

God's Plan for Sexual Intimacy

Making Love Last a Lifetime:

Genesis 2:24-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

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Did you know that the English word *sex* first popped up in the 1300s? Did you know that it was probably an import from the French (leave it to the French!), but it definitely is derived from the Latin term *sexus*? Did you know that it was never used to describe physical intimacy until the writings of D.H. Lawrence last century? Until then, it always described the reproductive categories, male and female, of animals and plants including humans. Did you know that the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, primarily uses three terms for physical intimacy. They carry the literal meanings of (a) to come near, (b) to uncover and (c) to know. Each Hebrew term is relational. *Come near*, *uncover* and *know* speak of intimacy.

Our topic the last several weeks is *Making Love Last a Lifetime*. Although this series is targeted at the married and those who want to be married, the principles apply to everyone: seniors, singles, even children. Our attitudes and actions toward the opposite sex carry momentous consequences. Godly attitudes toward sexual intimacy bring health to families, communities and cultures. A key truth is that sexual intimacy is God's idea and gift.

I remember some old movies where the bride or groom required pictures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary to be covered or removed. That attitude prevails, at least viscerally, among some people. However, (1) God made us male and female, equipping us for physical intimacy, (2) he commanded us to be fruitful and multiply and provided no non-sexual way to fulfill that command and blessing, and (3) God saw (his eyes were open to) what he made sexually and he declared that it was very good. Our sexuality and our sexual intimacy are God's ideas and gifts.

Unfortunately, gifts can be misused and bring harm. Electrical outlets provide power for cleaning, lighting and many important tasks, but as a child I stuck a pair of pliers into one. I was crying in pain very quickly. I had violated the purpose of this technological gift and suffered as a result. That happens with God's gifts. That's why the Bible gives us warnings, and that is why there is so much pain in our relationships. We must understand the purposes of God's gifts and use them accordingly. The Bible reveals two purposes for sexual intimacy.

The first revealed in Scripture is *procreation*. The words "Be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28 are a blessing and call to live out the image of God with the gift of sexual intimacy. Literally, we partner with God in his creation of humanity. Sexual intimacy is a holy gift with a holy call. Made in the image of God and in the context of love, we become co-creators with God. Anyone using this gift, even while employing methods of birth control, makes themselves available to God to parent. We ought to always be conscious of that.

The second purpose of sexual intimacy is *bonding*. The Scripture says, "***A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh***" (Genesis 1:24, NKJV). The term *joined* in "joined to his wife" actually means "stick to" or "adhere". It expresses what we mean by bonding. The physical act combined with spiritual love and commitment create such closeness between two individuals that they can be described as one flesh. They do not differentiate or hold things back from one another. They are intimate and actually discover themselves in the relationship. They're naked with each other and feel no shame with one another or with God. They've given their heart, their pledge and now their bodies; and they experience an intimacy that is both pleasurable and affirming. It grows them in God's image. To be fully known and affirmed is a godly experience. It is a taste of our heavenly Father's love. No wonder God looked upon all that he made, and saw it was very

good. The result is such an emotional and spiritual satisfaction and attraction that the couple physically adhere to one another. They're one flesh. They stick together... like duct tape.

When I was growing up, most cars had bench seats; and I saw a lot of double-headed drivers. Generally, they were young couples moving toward or just moving in this form of bonding. God's work was so visible. The Old Testament words and phrases for sexual intimacy are so appropriate: coming near, uncovering nakedness, and knowing.

Wouldn't it be nice if the story ended here? Wouldn't it be nice if when Adam and Eve were planted in the Garden of Eden with the tree of life and all the other fruit trees, no misuse of God's gifts occurred? Unfortunately, there is a tempter to whom they and we have listened. This tempter tells us that life is in the creation, not the Creator. Consequently, we separate the gifts from the giver and their purposes. The very appetites God gives us become misdirected and even intensified, divorced from their purposes. One friend took some weeks off to work in a distant mission. When he returned, he was so full of loathing and self-hatred because in the foreign community, separated from the support and accountability he had with us, he could not walk by an adult bookstore or the sexual encounters available to him there. Through sin, sexual intimacy turns from a grace that grows us to a master that dominates and destroys us.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

We urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more. For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor — not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5, NLT)

The phrase “keep clear from all sexual sin” is often translated “abstain from fornication.”

The word *fornication* is not well known today, but it speaks of non-marital sexual intimacy.

Since adultery generally depicts the breaking or betraying of an existing bond, fornication goes beyond that and emphasizes sexual intimacy without the benefit of marriage such as premarital.

The tempter says, “Eat this fruit and you’ll get the same benefit, the same physical and emotional satisfaction that married people experience and more, a buzz.” In truth, you’ll get a buzz from dangerous, illicit behavior, but you miss all the intimacy and most of the affirmation sexual intimacy can carry. Many studies show that sexually active singles and cohabiting couples report far less satisfaction. Moreover, they commit the physical act of bonding without their heart, pledge and community support. As they separate, their souls rip apart like divorce. Some of the stick on the duct tape is left with the persons they leave, and some stick is left on them; then, when they bond again, not as much stick is available. They have greater difficulty being intimate and sustaining their relationships when troubles come. The more sexual relationships, the less stick, the less satisfaction, the less stability and consequently, many emotional problems result. This is seen in a landslide of statistics.

The tempter says that everyone is doing it, but in truth the vast majority of youth aren’t. Some 54 percent of high school seniors have not engaged in sexual intercourse, and there are many places where that statistic is much higher and healthier.

Despite that good news, there is an enormous effort to submarine you, me and our children. A study, of pornography in America, in 2003, shows that revenues from pornography doubled the combined revenue of CBS, NBC and ABC. There were 4.2 million pornographic websites, and one in four internet search engine requests, like Google and Yahoo, were for porn sites. Some 47 percent of Christians identified pornography as a problem in their home. This **video harlotry** and **photographic prostitution** produce physiological changes in participants or viewers. Biochemical changes are produced. The sexual appetite is intensified and leads to

addiction. I wonder if the numbers of people destroyed by this addiction don't far outnumber those destroyed by alcohol. I'm watching friends in very responsible positions topple, and their families are pierced with grief.

The misuse of God's gift is like the electrical outlet and me. The danger and pain are very serious. I learned that if I had held the pliers with both hands the electrical charge could have stopped my heart. Such a good invention could have resulted in my sudden death.

The Bible teaches that God is moved by such losses. God is moved by our pain. God has come in Christ as our redeemer. God now gives a gift of redemption in his Son Jesus. There is a gift or grace. There is preventing grace. In preventing grace the Holy Spirit preserves us from death while urging us to turn and embrace redemption. The Holy Spirit speaks through people and events. The Holy Spirit puts you into relationships for your redemption. The Holy Spirit exposes to you the destruction of your actions and points you to help. There is also justifying grace. Though the Holy Spirit convicts, the tempter condemns. In justifying grace, we are released from condemnation and no longer need to fear God's judgment. Jesus took the judgment and gives us the identity of saints or holy ones. In sanctifying grace Jesus begins to grow us into that new identity. His Spirit works in us and through Christian relationships to clean us up and make us new. The Holy Spirit works in believers to become a Christian AA of sorts, a redeeming community, where there is exceptional love and power to become new.

Praise God that the Giver has provided another gift! There is hope, and there is help. Healthy relationships and God's beautiful gifts can be experienced in all their glory.