



LAURIE KRIEG *and* MATT KRIEG

AN IMPOSSIBLE MARRIAGE

WHAT OUR MIXED-ORIENTATION
MARRIAGE HAS TAUGHT US ABOUT
LOVE AND THE GOSPEL



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *An Impossible Marriage* by Laurie Krieg and Matt Krieg.
Copyright © 2020 by Laurie Krieg and Matt Krieg. Published in
association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates.
Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com.

ONE

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

[Jesus] is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold He always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on His shoulders. If He bids us carry a burden, He carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and super-abundant in love, you always find it in Him.

CHARLES SPURGEON

LAURIE

“What do you want?”

A friend asked me the question assuming she knew the answer: You *want* Matt. You *want* to be with him.

Did I? Did I *want* that?

I packed the question into my suitcase of warm clothes as I headed out into the Michigan snow. Our mentor had gifted both Matt and me with separate silent retreats, and it was my turn.

What do you want?

Over the previous year, I hadn’t given myself permission to ask such a question; I simply lived in our fractured home.

When our second daughter was born, a repressed memory came to the surface. It was a blurry one that included sexual assault by a stranger when I was very young. Something about the birth of Juliette jolted my brain into remembering the birth of my younger brother, which happened around the time of the

assault. My present life woke up my past life. The memory came back in unwanted flashes paired with panic attacks. I went into a near-catatonic state whenever Matt walked into certain rooms. Matt was not my attacker, but his maleness reminded me of him.

I dug into my spiritual and emotional toolbox to try to solve this ridiculous issue. (“Hello, I love Matt!”) But no matter how much I tried, the memory only gripped me tighter. None of my favorite tools were working: prayer, books, counseling.

As time wore on, the memory intertwined itself with my sexual orientation, intensifying the situation. *Matt is scary*, the memory whispered. *But you don't like men anyway*, my desires for women said.

Since I was very young, I experienced attraction toward my same gender. Girls were interesting, and boys were . . . like my five brothers. They were fun to play G.I. Joe and LEGO with, but they did not draw my eyes or attention. What began as a heart flutter around certain girls turned into a secret same-sex relationship in college.

Matt and I met while I was in such a relationship. It became clear he was interested in me as more than a friend. “Hold up,” I said. “You have no idea what’s going on with me.” I didn’t know what to say to him. I didn’t identify as gay or someone who experiences same-sex attractions (SSA), or any of the words you hear today. I didn’t even *consider* myself gay or SSA. I just liked girls, I wasn’t sexually attracted to men, and I was in a same-sex relationship.

Even though I was in quite a bit of denial about my attractions toward women, there was something about this Matt guy that drew me toward him in the midst of my sexual questioning. Our hearts ached over the same things, laughed about the same things, and desired the same thing: to care for the lost and the broken. I was not initially physically attracted to him, but I was drawn to him in other ways, which led to physical attraction.

We started out as good friends. When Matt made his intentions clear, I told him to pray until I was ready to share “what was going on with me.” When I did, he said he saw me no differently—and he didn’t. Charlotte Brontë said, “The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter—often an unconscious but still a faithful interpreter—in the eye.”¹ Matt’s eyes revealed the truth of his words.

We started dating, and about a month into our dating relationship I broke up with my not-technically-girlfriend girlfriend. (That season was as messy as it sounds.) Matt and I experienced a sweet relationship for about a year, but then I broke up with him too. “God said no,” I told him.

I believe God prompted this move because I needed some major heart work before talking about marriage—which we were. “I don’t want to get married,” I journaled during class one day. “But I do want to marry Matt.” By that I meant I knew that if we were going to get married, it would not be stereotypical—a doting wife and a take-the-reins husband. But I also saw we could be partners as we served God together. We could be friends who made each other laugh, had each other’s back, and worshiped Jesus together.

We did not imagine that even those minimal (though idealistic) dreams would fall like sand through our fingers eight years later.

But if we had gotten married before our breakup? I don’t think we would have lasted a year. I would have cheated or . . . something. But while we were apart, God connected me with a counselor and fellow Christian who God used to take my focus off of both women and men and place it on Jesus.

I became joyful. Hopeful. I was ready to move to one of the US coasts, earn my doctorate, and become a happy English professor while married to Jesus.

But then God called me to an earthly marriage. “I have someone for you,” he whispered.

“No,” I said back. I was always very honest with God. “God, you know my sexual attractions are toward women, but I am willing to surrender those to you daily. I just want to be married to you.”

