

# Sex & the Bible

If you've got your bibles, feel free to open them and turn with me exactly one page to Genesis 1. Last week, we kicked off this series called *The God of Sex*. If you weren't here last Sunday, please go back and grab the podcast because all that is very important for where we're headed for the rest of the series. But basically what I did was laid out my case for why I believe that in America, we *worship* sex. And by that, I mean that we have elevated sex and sexual expression to a place in our minds and hearts that it really doesn't belong. I think that's true at a cultural level. On an *individual* level, I think some of us probably worship sex and some of us probably don't. But if our *culture* as a whole *does*, that's inevitably going to affect the way that each of *us* think about it in some way. But that was the big idea from last week's teaching.

But another thing I mentioned is that I didn't want anybody to think that by saying that, I was implying sex is somehow bad in *itself*. It's *not*. It's very important to me that you hear that. Because somewhere along the line, God and the bible got reputations for being anti-sex. But that's crazy because the bible you and I hold in our hands has a *lot* about sex in it. And it's there's at least as much *positive, celebrating* sex as there is *negative, or cautionary* about sex. And so what I want to do today is show you exactly that. I want us to take a tour through the bible and take note of how the bible speaks about the celebration of sex and sexual expression. So think about it like this: **last week we talked about how *not* to think about sex, but this week I want us to talk about how *to* think about sex.** I'd like to spend some time if I can today, showing you just how sex positive"—if we can borrow that term—the bible actually is. And as we do that, I have a wager to make. My wager is that **by the end of the teaching, I can make some of you blush at how the bible talks about sex.** Maybe not *all* of you, but *some* of you. I think there's a good chance some of us will get just a little uncomfortable today at how open and blunt and frankly, *graphic* the bible is when it comes to sex and sexual expression.

So, we'll start off where all things start off in the bible, Genesis 1. Now, we will be turning to a lot of different passages today. If you're new, usually what we like to do is look at just one primary passage and work our way through it the entire time. But today we're going to break from the norm a little and look at a handful of different passages, so that we can sort of use them all to piece together a working understanding of this topic. So all that to say, if you have a bible, you're welcome to turn to all of these different passages with me, but we'll also put them all on the screen just for simplicity's sake if you'd rather just follow along there. Either way.

But first up, Genesis 1. Look with me starting in v. 27:

*[27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them [them being who? Male and female, Adam and Eve—he said to them], "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

So God creates man and woman and the *first thing* he tells them to do is "be fruitful and multiply." Two amorous people, with no clothes, in a garden, and nobody else around. And the command they are given is to enjoy one another and make babies—is everybody clear on how the baby-making thing happens?

Y'all at least remember *that* part of sex ed from high school? So I know the bible gets a bad wrap for having a bunch of rules in it, but the first rule here really doesn't seem all *that bad* does it? Skip down with me to v. 31. After God creates humanity and gives them the task of enjoying one another, this happens:

*[31] And God saw **everything that he had made**, and behold, **it was very [what's that word?] good.***

Notice that **in the opening pages of the bible, God creates man and woman, he gives them instructions that very clearly include sexual interaction with one another, and he calls all of that "very good."** That should clue us in a little as to how God feels about sex, right? Everything in the story is completely *good*—just as God intended it. The earth, sun, the moon, the stars, nature, animals, and most importantly for our purposes this morning—sex—at this point is *completely and utterly good*.

So here's our first takeaway for today, if you're taking notes, found right here in Genesis 1: **sex was meant to be good**. Put another way, **sex was God's idea**. It wasn't like God created Adam and Eve, set things in motion, and then one day found out they were having sex and freaked out. "What!? You used that body part for that!? I certainly didn't see that happening..." Nothing like that *ever happened*. Sex was all God's idea. He invented sexual desire, sexual attraction, sexual activity. He designed certain parts of our bodies to function in certain ways that make sex, well...*sexual*. All of this was created, *engineered* by God himself. I realize that probably seems weird to a lot of us. But it's true.

Put *another* way, **human beings were sexual before they were sinful**.<sup>1</sup> Remember, Genesis 1 is before *sin* ever enters the picture. If you know your bible, you know that things don't start going haywire until chapter *three*. Everything right here in chapter one is just the way it's *supposed* to be. So there's this unhelpful idea floating around Christian culture when it comes to sex. It goes something like this: "sex is dirty, gross, and sinful—so save it for somebody you love." Just so we're clear, you won't find that sentiment towards sex anywhere in the bible. Sex, according to God himself, was designed to be *good*. A good gift *from God himself* to human beings.

