

Wedding and Wedding Night: Song of Solomon 3:6 – 5:1
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This morning we come to the central portion of the Song of Solomon. In 3:6-11 there is a description of some of the things that happened leading up to their wedding ceremony. And then 4:1 – 5:1 captures some of the excitement of their first night together as a married couple.

Isn't the Word of God amazing! I never cease to be amazed by the things I learn in the Bible. It's inexhaustible. There is always more to learn, more to see, more to enjoy. The Bible is an exciting Book! If you think otherwise, if you think the Bible is dull and boring, then I don't know what you've been reading. Yeah, maybe you got hung up on one of the genealogies or something, but if you keep reading, and if you read with some attentiveness and interest, you're going to come across things that absolutely blow your mind. When we're bored with the Bible, I think God would say to us, "It's not My Word that's dull and boring, it's you—you're dull and boring if you don't think there's anything here to spend time on, if you think reality shows on television are more enjoyable than this!

I hope you're able to see, in this brief sermon series on Song of Solomon, that the Bible is not a dull and boring book. I also hope you can see how good God is to speak to us about all the various aspects of our lives that affect us so deeply. God has not left us to ourselves to figure out marriage or sex or family. God designed all of these things, He created them for a purpose, and we praise Him this morning that He is not silent. He speaks to us. He gives us clear teaching that is for our good and for His glory. We are fools to ignore what the Creator of the universe says about His design for such things.

As sinners, we want to chart a different course. We think we can have more fun without God. We think we know better. That's ridiculous. God knows best. I hope you believe me when I say that God is a better source of guidance than the messages that are being pumped through the media. Are you going to follow what God says, or are you going to follow what the magazines and the sit-coms and the celebrities say? The world's philosophy of sex may have a lot of appeal. It may seem very enticing. But there's no lasting joy there.

My prayer for us is that God will open the eyes of our hearts to see Him for who He is, to see that He is more precious and more pleasing than anything this world has to offer. God is the treasure. God is the prize. God is the only One who can fill that void in our hearts. Deep down, He is the One we desire and

desperately need. Without Him, there will be an emptiness that nothing else can take away.

So let's listen to what God's Word says about sex and marriage. May His Word guide us in our relationships, and also point us to the Gospel. As we look at what the Bible says, we learn that marriage, and even the sexual relationship within marriage, is intended by God to be a pointer to Christ's relationship to the church. This is plain in Ephesians 5. In 1 Corinthians 6 the connection is also made between the sexual union intended for marriage and the spiritual union of the believer to Christ.

This is serious stuff. When we talk about the institution of marriage, when we talk about sexuality, these are not plastic concepts that we can mold and shape however we want. People are confused about gender, about sexuality, about marriage, about love, and the only thing they will let guide them is their own sinful passion. I pray that this morning you will see the folly of that destructive path, that you will repent of your sin, that you will bow the knee to King Jesus, and that you will learn the joy of following Him. Who do we think we are to say that gender and sexuality and marriage are up for debate? Who are we to try to redefine these things? God have mercy on us!

What's so compelling about the Song of Solomon is that it gives a positive portrayal of God's design for marital intimacy. We have plenty of warnings in the Bible against sexual immorality. But here we have the ideal. Here we have sex as God intends it—wonderful, passionate, satisfying intimacy between a husband and wife.

In the world's eyes, if you get married, you say good-bye to sexual excitement. And, sadly, that is the case in many marriages. But it need not be the case. It should not be the case. A husband and wife who are both seeking the Lord should be growing in holiness, growing less selfish, growing in love for one another, and they should therefore be more and more attentive to one another's needs and desires—in all areas of their lives, including in the bedroom.

So let's try to kill the myth that says if you want exciting sex it has to be premarital sex or extramarital sex. The truth is that mature, godly, Christian married couples will be more sexually satisfied than anyone on the planet.

On that note, let's look at what Song of Solomon says about the wedding and the wedding night.

The Wedding (3:6-11)

These verses are describing the wedding procession as it approaches the city. We don't have a description of the wedding

ceremony, but we can note a couple of things from the snapshot we do have. First of all, this is a public ordeal. It's a celebration, and there are plenty of folks to witness it. The litter of Solomon would have been a kind of carriage with poles extending from the front and back, and several men carrying it. They would have burned incense, which appeared like columns of smoke. There were many people involved. There was some extravagance, which can be seen in how this carriage was constructed. There was a good deal of thought and planning that went into this wedding procession. And it was a happy time. The last line refers to "the day of the gladness of his heart."

