

“What Do We Do About Sexuality?”

Reading: Song of Songs 1:9-2:7; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

We're going to be deep, beautiful, and fearless today. We're going to be deep because deep people think hard about important questions. We're going to be beautiful in how we value the way God has made us with our bodies and pleasures and desires and delights, and in how we proclaim hope in God's ability to redeem us when we use them in harmful ways. And we're going to be fearless in our willingness to talk about things that might make some of us blush a little bit. Over the last month or so we've been asking the question of what we do in response to certain difficult challenges raised by our faith. We've asked what we do about hell, and what we do about greed, and what we do about submission. We haven't had time to answer all the questions we might have about them, but we've tried to get a sense of what direction the Bible points us in. And today we're asking what we do about sexuality.

We have to be fearless in asking that question because you and I both know that the world apart from God is fearless in pushing its own view of sexuality, and the only way that people will know that there is an alternative is if we live that alternative fearlessly. We have to be fearless in asking what to do about sexuality because the church has often been afraid of sexuality, and we've treated it like some dirty, unspeakable thing, and our enemy has used our fear to his advantage. And we have to be beautiful in how we respond to the question because in our fear, we have frequently been less than beautiful in dealing with people who have honest questions and struggles and have sometimes failed in the area of sexuality. So we're going to put into practice our call to be deep, beautiful, and fearless in our questioning today.

We have to ask this question because the church has a serious image problem when it comes to sexuality. You might say that it doesn't matter what others think of us as long as we're being faithful to our message, but image is important when that image doesn't line up with the message; it shows that something isn't being communicated well. I think it's safe to say that in general, the church has the reputation of being a killjoy when it comes to sex; we're obsessed with telling people what they're not supposed to do when, the thinking goes, they're not hurting anyone and it's no one's business. Add on top of that the fact that at least some churches spend an awful lot of time preaching against sexual sin only to have it come out later that some high profile pastor or leader was involved in some of the very sins they were condemning, and we all lose credibility. What business do we have telling people how to live their sexual lives when we're just a bunch of prudes and hypocrites?

The reality is that there is an awful lot of sexuality in the Bible. In some places, we see good examples of sexuality used well. In others, we see painful, dehumanizing uses of sexuality that stand as warnings to the ages of how not to use sexuality. Sometimes sex is dealt with in the context of lessons and laws given by biblical teachers to give us principles guiding us in the way to go. There is a lot of sexuality in the Bible, and if we ignore it, we're ignoring some important stuff.

The part of the Bible that is probably most often associated with sex is the book known as Song of Songs, or sometimes the Song of Solomon. There's nothing else quite like it in the Bible. In fact, it's so unusual that most people aren't quite sure what to do with it. It's been considered a part

of Scripture for a very long time, and yet it has very little to say about God directly. It's obviously intended to be a sort of poetic conversation between two lovers, and sometimes their friends make some comments, but we know practically nothing about the context. Is it intended to be performed like a play? Is it just a collection of love poems? Was it written by Solomon, about Solomon, or for Solomon? We just don't know. And of course one of the most striking things about it is how passionate it is. You don't have to read very far between the lines to figure out that the man and woman in the song are not just hugging and holding hands. Theirs is a *very* passionate love. I'm pretty sure that this is the first time I've ever preached on Song of Songs, in fact. But it's in there. It's part of our Holy Scriptures, the word of God, and we've got to deal with it.

And the first thing the book of Song of Songs shows us about sexuality is that human sexuality is a good thing. It is a gift from God. It's something He created us with, and it's something He wants us to enjoy, and it's not something we should be ashamed of or afraid of. It's an entire book all about passionate love smack in the middle of our Bible. It's not gratuitous or titillating, but it does get rather graphic. It lets us know that the physical love between a man and a woman is a beautiful thing, something God rejoices in. Sex is not a necessary part of the human experience, since God calls all people to live chaste lives outside of marriage, and the Apostle Paul makes it clear that remaining unmarried is commendable in his eyes since it allows you to devote your energy entirely toward God, but even so, love and sex are part of the human experience for many, many people.

It's interesting that this book of passionate love poetry is called Song of Songs. In Hebrew, one of the ways to say that something is the exemplar, the archetype, the pinnacle among its kind is to say that it is *the* Song of songs. Out of all songs there are, this is the best. Maybe you're more familiar with the phrase, "holy of holies," which we sometimes translate as the "most holy place." It's that part of the temple where God's glory resided; it was as close as you could physically get to God Himself in the temple, and so it was more holy than any other place. If you gathered together all the holy places in the world, they would all pale in comparison to the holy of holies. If you gather up all the songs in the world and put them side by side, they would all sound out of tune in comparison with this one. It's interesting, isn't it? In the Bible, it's not the songs of praise or thanksgiving to God that get called the song of songs, it's this one about the passionate love between a man and woman.

