

Sermon: The Beauty and Blessings of the Christian Bedroom¹

Song of Solomon 4:1–5:1

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Introduction

In an article entitled, “What They Didn’t Teach You About Sex in Sunday School,” Peggy Fletcher Stack writes, “Many people assume the Bible has just one message about sex: Don’t do it.”² Well, let me simply respond by saying that anyone who says that obviously has not read the Bible. God, in his Word, has a lot to say about sex and much of it is good.

Sex as God designed it is good, exciting, intoxicating, powerful, living, and unifying. Though the Bible is not a book on sex, it does contain a complete theology of sexuality: the purposes for sex, warnings against its misuse, and a beautiful picture of ideal physical intimacy as set forth in the Song of Solomon. The “one-flesh” relationship (cf. Gen 2:24) is the most intense, physical intimacy and the deepest, spiritual unity possible between a husband and wife. God always approves of this relationship (cf. Prov 5:21) in which husband and wife meet each other’s physical needs in sexual intercourse (cf. Prov 5:15, 18, 19). Paul indicates that sexual adjustment in marriage can affect the Christian life, especially prayer (cf. 1 Cor 7:5). Both husband and wife have definite and equal sexual needs that are to be met in marriage (1 Cor 7:3), and each is to meet the needs of the other and not his own (Phil 2:3-5). God gave us the good gift of sex for several important reasons. These purposes include: (1) knowledge (cf. Gen 4:1); (2) intimate oneness (Gen

2:24); (3) comfort (Gen 24:67); (4) the creation of life (Gen 1:28); (5) play and pleasure (Song 2:8-17; 4:1-16), and (6) avoiding temptation (1 Cor 7:2-5). A husband is commanded to find satisfaction (Prov 5:19) and joy (Eccl 9:9) in his wife, and to concern himself with meeting her unique needs (Deut 24:5; 1 Pet 3:7). A wife also has responsibilities. These include: (1) availability (1 Cor 7:3-5); (2) preparation and planning (Song 4:9ff); (3) interest (Song 4:16; 5:2); and (4) sensitivity to unique masculine needs (Gen 24:67). The feeling of oneness experienced by husband and wife in the physical, sexual union should remind both partners of the even more remarkable oneness that the spirit of a man and a woman experiences with God in spiritual new birth (John 3).

There is beauty and blessing in the Christian bedroom. Here God says eat and drink deeply (Song 5:1!). This text describes the wedding night of King Solomon and his bride, Shulamite (cf. 6:13). The bride and groom are alone with only God as the unseen but welcomed guest. Here before us the couple consummates their marriage in intimate sexual union. Our passage, in exquisite poetry, provides a portrait of what a Christian bedroom was intended by God to be.

Let It Be a Place of Satisfying Attractiveness (4:1-7)

These verses are a song of admiration from the groom to his bride. The time for

the sexual consummation of their marriage has arrived and yet, it will not be until verse 16 that it will happen. True romance is an environment of affection in which sexual union will occur more often and with greater satisfaction. In other words, there are some essential preliminaries before it is time for the main event! Unfortunately, this is not always clear to a male. Having been aroused sexually he is now on the prowl as a predator, and his bride can certainly feel the part of prey. Solomon was sensitive to this, and so he begins with the most important sex organ we have: *the mind!* Thinking about how his new wife might feel, he chooses first to cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance through carefully chosen words.

Men, Meet Your Wife's Need for Verbal Support (4:1-7)

Three times, both at the beginning and the end of this song, Solomon tells Shulamite she is “beautiful” (NKJV, “fair”). Twice he calls her his “love” or “darling.” In verse 7 he says there is no defect or “flaw” in her. In his eyes she is the perfect woman for him.

Women are verbal creatures. They are moved by what they hear and what they feel. “To a great extent, she thinks and feels [about herself] the way a man leads her to think and feel.”³ A man must learn to touch her heart (her mind) through her ears. This helps her feel good about herself, and it relaxes, prepares, and motivates her to give herself in passionate lovemaking to her husband. A wise man will understand the value of words, the right words, in preparation for sexual intimacy.

