

detox revisited

purging spiritual toxins

Lesson Six

SEXUALITY

Selected Scriptures

Listen! My lover is knocking:

“Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one.”

My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening;

My heart began to pound for him.

I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone.

O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my lover, what will you tell him?

Tell him I am faint with love.

My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand.

His head is purest gold;

His hair is wavy and black as a raven.

His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels.

His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume.

His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh.

His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite.

His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires.

His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold.

His mouth is sweetness itself;

He is altogether lovely. (Selections from Song of Solomon 5:1–16 NIV)

Romance novel? Or sacred Scripture? It’s no wonder that most preachers never touch Song of Solomon.

In our culture, we are surrounded by an easy acceptance of sexual immorality. More than half of Americans believe that living together before marriage is morally acceptable. Nearly half condone having a sexual relationship with someone other than their spouse. And about one-third of the population approves of the use of pornography.

We spend so much time dealing with the sins associated with sex that we never pay attention to the gift God created it to be.

Note: This week's lesson will be accompanied by a panel discussion. Experts in several related fields will be present to discuss these issues. Therefore, the questions in this lesson are more difficult than those in the other lessons. We want to provide you with some things to think about that you may not have considered in the past or that may be outside your comfort zone. Please answer as best you can, and then discuss questions with your group as needed.

SEX AND THE CHURCH

1. Why do you think it's difficult for women—especially Christian women—to talk about sexuality?
2. Where did your concept of sexuality come from? Your parents? Peers? Gym class? The media? The church? What messages did each of these teach you?
3. When you read the introductory passage from Song of Solomon, what emotions or response did it evoke?
4. Read Song of Solomon 4:9–5:1; 7:11–14. What do you learn about female sexuality from this passage? Does it line up with or refute your understanding of sexuality and morality? Explain.

Look up the words *sexuality* and *sex* in the dictionary and in a Bible dictionary. (You can find one at www.biblegateway.com.) Can we be sexual beings without ever engaging in sexual acts? Why or why not?

Bodily connection is the basis not only of marriage but of all our human relationships. We begin our lives and enter the community in the body of another, sharing in flesh and blood. Our earliest experiences as a human fetus are in and of the body of another . . . blurring lines between the community and ourselves. As we image God in our sexuality, we experience our profound human capacity to enter into a variety of life-giving and life-receiving relationships. (Barger 133–34)

What thoughts or concepts do you see in this excerpt that you have never considered before? Does anything jump out at you? What challenges your current understanding of this topic? Please explain.

DISTORTED VIEWS OF SEXUALITY

8. After the Fall (Genesis 3), men and women's expression of sexuality became out of sync with God's vision of marital sex. Come up with at least three specific examples you have observed or experienced.

9. In the New Testament, the Greek word *porneia* is used more than fifty times. You might recognize it as the root of our English word *pornography*. But the term is used much more broadly in Scripture. Each of the following verses contains the Greek term *porneia*. Choose the concept that you think corresponds to the Greek term and write it next to the Scripture reference.

Matthew 5:32

1 Corinthians 5:1–2

Hebrews 13:4

10. In 1 Corinthians 6:16–20, Paul teaches:

There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never "become one." There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for "becoming one" with another. Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body. (MSG)

Consider God's design for sexual intimacy. Circle the words in the passage that indicate why sexual sin violates the relationships and community within which God designed us to exist. Briefly summarize this passage in your own words.

Have you (or someone you care about) ever experienced the consequences that come as a result of "the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy"? How did you feel? What did you think? Did it change your relationships with others or with God? Please take a few moments to explain.

REDEFINING SEX GOD'S WAY

The Corinthian church existed during a time where divorce was rampant, Romans numbered their years by the names of their husbands or wives, homosexuality was a mark of the upper classes, and a low view of women was the norm. An old Roman adage opens a window onto that world: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we

have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs” (http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=791).

11. As Gentiles came to faith in Jesus Christ, they naturally brought their existing views of women, marriage, and sex into the church. Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth to help correct their distorted views. He addressed those who were living in sexual immorality and those who were advocating celibacy. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1–9:

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (NIV)

Underline each specific instruction Paul gave. How do they counter the Corinthians’ distorted views of women, sex, and marriage?

12. How would you counsel a friend who shares with you that she no longer has sexual relations with her husband?

During biblical times, girls were usually married as soon as they experienced puberty. Today the average American woman marries between the ages of 28–31. Some women choose to remain single.

13. Define *chastity* in your own words.

14. Check out the following excerpt addressing the issue of chastity. (It is long—don't give up; it's worth every word!)

Chastity is the practice of the principle that the body will not be turned over to serve what is not worthy of it. Chastity is when our bodily acts parallel our emotional and spiritual commitments, moving us towards living with integrity in our bodies and with others. Because there is no self-giving without a forgoing of self-containment, chastity is a significant precursor to the act of marriage. But chastity is not merely sexual self-denial. At the heart of chastity is self-containment unto God. First and always we reserve our deepest selves in devotion to our Creator. This provides us an eternal anchor, allowing us a place from which to give ourselves to others. . . .

Going further, chastity as an idea that includes sexually active married people is practically nonexistent. Exclusion of the married from any remaining definition of chastity denies that a faithfully married woman shares with celibate single woman a certain bodily integrity and therefore can be considered chaste. . . .

But even in marriage, a relationship that is defined by self-giving, each partner must reserve their deepest self for God. The self-giving embodied marriage can be truncated, and marital sex can become unchaste. The introduction of pornography to enhance sexual fantasies, the expectation that the other partner must be available for any variety of sex, and the denial of the emotional undercurrents of the relationship can render marital sex unchaste. By refusing to use the partner as a mere sex object and by establishing mutuality in regard to the marriage bed to reflect a shared life, married people can embody sacrificial self-giving for the wellbeing of the community.

Under the concept of chastity, marriage and singleness are not polarities of experience but are profoundly intertwined. By moving both married and single toward bodily integrity, chastity maintains the dignity of the single person and the one-flesh unity of marriage. Singles in their chastity remind the married of the need for the individual to be self-contained to God, while the married in their fidelity remind the single of the need to be self-giving for the needs of the larger community. (Barger, 149–150)

Summarize the author's description of chastity in your own words. How is it different from your original definition?

