

Sexual Intimacy. Andrew M. Greeley. Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1973.

Introduction

Greeley's 'model of man:' what distinguishes the human from other animals is his *capacity for language*.

Symbols enable man to give meaning and interpretation to his behavior

These meanings and interpretations are elaborated into complex cultural systems.

The patterns of behavior guided by such meaning systems constitute man's social structure.

Man is a culture-producing and a culture-produced creature.

Conventions prescribe appropriate behavior since humans have little in the way of instincts.

"Men and women cannot prescind from conversions ('values') in their sexual relationships.

The function of such 'values' is to *shed light on complexities and confusions of human behavior*.

A common difficulty is the confusion of interpretation with morality, not realizing that religious interpretation of human behavior has rather little to do with specific prohibitions or permissions.

"It is the intent of this book to deal with human sexuality both in the context of the human propensity to seek meaning in behavior and from the viewpoint of a particular religious meaning system – that of a schismatic Jewish sect founded by an obscure Galilean preacher named Jesus."

"What light can the Christian symbols throw on the ambiguity and confusion that humans experience in their sex lives?"

Chapter ONE: Friendship and Marriage

"An analysis of the dynamics of human friendship and an inspection of the Christian symbols which illumine the friendship relationship might be one profitable way of approaching sexuality and marriage.

Assumptions:

1. Human sexuality permeates the whole personality.
2. All human relationships are sexual; the more intimate, the more sexual.
3. Human intimacy need not terminate in genitality, though this is always a radical possibility.
4. Sexuality is a rhythm of giving/receiving, taking/being-taken.
5. The marriage relationship is the most difficult and most rewarding form of sexual intimacy.
6. Marriage is both source and model of all human friendships.
7. Friendship: "intimate relationship between two human beings in which both become sufficiently open to one another that they are able, at least to some extent, to put aside their fears and suspicions and enjoy the pains and pleasures of vulnerability."

8. Friendship is presently the ideal for the marriage relationship, though this has not always been the case.
9. Friendship is the ideal for marriage, and a married friendship is the model for human relationships; though not all marriages are friendships and not all friendships are marriages.
10. The ideal human personality is one which has been able to develop both the so-called 'masculine' and the so-called 'feminine' potentialities within it.

Assertions:

1. Friendship is *risk-taking*.

“...a mutual exploration of the complexities of the self and other.”

Vulnerability in permitting oneself 'to be taken' and in attempting 'to take.'

Courage is required throughout the development of the relationship, and great amounts of courage are required at the critical turning points.

“Friendship is only possible when *passivity* and *activity* are shared more or less equally by both partners in the relationship.”

“We are all terribly *afraid of rising ourselves* in intimacy.”

“In both the physical and psychological spheres, most human marriages, and indeed most human relationships, do not go beyond the minimal level that is necessary to keep the relationship from falling apart.”

2. Friendship is rooted in *mutual attraction which must grow* or it will atrophy.

Two processes mark the beginning of all human relationships:

- a. Showing greatness/strength; plea for admiration.
- b. Showing weakness/availability/need; plea for care.

Rhythm of *appealing* and *impressing*.

“It is essential that both partners participate in both sorts of activities, but it is also essential that they become sophisticated in adjusting to each other's cues.”

“In any relationship where both partners have become confident that their adjustment problem has been solved, it is safe to say that there is little left of the relationship.”

3. Friendship is an alternation between hiding and revelation, between keeping secrets and telling them, between *mystery* and *blatancy*.

The goal is “to reveal the self in such a way that the other knows ever more about us while his appetite is whetted to know more.”

Each needs *reassurance* from the other.

There must be *grace and elegance* in the process of self-disclosure.

“We tell enough about ourselves to keep the other interested, to make him want to come back to learn more, to encourage him; but we also wish to indicate that there is

always more to be learned, that there are always new delights to be revealed on another day.”

4. Friendship is a rhythm of *conquest* and *surrender*.

“We must be convinced that it is still necessary for us to work at conquering, and yet all the time have sufficient signs that our work will be successful”

“One breaks out of the bonds of loneliness, fear, and isolation by offering oneself; but the act of offering is also an act of pursuit.”

We must be *confident* of our own attractiveness to offer ourselves.”

The really pertinent question is to ask what light does the Christian symbol system throw on the anxieties, the fears, and the ambiguities involved in human intimacy.

