

# SEX IN MARRIAGE

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(1 Corinthians 7:1-9)

We live in a world saturated with sex, yet we may find ourselves confused in our pursuit of sexual joy and mutual fulfillment in marriage. Diminished sexual appetite is likely for spouses who are uncomfortable with their sexuality or reluctant to embrace a vigorous sex life. Marital tension builds as the consequence of lack of sexual desire or differing desires between spouses.

Even though sexual satisfaction has your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. . . . Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love" (Prov. 5:18, 19). Sexual passion as an expectation for marriage is also evidenced by the fact that the marriage bed is "undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). Sexual passion is not only demonstrated by the lovers in the Song of Solomon but is also implied by Scripture's guidelines for handling our sexual passion. If God had not designed us with passion, He would not have needed to teach us how to manage that passion.

The Bible instructs both the husband and wife to delight in giving themselves to each other. First Corinthians 7:3-5 teaches that married couples are to be sexual together, regularly enjoying each other for pleasure. In Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul instructs husbands and wives to be mutually submissive. Through Christ, we have the potential to reestablish the original design of creation—to be completely open and free sexually in marriage.

## DISCOVERING MUTUAL FULFILLMENT

## SEX IN MARRIAGE—PERFECTLY DESIGNED BY GOD

Whether our sexuality has brought us energy and deep fulfillment or led us into pain and despair, we are created as sexual people in God's image—male and female. Genesis 2:24, 25 shows God's design for a man and woman to be united as one flesh. What people may not be aware of, however, is that this sexual union occurred *before* mankind fell into sin. Thus, people were created to be free to share their bodies openly with their spouses in marriage, delight in each other sexually, and honor God with their pleasure.

## SEXUAL PLEASURE—A BIBLICAL EXPECTATION

Sex in marriage was intended not only for procreation, but also for unity and pleasure. Husbands and wives are to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 9:7), to become one (Gen. 2:24) and to be free and unashamed (Gen. 2:25). Sexual pleasure is endorsed throughout the Old and the New Testaments. "Let



en function on two tracks: the emotional and the physical. These must be connected for a woman to be interested sexually. Men function on one track; when physically aroused, men will usually be emotionally ready to have sex. Women desire sex and open up sexually when they feel loved by and connected with their husbands. Men connect and feel loved through sex.

Because of these differences, the man must start the process of discovering mutual sexual fulfillment by connecting with his wife. By selflessly loving her, a man loves his wife like Christ loved the Church. A husband's love, adoration, and connection with his wife allows her to open up sexually. His affirmation ignites her passion and she responds. He feels loved by her response and they both end up fulfilled.

A woman's responsibility is to take in sexual pleasure, receive her husband's affirmation, and lead by invitation, as did the bride in the Song of Solomon. For a woman to do this, she has to believe she is worthy and has a right to be sexual. She has to know that her body was designed not only for reproduction, but also for her sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Once a woman accepts her God-given sexuality, she leads, not by control or demand, but by listening to her body's desires, taking in the good feelings of being touched, and inviting her husband to enjoy her body as she enjoys his.

When the husband lovingly connects with his wife and the wife embraces her sexuality and shares it with her husband, mutual fulfillment is experienced.

#### **DISCOVERING MUTUAL PLEASURE**

To experience long-lasting passion in marriage, couples must accept their differences as men and women and focus their sexual times together on delighting in each others' bodies. Arousal, intercourse, and or-

gasm do not measure sexual satisfaction, but result when pleasure is the focus.

For pleasure to be the focus of sex in marriage, the couple has to accept both the husband's more predictable constancy and the ever-changing complexity of the woman. Sex will then be more interesting, less goal-oriented, less pressure-filled, and more deeply satisfying.

Our culture promotes spontaneity. The expectation is that great sex should just happen. But for most couples, the anticipation of planned times builds quality, and the allotment of those times increases quantity. True passion and great sex do not just happen. But by affirming God's design and pursuing mutual pleasure and fulfillment through the practice of the model of the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the Church, couples will discover the sexual satisfaction God intended for them in marriage.

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of sex in marriage include:

- Exodus 20:14
- Proverbs 5:15-20
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on sex in marriage at Hebrews 13:4 on page 1638. See also the personality profile of Solomon and the Shulamite on page 871.

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HEAR THE HEAVENLY VOICE

<sup>25</sup>See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, <sup>26</sup>whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake<sup>a</sup> not only the earth, but also heaven."<sup>b</sup> <sup>27</sup>Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

<sup>28</sup>Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may<sup>c</sup> serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. <sup>29</sup>For our God is a consuming fire.

