

SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

GOD IN MY EVERYTHING. KEN SHIGEMATSU. 2013 OCTOBER 20.



SONG OF SONGS 4:16-5:1; 6:3

I did some of my graduate work in San Francisco, and from time to time, I enjoyed driving north of the city to the Napa Valley. As many of you know, the Napa Valley is famous for its beauty and its vineyards, and people travel from literally around the world to go to the Napa Valley to taste its wines.

Wine has had a long history in the world. We don't know exactly how and when it was discovered, but we do know that in some of the earliest pages of Scripture, wine is referenced. God says, in passages like Psalm 104, that wine is a gift that can gladden our heart.

[Addressing somebody in the congregation:] You looking for a seat? Are you? Yes or no? No, you're not. Okay, I was just wondering, 'cause there are some seats at the front. All right. I don't mean to embarrass you. Everyone else, don't stare, all right? Don't stare. You're very welcome, by the way, all right? You can stand if you want, you can sit if you want – whichever and wherever you feel most comfortable.

Where was I? What was I saying?

Okay, so, people come to Napa Valley. God says that wine is a gift that gladdens our heart and can bring joy. But God also calls us to exercise wisdom with wine because wine has the capacity to dull our powers of perception; it can make us more prone to sin; it can even destroy us if we abuse it. Drinking wine can be a delightful and sensuous experience. *[Somebody in the congregation shouts, "Yeah!"]* Okay, we've got one witness in the house! God sometimes calls us to abstain, in certain cases, as with the Nazirites, but we have a witness in the house over here.

[Addressing somebody in the congregation:] Come on in. Hey, welcome! It's good to be here. We're just getting started, so welcome. All right.

So, it shouldn't surprise us that God compares wine to sexual love and vice versa in the Scriptures. As is the case with wine, God celebrates the gift of sexual love that he's given to us, but he also calls us to channel our sexual energy with wisdom so that it ends up being life-giving for us and for others rather than damaging us and others. Contrary to popular stereotype, God has this very positive, celebratory view of sexual love. In fact, there is a whole book in the Bible devoted to celebrating sexual love in marriage called the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. Probably the most famous verse is Song of Songs 6:3, where the woman says of her lover, "[I am my beloved's and \[he\] is mine ... his banner over me is love](#)" (Song of Solomon 6:3; 2:4 NASB).

Tonight, as we continue our series on what it means to experience God in every part of our life, we're going to look at how we experience God in our sexuality.

Now, as you may know if you are on The City— I know we have kids attending all of our services, so I posted an FYI through The City that I was going to be talking tonight from the Song of Solomon on sex, and I got an email before I sent this message out from a parent who attends one of our services, saying, "I know you guys have an amazing kids program here at Tenth, but our daughter, who's ten years old and is quite mature and precocious, actually likes to be in the service. She generally finds your sermons interesting, but she has this one critique: She's wondering why you talk about sex so much!" The parent added, "She's offering this challenge to you: Try to preach one sermon where you don't use the word 'sex' once." Well, this won't be that sermon! I'm sorry, but this

won't be it. Maybe in the future!

I see some kids out, and I'm very glad that you're here, but anticipating this, I did pick a passage from the Song of Songs – it is a little less graphic! So here we go. All right.

“She” – in the text, the woman speaking; she says:

Awake, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow on my garden,
that its fragrance may spread everywhere.
Let my beloved come into his garden
and taste its choice fruits.

(Song of Songs 4:16[‡])

The man speaks:

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
I have drunk my wine and my milk.

(Song of Songs 5:1a)

And then the “Friends” say:

Eat, friends, and drink;
drink your fill of love.

(Song of Songs 5:1b)

Let's pray together.

Living God,

We pray that you would breathe on us tonight.

We pray that, by your Spirit, you would illuminate our minds and our hearts so that we might understand your good purpose for sex and our sexuality.

We pray that we might channel our sexual energies in ways that bring life to us and others and that honour you.

It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Let me comment on some of the poetry in this passage briefly.

The woman says, “Awake, north wind, and come, south wind!” She's using the image of wind here in a way that suggests that wind has this life-giving power and that sexual energy has this potent life-creating capacity.

