

5) *The best sex means never having to say good-bye*

With the best sex, you fall asleep together. You wake up together. If you leave for the day, you say: "See you tonight." This is just simple logic. Who wants to say good-bye to the best? If it's so wonderful, you'll want to keep it forever.

6) *The best sex shares everything*

Which is to say that sex is more than intercourse. Sex, the best sex, means talking, sharing, listening, thinking-together. The hours after the hours before are as good as the actual act of love. They are not divided from each other. Essentially, they are the same.

Now Let's Talk About Love

All along I have been teetering on the edge of something-defining the best sex as the best love. Here I fall in.

It is possible to separate the urge for sex from the urge for love. You can go for sex without thinking of love. And there is a kind of thrill in that.

But when you begin to discuss, seriously, the best sex, the separation breaks down. The best sex can happen only between the people who love each other the most.

What does this all add up to? It adds up to marriage. I don't mean that you can't have enjoyable sexual episodes without marriage. I mean that if you want the best possible sex to come true for you, you are talking about marriage, whether you know it or not. Marriage, Christian marriage, is not made by a particular kind of ceremony in a church. A traditional ceremony has evolved, but only to back up the reality of two people promising before God and society to love each other forever in the way I have described. The ceremony doesn't make the marriage-the two people do.

At this point, somebody is certain to ask about living together. Isn't that just as good?

There are two differences between marriage and living together. One is legal. In marriage, you are legally and financially responsible for the other's welfare, and for the welfare of any children you might have.

The other, more important difference is that living together is without promises. You just do it; friends and family discover for themselves you are together. Marriage, by contrast, is living together after promising to God, to your families and friends, and to each other that you never quit loving each other.

Now I grant you that a lot of people who make that promise do quit loving each other. But the percentages are lower than with those who quit loving each other after living together- those who never made any promises. You can take this as a rule in life: If somebody isn't willing to promise, don't count on him.

So living together fails the best sex test at point 5 and, usually, point 2. Not only do you often split up, but you know you will probably split up, and that breeds a lack of commitment, trust and sharing-all of which undermines love.

Let me now get to the heart of my subject. I have been married for quite some time now, and I am not going to try to kid you that sex in marriage is always like life in a Playboy fantasy. Not for anybody, even Hugh Hefner.

What messes up sex is people. It turns out, in practice, that while the technique of great sex is tricky, the demands on your personality are much, much more critical. You have to love another person. It isn't easy, day after day. The initial thrills, the newness, disappear. Your differences can make getting along difficult. You lose self-consciousness with each other, and that's good. But if you are the least bit lazy, the lack of self-consciousness easily becomes complacency- not even trying to please each other. You have

to cope with what you don't like about the other person and about yourself. This all affects sex. It does for anybody, married or not. It's just that some people split up long before they even get started at the hard parts of achieving great sex- and great love.

But marriage, Christian marriage, makes you stick with it. When splitting up is not a serious consideration, you have the best chance to find satisfaction, love, and yes, even great sex- because you keep on working at it, year after year.

In the process, you find out that sex was something different from what you thought. It is greater, and lesser, than you ever imagined. Great as sex is, it shrinks in comparison to the greatness of the love of your partner that hides nothing, knows everything, shares everything, and loves all the more. Sex becomes almost incidental, as just one part of the wonderful experience of true oneness with another human being.

But in this oneness- this love- sex is also greater than you thought. It is more thrill than pleasure. It ties you into the deepest springs of love, love that has no limits and no end. This best sex is like a wonderful food. The sensations it offers- the smells, the tastes, the feelings- are fantastic. And the way it nourishes and heals you is even better.

I am not trying to kid you. Sex in marriage isn't always, or even usually, like that. But it is sometimes. And from what I know, you can find the best sex nowhere else. It is very much worth waiting for with all your patience, and very much worth working toward with all your energy.