CONCLUDING MORAL DIRECTIONS

**13** Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. <sup>3</sup>Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

<sup>4</sup>Marriage is honorable among all, and the

bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

<sup>5</sup>Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."<sup>a</sup> <sup>6</sup>So we may boldly say:

"The LORD is my helper;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?"<sup>a</sup>

CONCLUDING RELIGIOUS DIRECTIONS

<sup>7</sup>Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. <sup>9</sup>Do not be carried about<sup>a</sup> with various and strange doc-

trines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,  
today, and forever.  
**HEBREWS 13:8**

12:26 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *will shake*. <sup>b</sup>Haggai 2:6  
12:28 <sup>a</sup>M-Text omits *may*. 13:5 <sup>a</sup>Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5 13:6 <sup>a</sup>Psalms 118:6  
13:9 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text and M-Text read *away*.



Sex in Marriage

KEY PASSAGE

INTIMACY

(13:4)

God created sex and designed it to be enjoyed within the confines of the marriage relationship. God doesn't pervert sex; people do. To God, "marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled." Along with the characteristics that make for all good relationships—such as speaking kindly, being patient, listening carefully, etc.—marriage alone provides the opportunity for a man and woman to experience what God intends for their pleasure.

Married couples should also protect their sexual relationship because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. Immorality and adultery destroy marriages by cheapening the intimate act of sex. Because sex creates such a unique bond, immorality and adultery cause pain and devastation in a marriage.

Believers must seek to strengthen their marriages and not deprive each other of the sexual intimacy that unites them (1 Cor. 7:3–5). They should guard that aspect of their life together, making time to be with each other and to renew their intimacy.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about sex in marriage on pages 1500, 1501. See also the personality profile of Solomon and the Shulamite on page 871.

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Honey and milk *are* under your tongue;  
And the fragrance of your garments  
Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

A well of living waters,  
And streams from Lebanon.

#### The Shulamite

- 12 A garden enclosed  
Is my sister, *my* spouse,  
A spring shut up,  
A fountain sealed.
- 13 Your plants *are* an orchard of  
pomegranates  
With pleasant fruits,  
Fragrant henna with spikenard,
- 14 Spikenard and saffron,  
Calamus and cinnamon,  
With all trees of frankincense,  
Myrrh and aloes,  
With all the chief spices—  
A fountain of gardens,

- 15 Awake, O north *wind*,  
And come, O south!  
Blow upon my garden,  
That its spices may flow out.  
**Let my beloved come to his garden**  
And eat its pleasant fruits.

#### The Beloved

- 5** I have come to my garden, my sister, *my*  
spouse;  
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;  
I have eaten my honeycomb with my  
honey;  
I have drunk my wine with my milk.

### PERSONALITY PROFILE



Sex in  
Marriage

## SOLOMON AND THE SHULAMITE: THE LANGUAGE OF TRUE LOVE

(SONG OF SOLOMON 4)

When God designed marital love, he included as part of its character an intimate shamelessness. Genesis reveals that Adam and Eve were “both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). No fear, embarrassment, or shame complicated the early days of the original marriage. Later, echoes of that love were part of Jacob’s love for Rachel (Gen. 29:18–20). That kind of innocent passion returns to the Bible pages in the Song of Solomon. In the privacy of love during the hours of anticipation before the wedding and the moments of delight in marriage, we overhear the whispered exchanges between the couple. We are slightly embarrassed at least in part because we are an eavesdropping audience. The couple has eyes and ears only for each other.

The Song of Solomon celebrates the blessing of God on the sexual relationship within marriage. The book enjoys, rather than explains, sexual intimacy. We witness how God’s blessing touches the way husbands and wives see each other. It shapes their intimate conversation. What would be lust outside of marriage becomes appropriate desire when protected by genuine commitment.

In the Song of Solomon 4, the couple develop a mental picture of each other as they describe the details of each other’s physical body in the most beautiful and extravagant poetic terms. Love creates its own language. The lovers’ words may seem awkward unless we have been in love ourselves. Their expressions remind us, however, that sexual love within marriage is part of God’s plan and purpose for our lives. God finds no shame in marital sexuality. His rules lead to the most deeply satisfying enjoyment.

The Song of Solomon powerfully illustrates the value of appreciating both the spiritual and physical qualities of our partner. When we seek to meet our spouse’s needs with delight, we help to deepen sexual intimacy within marriage. Enjoy your spouse as a great gift from God to you!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about sex in marriage on pages 1500, 1501. See also the key passage note at Hebrews 13:4 on page 1638.

Every one bears twins,  
And none is barren among them.  
Like a piece of pomegranate  
Are your temples behind your veil.

There are sixty queens  
And eighty concubines,  
And virgins without number.  
My dove, my perfect one,  
Is the only one,  
The only one of her mother,  
The favorite of the one who bore her.  
The daughters saw her  
And called her blessed,  
The queens and the concubines,  
And they praised her.

