

# One Flesh: Physical Intimacy

## Building a Joyful Marriage: Part 13 Song of Solomon

Summary: One flesh refers also to sex. Sex is part of the display of the relationship between God and His people, and therefore must be live up to the ideal. The Song of Solomon is both a warning against premature awakening of romantic love and a picture of the ideal for the sexual relationship. It is to be unique – no third party and it should be a healthy mix of enjoying and being enjoyed, giving and desiring. Low desire spouses should increase their desire. Sex enhances all the other aspects of the one-flesh relationship.

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# Introduction

## One flesh includes sex

We are wrapping up our study of marriage by examining exactly what God means by the phrase “one flesh.” It involves setting your spouse as your highest earthly priority. It involves emotional and relational closeness. It involves being joined at the heart such that you are easily influenced by each other. It involves oneness of purpose and direction and method and affections.

And in 1 Corinthians 6:16 we discover one more thing it involves: sexual intercourse. So our task this morning is to think through what Scripture teaches about that, and why God included it as part of marriage.

## Why Sex?

Why is there such a thing as sex? God could have designed the human body any way He wanted. He could have designed reproduction any way He wanted. So why did He make it so that a man and woman physically join their bodies together? And why did God connect that act so closely with emotion? So much so that the act itself becomes impossible if certain emotions are present or absent.

### *Not just procreation (although that is important)*

In the past many people have assumed that the only purpose of sex is procreation – conceiving children. But that theory is blown by the Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs), which is an entire book of Holy Scripture devoted to marital love that never mentions children or procreation a single time.

Now let me hasten to add that that is not to say procreation is unimportant. We know from the rest of Scripture that having children is very important, and should be the norm in marriage. God says that children are a great blessing and a wonderful gift, so if you depart from that norm and do something to avoid conceiving children you had better have a good reason – a reason other than saying God is wrong about children being a wonderful gift. If you do not see children as a blessing and a delight and a marvelous gift from God then that is a difference between you and God and between your values and His values that needs to be corrected. So please do not hear me saying that procreation is unimportant. But do hear me saying that procreation is not the only purpose of physical union in marriage – or even the main purpose.

God could have given us the ability to have children through some other method. So why did He design male and female anatomy the way He did, and male and female psychology and hormones and desires and everything else so that the marriage bed would be what it is? If you have unlimited power, infinite wisdom, and total freedom to create things exactly the way you want them, and you create sexual intercourse, what does that say? It says that it is a supremely good thing that husbands and wives have this kind of relationship. And the implications for that have profound impact on our worship and the way we relate to God – both as married people and as singles.

## Sex displays the relationship between God and His people

And by this point in this study it should not be hard to figure out why that is. I hope that if we have done nothing else in this study we have at least established in everyone’s mind beyond the shadow of a doubt that the marriage relationship exists to illustrate and put on display the relationship between God and His people. And when you are considering which aspects of marriage accomplish that there is no reason to exclude the one act that God tied more exclusively to marriage than any other act. Nothing is tied more exclusively to marriage than sex, so there can be no question that it is very much part of the picture of the relationship between God and His people. That is why Ephesians 5 is very specific about saying the one-flesh relationship in marriage is part of how marriage illustrates the relationship between Christ and the Church. The sexual part is not excluded. Throughout Scripture God describes love for this world as committing adultery against God.

**Ezekiel 16:7-13 I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew ...<sup>8</sup> "Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love ... I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, ...<sup>10</sup> I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly**

garments. <sup>11</sup> I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, <sup>12</sup> and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

### *A picture of the glory of God*

The oneness of God with His people and the profound oneness within the Trinity are glorious, delightful truths about God, and what clearer picture is there in all of creation of that oneness than man and wife, deeply in love, joined in heart and soul and body in the marriage bed? There is no greater natural picture of unity and oneness.

And not only does it illustrate oneness, but it also illustrates the connection between that oneness and joy. When Jesus spoke of His oneness with the Father He also spoke of His unbounded joy and delight, so He gave us a special kind of relationship in which the most profound act of oneness and union is also the most intensely pleasurable and delightful kind of experience. He wanted us to associate oneness and pleasure.

## **The Interpretation of Song of Solomon**

### **Various theories**

So once again, this is an area where we must strive for God ideal in our marriages not just so we will be happy as couples, but more importantly so that we properly reflect the glory of God and fulfill God's purpose in creating marriage. So how do we do that? What does God want from us in this area? What is the ideal? That question is so important that God devoted an entire book of the Bible to describing what it is to be like: the Song of Solomon. Now, I realize that statement is a controversial one. The correct way to interpret the Song of Songs is a matter of a huge amount of debate in the field of biblical theology. Some say it is an allegory about Christ and the Church and it teaches us nothing about marriage. I reject that view because if it were an allegory it would be worthless because there would be no way to know what each part was supposed to represent. Others say it is a drama that describes the story of a man and woman who get married. Others say it is a historical description of one of Solomon's relationships. Others say it is a love triangle with three characters. Others say it describes a wedding. Others say it is a collection of unrelated love poems. One theory is that it describes a funeral! I don't see that at all. Nor do I see any clear drama or a chronological unfolding of a relationship.

### **Warning**

I have been studying the Song of Songs throughout this series on marriage. And as a result I have changed my view on how it is to be interpreted. In the past I have taught that a major purpose of the book is to warn us about the power of romantic love, and to especially warn us not to awaken it prematurely. Three times in the book the flow of the book is interrupted with this charge:

**Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you ... Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.**

Romantic love is not to be entered into prematurely because it is so incredibly powerful. It is like playing with fire.

**8:6 ... love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.**

Once you start dating and you start holding hands and sharing intimate conversation and all that, you awaken feelings of romantic love (the kind of love that makes you want to touch, and that is different from the way you love your other friends). And I believe that charge is saying that if you are not ready to get married it is foolish to do anything that will awaken romantic love. That kind of love wreaks havoc on your life as a single person. God did not design it for unmarried people, and it just creates frustration and distraction and anxiety and heartbreak. Dating is a terrible invention of our time that is designed to give people the advantages of a marriage relationship without the commitment. But what it does instead is give you all the

disadvantages of marriage without any of the advantages. It is the worst of both worlds – the disadvantages of singleness and the disadvantages of marriage without the advantages of either.

And beyond that, romantic love is designed by God to lead into sexual expression. If you nurture a romantic, dating relationship, but then try to stop short of sexual activity, you will find yourself trying to swim upstream against a current that will eventually get the better of you. The great majority of couples who do that, (start down the road of physical expression), even if they are fully committed to sexual purity, most eventually cave in to temptation and lose their purity. Your body doesn't know that you are not married, and the process of physical love that starts with holding hands and culminates in intercourse was not designed by God to be cut off at some arbitrary point. So even those who do manage to stay pure suffer from all kinds of distraction and frustration and unfulfilled desire.

## Model of married love

And so the repetition of that charge three times in the book makes it clear that one purpose of this book is to warn us about getting into a romantic relationship prematurely. When I taught the class on hermeneutics that is what I taught as the purpose of the book. And I still believe all that, however in studying the Song of Songs these past few months I have realized that that is not the only purpose of the book. Most of the book is devoted to describing the erotic thoughts and words and actions that take place between husband and wife. And it is not condemned or presented in a negative light at all; it is presented in a very positive light. I am now fully convinced that the Song of Songs is a description of the way the marriage relationship is supposed to be. It is just a collage of beautiful snapshots of married love that are masterfully woven together by the writer to give a multi-faceted portrait of God's ideal.

You may be interested to know that forms of the word *agape* are used in the Song of Songs 19 times, and *eros* appears zero times. This book teaches us what *agape* love looks like in marriage – it is a favorable treatment.

