

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE BE HAVING SEX?

<https://fiercemarriage.com/how-often-should-we-be-having-sex>

[00:00:00]

Ryan: If you've ever felt discontent with your sex life, you're not alone. I would say that we felt that a few times in our marriage. *[both laughing]* More than a few times...

Selena: I was like, "What?"

Ryan: ...in our 17 years of marriage. So you're not alone. One of the reasons people feel discontent is they feel like they're not having as much meaningful intimacy or as much intimacy as they feel like they should be having at whatever stage in marriage they're in. Whether you're newlyweds, or you've been married for 20 years, this thing will still come up. So today, we hope to answer that question or to help you rather answer this question of how often should a married couple or how often should you as a married couple be having sex.

Sex is a beautiful thing. It's something God created for our good, for His glory. It's also a thing that has been kind of contorted and twisted by culture. And we can, if we're not careful, adopt the world's view of sex, and therefore a wrong understanding and wrong application of sex. So stay tuned. We'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:03] <Intro>

Selena: Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

Ryan: Here, we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

Selena: Sex—

Ryan: Communication—

Selena: Finances—

Ryan: Priorities—

Selena: Purpose—

Ryan: And everything in between.

Selena: Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

[00:01:35] <podcast begins>

Ryan: So the inspiration for this podcast episode came from an article that I found. It asked simply this question: how often do married couples have sex? And here's what the research tells us. So it's more of a presentation of the data in this article, which I found really interesting because specifically, it talked about how frequency changes as the couple ages.

Selena: Hmm.

Ryan: So if you... *[laughs]*

Selena: Interesting. There's correlation there.

Ryan: People over 50 years old, like when married couples are over 50, how often are those couples having sex versus married couples under 50? This research comes from a survey. It's a General Social Survey that was conducted by the University of Chicago and the National Opinion Research Center. So, it's a general survey and it's for people to use. It's an objective source of information. So they asked a question: how often do married couples have sex? And here's what the data says.

Selena: The survey says. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: The survey says, yes. Over 660 couples were polled here. 25% of them had sex once a week. 16% had sex two to three times per week. 5% had sex four or more times per week. Imagine that. *[chuckles]*

Selena: Can you imagine that? *[Ryan laughs]* Goodness sakes.

Ryan: Okay. Sorry, I wasn't trying to be mean. *[Selena chuckles]*

Selena: You got to be careful here.

Ryan: Okay. 17% had sex just once a month. 19% had sex two to three times per month. 10% hadn't had sex in the past year. So that's 10% of couples polled...

Selena: Had not had sex.

Ryan: ...did not have sex once in the past year.

Selena: Wow.

Ryan: Okay. Then 7% had sex about once or twice in the past year. So if you picture a bell curve, 10% is a larger number on the one far end of the bell curve that didn't have sex at all in the year. But then it goes down to 7% who had sex once or twice in the past year. Then it's a healthy bell curve. It ends at the 5% who had sex four or more times per week. So on average, I think between one and eight times per month was the majority at 60%.

Selena: Sex seems to affirm I feel like.

Ryan: Yeah. That does seem to match our own kind of conversations with couples. I find that interesting. Here's why we care about this information is it does give us a sense of what is...from a human physiology standpoint. This is not a Christian poll. It's not looking at Christian couples. There's nothing explicitly biblical about this information other than we are people created in God's image, and there is something to be gleaned from looking at this information.

Selena: Yeah, absolutely.

Ryan: So it gives a little baseline for...okay. But now with this big caveat that honestly the only couple that can say what's healthy for you is you. So we're going to talk through all the details of that. Again, we're going to ask some underlying questions. I do want to do some of our housekeeping for the episode.

So the first bit is, you guys, if you haven't left a rating and a review, please do so. That means the world to us. It helps people get the word out about the podcast. When someone goes through iTunes or wherever [00:05:00] and they're looking for quality marriage gospel-centered content, they look at the reviews. I always look at the reviews. If it has like three average stars or whatever, then that's probably not a good podcast. If there's five average stars, it's great. Then I'll read the reviews and it says, "Hey, this is worth your time."

Selena: But if there's five average stars, and there's only like three reviews, and I'm like, "Mm hmm."

Ryan: True.

[Crosstalk] *[Selena laughs]*

Ryan: The more the merrier. So, yeah, please do that. Also, on the Patreon side of things, if you want to be a part of what we're doing here...last week we announced fierceparenting.com is live. We are going to continue moving the

needle on biblical family in our culture. The thing is, is we don't know how long we're going to be able to do that freely. Because iTunes and Apple and this big, massive tech company, the biggest company in the world, they are now indexing everything we say in the podcast so that you can go and search it. So if you go search for "Christian marriage", then you'll see that we just mentioned Christian marriage just now. And it would come up in your feed. What that means now is that they're compiling a database full of all the things we say, which then puts us at risk of "Hey, oh, they talk about the Bible," or "they think that biblical marriage is the only design for marriage, therefore, they should be censored." So I'm not really afraid of that. I really am not. I think as the body of Christ, we need to be mindful of it knowing that this is the water we swim in.

Selena: Right. Right.

Ryan: So we have an amazing group of patrons already on Patreon. And we would love even more that ensures that we will continue to get this message out. So if you feel convicted or you just feel...convicted is not the right word. If you feel led I'll say. If you feel led to join arms with us, we would be honored—the level started \$2 a month and go on up—you go to patreon.com/fiercemarriage.

Okay, final bit of housekeeping here is that our 17th anniversary—we mentioned it last week—actually it was yesterday as of the date we're recording this.

Selena: Woohoo.

Ryan: Woohoo. Yeah. 17 years.

Selena: 17 years. Any regrets? I already read yours. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: My one regret in our...