“But I want you to live out your mission of making disciples as a married woman,” he said.

I paused. “Fine. But you better pick him out for me because that is stressful.”

I didn’t think Matt would enter the picture again. God had said no before.

In his kindness, God brought Matt back. Through our breakup, God seemed to push pause on my love for Matt, gutted my perspective, called me to marriage, unpaused my love for Matt, and then put me in front of him. I reached out to Matt to “talk about something” in an email, and so we met at a Wendy’s over chocolate Frosties. (It was all very romantic.) “I think I still love you,” I said as my shake melted.

“I’m about to meet up with a girl I liked before I liked you,” he said, slowly chewing on a French fry.

“Okay,” I said, glaring at God.

“I’ll let you know,” Matt said.

Then God struck Matt’s house with lightning.

Not kidding. Matt was watching sports on TV in the middle of a thunderstorm and *zzzzap*. It went dark. Matt was fine, but the strike fried all of the electronic devices in his house. As a poor, just-graduated-college guy, he didn’t have the money to replace it all, let alone begin to pursue this other woman (who lived in another state at the time).

Instead, he visited his parents. “So, I think Laurie is back in the picture?” he told them.

“Laurie? We love Laurie!” They knew my story—all of it—and loved me and us through it.

“But I’m not good enough for her,” he replied. This was a theme of his life and the real reason he was hesitant to pursue me.

“You don’t have to be perfect, son,” his dad said. “Just be teachable.”

One month later we were engaged. Three months after that we were married and ready to take on the world in the mode we are called to make disciples.

But we also weren't ready. We didn't understand that yet. The first honeymoon years were sweet—we laughed often together. Then came the dark years of Matt's addiction to porn, followed by a year of light after he repented. And then, suddenly, our marriage movie cut to black.

Eight years in, after our second daughter's birth, I couldn't be in the same room with Matt without my entire body stiffening with fear bathed in rage. I felt like a jaguar. "Get away from me," I growled. We could not be physically close in any capacity for over a year and a half. My childhood memory saw Matt as a threat, and my sexual orientation offered what seemed to be a peaceful, freeing escape.

Matt was still the amazing man I married—even better. I had watched him grow in mind, body, and spirit throughout the near-decade of knowing him. And I had grown too. But after the memory resurfaced, the easy laughter and friendship that had permeated our dating relationship became harder and harder to find. There were moments, hours, and even days when we felt a springtime thaw, but then something else would trigger me and a blizzard would refreeze my heart.

The frozen, snowy roads matched the state of my heart as I drove to the silent retreat center.

What do I want?

"I need God to wake me up about marriage," I told a friend before leaving. "I need him to download something fresh..." I couldn't finish the sentence like I wanted to: "... so that I want to stay married." Christians don't say those things. They only think them quietly and announce them publicly to an uproar after building up files of reasons to leave. I had a lot of files.

I did *want* something fresh from God. I felt I needed it.

After unloading my bags into my room, I bundled up to take a walk in the woods. The winter sun cut through the trees. Snow

sparkled, but only my eyes noticed. My icy soul couldn't respond in worship to the God who made it.

A mile into my walk, I felt the urge to run. *Run, run, run.* I had been running for exercise all winter, and I wanted my muscles to burn with the faster pace. *I want to feel something. Anything. Even pain.* Maybe pain could melt my heart. There were times I stared at Matt across the icy tundra in our home and willed my heart to thaw by seeing his sad face. *Maybe if I see him in enough agony, I'll want to change, to stay, to work harder.* But even though Matt was kind toward me in the midst of turmoil, and even though he sometimes bared his own raw, shredded soul, it did not tap into my empathy. If anything, I bundled myself up further to protect my own aching heart.

"Where are you going?" I heard in a still, small voice.

"I want to get to the next thing," I said.

"What is the next thing?" it said.

"I don't know." I was afraid of finding out. *Leaving him?*

Back at the retreat center, I signed up for an hour-long session with a spiritual director. The woman was a kind, earthy type who likely listened to talk radio and ate vegan from her own garden. After she asked a few insightful questions, I shared with her how I came to find a new perspective on marriage. "It's been really hard," I said, making vague allusions to having difficulty connecting with my husband. She quoted the Christian mystics, dug into some Scripture about how "from death comes life," and said, "Sticking it out can bring gifts and even greater joy."