In your bulletin is an outline of the book of the Song of Songs that was developed by the late Robert Alden, who was my Hebrew professor in seminary. He saw this book as a gigantic grand chiasmus. The first paragraph of the book goes together with the last paragraph of the book. Then the second paragraph matches up with the second to last paragraph. Then the third with the third to last, etc. So if you work your way in toward the center of the book, what do we find this whole chiasmus pointing to in the middle of the book? The literary center of the book falls in the white space between the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. The last verse of chapter 4 and the first verse of chapter 5 both talk about her garden, which is a metaphor for the marriage bed.

**4:16 Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.**

**5:1 I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk.**

So chapter 4 ends with her inviting him into her garden, then chapter 5 begins with him talking about how wonderful and satisfying it was, and that white space in between is the center of the book. The entire book points us to that. And then look at the very next line:

**5:1 ... Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.**

There is some discussion about whether the speaker here is

A 1:1-4a "Take me away"  
 B 1:4b Friends speak  
 C 1:5-7 "My own vineyard"  
 D 1:8-14 "Breasts," "silver," "we will make"  
 E 1:15-2:2 "House"  
 F 2:3-7 "His left arm" "daughters of Jerusalem . . . so desire" "apple," "love"  
 G 2:8-13 "Fragrance," "come my darling," "blossoming"  
 H 2:14-15 "Vineyards," "show me"  
 I 2:16-17 "My lover is mine"  
 Ja 3:1-5 "The watchmen found me"  
 Jb 3:6-11 Description of carriage, "gold," "Lebanon," "daughters of Jerusalem"  
 Jc 4:1-7 Description of girl, "Your eyes . . . hair . . . teeth"  
 K 4:8-15 "Myrrh," "spice," "honey," "honeycomb," "wine," "milk"  
 L 4:16 "Into his garden"  
 L' 5:1a "Into my garden"  
 K' 5:1bc "Myrrh," "spice," "honey," "honeycomb," "wine," "milk"  
 J'a 5:2-9 "The watchmen found me"  
 J'b 5:10-6:1 "Gold," "Lebanon," "daughters of Jerusalem"  
 J'c 6:4-11 Description of girl, "Your eyes, . . . hair . . . teeth"  
 I' 6:2-3 "My lover is mine"  
 H' 6:13-7:9a [10a] "Vines," "wine," "that we me gaze c you"  
 G' 7:9b-13 [10b-14] "Fragrance," "come my darling," "blossom"  
 F' 8:1-5 "His left arm," "daughters of Jerusalem . . . so desire" "apple," "love"  
 E' 8:6-7 "House"  
 D' 8:8-9 "Breasts," "silver," "we will build"  
 C' 8:10-12 "My own vineyard"  
 B' 8:13 "Friends"  
 A' 8:14 "Come away"

the friends of the bride or if it is God, but either way it seems clear that that, along with all the similar statements of approval in the book, is designed to show divine approval of this couple's enjoyment of the marriage bed. And that would certainly fit with what we read in Proverbs 5.

**Proverbs 5:18-19** **May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup> A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated (enraptured, intoxicated) by her love.**

And even if we did not have those statements of approval throughout the Song of Songs I think it would be safe to say that erotic love is being portrayed in this book in a very favorable way. You do not really need a lot of direct statements about God's approval. When someone paints a breathtaking masterpiece they do not write all over it with a bunch of detailed information about the meaning and significance. You do not have a little arrow pointing to the clouds saying, "These are supposed to be breathtaking." Instead they just paint them with such beauty that they actually do take your breath away. I think that is what is going on in the Song of Songs. By placing this book in the Bible – a whole book on marital love, and portraying it as such a beautiful, wonderful thing, the implication is that sexual love bears divine approval.

And the fact that it is implicit and not explicit makes it all the more powerful an endorsement. If one of my kids comes to me with something and says, "Dad, is this OK?" and I say "Yes," that is one thing. But if I take that thing and present it to my child as a gift and I make a really big deal about it and place it in some fantastic, spectacular context – that really makes a statement about how much I approve of it. That is what God did in Song of Songs with sexual love in marriage. The point of the book is not to regulate it, but to display the beauty of it. And that is a powerful statement about God's approval of and delight in sex as He designed it to be in marriage.

## **God approves of sex**

That is a very important principle for us to understand, because there are many people even within the church who have the feeling that conjugal relations are kind of dirty or unclean or somehow sub-righteous. Very often there is so much guilt that gets dragged into the marriage because of the filthiness of sexual sin prior to marriage that in their heart sexuality in general is tainted as worldly or impure by nature – even within marriage.

Or, another variation of that is for people to think that it is OK within marriage as long as it is only for procreation. Some people think that if a couple gets the least bit creative or they enjoy it too much then it is kinky or worldly or somehow less than holy. So marital relations exist as this sort of necessary yet sub-Christian part of marriage. We have permission from God to do it, but barely. I have counseled married Christians who say, "I know it isn't evil - I know that in my head, but still, afterward I just feel dirty or violated or spiritually unclean."

So it is important for us to understand that not only is sexual intercourse allowed in marriage, but the extreme, passionate, creative, erotic expressions of it like we see in the Song of Songs and Proverbs are God's *ideal* for marital love.

## ***The holiness of sex***

The reason people think sex is tainted or impure may be the fact that sexual sin is spoken of in Scripture as being *so* wicked and vile. And it is. Sexual sin is especially evil and especially damaging, and the judgments against it are very severe. But why is that? Because it is unholy? No – it is not because sex is unholy. It is because it *is* holy.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual sin is evil not because it is obscene, but because it is profane. There are two kinds of swear words – profanity and obscenity. Obscenity is when you speak of that which is obscene, such as references to human waste – ugly, disgusting things. That is what *obscene* means. Profanity is when you speak of some holy thing in a profane, or common, earthly way. If you say the name of Jesus Christ and you really mean Jesus Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual things were very much separated from cultic worship in the OT – no sexual relations within a certain number of days of worship, etc. Perhaps that's because sex as worship is such a major part of paganism.

that is not profanity. But if you speak of it in a way that does not exalt the holiness of Jesus Christ – a way that reduces His name to a low, common level, that is profanity.

And so profanity only works if you are talking about something holy. If you start out with something that is already earthly, you cannot use it as a profanity because it is already profane – it is already common and earthly. If someone says, “Oh water!” or “Oh grass, stars, carpet, leaves!” no one would call that profanity, because water and grass and carpet are already profane – already earthly and common. The only way to have profanity is to start with something that is holy and drag it down to the common, earthly level. So that is the difference between obscenity and profanity. Obscenity takes that which is filthy and vile and throws it in your face. Profanity takes that which is transcendent and divine and holy and drags it down to the common.

So what about swear words that have to do with sexual references? Which category are they in? Most would say they are obscenities, but I would suggest that misuse of sexual terms is not obscenity – it is profanity. It is wrong to talk that way, not because sex is filthy and evil, but because sex is sacred and holy.

It is something that God has set apart as special – very special. God has taken this one act and made it so utterly different from every other human activity, and has restricted it so narrowly to one specific relationship, and has attached such severe punishment to any abuse of it, that it is, in a very real sense, holy – set apart by God.

So when you make love to your spouse, God is thoroughly pleased. As long as there is no involvement of any third party either physically or mentally, and you do it with an awareness that the sensations are just samples of the eternal pleasures at God’s right hand, and your goal is to express love to your spouse in the way that is the most delightful to your spouse, then the act of intercourse is very much glorifying to God, and the more you enjoy it the more He is glorified.

The next time you face a temptation toward some kind of sexual sin, resist it for the same reason you would resist standing up during the communion service to start telling jokes. Resist it for the same reason you would not walk into the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament times and desecrate the place. Resist sexual sin because sex is holy and sacred and near to the heart of God, and it is not to be trifled with or perverted. To take such a sacred thing and drag it into the slime of this world by profaning and perverting it, and to rip it out of the covenant relationship of marriage, so that it is detached from the picture of showing the image of God, is a horrible sacrilege. It is like going in and taking the Ark of the Covenant to use as a storage box in your garage. If a person did that with the Ark in Old Testament times he would die. Why? Because the Ark is so filthy? No, because it is so holy. And God has said that adulterers and fornicators and homosexuals will not enter the kingdom of heaven, not because sex is filthy, but because it is so holy.