Selena: You have one regret of our marriage. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: My one regret of our entire marriage is selling my 1972 Volkswagen bus...

Selena: It did not run.

Ryan: It did run. The battery leads were mislabeled. The battery leads are mislabeled. We had come back from...long story. We were out of the country for a number of months. Came back, got it out of your mom's garage to try to start it up, and unplug the battery. The led was not the right label.

- Selena:** They were mislabeled. That was it.
- Ryan:** Yeah, all I had to do is flip the leads and it would have started.
- Selena:** I didn't know that. That would be a regret for sure.
- Ryan:** So instead I took it to the mechanic and we sold it.
- Selena:** We traded.
- Ryan:** Man. Why did you make me do that?
- Selena:** *[both laughing]* I did not make you do that. I recall you pushing and pulling the thing to the mechanic, and I was driving it. We had a friend help us. Old good times. Well.
- Ryan:** Other than that, no regrets.
- Selena:** No regrets. *[both chuckles]*
- Ryan:** So, guys, to celebrate this because we like to do this—it's our podcast and we do the marriage thing—we are doing a discount on our store for 17% off anything in our stories.
- Selena:** Nice.
- Ryan:** So go to shop.fiercemarriage.com and use the code "17off", 1-7-O-F-F, and you'll save 17% off anything and everything. It doesn't matter what you buy. Except for book items. You can't buy book items because those are already really steeply discounted. So anyway. I love you. It's been 17 years.
- Selena:** I love you too. *[chuckles]* I was jumping on the next thing. I love you. Don't get your panties in a twist. *[both laughs]*
- Selena:** Whoo saucy.
- Selena:** You know I love you. Anyways.
- Ryan:** It's [inaudible] because you said that.
- Selena:** Anyway.
- Ryan:** You said panties. Anyway.

- Selena:** Oh, my goodness. Anyways. We don't tend to talk a lot about sex on this podcast because there are a lot of other podcasts, even Christian podcasts that talk about sex and probably go into more in-depth questions, they've done more research. We just are kind of over everything marriage but through a biblical worldview, the gospel lens biblical worldview. I feel like those are kind of interchangeable terms. But we're overdue for talking about sex. It's not my favorite subject to talk about on the podcast. But again...
- Ryan:** Why?
- Selena:** Because I feel sheepish. *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** Really?
- Selena:** You said that. That was not my words.
- Ryan:** We were getting coffee and I said, "I know you kind of feel sheepish." I don't feel like that's the right word though.
- Selena:** No. I think it is such an intimate thing and it affects us greatly, but the amount of time it actually takes is not a lot. And we're all different, rights? We have different experiences. We have different expectations. There's possibly some abuse in the past that you would probably have to...not probably. You do have to identify and work through, [00:10:00] and most likely not on your own if that's you.
- So it's easy for us to sit and share our story and maybe give you some tips, but we are not your pastors, and we are not your community members. We don't know you essentially. We're just, again, sharing our life through the biblical worldview that we're living in, hoping that it will help you. But again, we're not trying to focus on sex essentially.
- Ryan:** What I hear you saying is that it's a big, important topic, but it's really hard to treat it with the charity and the nuance that it needs to really help people, individuals. So we speak generally to it.
- Selena:** Yes. My heart is always that people don't feel ever just accused or glossed over or ignored or just completely...I want to be able to speak to those and serve, I guess, in that area. But again...
- Ryan:** Especially when you start talking about couple's experience with sex in their own marriage, same like, how often is often enough? Obviously, we can't possibly say...

Selena: We can't put a number on that.

Ryan: There's nothing on scripture that says that you should have sex X number of times per week, otherwise, you are being unwise or unhealthy. There's nothing in scripture that says that. So I think that's our fear is that you would hear this and you would hear either condemnation or shame or guilt because we are one way and you're not that way. Or some other couple is one way and not that way.

Selena: Sometimes there are seasons we go through that we have to abstain a little bit more. Again, there are seasons beginning and an end. If we just had a baby or there's just the physical aspect of it that you have to deal with, but—

Ryan: Or you're going through emotionally tough time or you're mourning the death of a loved one, or you're mourning some other aspect of your relationship.

Selena: Right. That's kind of the last thing on your mind and it's difficult to kind of jump into that realm.

Ryan: So I feel like people know us and they know that we're going to...

Selena: I know. I feel like the sex topics, those episodes tend to get the most feedback. They get the most everything I think.

Ryan: Here's my pushback on the whole sex thing too, is because I feel like there are a lot of people that are basically playing to the lowest common denominator when it comes to sex. Because there are people that will click on a podcast episode title just because they talk about sex because we have this culture that's very hyper-sexualized. So you have podcasts, Christian marriage podcasts even that are solely dedicated to maximizing sex. Now we'll get into a sex, but in 1 Corinthians 6 and 7, Paul actually puts sexual morality next to idolatry. And there's a reason for that, which is very interesting.

But I think we can be aware of it as Christian married couples knowing that as we deal with this issue, and as we prioritize this issue in a healthy way, we can easily go too far into idolizing this area of our lives and putting so much weight into it and staking our happiness, staking our joy, staking our relational identity in our sexual experience.

Selena: Yeah. And in our sexual partner. I think that's a lot of the expectations and weight.