Fundamental ambiguity: “Man desperately wants friendship and love, but he is terribly afraid of taking the traumatic risk of self-exposure that is necessary for love.”

The Christian believes that Reality is gracious, and that it is therefore ultimately safe to take and be taken because no matter what happens, a gracious Reality will protect one.

The revelation of Jesus tells us that we can move beyond “stored-up resentments, awkward divisions of labor, frustrated dreams, vast areas which by mutual consent are never discussed, trade-offs by which certain defense mechanisms of both partners are inviolable, subtle aggressions and manipulations, and brave pretenses to the outside world that all is well between us.”

“Christianity is the revelation that friendship and love are possible, that we are free to love, that man need not be afraid to give himself over to friendship, to take and be taken. For the Really Real proclaims itself as friend, then the whole universe is out to do us good. The joys of human friendship turn out to be an anticipation of the great life of friendship and joy prepared for us by this splendid, dizzying, crazy God of ours, whose Word made flesh manifested himself to us in these incredible words: ‘behold, I do not call you servants; I call you friends.’”

Chapter TWO: *Sexuality as Hunger*

The strongest *predictor* of marital adjustment is whether the two parties grew up in a family where the relationship between husband and wife was basically healthy and happy.

There is a common (erroneous) assumption that ‘we are enlightened about sex and our narrow, rigid, prohibitive ancestors were not.

Contrary to this assumption, “I insist that the norms of the past deserve to be understood on their own terms and ‘from the inside’.”

E.g., concerning ‘indissolubility:’ “I am convinced that there is a *strain toward permanence* in human [sexual] relationships; to say this does not necessarily commit one to the present requirements of the code of canon law, but one should examine the possibility that the code is trying to cope, however ineptly and inadequately, with what is a very real human dilemma.”

The most fundamental insight that primitive man had about sexuality is one that we frequently overlook or forget, that it is a *raw, primal, basic power* over which we have only very limited control.

Sexuality was viewed as *Sacred* because of its great power and because it was one of the fundamental forces that kept the universe going.

“He was afraid of that power because he knew that it could drive him into a frenzy. He did not understand it, he could not contain it, and therefore, like every other power that was both strong and mysterious, his own sexuality became something sacred.”

Taboos = attempt to contain that power so that it would not disrupt the fragile net of social relationships.

Every one of us experiences our own sexuality as imperious and demanding.

“Sexuality is a raw elemental force which sweeps us along like a thirty-five-mile-an-hour wind would toss a tiny sailboat on the waters of Lake Michigan. Any approach to understanding and living with sexuality that does not take into account the immense and undifferentiated power of sexual passion is naïve and self-defeating.”

“The beginning of sexual wisdom is to understand that we are dealing with a power that cannot be tamed. Living with sexuality does not mean eliminating its primal force; it means, rather, understanding how primal the force is and channeling it in directions which are both socially and personally productive.”

We must begin by understanding that the problems and possibilities of our sexuality, its hungers and satisfactions, are part of the human condition quite independent of particular time and space.

In the encounter between man and woman (e.g., on the beach, in the office), their sexual hungers are present, their sexual fantasies are at work, their sexual awareness will be active, that they will be kidding themselves if they think that their sexual differences do not have a powerful if subtle influence on the relationship that emerges between them.

Conventions necessary for social living *limit* sexual fantasies to the imagination; but some *release* is needed for the *tensions* that build up when they are so limited.

“The solution will most likely involve a development of a relationship between a husband and wife in which their respective fantasies can be more adequately expressed with each other at certain times.”

Variety seems to be a fundamental part of human sexual hunger.

“Dull sex is not an adequate response to the profound and tempestuous power of sexuality found within men and women, and both husband and wife should realize that.”

Living with sexuality involves both the *diversion* of sexual energy and understanding how and why we divert it and exercising sufficient control over the diversion so that the result is not harmful to us or others.

Limitations on freedom of married satisfaction of sexual hungers:

- Other responsibilities;
- Need for sexual privacy.

Great limitations on married sexual satisfaction arise from the fears, anxieties, defense mechanisms and resentments out of the past and present which focus on the marriage bed.

“In the great battle between *delight* and *disgust*, our fears, our resentments, our immaturity frequently loads the dice in favor of disgust. But our sexual hungers and energies are not thereby eliminated. On the contrary, they are diverted toward reinforcing the hatred and the disgust.”

The sexual drive can become brutal and punitive; the libidos are directed toward hatred, resentment, and disgust.