## Uniqueness

So once again, we need to excel in this area in our marriages so that our marriages fulfill their purpose of displaying and illustrating what God is like and how He relates to His people. The holiness of sex should cause single people to strive for absolute purity. And it should cause married people to develop a sexual relationship that lives up to what God designed it to illustrate. And it is the Song of Songs that teaches us how to do that. As children of God we are not free to just exist in a marriage with a sexual relationship that falls short of what it should be and put no effort into striving to make it pleasing to God. So let’s take a look at the standard in the Song of Songs

The only thing harder than studying an entire book of the Bible in three months is preaching that whole book in one sermon. Obviously we can’t go verse by verse all the way through the book this morning. So let me just give you the major emphases. Most of the book is dominated by the man and the woman talking about enjoying, being enjoyed, desiring, and being desired. And the foundation upon which all that desiring and enjoying rests is the fact that this love is unique to this relationship. There is no third party involved. Bringing a third party into the marriage bed – whether literally or only in your thoughts or in your affections, destroys the entire foundation upon which all the rest is built.

And of course this aspect of sexual union stands out not only in the Song but throughout Scripture. It is a kind of closeness that is absolutely unique. You have it with your spouse and no one else. Adultery is punished with the utmost severity. It is an especially wicked sin. God wanted the relationship that illustrated His relationship with His people to be one that is absolutely different from any other relationship. It is not acceptable for God to be slightly ahead of the #2 priority in your life. He is not satisfied with being #1 in your life. If God is slightly ahead of the #2 priority in your life you are not a Christian. A Christian is someone

who utterly forsakes every other priority in life in favor of Jesus Christ as his only priority, so as a Christian I have no other priority. My priorities are not, God, then family, then church, then work, etc. My priorities are God, then God, then God. I love and serve my family for one reason – to express my love for God. I preach for one reason – to glorify God. I eat, drink, sleep, exercise, relax – everything I do I do because I believe it is God’s will. And any moment that is not true in my life is sin. Any time I do anything for any reason other than to glorify God I am behaving as an unbeliever.

That is absolutely fundamental if a person is going to have a relationship with God. It has to be unique. And so it is no surprise that when God designs a special human relationship to illustrate and display that, he creates a relationship in which two human beings have a way of expressing love to each other that is restricted only to that relationship. The sexual part of marital love is to serve as one of the components of oneness that God placed only in marriage to illustrate the way Christ is related to His people. And so for your marriage to fulfill its purpose for existence there must be a oneness and unity between you and your spouse that is unparalleled in any other kind of relationship in the world.

And we see that not only in the strong prohibitions against extramarital sex in Scripture, but also in the way the man and woman think about each other in the Song of Songs. In his eyes she is the only woman in the world. When he looks through the lens of sexual interest, his wife is like the one woman in a whole world of men. In 1:9 he says she is like a mare among all the stallions of Pharaoh. Compared to her all the other females in the world might as well be men. In chapter 2 she feels like just a common, ordinary girl – like one of the thousands of lilies in the valleys. And he says, “No...

### **2:2 Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.**

And she feels the same way toward him.

### **2:3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men.**

In the closing section of the book she talks about how she has become to him like one bringing contentment because of her chastity (8:10). Her refusal to offer herself to anyone else but him is part of what makes her so delightful to him.

### **Be faithful**

The obvious application for this point is that we must be faithful to our spouse. All of your sexual energy belongs to your spouse.

### ***Premarital Sex***

If you do not have a spouse then you are like Paul and Jesus – you are to find satisfaction in God apart from any sexual activity or fulfillment. And if that distresses you remind yourself that no human being ever had deeper and more wonderful joy than Jesus Christ, and few, if any, have had greater joy than Paul. If you learn to enjoy communion with God then singleness is no obstacle to joy.

So singles are to have no sexual activity at all, because all sex is to be unique to the marriage relationship. In 1 Corinthians 7 singles are only given two options: get married or do not have sex at all. Those are the only two options for a Christian single.

### **1 Corinthians 7:8-9 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

This verse only makes sense if premarital sex is wrong. If any sexual activity outside of marriage were permissible then Paul would not offer marriage as the only solution to burning with passion – especially since Paul sees such massive advantages to singleness. We see the same thing in the first three verses – singleness

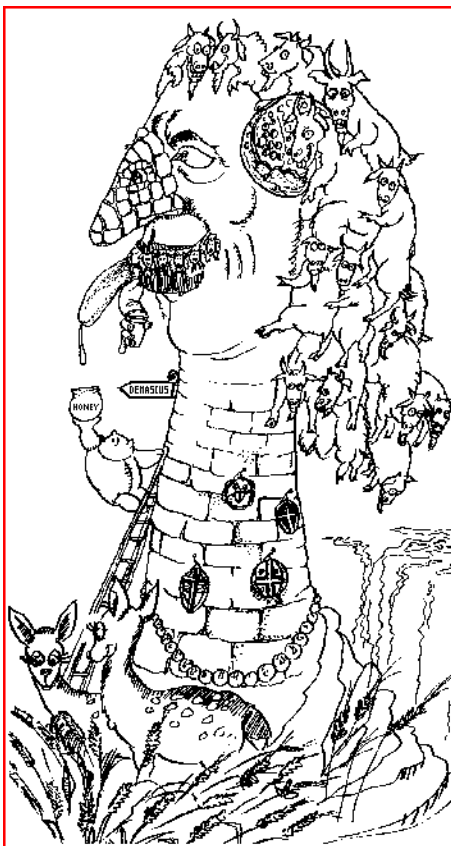
means no sex.<sup>2</sup> If you take sex out of marriage, or if you adjust it in any way to depart from the way God designed it, it is like scribbling on a Rembrandt. God has created something that is exceedingly beautiful – far more beautiful than any Rembrandt, and nothing we can do can improve upon it. Our adjustments and changes do nothing but destroy it.

### ***Looking with lust***

And that applies not only to intercourse, but all efforts to fulfill sexual urges. Jesus said if a man looks at a woman in order to lust, he is guilty of adultery. The same goes for looking at an image of a woman. If it is wrong to do, then it is wrong to think about. Anything that would be wrong to do with another woman is wrong to think about doing. And since it would be wrong to stand in a room with a woman and watch her undress, then it is wrong to think about that. And obviously if you are looking at images of it you are thinking about it.

### **Pr.5:20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? 21 For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD**

We are not to be captivated by the body of a woman we are not married to. And it is interesting that he only mentions the bosom (which is the chest area). So it is not talking about intercourse. Deriving any sense of sexual enjoyment from another woman's body - either by touching or looking, is adulterous.



## **Enjoying and Being Enjoyed**

So with the uniqueness of the relationship established, now we can discuss the rest of the book, which is all about enjoying, being enjoyed, desiring, and being desired. It is probably significant that the talk about enjoying comes mostly out of the man's mouth, and the talk about being enjoyed comes predominantly out of the woman's mouth. He loves enjoying her, and she loves being enjoyed by him.