- Ryan:** Right. So let's start with this question. Again, big question. How often should a married couple be having sex? Okay. *[laughs]*
- Selena:** Well, in the past we've answered this question. The frequency typically for us is two to three times a week. So taking that into consideration, knowing ourselves, knowing each other's paths, knowing how we connect, how we love each other, and what's best for each other, I think that's how we were able to establish those expectations.
- Ryan:** So you're talking through our own experience?
- Selena:** Yes.
- Ryan:** Okay. So for me, and I will just be very honest, I feel like I'd need it more. I'll say that.
- Selena:** Yeah, generally speaking typically.
- Ryan:** That's generally speaking. And the reason is—and Paul talks about this and will read it in 1 Corinthians 6—for me, it's a focus issue in a lot of times. There's also just the physiological. I've noticed that if we go more than three or four days, I have a hard time focusing on anything. *[Selena laughs]* I'm trying not to be funny, but it's true.
- Selena:** I know.
- Ryan:** It's like you're hungry and you just need to...
- Selena:** You get a little grouchy.
- Ryan:** I mean you get grouchy and you get hungry. I get hungry sexually. *[both laughs]* There's another word for that. *[both laughing]*
- Selena:** Hungry.
- Ryan:** But the point I'm trying to make is that there's a very physiological need. But there's also like this connection, right?
- Selena:** Yeah
- Ryan:** Because we do kind of get emotionally stopped up if we are not connecting in this way.

- Selena:** Right. And I'm sure we're going to talk about that—about how it's purpose-filled and whatnot.
- Ryan:** Yeah, yeah. So that's kind of our own. We've landed on our frequency just using our personal example based on lots of conversations. Again, 17 years of marriage where we've had lots of hits and misses in this area, [00:15:00] and where we've sat and talked, and we've had frustrating evenings, we've had fights, we've had some tears, we've had a lot of sexual angst that we've had to work through. Now, okay, 17 years in, we finally understand this. *[laughs]* So hopefully this episode...
- Selena:** Sort of. I think we're not clear as far as like...there's always challenges that come up because again, there's so many nuances to it.
- Ryan:** Well, there's knowing what to do, but it's also doing what you know to be healthy. I think the execution piece is if ever we have a frustrating thing around frequency, it's because we failed to make time for each other. Again, that's I think of...
- Selena:** And we become a little more selfish about it.
- Ryan:** ...a different conversation. Are we being disciplined? I mean, think about that. There is a sense of self-control discipline in the area of giving yourself to your spouse regularly. It's almost like going to the gym. If you don't go to the gym regularly...
- Selena:** I know.
- Ryan:** ...we can't expect to reap the results of the goals you've set that are based on going to the gym regularly. So with that said, we are still learning, but I think the knowledge is there. We're always still battling the flesh in this area. So you already reviewed that article. I don't want to look at that and say, okay, so you want to be in the majority of people that are healthy, 60%? Okay."
- Selena:** No. The point of it was to just give some numbers and some understanding and highlight, okay, this is where the average kind of falls of general couples. We have no other knowledge of them except that they are married. We don't know if they're Christians, we don't know anything else. It's just kind of say, Okay, this is the physical part of us as humans, but as believers, we are, again, which you're probably going to read, we are made in the image of God, and we have desires that He's given us that are affected by sin. I think the sexual area is...I just feel like it's such a different...not different type of sin. I hate to say those words. It feels involved a lot more at deeper levels. I don't know if that's true but it's just...

Ryan: It is. It is. We see the distinction happen within Paul when he's talking about this issue. He's talking about how human sexuality has a unique root in the human hearts and that it has different consequences because it's a soul-deep sort of sin. Yes, grace covers it, but there are different consequences. And I think we tend to gloss over those.

Let's back up a little bit. Again, the big question I'm answering is, how often should a married couple have sex? I want to ask some more questions as we get around to the answer. But this might sound very basic, and I hope I can ask this question, but we need to answer it clearly here. What is sex? What is a Christian perspective on sex? I do think it's important.

Sex is more than a physical act. You think about hookup culture, you think of apps, you think about the...we objectify each other so much in our culture. When I say each other I mean the opposite sex. Any person we're interested in physically, we don't see it culturally through a biblical lens. I think that's a safe thing to say. So you have apps where people are literally just swiping based on physical appearance alone. Meaning like, "would I have sex with that person?" Yes. No. Yes. Yes. Yes. No. No. No. No. Yes. You're hoping that someone also says yes. I've never used these apps, but I've heard.

And if they say yes, then you now have some sort of connection. Obviously, I use the word "connection" in quotes. *[chuckles]* It's just you both found each other attractive. At least, in a moment, you found each other physically attractive. So it begs the question, what is sex? Is it just physical? The answer is no. It is not just physical. The Bible...

Selena: I think even non-Christians would say...I mean, somebody might claim that it is just physical, but you can't live as if there's only physical.

Ryan: If you got into a conversation and they want it to be able to have sex whenever they wanted to with whomever, they would probably argue for the fact that it is purely physical because they are wanting to. Because you can't just go from partner to partner to partner if there's an emotional component, or there's a mental component to that. You can only do it if you're just having a physical transaction with somebody.

Selena: Well, in that case, I feel like you're forcing that physical in your mind because we're all made in God's image. He's knitted us together in a certain way. So we are soul beings, whether we want to deny that or whatever. As believers, we accept that and we understand that to be true and we understand the purpose of sex. [00:20:00] But if there's nonbelievers, then, of course, they're going to approach it differently. Of course, it's going to be more of a

commodity. It's going to be something self-serving, self-affirming. It's always going against what the Bible says. It feels like it's almost always the opposite of.

Ryan: Okay, there's two sides to this, to jump in. Yes, I think the man on the street sort of interview you, you would have a likely answer that's like, "Oh, yeah." If two persons just want to hook up and they don't want to have even one word of conversation, that's okay and that's good because they're both satisfied. They would probably give you some sort of that response, which is completely detaching the physical from the emotional and the spiritual.