A study in *Psychology Today* noted that women are more likely to be disappointed with marriage than men, especially in the

context of romance. Why? One explanation is that as compared with men, they have higher expectations for intimacy, and thus react more negatively to conjugal reality. In a major national survey conducted in 1976 by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, more wives than husbands said that they wished their spouse talked more about thoughts and feelings, and more wives felt resentment and irritation with husbands than vice versa. The researchers conclude: “In marriage ... women talk and want verbal responsiveness of the kind they have had with other women, but their men are often silent partners, unable to respond in kind.”⁴ A man must meet his wife’s need for verbal support.

Women, Meet Your Husband's Need for Visual Stimulation (4:1-6)

If a woman is a creature of the ear, a man is a creature of the eye. He is moved by what he sees. Verses 1–6 are a continuation of Solomon’s song of admiration as he praises 8 different parts of his wife’s body. This would continue to meet her need for verbal support, especially as we unlock the doors to the Ancient Near Eastern images we encounter. At the same time these verses also teach us something about the male and how visual he is when it comes to sex. A brief survey of these verses makes it clear that Shulamite was not clothed in sweats, flannel, or burlap! Apparently, only a veil covered her eyes. The rest of her body was in full view and Solomon liked, he loved, what he saw. Still, his patience and understanding is singularly remarkable. What an incredible example he sets for men everywhere.

Women in the ancient Near East wore a veil only on special occasions such as the day of their wedding. “Dove’s eyes

behind your veil” both hides and enhances her beauty. It conveys ideas of peace and purity, tranquility and tenderness, gentleness and innocence (cf. 1:15; 2:14; 5:2). Her eyes speak, they communicate to her husband that she has been calmed and set at rest by his kind and affirming words.

“Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead” (NIV) would probably not get a guy very far in our day, but it would have been lovely music to the ears of Shulamite. Viewed from afar, a herd of black goats descending or skipping down a mountainside as the sun glistened on their black hair was a beautiful sight. As Shulamite prepared to give herself to her husband, she has let her hair down. Cascading down her neck and across her shoulders, her beautiful wavy locks entice the sexual desires of Solomon. Mount Gilead was a high mountain range east of Galilee that was known for its good and fertile pastures. Shulamite is herself vigorous and fertile on this their wedding night. Letting her hair down signals to Solomon her readiness for him.

Verses 2 and 3 focus on the beauty of her mouth. Her teeth are clean, bright, and white; none are missing! Her lips are like a scarlet or red ribbon (lit. “thread”). Indeed, her mouth is beautiful. It is beautifully shaped and enticing to her man. There is some question, because of the unusual Hebrew word used here for “mouth,” whether Solomon has in view physical or verbal pleasures that come from her mouth. An either/or decision is unnecessary. “Her mouth is ... a fertile oasis with lovely words flowing out of it—not to mention possible heavy wet kissing.”⁵ Her lips and her words both are prizes of pleasure.

Her temples behind the veil are com-

pared to the halves of a pomegranate. They blushed red with desire and the sweetness of their fruit entreats Solomon to kiss them. Pomegranates were considered an aphrodisiac in the ancient world. Attractive to the eye and sweet to taste, the image appeals to both the senses of sight and taste.

Her neck was like the tower of David adorned with the shields and weapons of Solomon’s mighty men (cf. 3:7-8). She stands tall and graceful. She is neither cowed nor timid. Why should she be in the presence of a man who loves and admires her with such passion? The image “conveys a sense of unassailable strength. No man could conquer her, and her suitor is awed by the dignity she carries. Her love is a gift; it could never become plunder.”⁶

Verses 5 and 6 draw attention to Shulamite’s breasts. Note that there is nothing even remotely pornographic about this imagery. *Porneia* clearly refers to evil sexual desire and an entire industry is built on exploiting this sinful passion. Solomon’s point here is that a man’s desire for his wife is holy. His pleasure and erotic desire for her is holy. To deny this is to deny one of God’s good gifts. First, they are compared to twin fawns of a gazelle that feed among the lilies. They are soft and attractive, tender and delicate, making her husband want to gently touch and caress them. Second, he describes them as two mountains: one a mountain of myrrh and the other a hill of frankincense. Both spices were expensive and used as perfume for the body and the marriage bed. (Prov 7:17 informs us that the harlot perfumes her bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.) Now the senses of sight and smell are aroused. So enraptured is Solomon that he desires to make love to his wife all

night long: “until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.”