### **The man enjoying his wife**

Three times in this book he gives a detailed description of her body from head to toe. (Except the third time he goes the other way – he starts with her sandaled feet and works his way up.) And from the description, her sandals seem to be her only article of clothing – except for her necklace. So he looks her up and down and praises each part of her body with poetic metaphors. Some people have read those and haven't been all that impressed with this woman's looks. Your hair looks like a flock of goats and your nose is the tower of David? Here is one depiction of what this woman would have looked like if we take the metaphors literally. But metaphors are not intended to be taken literally; they are intended to be interpreted. And when you do that you see that this woman is exceedingly beautiful in his eyes. We know from the beginning of the book that she is actually kind of ordinary looking by most people's standards. But in the eyes of the man who loves her she is gorgeous, and he thoroughly enjoys

<sup>2</sup> In the first verse, the Greek phrase translated "to marry" is literally "to touch a woman (*gunaikos aptesthai*). This Greek phrase was a common euphemism for sexual relations. So Paul is literally saying, "It is good for a man not to have sex with a woman, but to avoid sexual sin he should go ahead and get married anyway." He's saying it is good to remain single, but if you can't stay pure get married. And the thing to pay close attention to is the fact that when he says "It's good to remain single" the way he says that is "It's good not to have sex." The whole point of the second verse is this: to reduce immorality (that is, premarital sex), people should be married, dedicated to one person with whom they share sexual relations." So there can be no question that remaining single means not having sex. Again, if premarital sex were an option he could have said, "It's good to remain single, but if you can't control yourself sexually then just sleep with your boyfriend/girlfriend."



looking at her.

### ***Make yourself attractive***

And a lot of that is because she makes an effort to be attractive to him. She wears jewelry and perfume and does various things to seduce him. She wants to be attractive in his eyes. It seems obvious that a married person would want to do that, but so often it isn't. There are many married people who spend all kinds of time and effort and money trying to make themselves attractive when they go out into the world, but at home they give no care at all to how they look. There are women who seem to be trying to be attractive to everyone but their husband. And men do the same thing. In the world they are winsome and courteous and manly, but at home they make no effort at all. Who are we trying to attract? If you are married, all of your decisions about clothes, makeup, bathing and hygiene habits, hairstyle – all of it should be done with a view toward pleasing and seducing your spouse. It does not matter if the people at work or at the grocery store think you look good. It does matter if your spouse thinks you look good.

And it honors your spouse. When a woman is trying to lose weight, and she says she wants to do it mainly for health reasons, or mainly so she isn't embarrassed when she goes to the swimming pool - how honoring it would be to her husband if she said, "Those are all part of my motivation, but what motivates me more than anything is wanting to be more beautiful for my husband." If there is some way you could be more attractive to your spouse – whether it be through hygiene or hair style or the clothes you wear (or don't wear) – do it! Learn to enjoy being enjoyed by your spouse.

### ***Don't detach the body from the person***

And when you enjoy your spouse, enjoy your spouse as a person. Wives, don't just enjoy the things your husband does for you without delighting in him as a person. Don't just be glad you have a breadwinner and handyman. Take delight in him as a person.

And men, don't turn your wife's body into an object that is disconnected from her as a person. In the Song of Songs the man talks a lot about his enjoyment of her body, but he does so in a very honoring way rather than an objectifying, demeaning way. He does not detach his enjoyment of her body from enjoying her as a person. He enjoys everything about her. He likes the way she smells (4:11). He praises her for her virginity coming into the marriage (4:12). He says she is flawless (4:7). He says she has stolen his heart by the way she looks at him.

### **4:9 You have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.**

And when he talks about intercourse with her, he doesn't just say it feels good. He connects his enjoyment to her as a person.

### **4:10 How delightful is your lovemaking, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your lovemaking than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! 11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue.**

It is her that he loves, not just what she gives him. I mentioned earlier that throughout the book her sexual delights are described as her garden. So when he comes into her garden he is coming in to enjoy her sexually. And in 4:13-14 he describes that garden with a long catalogue of exotic spices:

### **4:13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.**

The point of all that is that the pleasures of her love are so abundant and so varied that he could never become bored with such a profusion and variety of delights. Variety is a key part of what is so delightful to him – it is not a boring routine. There is creativity and newness.

## **Her being enjoyed**

### ***Make yourself available to your spouse***

And her response is in 4:11

### **Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.**

She says, “You like this garden? It is yours. Come on in.” She makes herself available to him because she loves being enjoyed by him.

### **2:16 My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies <sup>17</sup> until the day breaks**

She makes herself available to him because she enjoys being enjoyed. So she refers to her garden as his garden, which is exactly what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7.

### ***Spiritual warfare***

There is very little regulation of sex within marriage in Scripture. We do not have a lot of instruction saying, “Do it this way, don’t do it this way...” Basically all we have in the New Testament are two basic instructions:

#1 It is to be unique to your marriage – no third party is to be involved in any way.

#2 It is to be satisfying to your spouse.

If I asked you right now to tell me what are the most effective weapons in spiritual warfare, I would probably get a variety of answers. No doubt the first things that would come to your mind would be the armor in Ephesians 6 – especially the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith. Or someone might point to **James 4:7 – resist the devil and he will flee from you**. Someone else might mention 2 Corinthians 10, where we demolish strongholds by exposing the falsehood of bad doctrine and wrong ideas about God. Those are all excellent weapons to use in our war against Satan. But there is one weapon that the Bible says will work that I doubt anyone would mention: sexual intercourse. According to 1 Corinthians 7, physical relations with your spouse are a way to defeat Satan.

### **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.**

We overcome Satan’s efforts to tempt our spouse by providing adequate satisfaction to our spouse.

That text is very clear that physical intimacy in marriage is not optional. God requires that it take place with enough frequency and enough passion and enough romance and enough enjoyment for your spouse such that your spouse will be protected from temptation. If you are providing your wife with so little romance that she is tempted by romance novels or movies or fantasy or some other man, then you are in disobedience to this passage of God’s Word. Wives, if you are not providing a level of fulfillment that would protect your husband from the kinds of temptations he faces, that is disobedience.

Sometimes a spouse will withhold physical fulfillment from the other spouse as a means of punishment or control. A wife says, “OK, no more for you until you get this project done.” That is as blatant a violation of 1 Corinthians 7 as there can be. You do not ever have the right to say to your spouse – “no more for you until *anything*.” That is not your prerogative, because your body does not belong to you – it belongs also to your spouse.

In fact, you do not even have the right to jointly agree to do that as a couple, unless it is for the purpose of prayer and no other reason. And even if it is for prayer, still you are not permitted to do it for a long period of time. Even if it is for prayer it has to be a short enough time that it won’t cause too much temptation.

Sometimes couples hardly ever come together, not because someone is withholding, but because they just both want it that way. They are mad at each other, or maybe they are just too busy and too tired. He works and she works and their schedule is crazy and in the rare times they are both alone in the same place at the same time they are so exhausted neither one of them has the energy. If that is you, you need to understand it is ungodly, and you need to change your schedule in some way to you can begin obeying 1 Corinthians 7.

### *How often?*

How often is enough? The Bible doesn't say. Martin Luther said twice a week should be enough to keep the devil on the run. I am not sure what his basis for that was. I have heard some physiological arguments that for most men there is a large increase in desire after 72 hours or so. And it is also true that some women have physical problems when there is not enough frequency. When it is just a couple times a month they have much greater susceptibility to infections and other problems, and when the frequency is increased to multiple times per week those problems disappear. So there are some clues from the way God designed our bodies that His intention was likely somewhere close to what Luther was thinking of. But obviously couples are all different and it is a matter that you need to figure out with your spouse. But whatever you figure out, make sure it is sufficient to assure that your spouse is not having to wrestle against increased temptation that is unnecessary.

## **Desire and giving (enjoying)**

And make sure you understand that part of fulfilling your spouse's appetites involves desiring your spouse. It is not enough to just go through with the act. You must both offer pleasure to your spouse and desire your spouse. If you do not desire your wife and take delight in your wife you will not satisfy your wife, because part of the sex drive is the desire to be desired. And so when a man comes along who really does desire her it will be a temptation for her. And she will have to fight that temptation from a standpoint of weakness because you have failed to satisfy her craving to be desired and delighted in.

And that is true for men as well. If your husband has a sense that you do not have a great desire for him, and you are just doing him a favor, when another woman comes along who does really desire him, that will be a huge temptation for him. And it will be a temptation that he will have to fight from a standpoint of weakness because you have failed to desire him.