Science doesn't confirm that. I think even secular science confirms at least on the physiological level, there is an emotional thing happening during a sexual encounter. Let's put all that aside. Biblically speaking, we see in - what is it? Genesis 2 there is a consummation of the marriage. They are joining together as one flesh. That is both an analogy for what's happening spiritually, it's analogy for what's happening physically in both the joining of one flesh, in the act of sex itself. But also in the act of conceiving a child, that is a joining of one flesh.

So there is a spiritual component, there's a physical component, there is an emotional component, and that they are becoming intertwined emotionally. A cord of many strain is not easily broken. There's a lot of components that are being spoken of in that passage in Ecclesiastes.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is talking to the church in Corinth says, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, with whom you have from God?" So the sexual exchange is between two people, but your body is something that is not your own.

Selena: Within the marriage covenant.

Ryan: It's not your own within your Christianity. In 1 Corinthians 6, from there he goes right into sexual morality. It talks about principles for marriage. So you're not your own, for you were bought with a price to glorify God in your body. Again, that's 1 Corinthians 6—and this is the part I wanted to get to—Paul views sexual immorality as closely tied to idolatry. And we see that very clearly in how closely the two are conflated within 1 Corinthians.

We also see that in the Old Testament. Why is Paul doing that I guess is the question I want to ask. So if idolatry is so closely related to sexual immorality, and sexual morality is not a sin that's like any other sin, that it's a sin that's

within a person's own body, and their body is not their own, I think it's very interesting, especially as a culture. Because in Corinth, it was a very worldly culture. We've talked about this in the past. It was at a point of commerce. There was a lot of pagan gods. There's a plurality of gods.

Selena: Homosexually was...

Ryan: It was a sexualized culture in a lot of ways. Yes.

Selena: We've not strayed too *[chuckling]* far from Corinth.

Ryan: Right. And at the foot of the Acrocorinth, which is where Corinth was, there was I think a temple to the goddess of love. It was a pagan kind of ritual to have these sexual rituals around worship of this god.

So idolatry in our culture. What is idolatry? It's disordered love. It's putting anything else in the place of God. We can idolize our own independence, we can idolize our own thought, we can idolize our spouse because I'm going to do whatever she says regardless of what God tells me to do. We can idolize our job. We can worship something. So sexual morality I think is closely related to idolatry because we tend to idolize the sexual experience, meaning I will do anything it takes to get the sexual experience I feel like marriage should have or I feel like I deserve or I feel like I want.

Now, what's informing those desires is a completely different conversation. It could be movies, pornography, music. It could be your past. It could be your own distorted view of it. It could be a right view of it. The point is, is we can idolize even the right thing and make it into a wrong thing. *[both chuckles]*

Selena: We are idol factories. That is what we do. Sin is just hemmed in around us on all sides. We were listening to...I don't want to butcher his name. Voddie Baucham.

Ryan: Voddie Baucham.

Selena: Voddie Baucham. We're listening to him this weekend and he just talked about sin and how we tend to take this amish [00:25:00] approach of like, we're not going to use new technology to...we're going to avoid all the things that would like make us sin or avoid the people that would cause us to sin, avoid the cultural things that are coming at us. And it's like, well, there's no way we could because sin hems us at every point. So obviously, the answer is Jesus, right? *[chuckles]* He's always the answer of how we...There's spiritual warfare, I guess. So understanding that there's not anything that you can do I think sexually...we're not going to give you like, "Okay, if you do all these things,

then you'll have a purely sexual experience." It's about avoiding sin, but it's about so much more. Right?

Ryan: Right. We have to go to God's Word and align ourselves with what He says about sex from a right motivation, which is to honor and glorify God. We just go there saying, "Okay, how can I justify wanting what I want?" The sin is to fall in [inaudible]. And that's what Voddie was getting at is that we need to be brought to life. and it's by God's grace alone that we are brought to life.

Selena: Because before that we were dead. We were dead.

Ryan: Yeah, we were dead in our sin. Of course, we're not doing justice to how he said it. *[Selena chuckles]*

Selena: Understanding. Yes.

Ryan: So what does the Bible actually say about sex, and how does that drive our definition of sex? We've talked about all this. I'll just recap real fast is that sex is a gift to be enjoyed within the confines of covenant. Proverbs 5 is an amazing passage for this because you see in it a warning against adultery. That's the first 14 verses. Then starting in verse 15 through 23, he's now saying, "Instead of that, instead of following the adulterous path, drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well."

There's this sense that it is a spring of good things of life. Keep it pure. Enjoy it, partake in it within marriage. It is a good blessing from God. In 1 Corinthians 6, we also see the idea that it is a gift to be enjoyed within the confines of covenant. We just read that flee sexual morality. Then its purpose-filled. Genesis 2:24, "Go forth, fill the earth, multiply."

Selena: Fruitfulness.

Ryan: Be fruitful. Fill the earth, multiply, subdue it. I just said it in five different ways. *[Selena laughs]* The point is, there's a purpose around this covenantal marriage and the consummation that it brings about.

Selena: Right. If we don't have that biblical worldview and submit to that authority of what Scripture says, this is sex, this is the purpose that it fulfills, then we are going to distort it. That's just our tendency as sinners. I think that understanding that purpose is really helpful. I feel like the gospel is just this tightrope you're walking sometimes, and you can so easily just fall to either side of. And it's by God's grace you're just even on it.

You and I, I mean, we've fallen into missed expectations, or you've felt unloved, and I'm like, "I feel like I'm giving in," and we're not connecting because one of us is not submitting and applying God's Word to this area of saying, "Here, this is the purpose, this is what it's for. It's okay, and it's good. And it's something we are allowed to and invited into when we are married."