Wisdom consists in understanding both sexuality's *elemental force* and the simultaneous necessity and frustration in restraining its vigor and drive.

Five rules for living with sexual hunger:

1. We must accept the tremendous power of our sexuality and acknowledge the weakness and inadequacy of our control over that power.
2. We must accept the fact that our sexuality flows in many strange eddies and currents and can be diverted down dark, hateful, and punitive streams.
3. We must accept the fact that the same ill-controlled and frequently deceptive power that we experience also exists in everyone else.
4. We must accept the fact that casual attitudes, a simple formulae, easy answers, and magic techniques are inadequate responses to the fearsome power of sex.
5. We must accept the fact that whatever our sexual posture (married or celibate) hard work and constant effort at focusing energies is necessary for both healthy relationships with members of the other sex and for the diversion of our excess energies into constructive and creative activities.

“The essence of wisdom about sex is to understand that we are really in trouble when we think we have figured out the answers.”

“The yearning for sexual union can be seen as but one manifestation of man's drive to break out of the limits his own individuation imposes on him and attempt to achieve a basic unity with the life forces of the universe.”

“When a husband and wife seek unity with one another, they are attempting to achieve in their union a perfection which exists permanently in GOD.”

Unity of members of the opposite sexes reflects the unity of all things in God.

Proper reaction: “they should be *grateful* for the spark of the divine that is present in them and the revelation, however briefly, of the power of that spark.”

Chapter THREE: A Sexual Revolution?

The ‘Sexual Revolution’ as it is generally described is little more than a creation of the mass media.

The real sexual revolution means that we marry people who are our friends and attempt through mutual orgasm to deepen and enrich the friendship.

In ancient cultures, ‘friendship’ and ‘marriage’ were rigidly separated.

The idea of friendship without sexuality (e.g., coeducational monastery) and of eroticism without genitality (e.g., romantic love of the troubadours) were necessary steps in the

development of the very modern and very recent idea that marriage, friendship, and the principle of genital satisfaction could all exist in the same relationship.

With this development, sex became a form of play and mutual orgasm was something that one was to seek from one's spouse, who was not only a friend but also a playmate.

For *more is expected* of marriage than ever before; in our day, it is assumed that marriage will combine the satisfaction that were distributed in several different relationships in years gone by.

This combination of sexual hunger and friendship in one relationship is not an ideal easy to achieve or one that most married couples are ready to seriously seek.

Certain positive changes are a sign of progress:

- More openness in discussion of sex;
- More willingness to face explicitly the sexual components of our behavior.
- More awareness of the mutuality of social conventions concerning sex;
- More concern about the sexuality of women.

But the real sexual revolution still has a long way to go before it becomes a pervasive cultural phenomenon.

"Young men and women approach marriage today with a powerful expectation that they will be able to be friends and playmates. To the extent that this expectation is not met, the marriage is bound to be frustrating."

There are two common *assumptions* implicit in much of the 'expert' commentary on current sexuality:

- a. 'Evolutionary enlightenment' presumes that man becomes wiser and more enlightened with each passing decade.
- b. 'Scientism' views man as essentially a highly developed animal and assumes that human behavior can best be understood if man is compared with the other higher animals and his actions analyzed independently of the cultural and interpretive schemes that he has developed.

"The wise man is both suspicious of the past (and present) and willing to listen to it."

Implication: fundamental unity of human experience.

Man's capacity for language and power of interpretation affect him in two critical ways:

- a. Endows him with a capacity for *fantasy* which other animals lack;
- b. Gives him the possibility and imposes on him the necessity of assigning *meaning* to his behavior.

"The legalism of the past and the simplicism of the present have one important thing in common. They both assume that the problems of sexuality can be solved in terms of who you sleep with and what particular organs are combined in what ways. As anyone who has pondered his own sexual experience seriously knows, it is not all that easy – and it never will be so long as man has both a fantasy life and the power to interpret and give meaning to his behavior."

Chapter FOUR: How to Be Sexy

Mankind has a number of serious problems in coping with his own eroticism:

1. His sex drive can be aroused at any time;
2. His sexuality is set in a matrix of his behavior as a symbol-creating, meaning-giving animal; how he behaves sexually depends to a considerable extent on how he defines his own sexuality;
3. He has an extraordinarily active, vigorous, and creative fantasy life.