It is true that in the Song of Songs it is mostly the woman who talks about being enjoyed and mostly the man who talks about enjoying; however there are portions that have it the other way around. Men do want to be desired and enjoyed by their wives. It is extremely honoring to a man to have his wife want to look at his body too. There is one place in the Song where the woman describes the man's body from head to toe, and she takes great delight in that. That is a very important part of the one-flesh union. There is to be a mutual desiring and mutual enjoyment.

The moment you turn sex into a favor you are doing for your spouse, you ruin it. For lovemaking to be satisfying it must be a mix of desiring and giving. You offer your garden to your spouse and you desire your spouse's garden and if one of those is missing, you spoil the whole thing. Very often a marriage will degenerate into the low-desire spouse just giving without desire, and the higher-desire spouse desiring without giving (or giving only to manipulate the spouse into more giving.)

If you want to see what the perfect balance is just read the Song of Songs. Both the man and the woman give to the other, and both the man and the woman are consumed with desire for the other.

I mentioned earlier that the man loves enjoying her and she loves being enjoyed. Do not take that to support the traditional idea that the man should always be the initiator and the woman the responder, or the idea that men have more sexual desire than women. I think both ideas are unbiblical. The Biblical ideal is for both men and women to be very much consumed with desire. The statements about her sexual desire in Song of Songs are actually more frequent than his. Scholars have noted that this whole book is written mainly from the woman's point of view. It is a book about sexual desire and enjoyment, and God chose to have the woman be the primary one who speaks. The book begins with the line:

**1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth-- for your lovemaking is more delightful than wine.**

Later in chapter one she asks for special access to him. She says, "I don't want to be like all the other girls – I want to be the one who can come close to you." She talks about searching for him and finally finding him and taking him home with her. Her desires for him are intense, and she makes those desires known. She is not guilty of giving without desire. Giving without desire is incredibly insulting and demeaning to your spouse.

## Low and high desire

In many marriages there is a difference in the level of desire between the two partners – especially with regard to frequency. If you are the higher desire partner, don't demand anything from your spouse. Let your desires be known, but don't be demanding. 1 Corinthians 7 does not say, "Your spouse's body belongs to you, therefore take it." It says, "Your body belongs to your spouse, therefore give it."

So high-desire folks, do not demand anything. Find contentment in God alone. The nearness of God's presence is all you need for happiness and joy no matter what the situation is in your marriage.

But if you are the low-desire spouse, it is important that you work hard at increasing your desire. Capitalize on every little tinge of arousal, no matter how small. Any feeling or thought along that line that you have – if you just dismiss it, it will quickly die away. But if you cultivate it and feed it and make much of it, it will grow. Realize that joyful lovemaking is profoundly pleasing to God, and it is a sacred, holy, beautiful, marvelous act that is an exceedingly high and holy privilege. If it is not especially appealing to you pray and beseech God to remove whatever is blinding your eyes to the gloriousness of it, so that you can properly appreciate what God has created and given to married couples.

Scripture does not warn couples against the spiritual dangers of too much physical intimacy. There are no passages that warn us about problems that will arise if you do it too often. However there is a warning about not doing it often enough. So if anything, err on the side of frequency.

And if there is a physical problem that prevents intercourse, do something else. There is a whole lot to sex besides intercourse. And if you don't know what I am talking about, just think back to all the things you were tempted to do when you were dating. I am sure if you think really hard you could think of a way to bring some pleasure to your spouse even if you can't have intercourse at that time. There is a whole lot you can do to bring each other physical pleasure that isn't intercourse and all of that is part of God's plan for physical intimacy. So get creative. If you have to do a little research and study into physiology and the way God designed your spouse, do whatever you need to do.

### *Take me away*

And it is not just physical things. A big part of it – especially for women – is the setting and the context. Another thing that comes up repeatedly in the book is the fact that the woman loves the idea of him coming for her and taking her away.

### **1:4 Take me away with you--let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.**

In chapter 3 she sees his arrival as being like the arrival of King Solomon himself. When you are in love, the one you love is a majestic king or a gorgeous princess in your eyes. And she loves the thought of him coming to take her away.

### **2:8 Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. <sup>9</sup> My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. <sup>10</sup> My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.**

Part of the nurture of a proper marital relationship involves taking your wife away from the routine, humdrum confines of the same four walls she sees every day to some new, different place where you can be alone as a couple. It is hard to do. It takes time to plan around work and kids, it takes some creativity, it might cost some money (although it doesn't have to); it is not an easy thing to do, but when you really, deeply love a woman you will find a way to take her off to be alone with her from time to time.

## Sex enhances the other aspects of oneness

One final observation from the Song of Songs. It is clear to me from studying this book that the more you approach God's ideal for physical intimacy the more all the other aspects of the one-flesh relationship are enhanced. Emotional closeness, relational closeness, priority, commitment, and all those other components of marital love we have talked about - they are all enhanced and strengthened when the physical aspect is as it should be. It all goes together. Typically a man and wife never feel closer to each other than when they have

physical relations. Obviously there are exceptions to that. If there is something wrong in the relationship – something between them emotionally- some bitterness or unforgiveness or anger or guilt or whatever, then having physical relations might even make the estrangement worse. But when the relationship is as it should be, full of love (esteem, desire, and delight on both sides), then when that is all consummated physically it reaches its highest expression.

# Devotionals

## Day 1: The holiness of Sex

In 1 Corinthians 6:16 we discover one more thing that God had in mind when He used the term “one flesh” - sexual intercourse.

Why is there such a thing as sex? Why did God make it so that a man and woman physically join their bodies together? And why did God connect that act so closely with emotion? If you have unlimited power, infinite wisdom, and total freedom to create things exactly the way you want them, and you create sexual intercourse, what does that say? It says that it is a supremely good thing that husbands and wives have this kind of relationship. And the implications for that have profound impact on our worship and the way we relate to God – both as married people and as singles.

The marriage relationship exists to illustrate and put on display the relationship between God and His people. And when you are considering which aspects of marriage accomplish that there is no reason to exclude the one act that God tied more exclusively to marriage than any other act. Nothing is tied more exclusively to marriage than sex. So there can be no question that it is very much part of the picture of the relationship between God and His people. That is why Ephesians 5 is very specific about saying the one-flesh relationship in marriage is part of how marriage illustrates the relationship between Christ and the Church. The sexual part is not excluded. Throughout Scripture God describes love for this world as committing adultery against God.

The oneness of God with His people and the profound oneness within the Trinity are glorious, delightful truths about God, and what clearer picture is there in all of creation of that oneness than man and wife, deeply in love, joined in heart and soul and body in the marriage bed? There is no greater natural picture of unity and oneness.

And not only does it illustrate oneness, but it also illustrates the connection between that oneness and joy. When Jesus spoke of His oneness with the Father He also spoke of His unbounded joy and delight. And so He gave us a special kind of relationship in which the most profound act of oneness and union is also the most intensely pleasurable and delightful kind of experience. He wanted us to associate oneness and pleasure.

The literary center of the Song of Songs falls in the white space between the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. The last verse of chapter 4 and the first verse of chapter 5 both talk about her garden, which is a metaphor for the marriage bed.

**4:16 Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.**

**5:1 I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk.**

So chapter 4 ends with her inviting him into her garden, then chapter 5 begins with him talking about how wonderful and satisfying it was. And that white space in between is the center of the book. The entire book points us to that. And then look at the very next line:

**5:1 ... Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.**

There is some discussion about whether the speaker here is a friend of the bride or if it is God, but either way it seems clear that that, along with all the similar statements of approval in the book, is designed to show divine approval of this couple’s enjoyment of the marriage bed. And that would certainly fit with what we read in Proverbs 5:

**Pr.5:18-19 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup> A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated (enraptured, intoxicated) by her love.**

And even if we didn't have those statements of approval throughout the Song of Songs I think it would be safe to say that erotic love is being portrayed in this book in a very favorable way. You don't really need a lot of direct statements about God's approval. When someone paints a breathtaking masterpiece they don't write all over it with a bunch of detailed information about the meaning and significance. You don't have a little arrow pointing to the clouds saying, "These are supposed to be breathtaking." Instead they just paint them with such beauty that they actually do take your breath away. I think that is what is going on in the Song of Songs. By placing this book in the Bible – a whole book on marital love, and portraying it as such a beautiful, wonderful thing, the implication is that sexual love bears divine approval.