Ryan: So that is actually a great segue because we've looked at what God's Word says about sex in general. And that it is to be enjoyed within the confines of biblical marriage between a husband and a wife exclusively.

Selena: We've heard that quote a lot. But it's just so rare.

Ryan: But a lot of people who will listen to this will say, "What? I thought sex was..." So I won't go down that route. There's a lot of illiteracy around this.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Now, specifically, what does the Bible say about sex within marriage? It says sex is to be within marriage. Now, what about it? Here we are Selena and Ryan, we have agreed to this premise that God made sex for within marriage, and it's good and He blesses it, and it's to be enjoyed. So what does it say about us? How do we actually conduct ourselves? Let's look at 1 Corinthians 7. Selena, do you want to read this passage?

Selena: Yes. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."

Ryan: I want to make a quick note. Paul is switching gears. For the first six chapters of Corinthians, he's addressing some other things that were raised by a person by the name of Chloe. Some questions. The now concerning verbiage is actually a pivot. He's saying, "Okay, now I'm done with that. Now, I'm concerning this other matter [00:30:00] about which you wrote to me." And this is in quotes. Paul didn't say this, but he's quoting them saying this. They said, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." They're swinging the other way now. Complete piety, complete...they're abstaining now, and then they're basically saying it's bad to have sex. So Paul is addressing that exact exemption.

Selena: Yeah, the title for 1 Corinthians 7 is "principles for marriage". *[chuckles]*

Ryan: So they wrote to him saying, "Paul, it's good for men to not have sexual relations with a woman." And he's saying, "Okay, now concerning that..." He's

saying, "But because of the temptation to sexual morality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. Okay, why don't you go from there?"

Selena: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

The one thing we don't want to do here is to lay on top of (no pun intended), but we don't want to put our cultural understanding and our present-day and age understanding onto this. We hear words like the wife does not have authority over her own body. And I think some of us wives are like, "What?" [chuckles] You can get really upset. And the husband, you know, his body is mine. We have to understand, I think, again, the context of what Paul is saying, the time that he's seen it in, and not here...It's hard to shut off those voices because I think that's where the battle starts is in your head. I don't have authority over my body? But what if I don't want to have sex with my husband when he wants to have sex? Herein lies the question. [chuckles]

Ryan: We can inject our own meanings into these words and these sentences. That's very good. Paul is not saying...here's what he's not saying. He's not saying that a husband should be able to go to his wife at any moment, for any reason whatsoever, and say, "It's time to have sex" and she's supposed to be happy with that and just go with it. That's not what he's saying.

He's also not saying the wife can do that. Which by the way, he starts with the husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights first. He starts with that, which to me is like, "Why? Why husband?"

Selena: You know, some fiery wives probably in the city of Corinth.

Ryan: They're writing to him, "Please help," [Selena laughs] and their wives are just insatiable. But I do want to make sure that we're being very clear on that. Because a lot of husbands who would seek to use this verse to manipulate their wives. And if wives want to be obedient, they can feel pretty much backed into a corner on this. And that's not what Paul is saying.

What he's talking about is—and here it is—he says, "Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a limited time." In other words, you need to have been in agreement on this. And that's why we always harp that

chord. That it's not about five times a week, it's not about two times, it's not about one time, it's not about a minimum or maximum. It's about are you an agreement on this? Because the whole point of marriage, the whole point of sex is unity, the whole point of coming together as one flesh, it's a unifying thing. You need to be in agreement on it.

If you're going to have pain and heartache around this area, it's usually going to be because one person has an expectation or a desire or need that is not being met. And it's not just physical. It could be emotional.

Selena: It may even be unhealthy need too. I just want to put that out there. Because you say it's a need not being met, I think we are...like it says that we have these physical needs. But I'm saying that there are some that are I think unhealthy and unbalanced.

Ryan: You're thinking of a husband or a wife that might say, "I need it."

Selena: So or somebody who's addicted and has expectations and desires that are...

Ryan: We're going to get into that.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Yeah, we're going to get into that. The big theme here is that there is agreement. Now Paul does say this. He says, "Your body is no longer your own." Where does he say that in this passage? He says, "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does."

Selena: I think it's in Romans 12 as far as our bodies being a temple and us not belonging to ourselves. I'm sorry.

Ryan: But you're interrupting in the wrong time because *[Selena laughs]* that's where I think wives could go off the rails. It also says, "For the wife does not have authority over her body but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." The statements are equal. I didn't want to just say the wife has no authority over her body. I knew you would interject.

Selena: Sorry. *[chuckles]* Timing is everything, people.

Ryan: The point is this is that your body is not your own. When you stand at the altar and you say I do, you said, "I'm going to give myself to you. [00:35:00] I am giving my body. It's no longer mine alone exclusively. I no longer hold it to myself, but I am now offering it to you." That is the spirit of a sexual exchange

in marriage is I'm not going to you just to take, take, take from you, to give you a list of to-dos and a list of desires, and a list of wants. Whether or not that desires is healthy or not, we'll talk about that in a second. But the point is, I'm not just taking; I'm giving to you. So I'm going to go there.

We had a moment recently where we were going to be intimate. You were being super sweet, and I was trying to be accommodating, and we were both tired. And you said, "Well, how about this?" And I said, "Well, I was kind of hoping for this." (and I won't fill in the blanks). And you said, "Okay, well, that's fine." But then I thought, "Okay, what's best for you? What would be best for you? How can I serve you in this area? And what would be the simplest thing for you?" Here's the words I used. I was going to say, "What requires the least amount of effort?" *[both laughs]* I'm sorry. Because you were tired and you were...

Selena: Sometimes that's music to a woman's ear, especially after a long day with kiddos and questions and lots of touching and sticky fingers and kids. You're so great.

