

# Keep On Learning to Dance

by Tim Challies/October 28, 2016

It's a metaphor I heard from a friend and one that has stuck with me ever since. It illustrates a common, perhaps even universal, experience within marriage—sexual intimacy is good and wonderful but, maintaining healthy intimacy through all of life's ups and downs is a life-long challenge. The illustration goes something like this.

You are a young man or woman attending a wedding reception, an old-fashioned dance in a small-town dance hall. The band takes its place on stage and strikes up the music, a simple waltz. You don't know how to waltz, but you're eager to learn. You find your partner, a partner who is equally unskilled but equally keen to learn, and together you begin. You learn the positioning for your feet, you take hesitant first steps. For a while you stumble, you trip over each other's feet, you make silly mistakes. But after a few minutes you realize that you are beginning to get it. A few minutes later and you're moving, you and your partner gliding around the floor as one. This is fun!

But no sooner do you start to move smoothly than the music fades and stops. There is a moment of silence before the band leader strikes up a new number, this time a polka. "But, wait," you want to cry, "I've just figured out the waltz! It was just beginning to go well!" But the band is already well into their next number. You and your partner turn to one another, shrug and smile, and begin to learn this new dance. You discover the tempo. You learn where and how to position your feet, you learn to move them in unison, and after a while you are once again gliding across the floor. It becomes easy, it becomes smooth and fun. You're dancing!

And then, wouldn't you know it, the music changes again and this time the band moves into a foxtrot or swing or something else. "But, but, we had only just..." But it's too late. The band leader has given the word, the music has switched, the evening has moved on.

And in just that way, sex within marriage is like a dance. It is rhythms and movements of living, habits of communication, patterns of intimacy that you learn and act out together. Over time you grow in unison, you grow in your ability to anticipate your partner, to please and serve one another. There are moments when it just seems to work, where intimacy is smooth and fun and satisfying, where sex fits into life like a hand fits into a glove. It just works and you want it to stay that way forever.

But life is not a static thing. Just like the music changes at a dance, the circumstances change in life. Just like new music requires new steps and movements, these new circumstances require new rhythms, new ways of communicating, new ways of relating. For sex to be successful and mutually satisfying in these changing circumstances, you will need to let go of some of those old patterns and begin some new ones. You may want the old music to come back on, the old circumstances to return. You knew that dance, you knew how to move through life as one. But the past is the past and will never return.

If you are married, you need to learn the dance, the rhythms, patterns, habits, and actions that promote the deepest intimacy, the healthiest sexuality. Expect that you will learn to move to life's music, to learn its dance. But also be aware that the music has a way of changing at the whim, or perhaps better said, the design of the band leader. And when the music changes, be ready, be willing, be eager to learn the new dance.