

Intro:

I'm excited to start this new series because we get to talk a reality that is a part of all of our lives, whether we like it or not: sex. If you've had it or having it, you know that sex is a wonderful thing. But at the same time, sex can be a confusing thing, or worse yet something that brings up guilt, pain, anger, even emotional deadness- especially when we toss it in with the other tag words of this series- romance, and God. Maybe it's because we're single and trying to figure out what sex means as we're trying to follow God. Maybe it's because of checkered past with various partners or addiction. Maybe it's because of a current marriage or relationship, or lack thereof. I used to be a sex addict before I met Jesus and my wife, and continued to deal with sex addiction after meeting Jesus and my wife- confusion and guilt were the norm. Wherever we may be, this is huge part of our lives, affecting us in the deepest and broadest of ways.

Of course, the crazy thing is that, even though this is so big, we seldom talk about it. Oh, we do on one hand- I mean, it's all over the place in the magazines at the checkout stand, on talk shows, in our conversations when we're out with our friends. But talk about it in a way that's actually helpful, in a way where I can talk about my questions and ideas and hangups as it relates to these three components, without feeling judged or pressured, and actually grow and become more whole and healthy in this area? That's another story... but that's exactly what why we're tackling this series as 2011 gets started. My hope is that, in these next seven weeks, we can talk frankly about sex, romance, and God in such away where can experience all the good things God intended for sex and romance.

For guidance, we're going to looking at the Bible book of Song of Songs- which literally means the best song compared to all other songs- a book in the Bible that's all about sex, romance, and God.

Now, before we jump in, a couple of things about this book to note:

- First, It is a collection of poems written about 1000 years before Jesus. There's a debate as to if there is an overarching narrative plot to this book, and if so to what extent. I think there is to some extent, but it's hard to decipher. We'll mention some of those issues as we dig in these next few weeks.
- Second, Song of songs is really about human love and sex. This might seem obvious to us, but it needs to be said because many Christians and Jews, past and present, have interpreted as an allegory about God and his love for us. They've done those for various reasons, but the evidence is clear, both inside the text and in the culture of the time, that this is about human love and sex. We can talk more about that later if you're interested.
- However, that being said, it should be noted that, third, throughout the Bible God uses human love to help people understand His love. The picture of marriage and sex is used by God explicitly to help people understand how they should relate to Him- see extra study notes. So, throughout this series, we will be definitely thinking about the things we discover in this light as well.
- Finally, it should be noted that the larger context of what God shows us in the Bible is that sex is meant to be experienced in marriage- again, look at your extra study notes for more. I realize not all of us believe this or practice this- I am glad you're here if this is you. But it should be noted that this is how the Bible presents it, and we will assume this framework. I encourage you to read a book called Real Sex (online at our website) that explores the reasons for this; it's a good read.

Alright, we ready? Let's read our text for today. We'll read through the text, we'll talk about two key points from the text, and we'll have a time of discussion as we usually do.

Read Text:

Two things I want to note here today.

Sex is a great thing.

We see right at the get go, don't we? The woman exudes her desire for this guy-she talks about his kisses, his love, his smell, his character (note- she is not some shallow girl looking for a fling with anyone, or some girl stuck in puppy love-she's looking at the guy's character! Sex is a good thing only if it's with a good guy or girl. Not a perfect guy or girl- they don't exist. But a good one, according to what God says is good). Take me to bed, she says!

And the guy doesn't hide his desire either. He starts describing his feelings in v.9, and I love it- it's awesome, but you definitely need to have some background understanding! Because he says, in v.9, you're a horse!!! Now, guys- this probably not a good pickup line in our day and age- please don't use this on anyone this week. But back then, this was quite a complement. Because here's the deal: Pharaoh's army was one of the strongest around, his chariots were some of the best. They were of course driven by stallions- male horses. One of the things that opposing forces did to try and bring them down was to release a female horse- a mare! The stallions would see the mare, go crazy, and the chariots would be totally disbanded! What's the guy trying to say is that: You drive me and all the other men around here CRAZY. Sex, with the good person, is a good thing to be pursued.

Now, I know some of us have no problems with this point- you're like duh, of course! Let's go for it. And some of us are like yes, we believe this- but we're single trying to do things according to the Bible- we're trying not to think about it at the moment! I'm going to address you all who in this boat in just a minute.

But I want to first address those of us who really have hard time believing that sex is good. We may have a hard time with it because we've had some really bad experiences with sex- abuse, molestation, rape, or addiction. Or perhaps we've grown up in families or cultures or churches where sex was taboo and seen as dirty and bad, and any inkling of sexuality in adolescence was quickly and severely stopped and perhaps even punished. And so you're dating now, or perhaps you're married- and you can't stand it when he or she touches you that way and wants something that just turns you cold. Let me just encourage you: you are not alone, and you are not beyond the realm of love and hope. There are many who have gone through the dark valleys that you feel like you're in, and you can too. It won't be easy, but there is hope. The biggest thing you can perhaps do this series is to open up to someone and begin the journey forward. We have had many start the journey here at Ethnos, and I'm so glad. Start by sharing with pastor Chuck and I, and we can start getting you connected to the right people.

We want you to be like this woman, here in v.5-7. She mentions here how she has had a past where, due to the way her brothers forced her to work, she has not been able to properly develop romantically. Yet in the next verse, she is confident, taking initiative in her romantic life- why do I need to hide, why can't I come and be forthright with you?