And the fact that it is implicit and not explicit makes it all the more powerful an endorsement. If one of my kids comes to me with something and says, "Dad, is this OK?" and I say, "Yes," that is one thing. But if I take that thing and present it to my child as a gift and I make a really big deal about it and place it in some fantastic, spectacular context – that really makes a statement about how much I approve of it. That is what God did in Song of Songs with sexual love in marriage. The point of the book is not to regulate it, but to display the beauty of it. And that is a powerful statement about God's approval of and delight in sex as He designed it to be in marriage.

That is a very important principle for us to understand, because there are many people even within the church who have the feeling that conjugal relations are kind of dirty or unclean or somehow sub-righteous. Very often there is so much guilt that gets dragged into the marriage because of the filthiness of sexual sin prior to marriage that in their heart sexuality in general is tainted as worldly or impure by nature – even within marriage.

Or, another variation of that is for people to think that it is OK within marriage as long as it is only for procreation. Some people think that if a couple gets the least bit creative or they enjoy it too much then it is kinky or worldly or somehow less than holy so marital relations exists as this sort of necessary yet sub-Christian part of marriage. We have permission from God to do it, but barely. I have counseled married Christians who say, "I know it isn't evil - I know that in my head, but still, afterward I just feel dirty or violated or spiritually unclean."

So it is important for us to understand that not only is sexual intercourse allowed in marriage, but the extreme, passionate, creative, erotic expressions of it like we see in the Song of Songs and Proverbs are God's *ideal* for marital love.

The reason people think sex is tainted or impure may be the fact that sexual sin is spoken of in Scripture as being *so* wicked and vile. And it is. Sexual sin is especially evil and especially damaging, and the judgments against it are very severe. But why is that? Because it is unholy? No – it is not because sex is unholy. It is because it *is* holy.<sup>3</sup>

Sexual sin is evil not because it is obscene, but because it is profane. There are two kinds of swear words – profanity and obscenity. Obscenity is when you speak of that which is obscene, such as references to human waste – ugly, disgusting things. That is what *obscene* means. Profanity is when you speak of some holy thing in a profane, or common, earthly way. If you say the name of Jesus Christ and you really mean Jesus Christ, that is not profanity. But if you speak of it in a way that does not exalt the holiness of Jesus Christ – a way that reduces His name to a low, common level, that is profanity.

And so profanity only works if you are talking about something holy. If you start out with something that is already earthly, you can't use it as a profanity because it is already profane – it is already common and earthly. If someone says, "Oh, water!" or "Oh, grass, stars, carpet, leaves!" no one would call that profanity, because water and grass and carpet are already profane – already earthly and common. The only way to have profanity is to start with something that is holy and drag it down to the common, earthly level. So that is the difference between obscenity and profanity. Obscenity takes that which is filthy and vile and throws it in your face. Profanity takes that which is transcendent and divine and holy and drags it down to the common.

So what about swear words that have to do with sexual references? Which category are they in? Most would say they are obscenities, but I would suggest that misuse of sexual terms is not obscenity – it is profanity. It is wrong to talk that way, not because sex is filthy and evil, but because sex is sacred and holy.

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<sup>3</sup> Sexual things were very much separated from cultic worship in the Old Testament – no sexual relations within a certain number of days of worship, etc. Perhaps that was because sex as worship is such a major part of paganism.

It is something that God has set apart as special – very special. God has taken this one act and made it so utterly different from every other human activity, and has restricted it so narrowly to one specific relationship, and has attached such severe punishment to any abuse of it, that it is, in a very real sense, holy – set apart by God.

So when you make love to your spouse, God is thoroughly pleased. As long as there is no involvement of any third party either physically or mentally, and you do it with an awareness that the sensations are just samples of the eternal pleasures at God's right hand, and your goal is to express love to your spouse in the way that is the most delightful to your spouse, then the act of intercourse is very much glorifying to God, and the more you enjoy it the more He is glorified.

The next time you face a temptation toward some kind of sexual sin, resist it for the same reason you would resist standing up during the communion service to start telling jokes. Resist it for the same reason you would not walk into the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament times and desecrate the place. Resist sexual sin because sex is holy and sacred and near to the heart of God, and it is not to be trifled with or perverted. To take such a sacred thing and drag it into the slime of this world by profaning and perverting it, and to rip it out of the covenant relationship of marriage, so that it is detached from the picture of showing the image of God, is a horrible sacrilege. It is like going in and taking the Ark of the Covenant to use as a storage box in your garage. If a person did that with the Ark in Old Testament times he would die. Why? Because the Ark is so filthy? No, because it is so holy. And God has said that adulterers and fornicators and homosexuals will not enter the kingdom of heaven, not because sex is filthy, but because it is so holy.



## **Day 2: Uniqueness**

So once again, we need to excel in this area in our marriages so that our marriages fulfill their purpose of displaying and illustrating what God is like and how He relates to His people. The holiness of sex should cause single people to strive for absolute purity. And it should cause married people to develop a sexual relationship that lives up to what God designed it to illustrate. And it is the Song of Songs that teaches us how to do that. As children of God we are not free to just exist in a marriage with a sexual relationship that falls short of what it should be and put no effort into striving to make it pleasing to God. So let's take a look at the standard in the Song of Songs.

The only thing harder than studying an entire book of the Bible in three months is preaching that whole book in one sermon. Obviously we can't go verse by verse all the way through the book this morning. So let me just give you the major emphases. Most of the book is dominated by the man and the woman talking about enjoying, being enjoyed, desiring, and being desired. And the foundation upon which all that desiring and enjoying rests is the fact that this love is unique to this relationship. There is no third party involved. Bringing a third party into the marriage bed – whether literally or only in your thoughts or in your affections, destroys the entire foundation upon which all the rest is built.

And of course this aspect of sexual union stands out not only in the Song but throughout Scripture. It is a kind of closeness that is absolutely unique. You have it with your spouse and no one else. Adultery is punished with the utmost severity. It is an especially wicked sin. God wanted the relationship that illustrated His relationship with His people to be one that is absolutely different from any other relationship. It is not acceptable for God to be slightly ahead of the #2 priority in your life. He is not satisfied with being #1 in your life. If God is slightly ahead of the #2 priority in your life you are not a Christian. A Christian is someone who utterly forsakes every other priority in life in favor of Jesus Christ as his only priority, so as a Christian I have no other priority. My priorities are not, God, then family, then church, then work, etc. My priorities are God, then God, then God. I love and serve my family for one reason – to express my love for God. I preach for one reason – to glorify God. I eat, drink, sleep, exercise, relax – everything I do I do because I believe it is God's will. And any moment that is not true in my life is sin. Any time I do anything for any reason other than to glorify God I am behaving as an unbeliever.

That is absolutely fundamental if a person is going to have a relationship with God. It has to be unique. And so it is no surprise that when God designs a special human relationship to illustrate and display that, he creates a relationship in which two human beings have a way of expressing love to each other that is restricted only to that relationship. The sexual part of marital love is to serve as one of the components of oneness that God placed only in marriage to illustrate the way Christ is related to His people. So for your marriage to fulfill its purpose for existence there must be a oneness and unity between you and your spouse that is unparalleled in any other kind of relationship in the world.