I thanked her, but I received none of her words. There was a lingering question in the back of my mind. "What if she knew?" What would she say if she knew that my default sexual attraction was toward women and not my husband? How would her advice change? Some friends had offered solutions before, many of them matching the advice I could easily find on the internet: I don't have to die to myself. My type of marriage is too hard. Sticking it out won't bring joy. My metaphorical death doesn't bring life—only more death. In fact, it is itself a kind of assault.

Or maybe I was reading her wrong. She might have swung to the opposite extreme: Pray more. Have lots of sex with your spouse. Just do it. Force yourself. Submit yourself. It'll fix you. But such an answer would have only been another kind of assault to my soul.

Where was the middle road? Where was the one that upheld the covenant and the purpose of marriage to point to Jesus but also held my experience with tenderness?

Wrapping myself in a blanket, I plopped into a sunbathed chair in front of a corner window. For the next three hours I wrestled with God.

What do I want? I looked out at the still-sparkling snow and journaled.

I'm on the edge of a cliff. Do I stay or do I go?

Do I want to be married?

Do I want to be married to Matt?

No. To be honest? No. I don't. I'd love to be his friend.

Is that not enough? Is friendship not enough?

I thought of the spiritual director and what I assumed her advice would have been if I had been completely honest with her. *Just leave. You have a free get-out-of-marriage card because of your sexual orientation.*

Do I get a free pass to exit this relationship because I'm attracted to the same gender?

Do the death-to-self rules change for me because I am who I am?

Is there a different set of guidelines for me?

The world says, "Yes." The world says, "Start over. Be like other 'liberated lesbians.' Be best friends with your husband, but fall in love with a woman. Finally, be you and express yourself the way you need to."

That's very tempting. It's what I want.

But is it what I need?

A prompting encouraged me to flip my well-worn Bible to Psalm 37. I had a sense God was directing me to a certain verse.

Take delight in the LORD, / and he will give you your heart's desires (v. 4).

Is my heart's desire a committed relationship with a woman? Is my heart's desire to be in love? What is my heart's desire?

Maybe I don't know my heart. Maybe I don't know what it needs. Maybe I don't know what to feed it. Like my kids who think their cravings for sugar are going to satisfy, perhaps I think some human sugar will satisfy.

I looked over at the woods where I had recently run. I recalled the still, small voice asking me where I was going. "I want to get to the next thing," I had said.

I quieted my unruly will and went back to that moment. The voice kept speaking. "No, don't go to the next thing. Don't run away. Pause for a minute. Come with me."

In my mind's eye I saw myself sitting on a throne, which I took to be the judgment seat. Instead of deciding good and evil, I knew my role was to decide what would come next in my life. "Do you think you know what is best for you?" the voice asked. I could see who was speaking now. It was an angel. One of God's representatives—all bright, shining, and peaceful but also serious.

"Um, yes?" I said hesitantly at first, then garnered more courage. "Yes. I do know what is best for me." I looked in front of the judgment seat. There were a million buttons and slides that made it look like a DJ sound booth. I knew my job was to pick the right buttons in the right sequence to choose my next right step. I instinctively knew that the wrong buttons would yield devastating results. My finger hovered over one, but I could foresee it would usher in the death of my children. I put my finger over another but sensed it would cause a fire that would tear through blocks of buildings. *There has to be a less intense*

sequence to choose, I thought. But I couldn't find it. I didn't know the rules for this machine.

"I can't pick," I told the angel at last.

"Who can?" he asked. "Who do you trust with the controls?" Of course, I knew the right answer, but the way he phrased it kept me from rolling my eyes. He didn't ask, "Do you trust God?" He asked, "Who do you trust to lead your life?"

He went on. "Wouldn't you rather give the controls to someone who made you, made your world, knows the past and the future, created everyone else, is completely unbiased and yet biased toward all of you equally? Not only did he tell you how to live well, he lived it himself, and made a path for us to live it through himself. Wouldn't you rather have him choose what is best for your life?"

"Yes! But, God . . . *but, God!*" I stopped talking to the angel and turned my conversation to his boss. I knew he heard me—us. I knew he was involved in this whole stupid thing. "It is so hard! Not pretend hard but like *really hard*. Not Disney-movie hard but *ripping-my-heart-apart hard!*"

"I know, Laurie. I know. I wrote it, and I've walked it . . . with you. I have experienced the devastation of the broken world and the havoc it has had on your soul with you. I have never left you."

He was good, but I didn't let him crack me. "But, God! I would have so many more friends! I would have the type of intimate connection I want."

