

Stacey's Story:
"Help! We Fight About Sex! What Do I Do?"

Dear Patsy,

My husband, Joe, and I have been married for eighteen years. We have five beautiful children. By all accounts, everyone considers him a nice guy. He is a hard worker, a good provider, a family man, spends time with the children, prefers to be at home with us in his free time, etc.

I am a Christian. My husband is a professing Christian. He has taken us to church through the years but has never shown an interest in personal Bible study and prayer. I love my husband deeply and have many reasons to respect him. We are a family that does everything together, from meals to recreation, working to relaxing.... But our intimate relationship has been an ongoing struggle, particularly for me.

First, let me say, when we are together, we love it, probably more so now than when we were younger. My struggle is that our love life has always been sporadic. I realize now that I was a young, naive child in the early years of our marriage. Our first child came along a little more than a year after we were married. Time would go by and Joe showed no interest in sexual relations with me. But after the baby came, months would pass with no interest on Joe's part. When I brought it up, he always had an excuse or something.

More often than not, I am the initiator in relations, not always, but most of the time. Through the years, our marriage has had some very volatile times. I've learned many areas where the Lord has had to work on me to make me a godly wife. And of course, it is an ongoing work. :) But I have always been here for my husband and loved him deeply.

I never could figure out why Joe wasn't so interested in me sexually. I've kept myself in good shape even after five babies. I'm not tooting my own horn, but I knew in my heart my husband could do a lot worse, and that many men would probably be pleased to have me for a wife.

I've struggled with insecurity, etc. because of Joe's lack of interest. Don't get me wrong, I've always gotten a good-bye kiss in the morning, the hello embrace when he came home from work, the goodnight kiss, etc. We even take walks and hold hands. I have always shown an interest in Joe and made myself available to him. I flirt with him and show that I enjoy being with him. But many, many times to no avail.

As I said earlier, I realize now that I was a naive child in the early, if not most of the years, of our marriage. In the past three or four years, my frustration and anger grew to a point where I had to grow up. I started looking for answers as to why this has been a regular pattern in our marriage. We will be intimate for a few days, maybe several weeks in a row, and then it wanes off and Joe shows no interest. I express my frustration to him but to no avail.

Anyway, I remembered reading a book in the first years of our marriage that if a husband doesn't show interest, and another woman is not in the picture, the husband probably masturbates. I didn't think much of it then but I think it has always been in the back of my head all these years. Let me clarify, I have never had any reason to suspect Joe has or is committing actual adultery with a real woman. He spends all his time with the children and I. We always know where the other is. He comes right home at night, his work schedule and setting are not conducive to cheating, etc., etc.

But after doing research and growing up as to how a man is affected by the sight of a

woman, and seeing the culture we live in, I started to see the whole picture. I expressed my frustration at commercials that would come on with scantily clad women. I asked him how he thought it made me feel as his wife to sit there in our own living room having these women right in front of my husband.

I started talking about my concern with things on TV that showed skin. Of course, I'm not talking about hardcore bad shows. At first, he said I was being prudish. But he eventually started changing the channel when the skin appeared. Our, and his, more particularly, television viewing became less and less. This would be great; but in my heart, I wish I could believe Joe would, or does change the channel when I'm not in the room, or not at home.

One night, I went to bed before Joe. I had suspicions and listened intently to hear what he was watching on TV. He had the volume low, but it seemed like he was changing channels regularly. It sounded like the same channels, up then down. Eventually, he went to the bathroom. I quietly went into the room and checked the remote. When I went up a few channels, sure enough, there was a naked woman on a video channel.

When he came back, I confronted him on it. I was so upset I was shaking. Of course, he denied it profusely. I slept on the couch for several nights, crying myself to sleep. The next day, roses appeared. Joe has always been generous with gifts on birthdays and anniversaries, but this was new. It was the nicest flower bouquet I had ever seen.