So the first thing we learn from the Bible about what we do about sexuality is that human sexuality is a good thing given to us by God that He rejoices in with us. But there's another side to Song of Songs that also helps inform our reaction to sexuality. For a very long time, one of the traditional ways of reading Song of Songs is not just as a love song between a man and a woman, but as a love song between God and His people. That might seem a little odd, since Song of Songs describes a very passionate love, and maybe it doesn't seem appropriate to compare God's love for us with human sexual love. Surely God is above that sort of thing, isn't He? And it's true that even though we often refer to God in masculine terms, God is not actually male or female, apart from the person of Jesus Christ, and so sexuality is something that doesn't really apply to God. But even so, there is a clear comparison to be made between the passion of human love and the passion with which God loves His people. He is jealous for us. He fights for us. He woos us. He embraces us.

And in fact, as Song of Songs implies if you read it in that way, our sexuality is one of the best ways for us to understand what devotion to God ought to be like. Repeatedly throughout the Bible, when God's people wander away from Him, He describes their wandering in terms of adultery. It's

betrayal of a lover. Our relationship with God and our sexuality reflect off of one another. So there is this very deep truth that the ways in which we act on our sexuality have a massive impact on our spirituality. Our relationship with God is intended to be characterized by eternal, abiding faithfulness and love and devotion, and one of the best illustrations of that is to compare it to a marriage. Our human marriages are reflective of our faithfulness to God. How we love one another demonstrates how we love God, and nowhere more so than in our sexual relationships in which we give of ourselves in the most intimate ways we can, and so if that intimate sexual giving is not characterized by eternal faithfulness, that does not adequately reflect the godly faithfulness that we're called to.

That's what Paul was getting at in our reading from 1 Corinthians. The early Christians in some places lived in cultures every bit as pornographic as ours is, and maybe even more so in some cases. In some settings, it was even literally a part of worshipping certain deities to go to the temple and have sex with the temple prostitute. Some people were apparently using the argument that because Christ offers us freedom from sin, it does not matter what we do with our bodies. Sex is just sex; it doesn't have eternal consequences. And Paul says that well, technically, there's some truth to that. Maybe there's a case to be made that when we're free in Christ, all things are permissible. But clearly, not all things are beneficial, Paul tells us. You cannot divorce your spiritual well-being from the actions of your body, and *you* — body, soul, and spirit — are a representation of Jesus Christ in the world. You bear the seal of the Holy Spirit of God almighty when you proclaim Jesus as your Lord. What you do with your body reflects your understanding of the love of God.

And that leads us to the third thing we need to affirm about sexuality: that it is uniquely powerful, and therefore, while we rejoice in it, we also take it very seriously. Sex is uniquely powerful. Up until very recently, it was the only way to create human life. And, at the same time, we're very aware of the fact that sex is capable of killing, too; some parts of the world are losing entire generations to AIDS. That is power unlike anything else. If we saw someone playing with a gun, using it frivolously, pointing it at people and acting like it's just a toy, we would call that person an idiot. Guns are powerful; they're not toys, because they can kill. Our sexuality is even more powerful than that. It can make life or destroy it. It can seal a relationship or ruin it. It can build a family or tear it down. It can be used in a way that glorifies God and honors His kingdom, or it can be used in a way that fractures the image of God in us, wounds our relationship with Christ, and proclaims a lack of faithfulness toward our Lord. Sexuality is a good thing that God meant us to enjoy, but it is powerful like nothing else.

And therefore we take it very seriously. Especially in light of the fact that we are united with Christ, we do not make light of the power of sex to create and destroy. We don't think, "Oh, no one will know, so it doesn't matter." We don't think, "It's only sex; it's not a big deal." We don't use our sexuality as a weapon of control over others. We don't look at others as only vessels for our sexual enjoyment, because we know that God has made them more. We don't remove sexuality from its context of abiding faithfulness in marriage. We take it seriously, because it is powerful.

But at the same time, we also affirm that human sexuality is not so powerful that it is unforgivable. The church has a bad habit of treating sexual sins as though they are too big for God to handle. It's true, they can be powerful and tempting and addictive and destructive in ways that few other things can, but that does not give us the right to deny the kingdom of God to those who are repentant. Jesus saved a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. There is redemption and

healing available in Christ no matter what your past is. As powerful as sex is, it is not more powerful than the God who gave it to us.

So what do we do about sexuality? We rejoice in it, and we take it seriously. We recognize its beauty, but we also recognize its power. We affirm its ability to humanize us, but we also shudder at its ability to dehumanize. We proclaim a message of faithfulness, but also a message of redemption. We give our sexuality, along with the rest of ourselves, to our Lord Jesus Christ for His glory.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)