Next, let's make our way over to Proverbs 5. Proverbs, if you're newer to the bible, is a book full of these pithy, wisdom one-liners mostly written by a guy named Solomon to his son. He's trying to impart to his kid all the practical wisdom he can about how to go about life. And where we pick it up, he is right in the middle of giving his son the good ol' sex talk. *Awkward*. We'll pick it up starting in v. 15:

*[15] Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from **your own well**. [16] Should your **springs** be scattered abroad, **streams** of water in the streets? [17] Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. [18] Let your **fountain** be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth...*

Okay, so Solomon is obviously speaking figuratively here. In his day, the words *spring*, *stream*, and *fountain* were all euphemisms for a man's sexuality. I won't go into the details of why they chose *those particular* images for men—but suffice it to say, they're quite vivid. But once you know what those words refer to, you begin to see what Solomon is trying to say with these instructions. He's saying your

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<sup>1</sup> I stole this idea from a guy named John Mark Comer, who stole it from a guy named Mike Erre.

sexuality wasn't meant to be shared with anyone and everyone, not with random strangers, but rather should be reserved for your wife alone (fair enough, right?). And then he continues. Back at the beginning of v. 18:

*[18] Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice [or you could translate that, "enjoy"] in the wife of your youth, [19] a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight [no translation needed there—that means exactly what you think it means...]; be intoxicated always in her love.*

Be "intoxicated," it says, with her. The word here literally means to be *ravished*. **Solomon is instructing his son to be overtaken by love and passion and sexual desire for his wife. And apparently, specifically with her breasts.** ...And you thought *your* sex talk was awkward. But awkwardness aside, do you see how the bible speaks about sex here? Does this seem bashful or careful or reserved to you? It sure doesn't to me. **This sounds like a celebration of sexual desire if I've ever heard one.**

So here's our second takeaway from this passage in Proverbs—**sex was meant to be enjoyed.** I think there are people who might not say sex is *dirty* or *sinful*—who might say sex is okay to participate in under the *right circumstances*—but might still say that sex is mainly just for *procreation*. That sex is mainly for making babies, and that's about it. If that's true, the author of Proverbs never got that memo. To him, **sex is a celebration of passion and intimacy between a husband and a wife.** Or, maybe some people would say that sex isn't *sinful*, but it's just kind of this thing that we're supposed to do because we're married. Something that both partners are *obligated* to do. But that's not what the Proverbs teach either. Solomon doesn't say "son, remember to have sex with your wife because it's the *right thing to do*." He says "be intoxicated, be *ravished* with her." Sex is meant to be *enjoyed*. **It's meant to be, in his language, intoxicating to participate in.**

Next up, let's head over to the book of Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon, as we've mentioned before here on Sundays, is a book of ancient Hebrew erotic love poetry. Back in the day, Hebrew boys weren't allowed to read it until they were 13 years old because of how explicit it was. So if you're here and you're Hebrew boy under 13, my sincerest apologies for what's about to happen. But **the entire book is made up of a husband and a wife, on their wedding night, enjoying one another in a wedding night type of way.** It's written in stanzas, and it kind of jumps back and forth between the husband talking and the wife talking. We're gonna look at a few different passages here, but we'll start in ch. 4, v. 1 with the *husband* speaking to his *wife*:

*[1] Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.*

Just as a practical heads up to the guys in the room, some of these descriptions are very cultural and contextual. I don't know that I'd copy and paste these lines into a note you write to your wife or girlfriend this week. If you tell your girl that her head looks like a flock of goats and she slaps you for it, don't @ me—I *will not* help you. These are very *cultural* ways of describing and depicting his wife's beauty and sexuality. But he keeps going, v. 2:

*[2] Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes <you> that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young [She has all of her teeth! This is*

before the toothbrush was invented—that’s a big deal!). [3] *Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.* [4] *Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.* [5] *Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies.*

Then, down in v. 16 *she* speaks back to *him*, and stuff gets even *fresher*. Take a look:

[16] *Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread everywhere. Let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.*

Is *anyone* uncomfortable yet? I thought you might be. But just in case you’re *not*, let’s do one more that should make all of us squirm a little. I want us to take a look at one more passage in the Song of Solomon over in chapter 5. In this one, it’s again the wife speaking to her husband. **So one thing that many scholars have noted about the Song of Solomon is that the female takes a very active role in everything being said and done.** Many have suggested she plays the role of the *initiator* in sex just as much as her husband does, if not *moreso*. And in this passage, we’re about to see just that. So we’ve already heard the husband admiring his *wife’s body*, and now *she’s* about to spend some time admiring *his*. Let me read you everything she says and then I’ll go back and highlight one line of it for you. Chapter 5, starting in v. 10:

