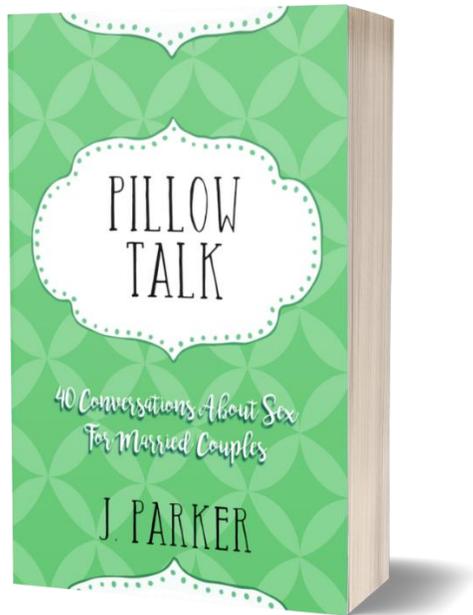
## Touch and Pray

*Our Father, we know that nothing can separate us from Your love, and we desire the same commitment to each other during our lifetimes—that nothing will separate us from our love for one another. Help us to renew our commitment each and every day, actively showing kindness and commitment. Bless our intimacy, inside and outside the bedroom, that it may honor You and strengthen our bond. In the name of Christ, Amen.*

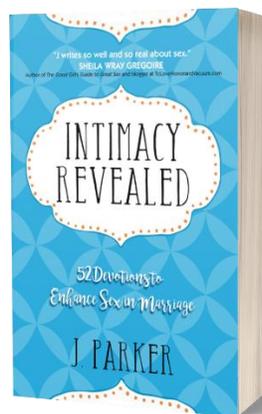
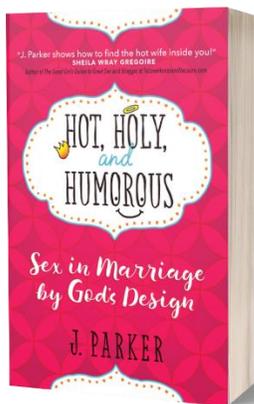
## Go and Do

1. Write or speak a pledge to your spouse, stating exactly why you love him/her and how to plan to stick around and pursue marital intimacy.
2. If possible, make love. During your encounter, incorporate expressions of commitment. For example: “I will always love you.” “I would choose you again and again.” “We can make it through this and anything else together.”

For more conversation starters, check out *Pillow Talk: 40 Conversations About Sex for Married Couples*. And to subscribe to Hot, Holy & Humorous, click [here](#) for the sign-up page.



Other books by J. Parker:



*Sex in Time of Pandemic*

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