"So, that's it, Laurie? It's about sex? It's about pleasure—pleasure I made in the first place—that you want to take out of my design? You want to eat the apple I said no to? You want *that tree?*"

That made me pause. "But the world! The world, God! The world says, 'I'll love you if you come out. I won't fight you. I will *champion* you.' I am so tired, God. So tired of fighting."

"They said that to me, too: 'We will love you if you become king! We won't kill you if you just stop saying you are God. We will champion you if you take over the way we want you to.'"

“STOP IT. Stop. Just stop. You don’t get it. You don’t know *this* type of pain. This is different. *And you are Jesus!*”

I waited for him to fight me. “You aren’t even going to respond to that, are you?” Nothing. He didn’t. “God, I know what I want . . .”

“And where does getting what you want lead?” There he was. “Where will it take you, Laurie? Walk it all the way down the trail . . .”

I wrote:

If I was to divorce Matt:

The good: I would be free. I would find someone who loved me and with whom I could have the intimacy I desire. I would be championed by some friends and some Christians. I’d feel treasured. I’d feel like a queen.

The hard: My kids. I wouldn’t want to lose them. I wouldn’t want to confuse them. I’d want them to have Matt in their life. I don’t know how long the physical aspect with someone new would last. I don’t know if the person would love me for me. I don’t know how long it would take until I would be frustrated with her neediness.

I wouldn’t be championed by everyone. I would be despised by some. I would probably become bitter toward them. I would lose some dear friends. If they ignored my pleas that I was still the same person, I would probably write them off as haters who don’t understand. Or I would try to convince them that this is the right way, the Christian way.

I would feel desired. I would feel wanted.

I would remember the days I felt like a queen with Matt: How he looked at me. How he treasured me. I would miss his strength. I would miss his masculinity. His shoulders. I’ve always liked his shoulders—to me they exemplify strength. A covering.

I would probably cover the matching tattoo we have.

Would I go to hell?

That’s a sobering question. But not enough. Or is it? Is it?

I wanted to be done thinking. Done writing. Done wrestling. I sent Matt a text, “I’m not doing well.” Perhaps this would warn him of what was to come.

But God wasn’t done with me. “Laurie, do you want to silence the Holy Spirit’s presence in you?”

I knew what God was alluding to. It was from the book of Jude, which I hardly ever read but happened to read the day before. Certain verses popped out to me as if they were radioactive:

But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ predicted. They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God’s Spirit in them. (Jude 17-19)

There are those who follow their *natural instincts* toward *ungodly desires* because they *don’t have God’s Spirit in them*.

If I followed my natural instincts for a woman, would I not have God’s Spirit in me?

“Fine. Let’s walk that down the trail of possibilities,” I thought. Everything was on the table. Even my faith. “What does your Spirit actually give me?” I knew I was playing with fire, but in that moment I did not care.

I stared ahead toward this question.

As I did, I suddenly felt sharply cold and terrified. I did not feel like I tumbled into a black hole, but that I was one. I felt like I had just siphoned life out of everything around me but was still hollow. I was dark, freezing, and to-my-cells lonely. My bones were lead, and I could not breathe.

The moment ended, and I gasped.

What just happened?

I believe God allowed me to experience a fraction of hell for two microseconds. Not even the full thing, just a breath of it. It took my breath away and left me shaking.

I looked outside at the sunshine while I panted. I wanted the sun to warm me. *Did God just let me experience a fraction of life devoid of him?* My eyes were wide as I processed what that meant.

The Holy Spirit isn't just some Jiminy Cricket guide in our lives. He is all-comforting, all-wise, and the only source of peace. He is God on earth now. If I followed what I wanted . . . it would lead to a life empty of true comfort, wisdom, and peace. It could lead to hell, a restless separation from God, always seeking but never finding that peace.²

"Do you want to silence the Holy Spirit's presence in you?" He asked again.

"No."

"Then follow me. Trust me. Come and die."

• • •

The next morning, I woke up at 5 a.m. to a swirling snowstorm.

Knowing I had received what God had for me for the weekend, I packed up my things and jumped in the car before the sun rose. Gone were the sunshine and diamond snow. Gone, too, was my wrestling with staying or leaving Matt. I was resolved.

I had *not* decided to go home, kiss Matt's face, and surrender to a straight marriage. But I was resolved to God being God. I surrendered to him, and I wanted what *he wanted*. This meant I wanted the life he called me to, the one I covenanted before God and others: a life with Matt and our kids.

I had no idea how he would fix our crumbling marriage. I had no idea whether Matt and I would ever be close again physically.