Time and tenderness are essential twins for a sexually and romantically attractive bedroom. Slow, romantic foreplay is underway. Solomon visually and literally, I believe, undresses his bride. He praises her specifically and in detail for everything he sees. He gives before receiving. He is as much concerned, if not more so, for her pleasure and satisfaction than he is his own. He is loving her as Christ has loved us (Eph 5:25ff).

It is interesting to note that we don't know what Shulamite really looked like. What we do know is what she looked like to Solomon. She was beautiful, gorgeous; no one compared to her. This bedroom is a place of satisfying attractiveness: both to Solomon and Shulamite.

Let It Be a Place of Sensual Anticipation (4:8-11)

According to a recent report, humans are apparently the only creatures on the planet who see sex as fun, with the possible exception of dolphins and pygmy chimps.⁷ I'm not sure what to make of that, if anything. I do know that we humans think about and anticipate the sexual experience, almost without exception. The fact is we give this area of life a lot of time and attention. People will attend seminars like “Getting the Love You Want,” “Resexing Marriage,” “Resurrecting Sex: The Passionate Marriage Approach,” “Marital Sex As It Ought To Be,” and “Hot Monogamy.”

Yes, we think and talk a great deal about sex, but far too often we don't understand it, at least not as God intended. The results of going our own way have not been pretty. Perhaps God has had it right all along. When it comes

to sensual anticipation, what counsel do we receive from him?

Invite Your Mate to Come to You (4:8)

Solomon's complete attention has been on his wife. There is only one first person reference in the first 7 verses (v. 6). Biblical sex will always be focused on one's mate before it looks to one's self. Then, and only then, is it the right time to take lovemaking to the next level. Solomon has called Shulamite his “love” or “darling.” Now he calls her his “bride” (NKJV, “spouse”). He calls her to leave where she is and come to him. Lebanon was near her home. The other mountain ranges mentioned are in the general area as well. The lion's den and the mountains of the leopards perhaps represent fears Shulamite may have. He does not charge her, he calls to her. He does not demand, he invites. He invites her to leave her home and her fears behind. He will care for her. He will love her. She is his love, his darling. She is his bride, his wife. Five times in verses 8–12 Solomon will refer to her as his bride. Sensual anticipation must be clothed with words of safety and security if it expects a warm reception. Solomon's invitation is beautifully delivered.

Indicate How Your Mate Captivates You (4:9-11)

It would seem that Shulamite responded in a positive manner to Solomon's invitation. Solomon's words in verses 9–11 would seem to affirm this. He begins by saying Shulamite has “ravished” or “stolen” his heart. Her love was so overpowering that he could not resist her. Her love had captured his heart and he could not escape. Just a glance of her eye or seeing one link in her necklace sent

him swooning out of control. She was enchanting, and he was powerless to resist her spell. Solomon then says something that is very strange to our ears. He again calls Shulamite his “bride,” but he also refers to her as his “sister,” something he will do no less than 5 times (cf. 4:9-10, 12; 5:1-2). Again we must understand the use of the word in its historical context. In the Ancient Near East “sister” was a term of affection and friendship. In addition to its literal meaning, it could indicate a close and intimate relationship that a husband and wife enjoyed. True lovers will also be true friends, even best friends. This is something Solomon understood quite well.

Repetition is often a wonderful teacher and in verse 10 Solomon again calls Shulamite his sister, his bride. He tells her that her love is delightful, and that it is better than wine. Wine is intoxicating and sweet, but it could not compare to her. He himself was drunk with love for her. Charles Spurgeon, the great British preacher of the 19th century, said her love was better than wine because it could be enjoyed without question, would never turn sour, would never produce ill effects, and produced a sacred exhilaration.⁸

Her smell also got Solomon’s attention. The fragrance or scent of this woman was superior to “all spices” (v. 10, NKJV). For a man, sight is closely followed by smell in the sensual realm. Shulamite knew this and so she prepared herself in a way that would draw her man to her (not that he probably needed any encouragement!).