"To be sexy is to create an erotic atmosphere around oneself, to radiate an atmosphere of sexual attractiveness, to invite potential sexual partners, to enjoy *playfulness* and *variety* in a genital relationship."

Childhood experiences from an important factor in becoming sexy.

We become sexy by *acquiring the skills* of sexiness; for most, this is a painful and difficult experience.

"Pretending to be sexy is infinitely easier than being sexy."

"To be sexy is to be aware of one's body as an instrument of playfulness and delight, to be able to communicate this awareness to others, and then to commit oneself to a gift of that body in a mutual search for pleasure, delight, variety, and playfulness."

Shame is basically a *feeling of inadequacy*.

- Physical: fear that one's physical organs may not be good enough;
- Existential: fear that one is inadequate to the task of accomplishing union as an individuated person;
- Psychic: feelings of guilt caused by conditioned emphasis on the evil of the human body and the risks of human sexuality.

Coexisting with shame, is the healthy instinct toward *privacy* as an assertion of personal dignity and independence.

We are plagued by a confusion of privacy and shame.

Shame is the enemy of sexiness.

"Sexiness is a communication of one's nature as a bodily sexed creature."

'Human beings are sexy creatures, but they can use their capacity for language and meaning to repress this sexiness, to hide it, to cover it, to pretend it isn't there.'

The simplicity of both the nudists and the prudes denies the complexity of the human condition.

"If the only thing that counts in a genital relationship is the coupling of organs, then clothing, etc., doesn't make much difference; but if variety, playfulness, challenge, stimulation are important aspects of a genital relationship, then they are of considerable importance."

"In a good erotic relationship, the two people involved do all they can to make the environment of the relationship conducive to maintaining a high level of eroticism."

Social conventions (which are changeable) assist us in determining the circumstances under which two fundamental sexual urges are exercised, i.e., under which it is perfectly appropriate to undress in the presence of others (longing, desire), and under which it is not appropriate at all (fear).

"We must face the fact that the nature of prudery in our society is such that for too many married couples inhibitions are so strong that there is probably much less nakedness in their relationship than would be healthy."

"In order to be sexy, to create an ambiance of eroticism around one's person, it is necessary to accept the body as good, sexuality as good, our own personhood as good, and then to understand that whether one likes it or not one is constantly omitting sexual messages."

The question is finally the capacity to arouse *wonder* and create *surprise*.

"Predictability destroys wonder, surprise, variety, and playfulness."

(If everything that will happen is absolutely predictable and routine, the wonder and surprise will have gone out of the relationship.)

The nerves and muscles of the human body and particularly of the human sex organs, were made to be *played* with by a member of the opposite sex.

"Lovers play with each other because it is *fun*."

The fundamental question is one of *belief*.

"A dull, monotonous, predictable genitality makes sense in a dull, monotonous, predictable universe."

"The Christian can only *respond to the surprise of God's intervention* by keeping alive his faith in the possibility of surprise and developing his capacity for bringing delightful surprises to others."

"It is strict theological truth to say that the capacity to cause surprise and delight in others by erotic self-display is a continuation of Yahweh's work."

By creating wonder in other we manifest our faith in the basic wonderfulness of the universe.

Chapter FIVE: The Insatiable Female

Summary of current research findings concerning female sexuality:

1. It takes somewhat longer for a woman to arrive at a full state of physiological sexual arousal than a man, but not much longer.
2. In a woman sexual arousal declines much more rapidly than in a man when the source of stimulation is removed.
3. In the presence of proper stimulation, a woman can remain aroused and experience orgasmic satisfaction indefinitely.
4. Physical exhaustion is the only limit to a woman experiencing genital orgasm indefinitely.
5. A woman may be psychologically satisfied with one orgasm, but physical satiety in the sense of having obtained sufficient physical release so that there is no possibility or more relieve apparently does not exist in women.

6. While cultural or psychological variables may make it difficult for a woman to experience either arousal or orgasm, physiologically it is a relatively easy matter to arouse a woman.

“Uninhibited by cultural and psychological barriers, a woman’s sexuality appears to be both more intense and more demanding than that of a man.”

The problem in our day is to facilitate the development of a more healthy and more open attitude toward sex in as many women as possible (recognizing that society and culture throughout history have imposed so many unnecessary restrictions that many women experience little if any sexual pleasure).

Many women, though enlightened in theory and convinced by research evidence that they are capable of sustained and intense sexual delight, are still caught in the cultural norms of the past as well as their childhood and adolescent experiences.