All I knew was that I did not get a free pass to exit the relationship. There was not a different rule book for me. The death-to-self gospel was equally good news for me as it was for the straightest person I knew.

My arms shook as my car cut through the predawn darkness, the flakes falling fast. I was not quivering from fear of the blizzard but from my very real encounter with a holy God. My

arms shook, and my heart felt raw from a surgery no one could see. I needed some recovery.

“God, what will you give me in exchange for this surrender?” I asked while my car slowly ascended and descended the wooded hills. I was still self-focused. I hoped God would tell me something about how we aren’t going to simply survive but thrive.

“Laurie? You will hear my Spirit even more. You will be able to discern even more clearly.”

I guessed that was nice. His words were not what I *wanted*, but perhaps they were what I *needed*.

I had a lot to discern.

I had a lot to learn.

• • •

MATT

Laurie texted me from her retreat: “I’m not doing well.”

I knew immediately that this was not a reference to a general malaise about life. We had been in severe marital pain for over a year, and she had become increasingly distant. This avoidance was not the same type I leaned toward in suffering, which was distant, detached—what Laurie called “Planet Matt.” Planet Matt was a landing place for my mind to think about the ridiculous, such as what to do in a real-life velociraptor attack, or to add to my list of dad jokes.

Laurie’s type of avoidance included hostility, which felt like invisible knives pointed at me. If I tried to get close to her in any way—with jokes, conversation, or (heaven forbid, for her) physically—the claws came out. It was often only with a look, but it shredded me.

When she texted that single line, I went back to my word for the year: steadfast. I had chosen it after much prayer, and it seemed to be a theme for this year of suffering. Just don’t move. Don’t get close to her. Don’t get too far away.

But pray, Matt, I heard in a still, small voice after reading her text. Pray for Laurie.

Our oldest daughter, Gwyn, couldn't sleep. I carried my burden of prayer into her room as I comforted her. "When is Mama coming home?" she wailed.

"Don't worry," I said. "Mama will be home tomorrow." I rubbed her back, wondering to myself, *Will she?* I didn't know.

As I fell asleep, I tried not to escape to my own planet but instead to stay in a space of prayer. *Help, God. Help Laurie. Please, help our marriage.*

People have asked us many times how we chose to get married when we knew Laurie's orientation. There were two things that helped me pre-marriage: One, Laurie's attraction toward women didn't threaten me. If she left me for a man, I'd feel like there was something about me that wasn't manly enough. If she left me for another woman, I could never be a woman, so . . . there. That was a competition I couldn't participate in.

The second thing that helped was that Laurie always said, "I'm not attracted to men, but I am attracted to Matt." That phrase felt good for many years—until we slammed our heads against her level of *un-attraction* toward me. The uncovered memory brought it to the surface for her. As the past became clearer, so did Laurie's realization that she had been detaching from any physical parts of our marriage from the start. Days before leaving on her silent retreat, she had told me, "I never wanted to kiss you—even on our wedding day."

We had our first kiss after we said our vows. Laurie told me she wanted to wait until then (if she ever got married) because she didn't want "to replace one lust with another." She had just broken up with her girlfriend and didn't want to numb out on hormones that can come with physical connection to anyone. I believed her. She truly believed herself. But she buried a box deep inside her that held her desire to have physical connection with a man—her husband. I thought when we were married, we would open it and it would be filled with

all sorts of desire-for-Matt-only treasures. She thought so too. But the box was empty. Neither of us really knew the truth while she detached her mind from her body for eight years.

I wanted her fixed. I hate even saying that, but the reality was I did not want this pain. I wanted my wife back. Or a new version of her? Or one that at least didn't resent me? I didn't want her straight—I knew her story when we married, but I wanted her to be “Matt attracted” as she had said so many times in the early years. I mostly wanted peace in our home. I encouraged her to seek counseling, but as a therapist I knew it was unwise to strongly exhort someone to go. They need to want it, and Laurie did not. Her heart was locked, and she held the keys.

She also held the keys to the car that could drive her away from us forever.

Pray, Matt.

The next morning, I threw hats and snow pants on our girls so that we could play in the winter wonderland outside. As I bundled them up, I was surprised to hear the garage open. “I'm home!” Laurie said, smiling hugely. She hugged the girls, and even hugged me. My nervous, racing heart slowed as I saw—what was that? *Peace? A shred of genuine joy?* I kept my questions quiet as we romped around in the snow together, laughing. She tackled me several times, and we laughed and played like we hadn't in many months.

When we put the kids down for a nap, Laurie sat me down at the kitchen table.