I cancelled our cable television then called my husband at work to inform him of this. It met with no resistance. Another unusual thing. Normally, doing something without his consent wouldn't have gone over so easy. I felt his guilty conscience was weighing on him. 'Til this day, he has never admitted viewing that porn program, but his actions afterwards convinced me he had been.

Soon afterward Joe came to me one night when I was on the couch and said he missed me and wanted me back in our bed. The next time we were intimate, I cried and expressed my concern over whether or not it was me he was really seeing when we were together. He assured me he was, but I had grown up by this time.

We stayed in status quo for a while. Then in the heat of an argument, I confronted Joe with my suspicion that he was masturbating regularly. He has always taken very long showers every work morning. He gets up well in advance of leaving for work. He has always said he relaxes in there. I realized my husband always seemed to be more interested in intimacy in the mornings than in the evenings. I suspected the long showers were where he had been cheating on me all these years. When I brought it up, he denied it vehemently, almost violently. But then I noticed during the following week he was taking ten-minute showers, if that. Of course, the same old patterns fell in place and the long showers returned.

When we've had disagreements and I confronted him with this issue, he turned it around and said I have a dirty mind. I told him I suspected the "gentleman doth protest too much." He now just brushes me off when I bring it up.

I should clarify, I have no reason to suspect Joe of being into pornography. He does not use our home computer and his work situation absolutely prohibits it. They have filters, etc. that even prevent emails with any word even closely associated with sex from ever coming through. Employee computers are monitored and he would never risk his job. He is a very busy at work, and I know he is a good worker. We watch minimal TV at home.

Yet I am not so naive anymore. I realize pornography is everywhere you go in our society. The grocery store checkout counters hit you right in the face with it. And guess who makes the frequent runs to the store for milk or bread? Joe. I know everywhere a man goes in our culture he is confronted with skin. So I do know the temptations are all around and I realize that if a

pattern or habit has taken hold since probably before we were even married, it's most likely still a pattern in Joe's life. But this sin habit is cheating us out of a glorious marriage.

I have always deeply desired that Joe would just be honest with me about this. He does not know what it is doing to me or to our marriage relationship. I know it is not a subject he even wants to discuss.

This month the same old pattern has taken hold. It has been weeks since we've been intimate. A week ago, I was flirting with Joe one evening but to no avail. When we got in bed, I confronted him and asked him how I was supposed to believe a normal, red-blooded American man wasn't interested in sexual relations. He brushed me off, and I cried myself to sleep. Avoidance is his answer. Ignore it and it will go away.

My urgent question is "What do I do?" I know I can't be his conscience. Frankly, I'm tired of keeping track of what he watches on the TV. I see what confronts his eyes at the checkout counters and I'm angry and bitter inside over it. I want to just deal with this openly and frankly.

I can't prove anything if he's in the shower away from prying eyes. I've even imagined getting some kind of hidden device to record him in the act so I could confront him with the evidence. But I don't know how to approach this whole issue in a Christ-like manner. I am of course concerned for my husband and his soul. I also want honesty and believe I have been cheated on. It hurts as much as if the woman were real. It's almost harder, because any woman of his imagination is perfect.

I also feel that Joe has cheated himself even more. He has a real woman who loves and respects him and has stayed by him all these years. I feel like this issue has to be dealt with once and for all so we can go on and have the glorious marriage everyone thinks we already have. I want to honor God and my husband. What do I do? Where do I start? What do I say?

I don't know of a strong church where we can get help. I have been faithful to Joe in that I have not discussed this with others. I want to deal with this uprightly. Please, could you give me some direction, a starting point, anything? I don't want this to be a pattern for another eighteen years of our marriage. This is *the sore spot* in our marriage.

Honestly, to the outside world, I should be the happiest woman in the world. The life the Lord has given me with Joe is much to be thankful for. But I know this area of intimacy is crucial and the Lord wants better for us, too. What do I do on my part? How do I show Joe I'm serious about this? How do I make him see we cannot, I cannot, continue on like this? Please, I need some good counsel.

Thank you so much for your time. I eagerly look forward to hearing from you.

By His Grace,
Stacey