“The real problem is to improve understanding, insight, and skills – both physical and psychological – in the *marriage* relationship.”

Conversation about a couple’s genital relationship requires an atmosphere of trust, confidence, openness, and love.

A woman’s responsibilities include the difficult task of helping the man overcome his subliminal fears about being an unskilled and inadequate lover – fears which beset many American men; she must teach him the combination of psychological tenderness and physical directness that are absolutely essential if he is to satisfy her.

“It is not fair that a woman should have to do all of these things. It is not fair that she must assume the responsibility for training her husband to be a lover while letting him think that he is initiating her into the joys of sexuality. But it is much to be feared that in our culture the only alternative for most women is continued sexual frustration.”

“A man can think of himself as a successful lover only when his wife wants him as badly as he wants her.”

Chapter SIX: The Uncertain Male

“If all sex was about was erection and orgasm, sexual problems of men would be very few. . . But since humankind is a self-conscious, self-reflective, interpreting creature there are other problems for male sexuality.”

The *fear of failure* is an abiding part of the sexuality of many American males.

“Quite simply, (when a man has an erection) his whole personality wants a vagina and wants it quickly, and there’s not much he can do to hide the fact; but he can be rejected.”

“He has exposed his maleness and it has not been deemed good enough.”

Many men are harassed at the semiconscious level with a fear of impotency and the related feeling of woeful inadequacy as a lover.

“One proves his virility in one way in the world in which he works and in a quite different way in the marriage bed and at the dinner table.”

“The usual unsatisfactory compromise is something that is not agentic enough for the world of career and not expressive enough for love-making.”

The truly virile man knows how to ‘make love,’ knows how to combine aggressiveness with tenderness, demand with surrender.

Men learn to fear women, yet deeply need women's affection.

"There is no up-per limit to the amount of caressing a man can absorb. The more the better. And the more direct and physical and sensuous the caressing is, the better it will be."

A man can be *confident* enough of his selfhood, his masculinity, his skills as a lover only when the woman has put considerable effort into building his morale, to reassuring him of his work, and encouraging him in his skills.

A man needs to be *wanted*: "he becomes free to be an imaginative, liberated lover when he perceives that his wife wants him as much as he wants her."

"One can take it as almost axiomatic that man will not become a skillful lover until it becomes obvious to him that his wife hungers for his body, for in perceiving that hunger, he perceives, perhaps for the first time, his worth as a male sexual creature."

"A man discussing his sexual uncertainties with his wife represents not merely an act of faith in her and in himself but in reality, whether one spells it with a small r or a capital R."

"In the Christian symbol system, the most obvious proof that one does not love masculinity or strength by exposing one's needs and desires is to be found in Yahweh making it quite clear how desperately he wants to be loved by his people, and making it clear indeed in explicitly sexual language. If Yahweh can admit that he 'needs' the affection of his beloved, then why should any man be afraid to admit the same thing? And if Jesus could weep over Jerusalem because he so desperately wanted the response of that city, would it be a weak man who would weep as he tells his wife how much he needs to be wanted by her? It is hard for a man to concede his vulnerability, to put aside the pose of someone who is always in control of everything, but if God can concede his vulnerability, maybe the admission of vulnerability is a sign of strength and not of weakness."

Chapter SEVEN: Sexual Intimacy and Children

There are more inhibitions of parental sexuality when children are present; the critical question is whether the man and woman permit these inhibitions to become controlling.

There are two ways to cope with the distractions and interruptions of life:

1. To respond helplessly to them, to allow ourselves to be buffeted from demand to demand;
2. Establish a hierarchy of goals and values and arrange one's life in such a way that distractions from high priority goals are reduced to a minimum.

"One is still not completely free from interruptions and distractions; but one has chosen to dominate and control the chaos of existence instead of being dominated by it."

"Parents organize their lives in such a way that there are times and places of guaranteed privacy and other times and places of minimal likelihood of distraction."

"... a lifestyle of control as opposed to a lifestyle of chaos does not mean that one wins all the battles; it merely means that we win more than we lose."

The choice involves the human dilemma of struggle between order and chaos.

The religious symbolism reveals that “the Ultimate Graciousness of Being has already triumphed over the forces of darkness, chaos and disorder and man’s ordering activity is a way of sharing in the victory.”

“If one believes the underlying truth of the genesis myth one has very powerful motivation for exercising an option in favor of reasoned and rational personal responsibility over one’s life. Chaos can be beaten; it is not necessary to surrender to the forces of confusion and disorder which swirl around us.”