Ryan: And you were so sweet because you were like, "Listen, I want to be with you and I'm just tired." And I said, "Okay, well, how can we be together at the least amount of effort for you?" And we came to an agreement and it was great. I feel like that's an example of maybe serving your spouse.

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: I could have said, "Well, I want what I want and you either meet me there or I'm going to be huffy puffy, upset and I'm not going to like you for the next 24 hours." *[both chuckles]* You know what I mean?

Selena: Right. I think that depending on the personality, one would acquiesce and say, "Okay, fine." And then in the whole process of it, they feel steamrolled or they feel unloved, they feel hurt, they don't feel heard, they feel used, essentially.

Ryan: And that's a big problem. So the theme that Paul is getting out here as your body is no longer your own. That's not a license for you to steal your wife's body or your husband's body. It's a license for you to give your body and your body away, not to demand your spouse give their body away.

Selena: You want to take care of. To love and care for. We tend to treat our stuff better than we do others right. I don't know if that's just something that has stood out to me. I'm not just checking off a box and taking care of you, but I'm loving you in this way. And I know that this speaks volumes to you. And that helps me...it comes back to you. You're not just giving of yourself but it also...

Ryan: Ideally it would.

Selena: It's reciprocal. Yeah, that's the idea.

Ryan: That's the idea.

Selena: It doesn't always happen for so many reasons.

Ryan: To summarize that, what does the Bible say about sex within marriage? I would summarize it as this. The Bible says and the Bible teaches sex is a giving of oneself to their spouse selflessly for the purpose of marital unity, emotional, physical intimacy, but also doing so in a way that honors God and brings glory to Him. That then informs the rest of our conversation. Which at this point I'd like to very clearly put a fork in the road and say: it's very helpful now to think categorically.

So we've defined what is sex, we've defined what the Bible says sex is even within marriage and the license that we have within marriage. So let's think about those licenses. There are non-negotiables and there are negotiables...

Selena: Within that. Yeah.

Ryan: ...about what the Bible says is sex. So I'm just thinking about frequency. Let's keep these in mind, these non-negotiables. Since we're after biblical perspective, our sex is reserved for Biblical marriage between husband and wife. We said that. I want to be clear. It's not extramarital, it's not premarital. A lot of people listening to this would agree but I want to make sure that we're cemented in that.

The second non-negotiable. Sex is to remain pure within marriage. So it's not extra. Think about you've got your marriage; you've painted a boundary around your marriage. I'm picturing a circular city that's surrounded by a 20-foot wall. Inside the wall, that's our marriage, inside the wall that's where sex lives. I don't go out outside of the walls of the marriage to get sex. But also—and this is what we see in Hebrews 13:4, it says, "But let marriage be held in honor among all at, let the marriage bed be undefiled for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." So undefiled.

Selena: I wanted to look up what that's translated into.

Ryan: While you're doing that, I'm going to continue. So it's not outside the walls. So I'm not going to find sex outside the walls. But I'm also not going to go outside the walls and bring things in that would now inform our sexual experience. So

what does that look like practically? [00:40:00] Clearly I'm not going out and having sex with another person. Married person is to not have sex with other people. We're also not bringing things in. Things like pornography. Anything that would demean or degrade or cause any sort of coercion or any sort of compromise of conscience. All right.

I just want to be really clear. It is a sin to bring porn into the married bed. Some couples will say, "Well, we need it to satisfy ourselves. We need it to feel like it's adventurous. What's wrong with it? No one's getting hurt." I'm telling you that no, it's wrong. Because porn is bringing another person effectively into your marriage. It creates...

Selena: It's wrong on so many levels.

Ryan: Those people are also being most likely harmed in other ways—people who are in the pornographic material. So I just want to be really clear. So bringing something inside from the outside is what I would say is defiling it. This is the other thing about Hebrews 13 is the call to an undefiled marriage that means that it is possible to defile it. And that's where we see that.

Selena: Right. That's what I was curious about in terms of just reading it. Because, again, I think part of that defilement would be bringing the Bible and saying, "This is what it says. So you're supposed to submit." Now, not only are you bringing two verses together, you're bringing two separate things about submission and your body is not your own. Therefore..." There's these big leaps in a very torn theology if this is your approach.

Ryan: The twisting of Scripture for our selfish...

Selena: Absolutely. Which is defiling the marriage bed. Again, knowing what the purpose of sex is, knowing what the Bible says about it, and how we're supposed to engage I think really informs the gray areas around it.

Ryan: That's good. That's good. Those are non-negotiables. So sex is not to be extramarital, not to be premarital, but also it is to remain pure within the marriage. We looked at Hebrews 13:4. The fact that we can really defile this good thing by bringing outside things in and we talked about porn, coercion, selfishness, you just mentioned that bringing in others, which would be porn, or any other physical person or any other witness of it. It's to be a closed-door transaction between husband and wife. That's the non-negotiables.

Now, the negotiables are—this is what really this episode is meant to land—is that do what works for you. So in terms of the sexual act, the quality and

quantity of the sex you're having, that is for you and you alone in your marriage to experiment with.

Selena: "You" meaning plural. You as a couple not just...

Ryan: That's what I meant. It's for you to figure out what works. It's for you to experience it together. In 1 Corinthians, in two different spots in chapter 10 and in chapter 6, Paul uses this language: "All things are lawful but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." Now that's interesting because we see that in 1 Corinthians 10, but also in 1 Corinthians 6 where he's talking about these things. He's talking about giving yourself away to your spouse or fighting sexual immorality. So he is parroting back to the church of Corinth that which...