[10] *My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.* [11] *His **head** is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.* [Ladies, he’s apparently got some kind of Bruno Mars-type hairstyle going on, if you’re into that] [12] *His **eyes** are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool.* [13] *His **cheeks** are like beds of spices, [14] mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His **lips** are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. [14] His **arms** are rods of gold, set with jewels.* [So ladies, I take that to mean he works out, but not *too much*. He’s chiseled, but not like Hulk-level muscles] ***His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires.*** [15] *His **legs** are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold.* [...And she goes on]

So obviously, the wife is admiring and complimenting her husband’s body...specific parts of it. She starts at the top, and then she works her way down. She goes from his hair, to his eyes, to his cheeks, to his mouth, and so forth. But there is one line I want to call your attention to. In v. 14, it *appears* that breaks the flow of thought up a little. She’s at his cheeks, then lips, then arms, then she *zooms out* to his whole body, and then zooms back in, to his legs. Now, if it seems like one of those doesn’t fit with the others, it’s because it doesn’t. **There’s somewhat of a consensus among Hebrew scholars that on this verse, the English translators of the bible sort of chickened out a little.** They say that most likely the wife isn’t referring to her husband’s body *as a whole*, but rather a very *specific part* of his body—below his arms, and above his legs. Are you picking up what I’m putting down?

Just so you don’t think I’m making this up, here’s Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman, a widely respected authority in the Hebrew language, describing it:

*Most English translations hesitate at this verse. The Hebrew is **quite erotic**, and most translators cannot bring themselves to bring out the obvious meaning...This is a **prelude** to their*

*lovemaking. There is no shy, shamed, mechanical movement under the sheets. Rather, the two stand before each other, aroused, feeling no shame, but only joy in each other's sexuality.*

My guess is that most of you didn't know *that* was in your bible. Now listen: again, with all of this, I know it might seem like I'm just saying all this for shock value. Please know that isn't my heart at all. But **I do feel like we need to, in some sense, rescue the bible's celebration of human sexuality, from those that want to pretend it has nothing to say on the subject. Or, from those who want to pretend that the bible only has negative things to say about sex.** And I simply want to help you see that that's just not the case at all. David Powlison, a big name in biblical counseling, puts it this way:

*The word of God chooses to spend whole chapters gazing in delight at male and female anatomy.*

No *amens* on that? But seriously, let that sink in for a moment. God gave us a book full of a husband and wife, fully enjoying one another's bodies. I think that *says something* about what God designed sex to be.

So here's our third takeaway from the Song of Solomon: **sex was meant to be mutual. What we see in the Song of Solomon is both partners—not just one—enjoying themselves and delighting themselves fully in the other person. Mutually enjoying one another.** I think that has at least a couple implications for us:

- First, married people in the room, I think this is a reminder that **sex is not something our spouse does for us.** I think it is very unhelpful, and maybe even dangerous to believe that sex is something *you* want, and your *spouse's* job is to meet the quota of how much you want it. So listen, if you regularly make passive aggressive remarks about the other person in your marriage not "putting out," about "your needs," about you needing to "get some" or about how "it's been a while"...or any comments like those, you have a fundamental misunderstanding about what sex is supposed to be. **Sex is not a product your spouse provides for you.** And if you're operating as if it is, I'd suggest you get to work changing how you think about sex.
- And second, it's a reminder that **sexual desire is nothing to be ashamed of.** I think in many cases, *women* specifically have been led to think that having a sex drive is somehow taboo or out of place. That if you regularly desire sex with your husband, that something is somehow off or wrong with you. **Women in the room, it is not wrong or shameful or sinful for you to desire sex.** It's not wrong or sinful for you to *enjoy* sex. I think even at times in *Christian* culture, even if sex isn't viewed as sinful, sexual *desire* is. So maybe sex is fine, but having a sex drive? That's considered to be "of the flesh" and wrong. But sexual desire in the bible is often *celebrated*. **So to any degree that you, as a guy or girl, have been led to believe that sexual desire is somehow wrong or improper for you to have towards your spouse, let's just call that out for the lie it is.** Because that's not the picture given to us in the bible. What we see in the Song of Solomon is a husband *and a wife* celebrating sex *and* sexual desire. That's what sex can and *should* look like.