Growing up in a home where sexual intimacy between parents is healthy and growing is extremely important for children.

“Young people learn how to deal with sex by watching how their parents deal with it.”

There are countless cues every day as to what a man is and what woman is and how they relate to one another. The children couldn’t miss such cues even if they wanted to.

“If the sexual relationship between man and wife is mutually exciting and satisfying, the children know it, not explicitly or consciously perhaps, but in the depths of their personality.”

“Words, tone of voice, touches, quick smiles, secret laughter, a flash of an eye, a twist of a hip, a brushing of bodies, a meeting of hands, an occasional pinch, or pat or squeal – all of these say far more to children than does the most clinical and sophisticated ‘liberal’ instruction (not that instruction is out of place).”

The best sort of atmosphere for children to mature in is one in which their parents are “engaged continually in seducing one another.”

The sexual atmosphere of the home, present and past is particularly critical when the child experiences the trauma of awakening adolescent sexuality.

“Having created an atmosphere in one’s home that is suffused with a healthy and passionate sexuality, one thereby equips one’s children with the attitudes and values which are the raw materials by which they can create cosmos in the midst of the chaos they will experience in their own lives.”

Chapter EIGHT: Sex and Conflict

One of the ways in which love grows is by conflict.

Conflict is the way two lovers disclose to one another the ‘imperfect fit’ in their physical and psychological needs.

Compromise is made possible in the clarification that emerges from the self-revelation occasioned by conflict.

“The conflict ritual permits the lovers to assert their fear that there is no love, to discover that the cause of tension is much less important, laugh at its relative triviality, and then take steps to eliminate it if possible at least to integrate it into their lives.”

It is important in the marriage that the couple develop a style and a ritual in which conflict can be waged as often as is necessary without threatening the structure of the marriage.

The ritual/style is a mechanism for dealing with tension that allows them to simultaneously express their anger and indicate to each other that the fundamental relationship is not in jeopardy.

There must be skill and tact and tenderness in every confrontation between lovers, but it does not follow that in confrontation one pulls punches: it must be direct, sincere, and to the point.

A confrontation is a demand for the best in the other; it is demanding what is wanted and what there is a right to.

“A love that is not passionate to demand the best from the other is not love at all.”

“Confrontation is not something distinct from the rhythm of taking and being taken in any human friendship. It is not a diversion from the process but a continuation and a furtherance of it. It can only occur when two people are confident enough of themselves and of their relationship to know that it can survive conflict and occasional acts of confrontation. But if this minimum confidence in the relationship does not exist and if conflict and confrontation cannot occur, then the two people who pretend to intimacy may continue to exist in some sort of physical or psychological juxtaposition, but friends and lovers they are not.”

Chapter NINE: Loneliness

There are two kinds of loneliness that afflict human life:

- a. That which comes from the human condition can be alleviated but not eliminated;
- b. That which is freely chosen can always be conquered if we choose to.

‘Existential loneliness’ derives from the fact that we are consciously individuated creatures.

Man may not break completely with his finitude and isolation, but his life is filled with opportunities to move beyond the barriers of individuation to find psychological and physical union with others.

Sexuality makes affection and tenderness possible, and in the final analysis this is what women and men most need and most want in their lives.

“Orgasms are nice, but affection and tenderness are indispensable.”

The most delightful lovemaking among married couples is precisely that which is explicitly designed to alleviate loneliness, discouragement, and weariness; it is then that love most effectively communicates to the other that he is worth something, that he is desired, admired, and loved.

It is man’s loneliness and need for affection that make possible those two difficult and pleasurable experiences between lovers: reconciliation and new beginnings.

To begin again means to admit one’s past mistakes, accept responsibility for one’s failures, write off all the wasted time, and go back, as it were, to ground zero to begin again.

“In most marriages that have grown cool is not cold, there is in both people a latent desire to begin again, though, unfortunately, they have grown skilled in ignoring the cues that other emits about the possibility of starting anew.”

Chapter TEN: Fidelity and Sexuality

“Fidelity” = the strain toward permanence and public commitment to permanence that is involved in any relationship beyond the most superficial.

“... a longing for love that does not end.”

“Genital fidelity is a model and symbol of a more general aspect of human relationships.”

“Fidelity that is not aimed toward permanence is not fidelity at all.”