“Should I be scared?” I asked. Maybe this would be when she let the axe fall. Play first, leave later.

“Not really,” she said, but her face was serious. “You're not in trouble.”

She told me she had been wrestling with leaving. She had never said those words aloud before. Her hostile detachment from our marriage had been a quiet one. Still, I wasn't shocked. God had prepared me.

“If I want to be with God,” she said, “then I want to be with you.” I didn’t hear her toss the words out in some sort of angry resolve. She seemed on an unsure foundation, but at least there was a foundation and the start of peace.

“That’s surprisingly comforting,” I said, sighing, playing with the crumbs on the table. “I know that in the battle between me and a woman, a woman would win. But in the battle between women and God, God would win.” I knew Laurie. She might wrestle for months or years with God, but at the end of the day she would never quit him.

The axe fell the next day. She let me read her back-and-forth conversation with God, and I felt the lacerations on my chest as—for the first time—I read the depth of her un-like for me. Her journal did not hold the genuinely sweet moments in our relationship: her choosing me, our friendship, and her desire to follow God. Instead, this journal entry revealed all the darkest thoughts including her total and complete lack of physical desire for me.

It hurt deeply.

We needed help. I needed help. Unfortunately, my prayers in that season were not, “Help me.” My prayers were, “Help her.” I wanted *Laurie* better so that I could have peace and so that we could have at least some kind of a physical connection. I felt justified in how I was petitioning God.

But oh, how much I had to learn. Not about Laurie’s same-sex attractions or her assault but about my own idolatry of sex. In my mind, I was a normal, red-blooded, respectful, heterosexual Christian guy, but I thought sex was what I *needed*—not just what I wanted.

Those of us men who grow up as—well, men—learn we are very visually, sexually driven especially around the time of junior high. And it is true. Louann Brizendine, a neuropsychiatrist and the author of *The Female Brain* and *The Male Brain*, has noted how the part of the brain dedicated to sexual pursuit is 2.5 times larger in men than women. Furthermore, in their teens, young men produce twenty to twenty-five times more testosterone than in

pre-adolescence. “If testosterone were beer,” she said, “a 9-year-old boy would be getting the equivalent of a cup a day. But a 15-year-old would be getting the equivalent of nearly two gallons a day.”³

So, what are Christian young men told when they are hitting that two-gallon-a-day drinking phase? Sex is good. You’re going to want it. But don’t. Just wait until marriage. *And then what?* Well, the assumption to even the Christian male brain is “My wife and I will have lots of sex and be happy.” Oh, there were some caveats too: “Men, sex starts in the kitchen. Love and serve your wife there, and you will be rewarded with sex.” We exchange service for sex. We exchange heart connection for sex. But what is the end goal? Sex. What is the focus? Sex. What is the commodity we are trading? Sex.

It’s Christianized, but the idol is still there: sex as a need.

In my counseling practice I meet with many types of couples. If there is a sexual issue in the marriage (either the husband or wife desiring more sexual intimacy than the other), do you know what the most quoted set of verses is?

The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife.

Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)

“See? My wife should be with me more often!” the finger-pointing husband says. “See? My husband should want me more!” the finger-pointing wife says. But they don’t notice the verb is reflexive. “Do not deprive each other,” Paul says. Not, “Make sure the other is not depriving you.” He’s saying, “Check *yourself*!”

These finger-pointing conversations become more complex and shame-laden in marriages where the male/female stereotypes break down. If the husband is having a hard time connecting with his wife (or even having any sort of desire), she can cross her arms in a huff and say, “It’s not supposed to be like this. I am the woman! I shouldn’t want it more than the man!” He feels shamed and the desire to be close to her disappears further into his own self-hatred.

For a woman, having trouble with a lack of desire to be physically close to her husband can stem from a number of places. She can feel intimidated by her husband’s masculinity and his sexual pursuits can be seen as demands. This does not draw a woman’s heart to a man; it terrifies or repulses her. Laurie felt this and cowered or became jaguar-like—even if all I wanted was to sit next to her.

Although I saw these demanding, finger-pointing attitudes in my practice, even though I gave talks on the idolatry of sex and marriage, I did not have the mirror up close enough to my face to see my own idol-worshipping reflection.

Sex is not a need—even in marriage. Sex is fruit. It is a gift for covenanted couples. It is a gospel metaphor within the gospel metaphor of marriage. It is something to be used to worship God, not to be demanded.

I did not know that yet. I had a lot to learn.

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/an-impossible-marriage