Verse 11 moves us into even greater sensual and romantic territory. Her lips, he says, drip sweetness like the honeycomb, and honey and milk are under her tongue. The idea that a particular kind of kissing began in France is put to rest by

this verse! Deep, sweet, and passionate kissing is at least as old as this Song. Canaan was a land of milk and honey (cf. Exod 3:8). It was a land of joy, blessing, and satisfaction that would provide for the nation of Israel. It was a land of sweetness to a people who had been enslaved for over 400 years. Solomon found immeasurable joy in the deep, long, and intimate kisses of his bride.

Besides smelling good herself, she also applied attractive fragrances to her clothes. Lebanon flourished with cedar trees (cf. 1 Kgs 5:6; Ps 29:5; 92:12; 104:16; Isa 2:13; 14:8; Hos 14:5-6). The fresh aroma of those mountain cedars filled the nostrils of Solomon as he undressed his bride and made preparation for lovemaking. Virtually all the senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound have played a role in this sensual symphony in this Christian bedroom. The lovemaking that we enjoy in our marriages will only be enhanced as we follow this example.

Let It Be a Place of Specific Availability (4:12-15)

One of the greatest gifts a person can give his or her mate in marriage is exclusive and exciting sex. To enter marriage as a virgin is indeed a precious treasure to bestow on our spouse. Unfortunately, it is also a far too rare treasure. The Bible is crystal clear on the issue: any sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sin in the eyes of God. This includes premarital sex, extra-marital sex, or unnatural sex (homosexuality, bestiality, etc.). “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18) is God’s command, and a wise person will always listen to God. Shulamite had listened to the voice of her God concerning her sexuality. Note the beautiful imagery Solomon uses to describe his

bride on their wedding night.

God Is Pleased When We Keep Ourselves Pure (4:12)

Shulamite is described as (a) a garden locked up, (b) a spring enclosed (NKJV, “shut up”) and (c) a sealed fountain. Each pictures her purity and virginity. She had sealed up herself for her husband. She had saved a precious treasure that belongs only to him. I have never known of a woman, or man for that matter, who ever regretted saving themselves sexually for marriage. I have, however, known many who regretted not doing so. In particular I think of a letter written to Josh McDowell several years ago that probably expresses the regrets of many scarred by the sexual revolution:

Dear Mr. McDowell,

Having premarital sex was the most horrifying experience of my life. It wasn't at all the emotionally satisfying experience the world deceived me into believing. I felt as if my insides were being exposed and my heart left unattended. I know God has forgiven me of this haunting sin, but I also know I can never have my virginity back. I dread the day that I have to tell the man I truly love and wish to marry that he is not the only one—though I wish he were. I have stained my life—a stain that will never come out.

Monica

God is pleased and we are protected when we keep ourselves pure.

God Is Pleased When We Give Each Other Pleasure (4:13-15)

Solomon extends the imagery of the garden in verses 13–14, describing his bride as an exotic array of fruits, flowers, plants, trees, and spices. She was unique and valuable, rare and desirable. She was

a fantasy garden, a lover's dream. To find pomegranates, henna flowers, spikenard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, aloes, and all chief spices in one garden was unimaginable and yet, in his bride, he found them all. She would satisfy his sense of taste, sight, and smell. He could never be bored. He would enjoy the multiple pleasures discovered in this garden. Each time would be an exciting time, a new and different adventure.

Solomon now thinks of “his wife” as “A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon” (NKJV). To other men she was locked up, enclosed, and sealed. For her husband she is wide open, accessible, and available. Indeed, her love is overflowing and streaming down for him. What she once held back from others she now gives to her husband with unreserved passion and abandonment. Why? Because she had saved herself for this day and this man. She was no casualty of sexual promiscuity. She did not have the wounds of a young 21 year old who said with pain and sadness in her voice, “I have had 17 partners—too many, I think.”⁹ Purity and pleasure go hand in hand when it comes to sex. Be specific in your availability. It is worth the wait.