In the Scriptures, we know that wind is often a symbol of God's Spirit; we know that breath or wind is often a way

[‡] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, NIV®.

to speak metaphorically of the Holy Spirit.

In Genesis, in the poem of creation, we see that God scoops his hand into the dust, into the dirt, and as he is about to create the first human being, he blows into the dirt and into the nostrils of the person who will become the first living human being, Adam. The word “Adam” literally means “of the earth” or “of the dirt.” We’ve got an Adam – at least one Adam – here tonight, helping us out.

In Ezekiel 37, there is this passage where the prophet envisions this valley filled with human bones. The wind of God’s Spirit blows on those bones. They begin to rattle in a hum, they come together, flesh forms on those bones, and they become living beings.

The woman in the Song is suggesting that the wind of sexual energy is life-creating. The woman speaks of the man coming into her garden, and the garden is a poetic way for her to describe her body. He speaks, in Songs 5, of having drunk wine, which is a way to indicate that he is anticipating the intoxicating pleasure of sex.

We’re in a series on what it looks like to experience God in every part of our lives. We’ve introduced the image of the trellis, which is the support structure that helps to uphold us as a grapevine – again, symbolically speaking. We’ve talked about rhythms and practices that help support our friendship with God. Tonight, we’re going to be looking at the subject of sexuality.

A few weeks ago, someone was looking at this diagram of the trellis, and they were pointing out to me (they were people from this service): “Why is the word ‘sexuality’ written so small when it is such a big part of our lives?” Good point! I did not do the fonts. Someone else pointed out that it is interesting that sex is right in the middle of the trellis – this was not by conscious design, but it is true that sexuality is at the core of our identity and existence.

Tonight, in our message, I want us to explore God’s purpose for sex and how we can channel our sexual or erotic energy in ways that give us and others life and ways that honour our Maker. We are also going to look, later, at practices that can help us flourish in our sexuality, which include fasting, friendships and fruit-bearing.

Let’s look at what God says to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 regarding sex and its nature. God says to us through Paul:

Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

(1 Corinthians 6:16, 18-20)

Paul is writing about how, in sex, God designed it such that two people become one. He makes an allusion to Genesis 2:24, where the writer there says, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (NASB).

The reason Paul, in our text, says that a person who has sex with a prostitute “sins against their own body” is because he understands that God designed sex as this profoundly unifying act that connects not only people’s bodies but also their souls as well. Paul understood that God designed sex such that when you take off your clothes with someone and unite with them sexually, there is a force to that act that makes you want to take off the clothes of your heart, so to speak, and unite with that person socially, spiritually and in every way.

I know that there are people who say, “Well, I don’t view sex that way. Sometimes when I have sex, I’m just giving my body; I’m not giving my heart.” But that’s not the way God designed sex. He designed sex such that we would unite in *every* way through that act.

Even if in your mind you’re saying, “It’s just my body,” your body is actually saying, “I’m bonding with (whoever it is).” In fact, there are chemicals that are released in our body when we’re sexually involved with someone, especially if we reach orgasm, and the release of those chemicals will bond us to that person. Dopamine and oxytocin are being released. So even if in our mind we’re saying, “I’m not really bonding with you,” the body is saying, “I am bonding with you.”

I was with a respected psychologist in a small group discussion and I remember how she looked at the women in our group, which consisted of men and women, and she said, “If you see a guy walking toward you and you know that guy is abusive and he extends his arms out to hug you, don’t hug the person.” She said, “Don’t hug the jerk. Because, even if you’re just being polite, when you hug that guy, you’re going to be releasing oxytocin and you’re going to be bonding with him, like it or not.”

There’s a movie where Tom Cruise was dating a character for a while. He’s had a fling with a character played by Cameron Diaz, and now he’s trying to drop her, trying to get her out of his life. She responds by saying, “Don’t you know that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise, whether you do or not?” I’m pretty sure her character in the movie was not reading 1 Corinthians 6, but at an intuitive level, she understood that when you sleep together, you bond and your body does make a kind of promise.

Erwin Raphael McManus, a pastor whom I know, writes, “There is no such thing as free sex. It always comes at a cost. With it, either you give your heart, or you give your soul. ... [Y]ou can have sex without giving love, but you can’t have sex without giving a part of yourself.”