So to summarize so far: according to the bible, sex was meant to be *good*, sex was meant to be *enjoyed*, and sex was meant to be *mutual*. With all of that taken together, I would argue that **the bible is very pro-sex book.** *But* that being said, I know some you might be asking why it seems like the bible is so restrictive on who a person can have sex with. You may be thinking *if the bible is pro-sex, it sure does seem like it narrows the list of sexual partners down pretty slim.*

Well for the answer to that, we need to know one last, very important (maybe *most* important) thing we need to know about sex. To find out what it is, we're going to need to head all the way back to Genesis. I want us to talk for a bit about two very important verses in Genesis 2, and then we'll talk a little about what all this means for us. In this passage, we get a slightly more detailed look at God creating man and woman, and about their relationship with each other. Here's what God says once he creates Eve and brings her to Adam:

*[24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and **hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.***

Now, there may be fewer phrases in the bible that have as loaded a meaning as those words, "*one flesh*." It could also be translated "one body." It's a description of two humans becoming one being together. One author paraphrases it as being "fused together at the deepest level."<sup>2</sup> Another author calls it "the mingling of souls."<sup>3</sup> The author of Genesis here is describing something deeper than just hooking up, something more profound than just messing around with another person. What he's describing is some sort of all-encompassing, all-of-life oneness with another person's body and soul.

In other words, **sex is purposeful**. Sex is meant to *accomplish* something. It's two people, fusing themselves together at the deepest levels of their humanity. It is two *separate* human beings becoming *one*. That's important. That's vital. And more importantly, that's *powerful*. Sex is a *powerful* thing. I don't think there's really any denying that. When you see how we talk about sexuality in our culture, I think it's very evident that sex is a *powerful* thing. When you see how much damage has been caused by sex being used as a weapon against people in our society, I think it's evident that sex is a *powerful* thing. **Sex may be a lot of things, but one thing it *isn't* is trivial.**

**One of the great contradictions about our culture's mindset on sex is that they want it to be both *all-important* and *entirely unimportant* at the same time.** So pop culture will tell us, on one hand, that *sexual expression is the most important thing about a person*. That sex is *so important*, that to tell a person who they should or shouldn't have sex with, is the same as *hating them* as a person. That a person can not be who they were meant to be without *completely unhindered* sexual expression. In other words, sex is *all-important* to our humanity. And then at the same time, we are also told that sex should be *completely casual*. That sex doesn't mean anything more than what the two people doing it decide it should mean. It need not have any sort of significance at all if we don't want it to. To which I would respond—well wait, is it *all-important*? Or is it not important at all? It can't be both. It has to be either one or the other. And I'm not trying to say that self-righteously or condescendingly—I'm just saying that because of how words work. Something can't be all-important and not important at all, at the same time.

But God's vision for human sexuality is that sex is *massively* important. So important, in fact, that there is only one context strong enough for it to thrive in. God says that sex belongs in a certain environment. Not because it's *bad*, but precisely because it is so *good*. The bible teaches that because sex carries such *power* with it, there are certain contexts it belongs in, and certain contexts it doesn't. So compare it to something like something like *nuclear energy*. Nuclear energy is *powerful*. It can provide power and

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<sup>2</sup> John Mark Comer, *Loveology*.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Chandler, *The Mingling of Souls*.

electricity to entire cities and regions of people. On the other hand, it can *destroy* entire regions of people and make a city uninhabitable for generations. And whether it is good or bad depends entirely on what *container* it's in. Is it in a reactor with tons of concrete and protections around it? Or is it in a warhead being dropped out of a plane?

In a similar way, sex can be incredibly good or incredibly destructive. It all depends on what *container* it's in. Scripture says that when sex is in the container of *marriage*, it's good. It fuses two people together, it deepens their relationship, it builds unity. But when sex gets taken out of that context, it's *not* good. It becomes selfish, harmful, and even destructive. **Because outside of its intended context, it can't be what it was meant to be.** When you're just hooking up with someone you met online or through a dating app, you're not trying to *fuse yourselves together* with them—but the problem is that you're participating in something that accomplishes precisely that. When you're just *dating* someone, you're not ready to be fused together at the deepest level yet. But by having sex, you're doing something that accomplishes exactly that.

This is why—almost without exception—breakups are way harder when two people have slept together beforehand. That breakup is almost always messier, more painful, more devastating than it would've been if they hadn't. *Because* part of them has been fused together with that other person, even though they weren't ready for that yet. And I would say that is *proof* of what Genesis says: that sex is becoming “one flesh”—that it's meant to fuse two people, two *souls* together at the deepest levels. And sex does that whether we want it to or not. And that is exactly where where sexual shame often comes from.