A wedding should be public, and it should be a time of celebrating. Marriage is a life-long covenant, and so the wedding should reflect that. Not that it needs to be expensive or showy, but it should be celebratory in a way that makes a statement about the significance of what's happening.

Let your friends and family know how significant this is in your lives. Marriage is a covenant before God. It should be special. It should be Gospel-centered. It's an opportunity to honor one another and honor God. It's an opportunity to proclaim God's design for marriage, that it's a pointer to Christ and the church.

Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Leaving and cleaving is a huge transition in the life of the man and the woman who are getting married. A new family is being formed. The husband and wife are starting a new life together. So it's only appropriate that a significant public ceremony mark the start of this new life.

Jesus likes weddings. Do you remember Jesus' first miracle in the Gospel of John? He was at a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and He turned water into wine to help with the celebration. So if you're planning a wedding right now, or if someday in the future you're planning a wedding, think about how to make it about Jesus, about the Gospel, about God's design for marriage. Think about how to include friends and family and make it a sacred ceremony that will help to imprint on your minds and hearts the vows that you make to one another.

In the weddings I've officiated, I have opened the ceremony with these traditional words: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this couple in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted by God, and signifying to us the mystical union which exists between Christ and His Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with His presence in Cana of Galilee. It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God." I

think that sets the appropriate mood for what's going on. This is about God. It's about the Gospel.

It's not just a human contract that can be broken, and often with a prenuptial agreement that assumes it will be broken. That kind of attitude dishonors God, dishonors the institution of marriage, and dishonors one another. But instead it's a lifelong covenant made before God and before witnesses, as a man and woman pledge themselves to one another, until death parts them. That's the only thing that legitimately ends a marriage—death. I preached on this last year when we were in Mark 10, and I would encourage you to look at those sermons on divorce and remarriage. Jesus takes marriage very seriously. As we heard in our Scripture reading this morning, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24 and then adds, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

So a wedding should be both celebratory and solemn. It should be a party and also the most serious of promises. So put some thought into this event. Make it distinctively Christian. Don't fall into the world's way of thinking about wedding ceremonies. It's not about the glitz and glamour of material things. It's not about putting on a show. It's not about entertaining people. Also, don't fall into the trap of spending so much time planning the wedding event that you are underprepared for marriage. Take the time to do pre-marriage counseling. Read books together on marriage. Study what the Bible says about marriage, about manhood and womanhood, about husbands and wives, about family. Seek counsel from godly, mature couples. Pray together for your marriage. Have long conversations, not just about where the reception is going to be and what color the napkins are going to be, but talk about the kinds of things I was mentioning last time when we were looking at 2:15 and the potential foxes that could erode a relationship. Talk about theology, family, time, money, future plans . . .

One other thing to note here in chapter 3 is how this groom is communicating his intent to take care of his bride—to provide for her and protect her and honor her. Did you notice the entourage of men who accompany this wedding procession? “Sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, all of them wearing swords and expert in war . . .”

At our wedding I had six groomsmen. Stacy had 8 bridesmaids, because she has more friends than I do. We thought we had a lot of folks standing up in our wedding. But I was trying to imagine if I had, not 6, but 60 groomsmen, and if they all had machine guns over their shoulders. That's the kind of image being portrayed in Song of Solomon 3. It's an image of power, protection, provision, honor. He is saying to his bride, and for all around to see, he's saying to her, I cherish you, I want to honor

you and guard you from harm, I want to set up a hedge of protection around you.

That's something to think about, men. If you're married, how are you communicating this to your wife? In what ways are you showing her that you cherish her and want to provide for her and protect her? Are you sensitive to her needs? Are you sensitive to the things that are wearing her down, the things that may be putting her in some kind of danger (spiritual danger, emotional danger, physical danger)? What sacrifices can you make to serve her and keep her from harm? Are you willing to be the sacrificial leader that God calls us to be so that you can lead, provide for, and protect your wife?

The Wedding Night (4:1 – 5:1)

Moving on to chapter 4 the song then turns to the central segment of the entire book, which is the wedding night. I'll say again that this is a difficult book to interpret. It's not a chronological narrative of events. Rather, it's a song that gives us snapshots of this couples' relationship. But it seems that what we have in this passage is first a description of the wedding procession at the end of chapter 3 and then a very tasteful and discreet description of the consummation of the marriage in 4:1 – 5:1. Scholars have noted that 4:16 – 5:1 marks the exact center of the book. There are 111 lines before it, and 111 lines after it. This is the climactic point of the book.

