

# A FAST FROM INTIMACY, FOR COUPLES

Better  
Pleasure

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## **Re-Thinking Series**

- God's Purpose & Design For Sex
- The Principles For Godly Sex In Marriage
- The Life In Grace
- Battling Continued Lust Thoughts
- Unplugging From the Matrix (For Students)
- Love & Lust
- A Fast From Intimacy
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# Introduction

This is a response to the idea of a 90 day sex fast that can be prescribed by a counselor during marriage counseling. We at *Running Light Ministries* have included our comments in red in addition to the article on this subject by the ministry formally known as *Setting Captives Free Ministries*. We hope this will be a thorough look at the scriptures to help us in the crucial area of sexual restoration for couples.

Hebrews 13:4 of the New King James Version says, *“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”*

In order for the marriage bed to be undefiled there needs to be agape love that resounds within it. Agape love is self sacrificing love which puts the joy and good of another before your own. And even further said, agape love, is our joy being rooted in the godly benefit of the other (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-8).

What we often find with the men we work with, is that instead of the marriage bed being a place of agape love, it instead becomes a place for lust (adultery) to thrive! This adultery takes place in their minds, as they have seen hundreds upon hundreds of sexual images and videos in our culture.

Referencing 1 Corinthians 7, Paul would in no way ask that a man demand his wife to have sex with him because he is tempted to commit fornication (porn or adultery), when he is using her to fulfill his lust for porn or adultery!

- Remember that in Paul’s mind as a Jew, if there was adultery there was a death or divorce. (Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 24:1)
- If you had committed adultery, you would be put to death and your wife would be free to remarry.
- This Biblical understanding should help you understand your wife’s pain if she has decided to stay living with you in marriage. Remember that she is not obligated to stay (Matthew 19:9). In addition, a healing is needed in the heart (Matthew 19:8).
- Love must be the guiding factor for 1 Corinthians 7 to work. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is the guiding principle in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 *“Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise*

*also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."*

- *Do unto others as you would have done to you. (Luke 6:31)*
- *...husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (Ephesians 5:28)*

The marriage bed was meant to be a place of great honor and purity. A man can have such a distorted view of the marriage bed that there needs to be a time of re-training, a sex fast it has often been called; A longer time apart might be necessary at this point.

This all stems from a man not being able to possess his own vessel properly:

- *...each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 Thessalonians 4:4 )*
- *The fruit of the Spirit is love...self control. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

We should know how to possess our own bodies and not act out in lust like those that do not know God. This means that our sex life should not be lustful like the Gentiles (unbelievers), who do not know God. There should be a difference in our sex, and that difference is agape love. The following are questions for you to consider.

Do you:

- Care what your wife thinks about sex?
- Encourage her and build her up?
- Get mad when she does not want to have sex?
- Pray with her about your intimate life together?
- Imagine pornography or other fantasies while having sex?
- Show your wife that God is the center of your sex life through teaching her about sex from a Biblical worldview?
- Have her best interest in mind during sex?
- Give your wife rule over your body, or are you self gratifying?

These are some things you should prayerfully seek God in as you decide together whether a time apart sexually is the best thing for your marriage.

## 90-day Sex Fast?

A number of married students who are pursuing purity have told us that a time of abstinence from sexual intimacy has been recommended to them "for emotional healing" or to "kill through starvation" the passions of the flesh. This "sex fast" is often recommended for a period of 90 days. But, as with all counsel, we need to examine it, to see if it is biblical and godly.

If Bible verses are used to support this recommendation, the ones cited are found in 1 Corinthians 7:

***5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 1 Corinthians 7:5-6 (NIV)***

When examining the real intent of this passage, it is important to note that the original language has the word "fasting" and then "prayer" as reasons to abstain from sexual intimacy for a time.

It is important to understand the context of this passage. Paul is responding to a letter that he has received from the Corinthians on the issues of "is it good for a man not to touch a woman."

In history many believers have felt it was more honorable to not have sexual relations, even within marriage. Here Paul clears it up! Sex within marriage is not evil but good, and is expected to protect each other from the sexual temptations of Satan, and our lack of self control.

The couple who abstains from sexual intimacy should do so only to fast and pray, and this should only be by mutual consent, and only as a temporary measure. Obviously, we are not referring to those who must separate for reasons such as job function, illness or disability (hospitalization), deployment in the military, incarceration, etc. Rather, we are referring to those who separate by choice.

The command here is "do not deprive each other;" the exception clause is "except by mutual agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer." When helping those in bondage to impurity to find freedom, we would do well to *not* teach the "exception" as a rule, or even as a

good idea.

Paul is issuing a warning about separating physically, stating that temptations may come into the marriage when couples do so; and, he states that the only way to separate is by mutual consent for the purpose of fasting and praying. Then he adds that the couple must get back together to prevent the work of the devil in the marriage. In other words, sexual intimacy in marriage fends off the temptations of the evil one, and must only be broken by mutual consent for the purpose of seeking the Lord through giving up all food and praying to the Lord.

The overall view of Paul here is not that a 90-day sex fast would be a good idea, but that a married couple should make sexual intimacy a priority in their marriage, as a preventative to the work of the devil. This is the intent of the passage.

