

**An Interview with Joel R. Beeke about his book *Friends and Lovers: Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage*. Cruciform Press, 2012, 96 pp., paperback.**

Interviewed by Brian G. Najapfour

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed about your book that is filled with godly wisdom. As a newly married husband, I read this volume with great profit. I especially liked the biblical, pastoral, practical, honest, and balanced tone of your book.

Here are some of my questions for you about your work:

**1. Can you please briefly explain why *friendship* and *sexual intimacy* are “two key ingredients in a vital marriage” (p. 8)?**

From the beginning God designed marriage to be a bond of personal and sexual unity. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Cleaving (or clinging) expresses the commitment or bond of a shared life. One flesh expresses sexual intimacy. It is interesting that the desires of women tend to major on the bond of friendship, and the desires of men on the sexual bond. In reality we need both to make a vibrant marriage. There is something inexpressibly beautiful about making love with your spouse as your best friend, and sharing life with your lover.

**2. You say that “[f]ew books on marriage include even one chapter on friendship” (p. 13). Why do you think this is so?**

That’s a hard question to answer with certainty. Perhaps part of the reason is that we have become a culture obsessed with skills, but awkward about relationships. There are lots of books about how to find your dream mate, how to communicate well, how to make love well, how to avoid tragedy well, etc. But as a culture North Americans don’t seem to know how to “be together” well.

Another factor may be the negative influence of communications media. We have traded real friendships for superficial forms of intimacy flashing on screens both large and small. Social media allow people to network and share information at an unprecedented rate. These are useful tools for work and business. But they are no substitute to eating dinner together every night, talking about what’s going on in your hearts and lives, reading and discussing the Bible, and praying hand-in-hand in the presence of the living triune God.

- 3. I like what you mention on page 45: “The gospel of Christ energizes us to enjoy sex as a sacred passion.” Can you please further elaborate your thoughts on this statement?**

Sex is not a sacred act in the same sense as trusting in Christ or worshiping God. It is not something especially produced by the saving grace of God. Sex is part of the created order, a common grace given by God to all mankind when He made us in His image. It is His will for all married people to delight sexually in their spouses (Prov. 5:18–19).

Sex falls into the category of blessings to which Paul referred in 1 Timothy 4:4–5, “For every creature [creation] of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” That means that the gospel of God’s grace produces in us a holiness and gratitude that makes our use of God’s creation clean and beautiful again despite our fallen, sinful nature.

The gospel teaches us to love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). The spiritual love of God in Christ then moves us to love other people, especially our spouses (Eph. 5:2, 25). That motivates us to do everything in our marriage with kindness, delight, and gratitude. So the grace of God in Christ makes us into passionate lovers.

- 4. What books can you recommend to a spouse who would like to grow more in his/her companionship and intimacy with his/her spouse in marriage?**

Some good books on marriage are R. C. Sproul, *The Intimate Marriage*; Alan Dunn, *Gospel Intimacy in a Godly Marriage*; William Gouge, *Of Domestic Duties*; Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*; and Gary Chapman, *Covenant Marriage*.

- 5. What writing projects are you currently working on?**

Mark Jones and I are finishing a major book titled *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, which is the first Puritan systematic theology ever written. It will explore what the Puritans taught on about sixty subjects of systematic theology. I am also working on a book about Christian zeal, a book of devotions revolving around feasting with Christ in the Lord’s Supper, a book explaining Reformed experiential preaching, a book on Puritan preparation for saving faith, and various articles.

**Note:** *Friends and Lovers* can be obtained from Reformation Heritage Books for the discount price of \$7.00 plus postage.