Public and unrestricted.

“Fidelity in any relationship is a permanent commitment to ‘reach out’ for the other, a promise to persist in efforts to transcend the barriers and the distance that separate one from the other, a firm resolve to maintain effort in sustaining and developing the relationship no matter what difficulties and trials arise.”

“Genital fidelity” means that one is firmly committed to developing, enriching, and expanding the genital relationship with one’s partner no matter how many frustrations, disappointments, and failures may intervene.

Thus, marital fidelity is positive and not merely negative: “Rejecting the offer of a new body requires courage and strength of rather limited duration; trying to improve one’s capacity to bring pleasure to and obtain pleasure from a body which is next to one in bed every night is a challenge that never ends.”

Fidelity means increasing sensitivity to the other:

- a. Becoming ever more sophisticated in understanding the physiology of his genital partner;
- b. Growing in understanding of the psycho-sexual needs and dispositions of the partner (e.g., fantasy) – learning how to read defense mechanisms;
- c. Striving to become gracious in the techniques of providing the other with the needed feedback in such a way as to enhance rather than weaken fundamental self-esteem as a sexual person and as a genital partner.

“It is interesting to observe that many married people experience great feelings of guilt when they sleep with someone else but relatively little feeling of guilt when they allow the nightly or thrice weekly romp on the marriage bed to become dull and routine.”

Essential to fidelity is gentleness.

“Fidelity is persistent, dauntless, implacable when needs be, challenging when challenge is called for, and in the midst of everything, always gentle.”

The most basic reason for lack of sexual satisfaction is existential: “Unless they are willing to believe that they are lovable and attractive as human beings and that the risk of vulnerability is underwritten by a fundamentally gracious cosmos, their sex lives are not going to be especially rewarding.”

The absolutely essential prerequisite of sexual growth is to build up the other’s confidence in his/her own sexuality.

“If one chooses to invest the other with eroticism and gently helps to develop it, one has in fact yielded to the other’s attractiveness.”

Part of the promise of fidelity is the commitment to maintain physical attractiveness in keeping with one’s age.

“In the entire range of the components of a marriage, what fidelity means is that one commits oneself never to wait for the other to take the initiative to heal a separation and never to reject the other’s initiative no matter how awkward or inarticulate that initiative may be.”

In every faithful relationship, there are turning points: decisive occasions when the whole tone and ambiance of the relationship is transformed. But there will be one point which is crucial because it points the way to all the others.

The faithful lover is constantly sensitive to the possibility that the other may be saying in word or deed, ‘Please, please love me NOW.”

The reason why we Christians are faithful in our relationships to one another is that Yahweh is faithful to us.

Christians are faithful to one another in all their relationships because Yahweh’s “fidelity gives them the confidence that their own fidelity requires and because they understand that their fidelity is an exercise in their vocation of manifesting Yahweh’s love to the world.”

“To the extent that a man and woman are committed to improving the surprise and pleasure, the excitement, the challenge of what goes on between the sheets, then they are reflecting God’s commitment to his people.”

Chapter ELEVEN: Growth Through Death

“Humans can get much more satisfaction out of their sex lives than animals, but they have to work at it much harder.”

A live of creative intimacy requires courage:

- The courage to demand sexual response;
- The courage to ask for reassurance and affection.

Faith is the conviction that despite distraction, discouragement, disappointment, failure, disillusionment and frustration, it is still worth the effort to try to love and be loved.

The central symbol of Christianity is the combination of the cross and resurrection: Jesus who died not lives!

“When we put on this cross and resurrection symbol we are then able to see that each new conflict, each new risk, each new thrust against loneliness is a death that we must endure if we have hope to live anew.”

The surprise component of sex has as its principal purpose the arousal of the other so that in his excitement he will pursue us. So, too, with Yahweh’s intervention in human events. He surprises us in order that he might attract us. He excites us so that we might be drawn out of our mundane lives and pursue him.

“The more the lover excites the partner into a frenzy of passion, the more godlike he is.”

The cross and resurrection symbolism tells us in the most dramatic religious terms possible that human growth comes through death and rebirth, and that it is safe to take the risk of dying because God has guaranteed us rebirth.

“‘Putting on’ the symbols of the cross and resurrection of Jesus ought to make a man and woman far more sexy than putting on mint green underwear (though there’s nothing wrong with

that either). If the cross and resurrection do not make us more sexually attractive, that is not Jesus' fault. It's ours."