Let It Be a Place of Sexual Affection (4:16–5:1)

What do happy couples say about sex? *Reader's Digest* ran an article that answers that question with the caption, “With a dash of surprise, a pinch of romance and a word or two at the right moment, love can be kept simmering even in the longest marriage.” Adapting their list slightly and adding a couple of other suggestions, I think at least 12 things can be said.

What Happy Couples “Say” About Sex

1. They make sex a priority; it is important to them.
2. They make time for sex.
3. They stay emotionally intimate.
4. They know how to touch and what works.
5. They keep romance alive by meeting each other’s needs.
6. They keep their sexual anticipation alive.
7. They know how to play and foreplay (both in and out of bed).
8. They know how to talk to each other.
9. They remain lovers and friends.
10. They maintain a sense of humor and know how to laugh.
11. They want to please the other.
12. They cherish each other as a sacred and precious gift of God.¹⁰

Shulamite and Solomon certainly intended to fall in the “happy couple” category when it came to their sex lives. For the first time in our passage Shulamite speaks, and her words would have gotten her husband’s attention immediately.

Encourage Your Mate to Make Love with You (4:16)

In beautiful and enticing poetry Shulamite invites Solomon to make love to her. She who has said twice not to awaken love until the right time (cf. 2:7; 3:5) now says, “the time is right. I am yours. Come and take me.” North winds are strong and south winds more gentle. In lovemaking Shulamite wants and needs both. She has been listening to every word spoken by her husband, and she too picks up on the imagery of the garden. She is that garden and her beloved is welcome to come in and enjoy. She invites him, she guides him, she tells him what she is feeling and what she wants. *Great sex is the result of good communication.* All the parts fit when a man and woman come together, but sex is more than mere mechanical union. It is a personal and

spiritual union nurtured by careful communication. We cannot be certain of all that is meant by the imagery of coming to the garden and tasting the choice fruits. It is not difficult to imagine all sorts of good things!

Encourage Your Mate after Making Love (5:1)

The marriage has been consummated. The couple has made love. They were not disappointed. They had planned for it, saved themselves for it, studied up on it, and talked about it. All of their time and effort had been rewarded.

It is beautiful to note that Shulamite invites Solomon to come to “his” garden in 4:16. Now in 5:1 he calls her “my” garden. In fact, 9 times in this one verse he uses the word “my.” Note it is used in this manner after, not before, their lovemaking. In tender words he calls Shulamite his garden, his sister, and his bride. Coming in to her was indeed a garden delight. She smelled good, tasted good, and felt good; and he told her so. Their lovemaking had been good. It had been wonderful. She invited him to come to her and he did. He no doubt hoped for many more times together just like this, and so he romantically and tenderly expressed the pleasure she had given him.

In a study by Susan Sprecher, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at Illinois State University, sexual satisfaction was greater in relationships in which partners initiated equally or in which women sometimes initiated sex. Why then, do so many couples fall in the pattern of the man being the only one to suggest having sex? Sprecher and other sex researchers speculate that society’s norms suggest that men should pursue and women should be pursued. The result may be that women tend to be less comfortable initiating sex. Or

it may be that women tend to use subtle, indirect cues—which may not be consciously noticed—to initiate sexual activity, while men use more direct verbal requests and other measures. Women who initiate sex frequently are often very sexually satisfied to begin with, Sprecher believes, and this enables them to be more at ease about expressing their sexual desires. A woman who initiates sex also often stimulates her partner’s sex drive and his desire for her, which helps drive this entire pattern. Several studies have found that many men like it when their female partner initiates sex. Matt Sess, 39, of New York City, says that he has always been the primary initiator in his relationship with Laura, his wife of eight years. “But when she initiates sex, it’s definitely a turn-on,” he says. “It doesn’t happen a lot, but when it does, it’s a pleasant surprise.”¹¹

No doubt Solomon found Shulamite to be something of a “turn on,” and he let her know it. He was a wise man indeed.