When God calls us to reserve sex for a lifelong covenant relationship – that is, when God calls us to reserve sex for marriage – he’s not doing it to diminish our experience but so that we honour our design and flourish in every way. When you have sex with someone whom you’re not committed to, there are times when you can feel more vulnerable than you intended or more attached – things get complicated, and some of you know the feeling of regret or even shame.

I know that there are some people who say, “Well, it hasn’t been a big deal for me” – and that may be your subjective feeling. If that’s the case, it may be that you have perhaps unconsciously misused God’s sexual design in your life that it is now no longer operating the way it’s supposed to operate; you may have compromised your ability to really bond with a lifelong partner in a long-term, satisfying, fulfilling relationship.

It seems as though every time I speak on sex – and today has been no exception – someone will approach me, either in person or by email, and they’ll say, “I wish I had heard this message years ago. I have done things that I regret; things about which I feel guilt and shame.” Or they’ll say or they’ll write, “Someone else made a choice to violate me, and I feel pain – a lot of pain – around that.”

I’m so glad that, earlier tonight, Yuhei and Jeannie and the Worship Team led us in that song, “Beautiful Things.” Indeed, God makes beautiful things out of us; he is making us new. He’s making us new! The wonderful thing about knowing Christ is that God can make us new, and new again, and new again, and new again. I so love that about God. I’m so grateful for that in my own life, and I’m so hopeful for that in your life as well.

This past week, I was listening to Lamentations on my phone. Lamentations is a book in the Bible, and there’s a wonderful verse there that says:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV)

Another great passage, which I love, comes from Ezekiel 36, where God says, “I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land” (Ezekiel 36:24); “I’m gonna be bringing you home!” God goes on:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

(Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Great hope in those words.

In the chapter on sexuality in *God in My Everything*, I wrote about how Yosemite National Park, years ago, experienced a devastating forest fire. I wrote about how the fire left that part of the forest blackened and levelled to soot. But then the rains came, and the sun came, and after some time, vegetation began to slowly re-emerge: Flowers began to grow; trees began to sprout out up; the beauty returned to the garden, the freshness to the forest. I wrote about how, in a manner of speaking, Yosemite “revirginized.”

So it can be for us. If we have felt sullied and dirtied – compromised – in some way sexually, we can invite the rains of God and the water of God to cleanse us. We can invite his sun to shine on us, and the grass and the flowers and the trees can re-emerge in the garden of our life, and we can be made beautiful again. We can become a pure forest. In a manner of speaking, we can revirginize.

With God there is always hope because, as we were singing, “You [God] make beautiful things out of us.” He makes beautiful things out of us.

I know that for some people, the teaching that God reserves sexual intercourse for marriage seems so antiquated, so outdated – even crazy. But here’s the thing: It’s not just Christianity but all the major world religions that teach that sex is intended for marriage. There are some rare exceptions (as in a certain minority stream of Tantric Buddhism), but by and large, all the world religions affirm that sex is for marriage. Even in cultures that we consider very primitive and savage, those cultures have taboos around sexual behaviour because they have thought about it for a long time and they know, in their gut, that sexual energy is powerful and needs to be respected. Our culture is one of the few ever in human history with no taboos or very few taboos around sexual behaviour, and we are paying the price for it, in the form of all kinds of brokenness and heartbreak, as a result.

How do we move toward a healthy sexuality?

One way – one practice – that I want to commend as a possibility is fasting, if that’s physically possible, if you’re not diabetic or hypoglycemic. I fast typically 24 hours once a week. If you’ve never fasted and you start fasting regularly, you’re going to feel hungry and you’re going to probably be cranky. But as you get used to it, you’ll find that your internal digestive organs are at rest while you’re fasting, and you’re going to be more alert intellectually, more perceptive spiritually. It will feel like a gift.

Here's the other thing: Fasting is a way to develop your spiritual muscles because learning to say no is a spiritual muscle that gets stronger with use. With God, you say no in order to say yes to something else. As you fast and say no to food, you're going to find yourself being able to say no in other areas of your life so that you can say yes to something greater.

Obviously, you don't need to just fast in relation to food; fasting in relationship to food is not the only way to fast. You could fast in relationship to other things – for example, media, which may be more apropos to this message.