I just continue to marvel that God put an entire book in the Bible devoted to romance and sex. We should also observe here that the focus of their sexual relationship is not procreation. Procreation *is* certainly part of the calling we have as married couples. "Be fruitful and multiply," God says in Genesis 1:28. But that's not the only purpose for which God created marriage and sex. Sexual intimacy in marriage is also intended simply for pleasure. I think that's the message that comes through loud and clear in Song of Solomon. This couple is enjoying one another, complimenting one another, pleasuring one another, all to the glory of God! Dr. Ed Wheat and his wife have a book entitled *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage*. It's a good resource for married couples, or for engaged couples to begin reading in the weeks just before their wedding. The point is well made in their title. This is intended for pleasure! This is a wonderful gift from God for married couples.

Now, there's something else that sex does, and that is bond the couple together in a very profound way. As Genesis 2:24 says "they shall become one flesh." Becoming one flesh is the consummation of the marriage. That is the sexual union of the husband and wife. The two become one. Isn't that remarkable!

Sex is unlike any other way that two individuals interact. There are lots of different experiences that may bond individuals together in different ways. People you are related to, people you work with, people you go to school with, people you are part of the same church with—in different ways, you feel some sense of connection with these other individuals.

But to have sex with someone is a uniting act that is on a whole different level. And that's what makes sex such a positive and edifying aspect of marriage, and it's also what makes sex so destructive and painful outside of marriage. Listen to what Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, says about sex as a uniting act:

“The modern sexual revolution finds the idea of abstinence from sex till marriage to be so unrealistic as to be ludicrous. In fact, many people believe it is psychologically unhealthy and harmful. . . .

The Bible does not counsel sexual abstinence before marriage because it has such a low view of sex but because it has such a lofty one. The Biblical view implies that sex outside of marriage is not just morally wrong but also personally harmful. If sex is designed to be part of making a covenant and experiencing that covenant's renewal, then we should think of sex as an emotional ‘commitment apparatus.’

If sex is a method that God invented to do ‘whole life entrustment’ and self-giving, it should not surprise us that sex makes us feel deeply connected to the other person, even when used wrongly. Unless you deliberately disable it, or through practice you numb the original impulse, sex makes you feel personally interwoven and joined to another human being, as you are literally physically joined. In the midst of sexual passion, you naturally want to say extravagant things such as ‘I'll *always* love you.’ Even if you are not legally married, you may find yourself very quickly feeling marriage-like ties, feeling that the other person has obligations to you. But that other person has no legal, social, or moral responsibility even to call you back in the morning. This incongruity leads to jealousy and hurt feelings and obsessiveness if two people are having sex but are not married. It makes breaking up vastly harder than it should be. It leads many people to stay trapped in relationships that are not good because of a feeling of having (somehow) connected themselves.

Therefore, if you have sex outside marriage, you will have to steel yourself against sex's power to soften your heart toward another person and make you more

trusting. The problem is that, eventually, sex will lose its covenant-making power for you, even if you one day do get married. Ironically, then, sex outside of marriage eventually works backwards, making you *less* able to commit and trust another person.” (pg. 226; *The Meaning of Marriage*)

God was very intentional in everything He created. He knew what He was doing. And as with all of the good things He made, they can be perverted and used in very sinister ways. And thus, something so precious, so beautiful, so strengthening to marriage, is being cheapened by the message of free love. I’m pleading with you, young people, and all single people, don’t believe that lie. Don’t believe that you can engage in casual sex, premarital sex, recreational sex, and not have any consequences. Don’t settle for the world’s very low view of sex. See it as God intended it, as God designed it—to be a powerful and pleasurable means of uniting a man and woman together for life.

My hope is that the romantic and passionate verses here that portray a married couple consummating their marriage—I hope this will encourage married couples, and I also hope it will give single men and women something to hold out for. Don’t settle for something less than this. Don’t rebel against God’s plan. Instead, trust God, obey Him, and seek the joys of following His will.

OK, now some things for the married couples. Notice here that the husband is speaking. He refers to “his bride” 5 times in these verses. He also calls her “my love.” He calls her “my sister” as well, but don’t stumble over that. Sister was simply another affectionate term. The point is, he is lavishing her with praises and compliments. He is expressing very creatively and thoroughly his delight in her.

Some of you guys might get embarrassed just reading this, much less trying to say something like this to your own wife. Not that you should use this stuff verbatim. That could get you into some serious trouble, if you start telling your wife that her hair looks like goats and her neck is like a tower. Most of these figures of speech won’t work for us. But you can think of your own figures of speech. You can come up with thoughtful ways to compliment your wife’s beauty. He talks about her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her lips and mouth, her cheeks, her neck, her breasts. He is extravagant in his praises of her. He is specific. And he has all good things to say.