And we see that not only in the strong prohibitions against extramarital sex in Scripture, but also in the way the man and woman think about each other in the Song of Songs. In his eyes she is the only woman in the world. When he looks through the lens of sexual interest, his wife is like the one woman in a whole world of men. In 1:9 he says she is like a mare among all the stallions of Pharaoh. Compared to her all the other females in the world might as well be men. In chapter 2 she feels like just a common, ordinary girl – like one of the thousands of lilies in the valleys. And he says, “No...

### **2:2 Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.**

And she feels the same way toward him.

### **2:3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men.**

In the closing section of the book she talks about how she has become to him like one bringing contentment because of her chastity (8:10). Her refusal to offer herself to anyone else but him is part of what makes her so delightful to him. The obvious application for this point is that we must be faithful to our spouse. All of your sexual energy belongs to your spouse. If you don't have a spouse then you are like Paul and Jesus – you are to find satisfaction in God apart from any sexual activity or fulfillment. And if that distresses you

remind yourself that no human being ever had deeper and more wonderful joy than Jesus Christ, and few, if any, have had greater joy than Paul. If you learn to enjoy communion with God then singleness is no obstacle to joy.

So singles are to have no sexual activity at all, because all sex is to be unique to the marriage relationship. In 1 Corinthians 7 singles are only given two options: get married or do not have sex at all. Those are the only two options for a Christian single.

**1 Corinthians 7:8-9. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**

This verse only makes sense if premarital sex is wrong. If any sexual activity outside of marriage were permissible then Paul would not offer marriage as the only solution to burning with passion – especially since Paul sees such massive advantages to singleness. We see the same thing in the first three verses – singleness means no sex.<sup>4</sup> If you take sex out of marriage, or if you adjust it in any way to depart from the way God designed it, it is like scribbling on a Rembrandt. God has created something that is exceedingly beautiful – far more beautiful than any Rembrandt, and nothing we can do can improve upon it. Our adjustments and changes do nothing but destroy it.

And that applies not only to intercourse, but all efforts to fulfill sexual urges. Jesus said if a man looks at a woman in order to lust, he is guilty of adultery. The same goes for looking at an image of a woman. If it is wrong to do, then it is wrong to think about. Anything that would be wrong to do with another woman is wrong to think about doing. And since it would be wrong to stand in a room with a woman and watch her undress, then it is wrong to think about that. And obviously if you are looking at images of it you are thinking about it.

**Pr.5:20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?  
21 For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD**

We are not to be captivated by the body of a woman we are not married to. And it is interesting that he only mentions the bosom (which is the chest area). So it is not talking about intercourse. Deriving any sense of sexual enjoyment from another woman's body - either by touching or looking – is adulterous.

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<sup>4</sup> In the first verse, the Greek phrase translated “to marry” is literally “to touch a woman (*gunaikos aptesthai*). This Greek phrase was a common euphemism for sexual relations. So Paul is literally saying, “It is good for a man not to have sex with a woman, but to avoid sexual sin he should go ahead and get married anyway.” He’s saying it is good to remain single, but if you can’t stay pure get married. And the thing to pay close attention to is the fact that when he says “It’s good to remain single” the way he says that is “It’s good not to have sex.” The whole point of the second verse is this: to reduce immorality (that is, premarital sex), people should be married, dedicated to one person with whom they share sexual relations.” So there can be no question that remaining single means not having sex. Again, if premarital sex were an option he could have said, “It’s good to remain single, but if you can’t control yourself sexually then just sleep with your boyfriend/girlfriend.”

### **Day 3: Enjoying & Being Enjoyed**

So with the uniqueness of the relationship established, now we can discuss the rest of the book, which is all about enjoying, being enjoyed, desiring, and being desired. It is probably significant that the talk about enjoying comes mostly out of the man's mouth, and the talk about being enjoyed comes predominantly out of the woman's mouth. He loves enjoying her, and she loves being enjoyed by him.

Three times in this book he gives a detailed description of her body from head to toe. (Except the third time he goes the other way – he starts with her sandaled feet and works his way up.) And from the description, her sandals seem to be her only article of clothing – except for her necklace. So he looks her up and down and praises each part of her body with poetic metaphors. Some people have read those and have not been all that impressed with this woman's looks. But metaphors are not intended to be taken literally; they are intended to be interpreted. And when you do that you see that this woman is exceedingly beautiful in his eyes. We know from the beginning of the book that she is actually kind of ordinary looking by most people's standards. But in the eyes of the man who loves her she is gorgeous, and he thoroughly enjoys looking at her and a lot of that is because she makes an effort to be attractive to him. She wears jewelry and perfume and does various things to seduce him. She wants to be attractive in his eyes. It seems obvious that a married person would want to do that, but so often it isn't. There are many married people who spend all kinds of time and effort and money trying to make themselves attractive when they go out into the world, but at home they give no care at all to how they look. There are women who seem to be trying to be attractive to everyone but their husband. And men do the same thing. In the world they are winsome and courteous and manly, but at home they make no effort at all. Who are we trying to attract? If you are married, all of your decisions about clothes, makeup, bathing and hygiene habits, hairstyle – all of it should be done with a view toward pleasing and seducing your spouse. It does not matter if the people at work or at the grocery store think you look good. It does matter if your spouse thinks you look good.

And it honors your spouse. When a woman is trying to lose weight, and she says she wants to do it mainly for health reasons, or mainly so she isn't embarrassed when she goes to the swimming pool - how honoring it would be to her husband if she said, "Those are all part of my motivation, but what motivates me more than anything is wanting to be more beautiful for my husband." If there is some way you could be more attractive to your spouse – whether it be through hygiene or hair style or the clothes you wear (or don't wear) – do it! Learn to enjoy being enjoyed by your spouse.

And when you enjoy your spouse, enjoy your spouse as a person. Wives, don't just enjoy the things your husband does for you without delighting in him as a person. Don't just be glad you have a breadwinner and handyman. Take delight in him as a person.

And men, don't turn your wife's body into an object that is disconnected from her as a person. In the Song of Songs the man talks a lot about his enjoyment of her body, but he does so in a very honoring way rather than an objectifying, demeaning way. He does not detach his enjoyment of her body from enjoying her as a person. He enjoys everything about her. He likes the way she smells (4:11). He praises her for her virginity coming into the marriage (4:12). He says she is flawless (4:7). He says she has stolen his heart by the way she looks at him.

#### **4:9 You have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.**

And when he talks about intercourse with her, he doesn't just say it feels good. He connects his enjoyment to her as a person.

#### **4:10 How delightful is your lovemaking, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your lovemaking than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! 11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue.**

It is her that he loves, not just what she gives him. I mentioned earlier that throughout the book her sexual delights are described as her garden. So when he comes into her garden he is coming in to enjoy her sexually. And in 4:13-14 he describes that garden with a long catalogue of exotic spices:

**4:13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.**

The point of all that is that the pleasures of her love are so abundant and so varied that he could never become bored with such a profusion and variety of delights. Variety is a key part of what is so delightful to him – it is not a boring routine. There is creativity and newness.

And her response is in 4:11

**Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.**

She says, “You like this garden? It’s yours. Come on in.” She makes herself available to him because she loves being enjoyed by him.

**2:16 My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies <sup>17</sup> until the day breaks**

She makes herself available to him because she enjoys being enjoyed. So she refers to her garden as his garden, which is exactly what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7.

## Day 4: Spiritual Warfare

There is very little regulation of sex within marriage in Scripture. We do not have a lot of instruction saying, “Do it this way, don’t do it this way...” Basically all we have in the New Testament are two basic instructions:

#1 It is to be unique to your marriage – no third party is to be involved in any way.

#2 It is to be satisfying to your spouse.