I was in the home of someone in our community not long ago, and for some reason, we got on the subject of Sabbath. His family has a couple of kids – one in elementary school, one in junior high – and they were saying, “On our Sabbath, all of us take our iPhones, our iPods, our electronic gadgets, and we all put them on the mantelpiece over the fireplace in our home. We call it a ‘Mantel of Shalom [Peace].’” They just allow totally no media, no screens, no newspapers – nothing – for 24 hours on their Sabbath. And the couple was telling me that they (just the couple) went on vacation recently; the husband's parents were looking after the kids in their home, and on the Sabbath, their two boys voluntarily took their iPods and iPads and put them on the Mantel of Peace – no parents around; they just voluntarily did it.

This can be really relevant to us. Do you know that, compared to the 1970s, when the average person was exposed to 350 media messages a day, today the average person is exposed to 5,000 media messages a day? And a number of them, as you know, have sexual overtones. So fasting from media may be a way for us to better pursue purity.

Most of you tonight are single, and you may think that if a person is married, there's no sexual temptation, right? Fact is, a lot of you are going to be married one day, and you're going to know that the temptation continues even when you're married. You're saying no to sex outside your marriage, you're saying no to pornography, and so on, and so this principle of fasting as cultivating spiritual strength is relevant to us all.

Second— So, there's fasting, and then there's also friendships.

We are in this emphasis called Life Together. If you were away last week – because of Thanksgiving, a lot of you were probably gone – you can listen to last week's message on “Spiritual Friendships,” if you want, on our website. Just go to the Sermon section and you can stream or download the messages in MP3.

Friendships, whether you're single or married, can foster a healthier sexuality.

There's this guy whom I know. He's given me permission to share this story. I'm going to call him “Ray” – that's not his real name, but he's okay with my sharing his story. He's single, and he was telling me that one day he was really feeling sexually restless and wanted to go to downtown Vancouver, to a bar, meet a woman and have a one-night-stand. And he was saying, “I really wanted to do this, but as a Christian, I thought, ‘That's probably not such a good idea.’” He said, “Instead, I went to a dinner party, had some really good food and wine, great conversation. It was just an amazing, really fulfilling time. And as I look back, because of that time with my friends, the sexual temptation just dissipated.”

There's something about a healthy connection with friends that can cause temptation to, if not totally go away, at least decrease. Where there is lack, sometimes we pursue excess. So friendship, whether we're single or married, can be a healthy way to foster a life-giving sexuality.

My friend David Bentall, whom I cited last week, has written a book on friendship in which he shares the following story of a friend of his. David is a guy from here in Vancouver who has occasionally worshipped with us at this service with his family.

David's friend recounts: "I'd been resolutely faithful to my wife and had no intention of being unfaithful," but on one occasion he found himself sitting beside a very attractive and alluring woman on a flight on a business trip. They hit it off.

When we landed, she offered to chauffeur me to my hotel, and by the time we reached it, we'd arranged to meet that evening. ...

We went for dinner and found a club with great dance music. It felt intoxicating and all too soon, midnight had come and gone. We hailed a taxi, and ... she squeezed as close as possible next to me....

Did she want to meet again? She just nodded. She moved to kiss me on the lips, but I reluctantly turned so that my cheek received the memorable caress.

When he got back to the hotel, he says:

My body was on fire for her and my mind led the charge. When I finally fell asleep, clothes still on, it was 4 A.M.

The alarm shrilled at 7:30 A.M. to begin what was supposed to be a day of business for my largest client. But I had something more important to do.

Grabbing my electronic pocket diary, I plugged in the name of one of my buddies from the men's Bible study group with whom I'd met weekly over the past three years. ... I needed that friendship now. I was calling just one of them, but really it didn't matter which one. I knew they would all be there for me – to act as the powerful shield that I could have used the night before. I needed one of my buddies to point me back in the right direction.

I couldn't reach one, nor another . . . nor another. No luck, but ... by the time I'd got the third phone number, I didn't even need to dial it.

"Just the act of acknowledging the authority my friends had over me and my marriage," David's friend explains, brought him back to a place of clarity. Praise God!