Let It Be a Place of Spiritual Approval (4:16–5:1)

The last part of verse 1 has created quite a bit of interpretive discussion. Exactly who is it who encourages this man and woman in their lovemaking? Some believe that it is the friends of the couple. However, the intimate knowledge of this speaker of all that has transpired in their bedroom would rule this out. Others believe it to be the voice of the wind again, personified from 4:16. Clearly it cannot be either Solomon or Shulamite for they are the ones being addressed.

Though his name never appears directly in the entire Song of Solomon, I believe the one who speaks here is God. He is the unseen but present guest in their bedroom. He has observed all that has happened this night, and He tells us what He thinks about it all.

Sex in Marriage Enjoys Divine Approval

“Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill” (or “deeply”). The love they share and the gift of sex was given by God.

He lifts His voice and gives hearty approval to the entire night. He vigorously endorses and affirms the love of this couple. He takes pleasure in what has taken place. He is glad they have drunk deeply of the fountain of love. Two of His own have experienced love in all the beauty and fervor and purity that He intended for them. In fact, He urges them on to more.... That is his attitude toward the giving of their love to each other. And by the way, that’s also His attitude toward couples today.¹²

Yes, God is there and he is pleased with what he sees. “He sees the passion. He hears the sighs of delight. He watches the lovers as they caress one another in the most intimate places. He is witness to the fleshly, earthly sights, sounds, and smells.... God desires for us to rejoice in our sensuousness, to give in to it.”¹³

Spouses in Marriage Enjoy Divine Affection

Two terms of tender affection flow from the mouth of God as he looks upon the couple enjoying his good gift of sex as he intended. First, he calls them “friends.” Second, he calls them “beloved ones” (NKJV). God loves them and he loves what he sees. How foreign this is to so many persons’ thinking when they try to imagine what the Creator thinks about sex. He loves us and he likes it when we are engaged in the passion of lovemaking within the covenant of marriage. It can truly be revolutionary and transforming when we accurately and correctly get the

Creator's perspective. We can become like a woman named Beth who said,

Loving my husband can become an act of worship to God. As my husband and I lie together, satiated in the afterglow of sexual ecstasy, the most natural thing in the world is for me to offer thanksgiving to my God for the beauty, the glory of our sexual joy. I don't even think about what I am doing; my heart just turns to the Lord and offers praise. Truly His gift of sex is a wondrous thing.¹⁴

Conclusion

God intended marriage to be enjoyed not endured. He designed it to be a blessing not a curse. God's plan is that we would find unending joy and pleasure with our mate both in and out of the bedroom. A healthy relationship in one area is usually essential to a healthy relationship in the other. With a marriage and a bedroom dedicated to the Lordship of Jesus, we can discover an earthly love that is so much more than we would have ever imagined. This is one of the good gifts our great Creator gives to His children. May we find in it all that He planned from the very beginning.

ENDNOTES

¹Evangelicals have sometimes been hesitant in talking about issues of sex and intimacy in the Church. To a certain extent this is understandable, but at the same time it should be noted that the Bible addresses such topics in appropriate and tasteful language. The Song of Solomon in particular addresses these issues and we can greatly benefit from the godly counsel it contains.

²Peggy Fletcher Stack, "What They Didn't Teach You About Sex in Sunday School," *Religious News Service*, 13 October 2000.

³Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance*

(Nashville: Nelson, 1998) 89.

⁴Carin Rubenstein, "The Modern Art of Courtly Love," *Psychology Today*, July 1983, 49.

⁵John G. Snaith, *Song of Solomon* (New Century Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / London: Marshall Pickering, 1993) 61.

⁶Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993) 405.

⁷*U.S. News & World Report*, 4 August 1997, 62.

⁸Cited in Paige Patterson, *Song of Solomon* (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 73.

⁹Patricia Dalton, "Daughters of the Revolution," *Washington Post*, 21 May 2000.

¹⁰"What Happy Couples say About Sex," *Reader's Digest*, February 1989, 13–16.

¹¹Julie Walsh, "Who's Lighting the Fire?" (*WebMD Medical News*, 16 March 2000).

¹²S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976) 25.

¹³Linda Dillow & Lorraine Pintus, *Intimate Issues* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 1999) 17.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 19.