If I asked you right now to tell me what are the most effective weapons in spiritual warfare, I would probably get a variety of answers. No doubt the first things that would come to your mind would be the armor in Ephesians 6 – especially the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith. Or someone might point to **James 4:7 – resist the devil and he will flee from you**. Someone else might mention 2 Corinthians 10, where we demolish strongholds by exposing the falsehood of bad doctrine and wrong ideas about God. Those are all excellent weapons to use in our war against Satan. But there is one weapon that the Bible says will work that I doubt anyone would mention: sexual intercourse. According to 1 Corinthians 7, physical relations with your spouse are a way to defeat Satan.

**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.**

We overcome Satan’s efforts to tempt our spouse by providing adequate satisfaction to our spouse.

That text is very clear that physical intimacy in marriage is not optional. God requires that it take place with enough frequency and enough passion and enough romance and enough enjoyment for your spouse such that your spouse will be protected from temptation. If you are providing your wife with so little romance that she is tempted by romance novels or movies or fantasy or some other man, then you are in disobedience to this passage of God’s Word. Wives, if you are not providing a level of fulfillment that would protect your husband from the kinds of temptations he faces, that is disobedience.

Sometimes a spouse will withhold physical fulfillment from the other spouse as a means of punishment or control. A wife says, “OK, no more for you until you get this project done.” That is as blatant a violation of 1 Corinthians 7 as there can be. You do not ever have the right to say to your spouse – “no more for you until *anything*.” That is not your prerogative, because your body does not belong to you – it belongs also to your spouse.

In fact, you do not even have the right to jointly agree to do that as a couple, unless it is for the purpose of prayer and no other reason. And even if it is for prayer, still you are not permitted to do it for a long period of time. Even if it is for prayer it has to be a short enough time that it won’t cause too much temptation.

Sometimes couples hardly ever come together, not because someone is withholding, but because they just both want it that way. They are mad at each other, or maybe they are just too busy and too tired. He works and she works and their schedule is crazy and in the rare times they are both alone in the same place at the same time they are so exhausted neither one of them has the energy. If that is you, you need to understand it is ungodly, and you need to change your schedule in some way to you can begin obeying 1 Corinthians 7.

### *How often?*

How often is enough? The Bible doesn’t say. Martin Luther said twice a week should be enough to keep the devil on the run. I am not sure what his basis for that was. I have heard some physiological arguments that for most men there is a large increase in desire after 72 hours or so. And it is also true that some women have physical problems when there is not enough frequency. When it is just a couple times a month they have much greater susceptibility to infections and other problems, and when the frequency is increased to multiple times per week those problems disappear. So there are some clues from the way God designed our bodies that His intention was likely somewhere close to what Luther was thinking of. But obviously couples are all different and it’s a matter that you need to figure out with your spouse. But whatever you figure out, make sure it is sufficient to assure that your spouse does not have to wrestle against increased temptation that is unnecessary.

## Day 5: Desire & Giving

And make sure you understand that part of fulfilling your spouse's appetites involves desiring your spouse. It is not enough to just go through with the act. You must both offer pleasure to your spouse and desire your spouse. If you do not desire your wife and take delight in your wife you will not satisfy your wife, because part of the sex drive is the desire to be desired. And so when a man comes along who really does desire her it will be a temptation for her. And she will have to fight that temptation from a standpoint of weakness because you have failed to satisfy her craving to be desired and delighted in.

And that is true for men as well. If your husband has a sense that you do not have a great desire for him, and you are just doing him a favor, when another woman comes along who does really desire him, that will be a huge temptation for him. And it will be a temptation that he will have to fight from a standpoint of weakness because you have failed to desire him.

It is true that in the Song of Songs it is mostly the woman who talks about being enjoyed and mostly the man who talks about enjoying; however there are portions that have it the other way around. Men do want to be desired and enjoyed by their wives. It is extremely honoring to a man to have his wife want to look at his body too. There is one place in the Song where the woman describes the man's body from head to toe, and she takes great delight in that. That is a very important part of the one-flesh union. There is to be a mutual desiring and mutual enjoyment.

The moment you turn sex into a favor you are doing for your spouse, you ruin it. For lovemaking to be satisfying it must be a mix of desiring and giving. You offer your garden to your spouse and you desire your spouse's garden. And if one of those is missing, you spoil the whole thing. Very often a marriage will degenerate into the low-desire spouse just giving without desire, and the higher-desire spouse desiring without giving (or giving only to manipulate the spouse into more giving.)

If you want to see what the perfect balance is just read the Song of Songs. Both the man and the woman give to the other, and both the man and the woman are consumed with desire for the other.

I mentioned earlier that the man loves enjoying her and she loves being enjoyed; do not take that to support the traditional idea that the man should always be the initiator and the woman the responder, or the idea that men have more sexual desire than women. I think both ideas are unbiblical. The Biblical ideal is for both men and women to be very much consumed with desire. The statements about her sexual desire in Song of Songs are actually more frequent than his. Scholars have noted that this whole book is written mainly from the woman's point of view. It is a book about sexual desire and enjoyment, and God chose to have the woman be the primary one who speaks. The book begins with the line:

**1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth-- for your lovemaking is more delightful than wine.**

Later in chapter one she asks for special access to him. She says, "I don't want to be like all the other girls – I want to be the one who can come close to you." She talks about searching for him and finally finding him and taking him home with her. Her desires for him are intense, and she makes those desires known. She is not guilty of giving without desire. Giving without desire is incredibly insulting and demeaning to your spouse.

In many marriages there is a difference in the level of desire between the two partners – especially with regard to frequency. If you are the higher desire partner, do not demand anything from your spouse. Let your desires be known, but do not be demanding. 1 Corinthians 7 does not say, "Your spouse's body belongs to you, therefore take it." It says, "Your body belongs to your spouse, therefore give it."

So high-desire folks, don't demand anything. Find contentment in God alone. The nearness of God's presence is all you need for happiness and joy no matter what the situation is in your marriage.

But if you are the low-desire spouse, it is important that you work hard at increasing your desire. Capitalize on every little tinge of arousal, no matter how small. Any feeling or thought along that line that you have – if you just dismiss it, it will quickly die away. But if you cultivate it and feed it and make much of it, it will grow. Realize that joyful lovemaking is profoundly pleasing to God, and it is a sacred, holy, beautiful, marvelous act that is an exceedingly high and holy privilege. If it is not especially appealing to you pray and beseech God to remove whatever is blinding your eyes to the gloriousness of it, so that you can properly appreciate what God has created and given to married couples.

Scripture does not warn couples against the spiritual dangers of too much physical intimacy. There are no passages that warn us about problems that will arise if you do it too often. However there is a warning about not doing it often enough. So if anything, err on the side of frequency.

And if there is a physical problem that prevents intercourse, do something else. There is a whole lot to sex besides intercourse. And if you don't know what I am talking about, just think back to all the things you were tempted to do when you were dating. I am sure if you think really hard you could think of a way to bring some pleasure to your spouse even if you can't have intercourse at that time. There is a whole lot you can do to bring each other physical pleasure that isn't intercourse and all of that is part of God's plan for physical intimacy. So get creative. If you have to do a little research and study into physiology and the way God designed your spouse, do whatever you need to do.

And it is not just physical things. A big part of it – especially for women – is the setting and the context. Another thing that comes up repeatedly in the book is the fact that the woman loves the idea of him coming for her and taking her away.

**1:4 Take me away with you--let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.**

In chapter 3 she sees his arrival as being like the arrival of King Solomon himself. When you are in love, the one you love is a majestic king or a gorgeous princess in your eyes. And she loves the thought of him coming to take her away.

**2:8 Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. <sup>9</sup> My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. <sup>10</sup> My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.**

Part of the nurture of a proper marital relationship involves taking your wife away from the routine, humdrum confines of the same four walls she sees every day to some new, different place where you can be alone as a couple. It is hard to do. It takes time to plan around work and kids, it takes some creativity, it might cost some money (although it doesn't have to); it is not an easy thing to do, but when you really, deeply love a woman you will find a way to take her off to be alone with her from time to time.