He later said the verse in 1 Corinthians 10:13 never came more alive to him, where God says, "[No temptation has seized you except what is common to \[human beings\]. And ... when you are tempted, \[God\] will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it](#)" (NIV84).

God often provides that way out of temptation through a trusted friend who also wants to honour Christ.

Now, I know that most of you are single, but I want you to listen to what my good friend Joelle Hassler writes. She is married, and a lot of you are going to be married one day if you're not already. Joelle was just telling me this in the context of a small group, and I asked her if I could share it; she actually originally wrote this to her friends on a small blog. She was thinking a lot about her own marriage and how she tended to be critical of her husband and how her friends were also being quite critical of their husbands, and so this is what my friend Joelle wrote:

I wanted to share some perspective on something I've been thinking a lot about lately – marriage. ...

Over the past few months I've been thinking and praying a lot about marriages. My marriage and the marriages of my friends. ... [M]any of us have been married more than 5 years and what we're finding out is that our husbands are not perfect. Pause for effect . . . That's right, people, Adam (my husband) is not perfect. There, I said it. You say it too: (insert your spouse's name here) is not perfect. Now that it's out in the open we can start getting over it. Let's be real, people.

Remember, Joelle is a woman, and she's writing to her friends. She continues:

We did not marry Jesus. We married broken people who are constantly changing – so the man I said my vows to is not the man I am married to now. He is my man plus 8.5 years of change. When I talk to women my age somehow this basic truth seems lost on them.... They are frustrated, annoyed and all out angry with their spouse because he is not the man they once knew, and he is not the man they dreamed he would become.... Nope – these guys we are married to are regular guys. They are not always exactly like prince charming, or a super hero, ... and they don't always do what those guys in the chick flicks do.

[A distinct laughter is heard from the congregation.]

All right, someone is appreciating. Good. Thank you! I'm going to take you with me if I ever do stand-up comedy, all right? You and my mom, okay?

Nope, they are regular guys – most of whom are trying to provide for their families, make their wives happy, be good fathers and get a little time off to be with their friends or take up a hobby.... And ladies, we are ON THEIR CASE. We don't like how they folded the clothes, or what they fed the kids for dinner. They came home 10 minutes too late, they didn't buy us what we wanted for Christmas, and they didn't make enough money this year to give us the new bathroom.... And ladies, we give them that look that says, "Are you just plain dumb?"....

WHAT HAPPENED?

Do you remember the look you gave them when you said your vows? ... When was the last time you made him feel like he was at the TOP of your list – of people you want to hang out with, people you admire, people you want to know better??? If it's been a while, then let's discuss just what happened.

You changed. He changed.

You had kids. You didn't have kids.

He gained 10 lbs. You gained 10 lbs.

[Somebody in the congregation applauds.]

I've got a friend in the house, my homeboy!

He stopped asking you on dates. You stopped asking him on dates.

You fought, but didn't make up. (He didn't apologize when he should have, of course!)

And the list goes on and on.

... So many things come into play when it comes to our marriages and Satan wants nothing more than to TAKE US DOWN. So the problems we face are real and if we don't address them, we'll find ourselves in a marriage headed toward divorce.

Ladies, can I ask you a few questions that might help us all stay on track when it comes to our marriages?

Then she asks the questions. If you want them, I'll be glad to email them to you.

Joelle was saying, "My marriage isn't perfect," but she's the kind of friend who lifts my marriage and the marriages of our friends up. When we get married or if we are married, we need friends that will lift our marriages up and encourage us to be faithful.

So, fasting and friendships can foster healthy sexuality. And fruit-bearing as well. Fruit-bearing.

Last Sunday, I talked about this National Geographic study that was tracking people at age one hundred and beyond who were flourishing. One of the zones in the world they zeroed in on was Okinawa, Japan. I want you to meet this guy: His name is Seikichi Uehara. I'm not sure if he's a relation to the Boston Red Sox closer or not, but why don't you show his picture? Guess how old he is. I think he's like a hundred and two. Every day, this 102-year-old man is teaching people karate – a rare form of karate. He has a purpose for life. He has what the Japanese describe as *ikigai*: He has a reason for living. He's bearing fruit in the lives of others by teaching them karate.