They had embraced what theologians call antinomian view. So antinomian against *nomo*, I think is the Greek word for the law. They had thought, "Okay, since we are saved by grace alone in Christ, therefore the law bears no more weight on us. [Selena chuckles] We can do whatever we want. We're saved by grace. It's great."

Paul talks about this a lot in Romans, I think chapter 7. I don't remember exactly where he talks about it in other places. But here he's actually parroting back to them saying, "You say all things are lawful." Paul is now saying, "Yes, true, but not all things are helpful or beneficial, even righteous in that sense." So we need to have that kind of purview as we go into it. So Paul basically reproaches them, he realized they're thinking that not all things that are permissible are beneficial, but also grace should have an outworking in your life as evidence of the fact that you've received it. And that's the entire book of James. [both chuckles]

So in marriage, especially since it's used in such close proximity to sexual morality, this leads us to think in terms of what is permissible in the marriage but may not also be beneficial.

Selena: There's a lot of this.

Ryan: There's a lot to this. So I'm thinking of the husband or the wife who are listening saying, "Okay, we need to be having sex more. So I'm going to go to my spouse, and I'm going to say, 'Don't withhold your body for me. And by the way, don't defile the bed in these ways.'" [Selena chuckles]

Selena: Going in with the list of rules and expectations never goes that well. So I think having a conversation around more of the question: [00:45:00] what is

edifying? How are we going to edify each other? Our frequency should reflect our level of how much we love and want to edify each other, and again, bring glory to God. Not simply, I am feeling hungry and want this, and that's it. There's, like we've said, plenty to go there.

Ryan: So how do we know if we're edifying?

Selena: There's a couple of I think principles that you've written out. But the first and simple one would be you've agreed to it.

Ryan: It's good.

Selena: We see that laid out in Scripture also. That you are agreeing to a frequency, you're agreeing to expectations. We've talked also about in another...did we do the podcast or was it just a blog post about the spectrum of sex? I think we talked about it.

Ryan: Yeah, we talked about it.

Selena: That's basically about expectations and communicating those to each other and knowing what each experience holds and that not all experiences are the same. And that's okay as long as, again, you are in agreement on it.

Ryan: Yeah. That's where it can get tricky is that someone can be coerced or manipulated into agreeing to these things.

Selena: We have a whole podcast episode on manipulation, too.

Ryan: Yeah. Yeah. Whatever "agreement," quote-unquote you came around to, it needs to be genuine. It needs to be sought out with charity and selflessness toward one another.

Selena: And held with open hands. Because it's not a true agreement if you can't really ever revisit the conversation. Because I think you could easily be like, "No, you said this, so this is where we're at." Obviously, there's a self-serving spirit behind that. So yeah, agreeing to it, not coercing or manipulating each other, and your agreement is genuinely mutual. I think that speaks to the higher part of not just, "Okay, don't do this. Don't do that. But here is the path." Look at the path. Don't just look at the nose.

Ryan: Yeah, that's good. We're going to answer this question: how long should a healthy couple quote-unquote, "have sex"? Real quick to root us again. The nature of your sexual experience as we're saying here is really up to you as long as the marriage bed remains pure. One. Two, you edify one another. This

is our way of blowing that up. As a rule, sex should never humiliate, it should never demean, objectify, inflict pain, be manipulative, or in any way violate your covenant through porn and images, or be immoral in a way or violation to this conscience. So when I say immoral, I'm thinking in terms of like drunkenness. I won't get into it. But just I want to draw that line. So we're edifying one another in a circumspect manner.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: I guess this could be rolled into the third one, which is you basically honor God with your sex life.

Selena: Everything you do, do it all the... [00:47:58] *[chuckles]* I'm kidding.

Ryan: But if I think of you as God's daughter and I am God's son in law, I know that I'm a son in Christ and I get that we're siblings in that sense and that you are my sister in Christ, but you're also my wife, a gift God's daughter, if I think of you in those terms, it drastically changes how I approach you.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: You are a daughter of the king, and I'm to honor you.

Selena: We are image-bearers.

Ryan: You're an image-bearer. So, again, your sexual experience is up to you so long as you honor God, your marriage bed remains pure. And here's the thing is you can also have a very...let me use this word. Erotic experience. Look at Song of Solomon. It's a steamy book. There's a lot there. We did a talk with Sharon. Was it Sharon Jaynes recently, I believe. She talked about Song of Solomon.

There's a lot of language in there that'll make you blush. It's a little funky and it's a little weird. This seems a little odd to us now because it's written in such a poetic way and we're using imagery we don't really connect with. But if we understand why the imagery was used, we start to connect with it pretty fast. So the point is not to be a prude in bed, it's to be honoring to God. And you can still have a very fulfilling very...I'll use the word "adventurous sex life" that still honors God.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: Okay. As long as you're not humiliating, demeaning, those sorts of things. We'll leave it there, saints. You figure it out. You figure it out.

- Selena:** I mean, if you really do have questions, we're happy to try to answer some of those. But I'm sure there are people in your life that you can go to.
- Ryan:** Okay. So now how often should we be having sex? So the answer is only you can really answer that question. Generally speaking, it seems based on the research that most couples, generally speaking, benefit from sexual frequency around two to three times a week. That happens to be the same rhythm that we find ourselves in. We have friend couples who do it less. We know this because we're in close community with them and I ask the guys, "How's your marriage or whatever?" [00:50:00] So don't think that's a weird thing. We talk about this stuff in very open broad terms. We also know couples that do it more than that. And that's what's healthy.
- Selena:** So I have a question for you. If we aren't as a couple in a healthy place sexually, what should we do? What should we do?
- Ryan:** Why don't you answer that question? *[both chuckles]*
- Selena:** Well, again, assuming that we are in agreement, assuming that we are together, having the same expectations, we would always recommend you just talk and listen really, really well. Be very sensitive and tread lightly as you talk openly about sex. Communicate about it.
- Ryan:** You say tread lightly. I think what you mean to say is be really intentional about the language you're using.
- Selena:** Your language and tone, sorry. Yeah.
- Ryan:** You don't have to be afraid to talk about this.
- Selena:** Don't be afraid to use the words that you need to use to talk about it. But I don't think that you should shy away. I just think you need to be aware of how those words are going to be heard by your spouse. You know your spouse. How is that going to affect them the way you say and say whatever you're going to say, and however you talk about it?
- Ryan:** Good, good. Another piece of that, assuming you have agreement on this, is deal with whatever issues might be getting in the way.
- Selena:** Dealing sounds so glossed over. I don't think "deal" is the right word. But address them, acknowledge them and also get help with them. Whether that be a counselor...