While your story may be different from this woman's, we want you to be able to embrace romance and sex again with confidence.

So sex is a great thing. **But there's something better than sex.** Something more gratifying, more satisfy, more able to fulfill us in the ways we are really looking for. And this is where I want to direct us all to, especially those of us who were like "duh" sex is great, and those of us who are single and waiting for sex.

In v. 2 the woman exclaims "your love is better than wine."

But you know, the Bible also makes this claim: "your love is better than life," in reference to God. (Ps. 63:3) In other words, God is better than sex. This radical claim is presented all throughout the Bible. Most intriguing is how the Bible describes heaven as being a place of ultimate glory and joy and satisfaction and goodness, but there is no marriage (and hence no sex) with others there! Rather, there is a "marriage"- here's where the Bible uses human metaphor to communicate the God-human relationship- with God. Now, some of you may be thinking- I'm not going to heaven then! But you miss the point- there is something better than sex, according to the Bible- something more wonderful: God! **God is better than sex, and the thing we are ultimately longing for.** This is not to say that sex is bad or that sex is not important. Sex is great! But there's something more we long for.

I think many of us know this to varying degrees, although we wouldn't say it outright. We have sex, whether it be with our spouse or someone else, or we logon and get a porn fix, or we do whatever we do satisfy that sex drive- and somehow still, at times, we feel like something is missing, we feel like we need something more. Because yes, while we definitely got a chance to release our hormonal buildup, what we were wanting at a deeper level was something else, some sort of deeper fulfillment, some sort of deeper acceptance, some sort of- dare we use the word- love.

In the June 2001 of *Philadelphia*, Sandy Bentley, one of Hugh Hefner's girlfriends, said this about Hugh Hefner's sex life: Hugh "had trouble finding satisfaction through intercourse; instead, he liked the girls to pleasure each other while he masturbated and watched gay porn." Here is a man who led the way for the sexual revolution and was and is the ultimate icon of free, uninhibited sex. And yet he was unable to find sex gratifying. Why? There's more, there's something better that we are really looking for. And it is God.

Now, the question is how do we tap into this truth? I mean, nice idea, you may be saying, but for me sex is so much more real than God, so much more powerful. And it feels so good- and rightly so!

I want us to do a couple of things this week to tap into this reality. A little experiment if you will.

First, for those of us who aren't really into God or spirituality or Jesus, or perhaps you once were but haven't been in some time, I want you to commit to giving Him some space in your life. The Bible talks about how we were all created to experience a full, holistic, satisfying life, one where we feel fully alive to this world, other people, and God. But we made choices to push God out of our lives, and this has resulted in an a broken life, with consequences in both this and the next life, including things like shame, and broken relationships, and guilt, and emptiness, and- ultimately- judgment from God. But God became a man, Jesus, to take these consequences for us, to take them on so that we would not have to. We are invited to the fullness of life, if we let God come and be the God of our lives. Some of you need to give God space again in your life; I want to ask to you to commit to that today.

Second, and this is for all of us regardless of age, religion, marital status. I want us to try something this week, a little experiment. This week, when you are feeling sexual and its perhaps building up, I want you to begin to ask God how He is better than sex. Perhaps you'll find yourself in this spot when you're thinking about that special someone in a good way, or you'll find yourself here when as you're trying not to go to a certain place or site, or you're married and your spouse is not wanting it tonight and so you have some sexual buildup, or... you fill in the blank. This is what I want us to try, at that very moment.

1. Bring these two statements in the Bible in mind:

Your love is better than life...

Psalm 63:3

In your presence there is fullness of joy;

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore...

Psalm 16:11

2. Talk with God about them, honestly asking Him questions like: God how is this true? God, can you show me? You may also declare certain things during this time, or make requests: God, I want you to be my source of ultimate joy and satisfaction and pleasure.

Here's what I'm hoping for. I can't guarantee anything because I can't put God in a box, but my sense is that God might actually meet you and I as we try this. I mean, we're taking some claims he's made about himself, and we're bringing it to Him and saying God, show us how this is true! Our lives may not change right then and there, but something could happen- however big or small- that begins to get us on the path of seeing the something better that we can all have our fill of- God. There's a lot to cover in these seven weeks, this is just a start. But I believe he can meet us in ways we can't even imagine.

Questions?

Close/Communion:

Take the steps toward sexual wholeness again.

Give God space.

Begin to talk with him about how He is better.

Extra Study Notes:

Please visit www.sexatchurch.com for a list of resources for various sexual issues.

God's love with us using marriage/sex as a metaphor: Ezekiel 16, 23; Jeremiah 2:1; Isaiah 54; Ephesians 5:21-33; Rev. 19:6-8.

Marriage as the context of sex: Genesis 2:23-25, Deut. 2:28-29, Proverbs 5-7, I Corinthians 5-7, Hebrews 13:4.

v.1- "which is Solomon's" can technically be interpreted as a) dedicated to Solomon, b) written by Solomon, c) about Solomon, or d) in the tradition of Solomon's wisdom. Those who tend to think Solomon did not write it cited 1 Kings 11:1, talking about Solomon's very loose love life. For a view of Solomonic authorship, visit:

<http://bible.org/article/introduction-song-songs>.