Richard Rohr is a single, celibate priest who will never, in all likelihood, become a biological father. He's a Franciscan; he's taken a vow of celibacy. Yet his *ikigai* – his reason for living – is to impart words that will generate life in others. If you've read Richard Rohr, you know that his life-giving words bless people; they lift people up. He is fruit-bearing.

I think of Oprah. Now, I know that Oprah is a polarizing figure, and a lot of us here probably disagree with many of her views and perhaps her lifestyle. But if you think about Oprah's life— Here's a person who was born as a black child in the United States – it's a very hard place to be; she was born into poverty. As a child, she was sexually abused. As a teenager, she became pregnant out of wedlock; her baby died. As far as I know, she never married. Again, we may disagree with her views, but Oprah has done something with her life. She's used her gifts to try to help other people. She has *ikigai*. She has been fruit-bearing.

And so through fasting and through friendships and through fruit-bearing we can cultivate a healthier sexuality.

The Bible, as I suggested earlier, and God have this high view of sexual love and marriage. God also has this high view of singleness – arguably an even higher view, according to the apostle Paul, who was once married and then became single and said, as a single person, “It seems to me that I have an opportunity for a more singular-hearted devotion to God and the work of his kingdom.”

How can God affirm both marriage *and* singleness? Here's how: Neither marriage nor singleness are ultimate, but they point ahead to a greater union that those of us who know Christ will one day enjoy in the world to come. On that day, we will be so spiritually united with Christ in a way that I can't explain, in a way that's hard to imagine, but we will be so united with Christ in a way that's so filling and so complete and so satisfying that we will feel no more need for marriage in the way we understand marriage here on earth.

John Chrysostom, an early church father, said that marriage – great marriage – is an image of heaven. The apostle Paul writes, “[For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.](#)’ This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32). It's a mystery, the union we will one day enjoy.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and said, “This is my body given for you.” He took wine and said, “This is my blood being poured out for you, for the forgiveness of your sins.” And then he said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I enjoy it anew with you in my coming kingdom.” The next day Jesus hung on a Roman cross, absorbing our sins and shame in his body so that we might have a new beginning with God. He died. On the third day, he rose again. As he met his friends and followers, he breathed his Spirit on them. He broke bread with them – and he drank the wine in his new kingdom with them.

Biblical scholars point out that when, in the upper room, the night before he went to the cross, there in Jerusalem, gathered with his friends, Jesus said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I enjoy it anew in my kingdom,” he was not only referring to the three days after he died when he rose again and met with his original

disciples; he was also looking ahead to another day, to a far more future kingdom, when you and I would one day sit down with Jesus Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and drink wine with him there. And on that day, the words “I am my beloved’s and [he] is mine ... his banner over me is love” will take on a whole new meaning, and we will understand it really for the first time.

Let’s pray together.

It’s my deep hope and prayer that, if you’re in the room tonight, you will one day be there, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, in the world to come, in the kingdom of heaven. If that’s your desire to be there, would you prepare for that day, even now, by asking God to cleanse you and purify you?

If you’re struggling with pornography, would you say no to that? I know it’s not so simple and it’s not easy, but with the help of God, would you confess that – to a trusted friend, a pastor, a counsellor – and put that behind you as a way of cleansing yourself with God’s help?

If you’re here tonight and you’re engaged in an affair – you’re married and you’re in an emotional affair; you’re single and you’re connecting with a married person, emotionally or physically – would you resolve *now* to break that off, confess that to someone you trust who loves God and who has wisdom, and put that behind you?

If you’re here and you’re sleeping with someone whom you’re not married to, would you say, in your heart, before God, tonight, “I will be pure and I will save myself sexually until marriage”?

And if that’s in your heart, I want you to hear God’s words. Again, through the prophet Ezekiel, God says, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.” Pray that that would be so. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my [ways].”

Would you pray that God would breathe on you and make you pure and give you the power to live the beautiful life he has always intended for you?

[silence]

And we pray these things in the name of the Father, who loves us; in the name of the Son, who always offers us grace; and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who always walks with us.

Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why is sex never truly casual?
- What are a few ways we can channel our sexual energy in ways that honour our design?

RECOMMENDED READING

Shigematsu, Ken. “Sex and Spirituality.” *God in My Everything*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.

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