Placed in a diagram, the passage would look like this:

1. Do not deprive each other (do not separate physically) except
  1. by mutual consent
  2. for a time
  3. for fasting and praying only
2. Come together again (restore sexual intimacy)
  1. so that Satan will not tempt you
  2. because of your lack of self-control

It is also important to take 1 Corinthians 7:5 in context with the four verses which precede it.

**1 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. 2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**  
1 Corinthians 7:1-5 (NIV)

In the above passage, Paul makes it clear that sex in marriage is the God-

ordained means of thwarting temptation and avoiding immorality. Because sex is a help in these areas, it is important that the married couple does not deprive each other but should instead maintain regular, ongoing, consistent sexual intimacy in the marriage. The only legitimate reason given in Scripture for separating is "for fasting and prayer." Therefore, if abstaining from sexual intimacy in marriage, the couple must also abstain from food (fasting) and seek the Lord earnestly (praying). Obviously, this cannot be done for a very long period of time, and certainly not for 90 days.

It is also helpful to examine the previous chapter, where we see the Scriptures say to "flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). The message is "You are no longer free to give in to the lusts of your flesh, or to have sex with whomever you want. Instead, glorify God with your bodies!" How does a married man flee sexual immorality? How does he glorify God? He glorifies God by fleeing immorality (1 Corinthians 6) and by running to his wife, instead (1 Corinthians 7). Marital intimacy is given to the couple as a protection against the temptations of the devil and, when Christian counselors recommend a "90-day sex fast," they are unwittingly removing the God-given protection from the marriage that Paul states is so very important.

Another passage of importance on this topic is in Proverbs.

***15 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.  
16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in  
the public squares? 17 Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with  
strangers. 18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the  
wife of your youth. 19 A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts  
satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. 20 Why be  
captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of  
another man's wife?***  
**Proverbs 5:15-20 (NIV)**

We note from verse 19 that a wife's breasts are to fill her husband with delight "at all times," and the husband is to be intoxicated with her love "always." This is good and godly sexual intimacy in marriage, where a man has turned from all forms of impurity (pornography, homosexuality, adultery, etc.) and is learning to delight in his wife's body at all times and to be intoxicated with her love always.

***My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts.***  
**Song of Songs 1:13 (ESV)**



***I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Song of Songs 7:10-12 (ESV)***

Christian counselors may mistakenly focus on the exception clause of 1 Corinthians 7, "except by agreement for a limited time" but, in so doing, they divorce this exception clause from the requirement which follows, "come together lest you be tempted."

On the other hand, we do not want to discount the benefits that may come from a time apart, sexually, that is devoted to prayer and fasting, when mutually agreed upon by the couple. Isaiah 58 states many benefits of fasting. In addition, the gospels of Matthew and Mark both tell the story of a demon-possessed child which the disciples were unable to heal. After Jesus cast out the demon and healed the child, the disciples asked Him, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?" Jesus responded, ***"However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21 MKJV).***

Prayer and fasting may be a powerful weapon against the evil one and, when a couple wields this weapon together, it may bring unity to their marriage in amazing ways. Prayer and fasting unites the couple in suffering, since going without food isn't easy. Prayer and fasting also demonstrates a serious willingness to be free from sexual impurity. If a man is willing to give up his food for the sake of being pure in heart and mind, it may be a great encouragement to those who have been sinned against. Praying and fasting together unites a couple in their love of Christ and in their pursuit of Him and His power.

So, if a married couple agrees to enter into a time of sexual abstinence for the purpose of prayer and fasting, they should do it quietly and devote what would have been meal times to prayer for healing from sexual impurity and the defilement of it. If they will do this whole-heartedly, they will likely find what they are seeking and, in the process, their hearts can be united together, spiritually. This will likely result in a desire to express their oneness, and they will end their fast and come together intimately, with great joy. This "coming together again" is important, lest one be unduly tempted to turn to past sinful ways to quench the God-given desires of the heart for intimacy.

Summary: there is nothing scriptural about stating there should be "three months of abstinence" or "a hundred days of abstinence" as the benchmark to be attained when abstaining from sex within marriage. Quite the contrary, there are warnings about staying apart too long. It is presumptive and audacious for anyone to attempt to box God in by stating that a man or woman must fast for

"x" number of days in order to be free. Jesus doesn't give a time period for prayer and fasting, nor should anyone else. God may heal a person in a moment with one touch or one word or He may delay healing for His own glory. If He chooses to use brief abstinence, prayer, and fasting as a means of grace in one person's life, it does not mean we should attempt to make it the rule for all. God is sovereign, and does as He pleases (Psalm 135:6).

Conclusion: because of the warnings in Scripture to not deprive one another, because of the requirements of fasting and prayer if the couple does mutually agree to abstain from sexual intimacy for a time, and because of the requirement to immediately come together again if tempted, we at *Setting Captives Free* do not recommend or agree with any counsel that sets any specific time period for the couple to abstain from sex within marriage. Further, because of the spiritually-dangerous condition of prolonged separation, we at *Setting Captives Free*, as a rule, do not work with students who are acting on the unbiblical advice to separate for an extended period of time. We are here to help men and women find freedom from impurity of all types, and part of the equation for finding freedom from impurity is for married couples to learn how to become captivated and intoxicated with each other. This is the God-given model for a healthy sexuality within marriage.

SCF Staff

Comments in red were contributed by *Running Light Ministries*.