Men, don’t ever criticize your wife’s looks. Don’t ever say a negative word about her body. You should be complimenting her, praising her beauty, telling her how attracted you are to her, telling her how much you desire her.

This chapter gives us an insight into the typical way that men and women work. Men are typically very visual. He wants to see her, and he obviously really likes what he sees. Women, on the other hand, are typically very verbal. She wants to talk with him. She wants to hear how he feels. She is very moved by his compliments.

And so the admonition to the husbands is, talk to your wife! Don't be the jerk who ignores his wife, ridicules his wife, never says anything nice or does anything nice for his wife, doesn't make time for his wife, but then expects her to be exciting in the bedroom. You have to connect with her emotionally. Like C. J. Mahaney writes in his book *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know*, he says, "In order for romance to deepen, you must touch the heart and mind of your wife before you touch her body." (pg. 28)

You see, as a husband, your focus may be on the physical intimacy. That's the goal you have in mind. But your wife is probably much more interested in the romance. She wants the emotional intimacy.

Husbands, I would encourage you to study this chapter of holy Scripture and seek to emulate it in your own marriage. How can you touch the heart and mind of your wife? How can you connect with her on a deep emotional level? It will take time. It will take thought. It will take creativity. But it will all be worth it, to nurture that bond with your wife and to enjoy the benefits of that close relationship. Look at how she responds to him at the end of verse 16. She says, "Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits." She wants him! She is eager for them to consummate their marriage together. She speaks of her body as *his* garden. She belongs to him, in other words. And she is inviting him to enjoy her.

The admonition to husbands is, be verbally encouraging and expressive. Talk to your wife like this. Let your wife *hear* you praising her. The admonition to wives, then, is to let your husbands *see*. Be visually attractive and enticing. We talk about modesty, but that doesn't mean you have to be all covered up when you're around your husband. Let your husband enjoy your body. Encourage him to do so. Of course, if he's insensitive or demanding or demeaning, or if he's totally neglecting your needs and desires, tell him that. But don't be the wife who is frigid in the bedroom, uninterested in having any fun, who sees sex as a chore, as a duty, who is always looking for excuses not to have sex.

As an extreme example of that attitude, let me read you the instructions that a pastor's wife in the late 1800s gave to young brides.

INSTRUCTION AND ADVICE FOR THE YOUNG BRIDE on the Conduct and Procedure of the Intimate and Personal Relationships of the Marriage State for the Greater Sanctity of This Blessed Sacrament and the Glory of God (by Ruth Smythers, wife of the Reverend L. D. Smythers, 1894)

“To the sensitive young woman who has had the benefits of proper upbringing, the wedding day is ironically, both the happiest and most terrifying day of her life. On the positive side, there is the wedding itself, in which the bride is the central attraction in a beautiful and inspiring ceremony, symbolizing her triumph in securing a male to provide for all her needs for the rest of her life. On the negative side, there is the wedding night, during which the bride must ‘pay the piper’ so to speak, by facing for the first time the terrible experience of sex.

At this point, dear reader, let me concede one shocking truth. Some young women actually anticipate the wedding night ordeal with curiosity and pleasure! Beware such an attitude! A selfish and sensual husband can easily take advantage of such a bride. One cardinal rule of marriage should never be forgotten: give little, give seldom, and above all, give grudgingly. Otherwise what could have been a proper marriage could become an orgy of sexual lust.

On the other hand, the bride’s terror need not be extreme. While sex is at best revolting and at worst rather painful, it has to be endured, and has been by women since the beginning of time, and is compensated for by the monogamous home and by the children produced through it.

It is useless, in most cases, for the bride to prevail upon the groom to forego the sexual initiation. While the ideal husband would be one who would approach his bride only at her request, and only for the purpose of begetting offspring, such nobility and unselfishness cannot be expected from the average man.

Most men, if not denied, would demand sex almost every day. The wise bride will permit a maximum of two brief sexual experiences weekly during the first months of marriage. As time goes by she should make every effort to reduce this frequency. Feigned illness, sleepiness and headaches are among the wife’s best friends in this matter. Arguments, nagging, scolding and bickering also prove very effective if used in the late evening about one hour

before the husband would normally commence with his seduction.