Ryan: Things like addiction, body image, insecurity. Even there's physiological things. You have a health thing...

Selena: Past abuse and whatnot.

Ryan: So the point is you're talking and you're actually being transparent in these areas. As a husband, I'm dealing with this issue. Oh, let's mourn this revealing of the sins bomb that was dropped. Don't gloss over that though. Deal with it. Press into the reconciliation of that. We have lots of episodes on that. Usually, that means getting help from an outside counselor when you get into some of the deeper issues.

Selena: You can't do it alone. You just really can't.

Ryan: You can't. You're not meant to just live in isolation. We need to be surrounded by Christian community, we need wisdom, we need rebuke once in a while, and we need help. That was assuming in agreement.

If you are a husband or wife listening to this thinking, "I can't get my spouse to even talk about this. We haven't had sex in three months and anytime I bring it up, we just fight." If that's you, know this and rest in this that God alone changes hearts. You can't change your spouse's heart. I'm sorry that might sound like a pat answer. But it's just the truth is that all you can do is pray, hope, find all of your joy and everything you need in Christ. Marriage takes two. You join in a covenant with a person who is maybe not upholding their end of it. Biblically speaking, that stinks. That is horrible, and there's no quick way through or out of that. So cling to Christ.

Here's the first step. I feel like all you can do is just set your foot on the first step down the path, is that seek to communicate with your spouse, but then get help. Get outside help, get pastoral care, get care from friend who is going to advocate for your marriage who's going to help you.

Selena: You get a counselor. Honestly, I feel like counselors have so many more tools at their disposal than we can begin to understand. and God created counseling. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: Actually, we have a series. We're doing a four-week series on the gift of counseling for marriage. That'll be starting next week, I believe.

Selena: Hmm. Teaser.

Ryan: Little teaser. Anyway, yes. Find a biblical counselor to help you hash through that because through this podcast, it's impossible for us to help in a really tangible, specific way.

Here's the fun part. We have very little time left. The couple's conversation challenge. I'm going to challenge you to this. We are going to challenge you to this. *[both chuckles]* Take a sex inventory, if you will, and ask each other these three questions. I would recommend actually laying these questions out all three of them, writing down your answers separately, and then coming together and just reading your answers to each other and then discussing instead of answering your spouse out of the blue. He or she just got home from the grocery store, "On a scale of one to 10, how healthy is our sex life?" *[both laughs]*

Here are the three questions. I'll just lay them out. That's the first one. On a scale of 1 to 10, how healthy would you say our intimate life is? The second question, how often do you think we should be having sex in order to maintain our connection and marital health?

Selena: That's a good question. Good job.

Ryan: Third question. What do I most hope to gain from a healthy intimate life with you—with my husband, with my wife?

Selena: Oh, man.

Ryan: Okay. Right?

Selena: Yeah. They're good. I just think they're very revealing.

Ryan: Okay. If you need to hear those again, just go back 30 seconds and listen to those again. Anyway, go with grace in those questions and go with God's Word as your lens for understanding what healthy sex is, understanding what agency, what kind of freedoms He's given you within your marital covenant, and then go with grace as you communicate through that. I can tell you that it might be a fight, it might be hard. But if you persevere, if you continue on the path you do so together, you do so in light of Scripture, it will get easier, it will get better.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: I pray at least it gets better. So with that said, I've been talking a lot.

Selena: No, you've been great. As you can probably imagine, listener, Ryan was a bit in charge of this episode, and he's done an awesome job.

Ryan: I feel like yours are way better—your rundowns.

Selena: No, you did great, beb. You're solid. You know how much I love just talking about sex.

Ryan: [inaudible] minor approved right now. *[both chuckles]*

Selena: Favorite topic of all time. Anyways. *[Ryan chuckles]* God, thank you so much for the listener and for our conversation. Help us to be able to talk openly and safely with each other, to communicate expectations clearly and without, I don't know, just not hurting each other. And help us to extend grace to one another. God, all of this is to glorify you, to build the home that you have created, to change the world literally from the beginning of our home and our relationship. Lord, you've given us such a good gift in our spouse Help us to do the work that you have called us to you in terms of this area of our marriage. In your name, amen.

Ryan: Amen. All right, ladies and gentlemen, thanks for joining us for this episode of the Fierce Marriage podcast. If you want to be a supporter, please pray about it. We ask you act on however God leads you. But you can act on it by going to patreon.com/fiercemarriage. That means the world to us and ensures the message continues getting out there. With all that said, this has been a good episode. This episode is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: All right. Till next time. We will see you in about seven days. Until then—

Selena: Stay fierce.

[00:57:12] <outro>

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PODCAST NOTES

- **[00:21:38]**
 - Scripture references:
 - 1 Corinthians 6, ESV
 - Proverbs 5
 - Genesis 2:24
 - Hebrews 13:4

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