But—on the other hand, sex between a husband and a wife produces something altogether different. Take a look back at Genesis 2, v. 25 with me. Right after the whole “one flesh” thing, it says this:

[25] *And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

The author of Genesis says that Adam and Eve were “naked and were not ashamed.” Now, that obviously includes *literal* nakedness (as in, most people's preferred clothing choice when having sex) but it also includes more than that. *Nakedness* is sometimes the bible's way of describing complete openness and vulnerability with another person. So **sex at its best is two people with nothing at all to hide—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and sexually. Two people who are fully transparent with each other with nothing held back.** That is what sex was intended to be: *purposeful*. So there we have four truths about what sex was meant to be: that it was meant to be good, to be enjoyed, to be mutual, and to be purposeful.

Now you'll notice that I put the phrase “meant to be” in front of all of those.” That was very intentional. Because as a pastor, I am fully aware that **for a lot of us, myself included, our experiences with sex are actually something other than what sex was “meant to be.”** So before we close, I'd love to speak for just a bit to any of us that have experienced *that* side of sex. Maybe you're here and you currently experience a *ton of shame* as it relates to sex because of your sin or someone else's. Or maybe you're *married*, and even though you would love to be “naked and not ashamed” with your spouse, that just hasn't been your experience at all. For you, even sex *inside* of marriage is filled with shame, or difficulty, or frustration, or pain, or really anything else. Whatever it is, married or unmarried, a whole lot of us have experienced sex as something *other* than those things we listed out this morning. So any of that sounds

like you, I just want you to hear me say one thing this morning. I want you to know that ***that is not the end of your story.***

One thing I love about the bible is how incredibly realistic it is. **Even though God lays out the design for sex in the opening pages of the bible—one woman, one man, becoming one flesh with one another—the bible doesn't pretend for a second that no other instruction is needed.** The bible doesn't just say "here's the rule, everybody—good luck living up to it." Not at all. Instead, it lays out the *ideal* and then speaks life and hope into all kinds of situations that are *not* the ideal. Jesus, interacting with the woman at the well who has been in one broken sexual relationship after another, calls her to something better even while saying "I will give you Living Water, and if you take it, you will never thirst again." Jesus again, interacting with the woman caught in adultery, says calls her out of her sin, while at the same time proclaiming over her, "I do not condemn you." Jesus holds out the ideal, and then speaks *life* into situations that are *not* the ideal. And similarly, in 1 John 2, it says this:

*My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin.* [in other words, here's the ideal. But he doesn't just stop there, look...] ***But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.***

Marriage ultimately isn't what does away with sexual shame—the *cross* is. **Jesus is not intimidated or scared away by the sexual shame you deal with.** In fact, if he can conclude anything from the bible, it's that he moves directly *towards* those who experience shame. And so if you're here and that's true of you, **Jesus wants to put your broken sexuality back together.** He wants to walk side-by-side with you as you allow him to heal, restore, and redeem what's broken in your life. It likely will not be instant or immediate, but it is *possible*. With Jesus, nothing is lost forever. Nothing is permanently broken. Things can be put back together, and Jesus wants to do exactly that.

So let me just conclude with one question: **what do you need Jesus to do in regards to how you think about sex?**

- **Some of us need to let Jesus correct.** For some of us, we have viewed and practiced sex too wrongly for too long and what we need to let Jesus do this morning is realign our understanding of sexuality with his. Maybe you've always thought of sex as dirty and shameful and taboo and this morning, you need to let Jesus show you that it is a good gift to be enjoyed. Maybe you've always thought of sex as just a recreational to be taken flippantly and you need to come to terms with the power it actually has. One way or another, some of us need to let Jesus *correct* our understanding of sexuality in some way.
- **Some of us need to let Jesus restore.** Others of us have already let Jesus correct our view on sex, but we've still got this thick hangover of shame from things in our past. And for some of us, that shame is keeping us from enjoying sex as it was meant to be now. So if that's you, maybe today should mark the beginning of letting Jesus heal, restore and redeem what is sexually broken in your life. Letting him start to put back together what has been broken.

Whichever it is for you, I think it looks like *acknowledging as true what the Scriptures teach.* And then in turn it looks like letting other people into that journey of healing with you. If you're married, it means being honest with your spouse about where you've thought about sex sinfully or selfishly. If you're not married,



it looks like being honest with the folks in your LifeGroup about exactly where you're at with it all, and asking them to be partners with you in the journey to let Jesus do his work.

I'd love to pray to that end as we close.