Clever wives are on the alert for new and better methods of denying and discouraging the amorous overtures of the husband. A good wife should expect to have reduced sexual contacts to once a week by the end of the first year of marriage and to once a month by the end of the fifth year of marriage. By their tenth anniversary many wives have managed to complete their child bearing and have achieved the ultimate goal of terminating all sexual contacts with the husband. By this time, she can depend upon his love for the children and social pressures to hold the husband in the home.” (cited in *Time Magazine*, “Behavior: Sex Talk Through the Ages,” Monday, October 19th, 2004)

I’m certainly glad that’s not the attitude of the pastor’s wife in this church! And that’s the not the advice you’ll get, ladies, if you talk to Stacy. But there are certainly Christian women who share Ruth Smythers disdain for sexual intimacy. That’s sad. It’s sad for the husband, of course. It’s also sad for the wife, for the enjoyment she is missing. It’s also sad for the family, because the marriage is held together primarily by duty rather than delight. Not to mention it’s also dishonoring to God and disobedient to Scripture.

1 Corinthians 7 says, “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps . . .” *if she has a headache or is feeling tired.*

No, that’s not what it says. Listen to what it says. I didn’t hear this one on Mrs. Smythers list. It says, “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, ESV)

There are a lot of different problems that couples face that hinder the sexual relationship in marriage, but prayer is not typically one of them. Prayer is not typically a hindrance to a marriage. I’ve never talked to the guy who says, “My wife won’t be intimate with me because she’s always fasting and praying.” Now, guys, you should be sensitive to your wife, and if there are times when she is not feeling well or she’s exhausted, you need to understand that. But I also want to challenge wives to examine your own heart to see if there’s been a consistent pattern of refusal in the bedroom. And, if so, why? Maybe there are some unresolved conflicts in your marriage that you need to talk about. Maybe you have a skewed view of sex. Maybe you were abused

or hurt in some way. Maybe the baggage of past sexual experiences have left scars that still keep you from enjoying intimacy with your husband. Maybe it's simple selfishness, or a means of controlling your husband. You use sex as a means of power and manipulation. Whatever is going on, figure it out. Talk about it. Get help.

Husbands and wives both need to realize that physical intimacy in marriage is something God cares about very much. We cannot act like God cares about how consistently we're having a quiet time, but what happens in the bedroom is none of His business. That's simply not true. God speaks to our sexuality. He gives us good commands, and He gives us the carrot and the stick to motivate us toward obedience. He gives us promises of blessing (the carrot) and also warnings (the stick). The verses I read from 1 Corinthians 7 serve as a warning. Don't deprive one another, so that Satan may not tempt you. Regular intimacy is important in a marriage, because if you go extended times without that intimacy, you become susceptible to all different kinds of attacks from the enemy. And then Song of Solomon gives us the carrot. This is the promise of blessing. This is a picture of the pleasure God intends for us. Here we have a couple who is reveling in the enjoyment of romance and lovemaking. It's a beautiful thing. You don't want to miss out on this good gift that God has given His children.

I'll close with the statement in 5:1. They have now consummated their marriage. He is speaking in the past tense now. And then another voice speaks. Who could this be? Who could possibly be interrupting the privacy of the wedding night? Some commentators have concluded that these must be the words of God, Himself, voicing His divine approval of the couple's lovemaking. Whether that was the intent of the human author or not, we certainly have here in God's inspired Word an encouragement, indeed, a command to passionately pursue the pleasure of physical intimacy in marriage. "Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!" That's quite a statement!

If you can't picture God saying that, then you need to modify your understanding of who God is. And you also need to modify your understanding of sexuality. God designed marriage. God designed sex, for our good and for His glory. He ordained that husbands and wives be a portrait of Christ and the church. And He ordained that the one flesh union of marriage be a picture of our spiritual union with Christ. So this is way beyond us, way beyond the scope of doing what feels good at the moment (which is the world's way of thinking about sex and marriage). Friends, we're talking about divine spiritual realities here. We're talking about the Almighty God creating us in a particular way so that the most intimate of human relationships might testify to the Gospel.

Jesus came into the world as a bridegroom pursuing His bride. And He sacrificed Himself to redeem her, to save her, and He united Himself to her eternally. Human marriage lasts a lifetime. The marriage of Christ and the church lasts forever! And that's why all of us—married and single—ought to be very interested in what the Bible says about marriage, because this is not just an instructional seminar on how to have a happier love life. This is about the Gospel, about how we understand the Gospel and how we testify to the Gospel in our lives and in our relationships.

Brothers and sisters, let's pray for marriages. Let's seek to build up marriages. And let's put our hope in that great marriage celebration that will begin when the Bridegroom comes back for His bride.