- 10 Who is she who looks forth as the  
morning,  
Fair as the moon,  
Clear as the sun,  
Awesome as *an army* with banners?

#### The Shulamite

- 11 I went down to the garden of nuts  
To see the verdure of the valley,  
To see whether the vine had budded  
And the pomegranates had bloomed.  
12 Before I was even aware,  
My soul had made me  
As the chariots of my noble people.<sup>a</sup>

#### The Beloved and His Friends

- 13 Return, return, O Shulamite;  
Return, return, that we may look upon  
you!

#### The Shulamite

What would you see in the  
Shulamite—  
As it were, the dance of the two  
camps?<sup>a</sup>

#### EXPRESSIONS OF PRAISE

##### The Beloved

7 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,  
O prince's daughter!  
The curves of your thighs *are* like jewels,  
The work of the hands of a skillful  
workman.  
Your navel *is* a rounded goblet;  
It lacks no blended beverage.  
Your waist *is* a heap of wheat  
Set about with lilies.  
Your two breasts *are* like two fawns,  
Twins of a gazelle.  
Your neck *is* like an ivory tower,  
Your eyes *like* the pools in Heshbon  
By the gate of Bath Rabbim.  
Your nose *is* like the tower of Lebanon  
Which looks toward Damascus.  
Your head *crowns* you like *Mount*  
Carmel,  
And the hair of your head *is* like purple;  
A king *is* held captive by *your* tresses.

- 6 How fair and how pleasant you are,  
O love, with your delights!  
7 This stature of yours is like a palm tree,  
And your breasts *like* its clusters.  
I said, "I will go up to the palm tree,  
I will take hold of its branches."  
Let now your breasts be like clusters of  
the vine,  
The fragrance of your breath like apples,  
And the roof of your mouth like the best  
wine.

#### The Shulamite

*The wine goes down* smoothly for my  
beloved,

6:12 <sup>a</sup>Hebrew *Ammi Nadib* 6:13 <sup>a</sup>Hebrew  
*Mahanaim*

#### SOUL NOTE



**Oneness** (7:6–12) Throughout the Song of Solomon, the husband and wife exult in each other's physical attractiveness. These explicit descriptions of their love underscore the importance of the soul relationship and deep commitment of the couple to one another. Three times a form of the refrain is repeated: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16; 6:3; 7:10). When a man and a woman become one in marriage, the bond of intimacy will strengthen their relationship. Within the bonds of marriage, God approves of and encourages sexual pleasure. **Topic: Sex in Marriage**

a commandment. <sup>7</sup>For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

<sup>8</sup>But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; <sup>9</sup>but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

#### KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE VOWS

<sup>10</sup>Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. <sup>11</sup>But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup>But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and



#### SOUL NOTE

**Enjoy (7:2-5)** Because of the immorality in Corinth, many believers may have thought that all sex was evil; so they began to refrain from sex even in their marriages. Paul explained that God created sex for the enjoyment of a man and woman in marriage and for procreation. Sex in marriage binds a husband and wife together. A healthy sex life also helps the couple to withstand any outside temptations. Sex in marriage should be fulfilling, intimate, and sensual. A believer can and should enjoy the sexual relationship of marriage and the bond it brings them and their spouse.

**Topic: Sex in Marriage**



#### Singleness

#### PERSONALITY PROFILE

### PAUL: SINGLE AND NOT ALONE

(1 COR. 7:8)

Paul was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived—tirelessly traveling the known world with the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. He told the Corinthian believers, in the context of their questions about marriage, “I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am,” meaning single. Why such advice? And what’s wrong with marriage?

Nothing is wrong with marriage. In fact, throughout this section, Paul also told the married people to stay married, even if they were married to unbelievers. The situation in Corinth needed to be handled carefully. The rampant immorality of the city meant that believers needed to learn how God would have them live pure lives. The specter of persecution from the Roman Empire meant that Paul felt an urgency to share the gospel with as few hindrances as possible. Paul advised those already single to remain that way—not seeking to get married as if getting married was to be their goal. Their focus should first be on God; then, if marriage presented itself as a possibility, they could certainly marry.

Paul also explained, realistically, how a married person’s priorities are different. A single believer has different service opportunities than a married believer. Paul, passionate for the gospel to spread, simply wished that more people were like him.

Singleness can be used for God’s glory. Whether a person has never been married or has become single by way of divorce or bereavement, single people are not set aside by God. He has great things for single people to accomplish for His kingdom. Single people must get their own priorities straight—seeking God and His will above all. Single believers are never alone, because God is always with them.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about singleness on pages 1262, 1263. See also the key passage note at 1 Corinthians 7:26-35 on page 1503.