

“The Power of Sex” // Proverbs 5:5–19; 30:18–20 // From the Beginning, Message #1

This **weekend we are beginning a series** called *From the Beginning*, where we are going to take a look at God’s designs for relationships and sexuality.

Now, as your campus pastor said, **we always encourage you, if you have kids, to take advantage of our awesome stuff going on at Summit Kids. But over the next few weeks, I really want to encourage you to consider that. I’m not going to be intentionally risqué, but we might dip into some PG-13 content from time to time... and I don’t want to force these conversations on you if you are not ready for them... So if you think your kids might not be ready for this yet, now might be the time to stage an emergency bathroom run and drop them off in Summit kids. (If they are 13 or over they should be fine... in fact, they might have to end up explaining a few things to you.)** But, you’ve been warned.

One of the legendary stories here at the Summit Church seems to be about a word-gaffe I committed while preaching about sex... People refer to it as, **“the sex in the fireplace story.”** I was explaining how God had designed sexuality with incredible powers to bless, but with that great power came great ability to destroy, too... and **I compared it to fire. Do you want fire in your house?** I didn’t realize what I said... everyone laughed. I figured it out, and it would have been fine... at that point it became a legend. So the staff has asked that for this series I not say anything that just pops in my mind... that I stick closely to the script.

That illustration sets up the **main idea** of our next few weeks: **Sexuality is a special creation of God**, among the loftiest of the natural gifts God has given the human race... and **as such it has incredible powers for life**—if engaged correctly; and destruction—if misused or abused.

Human sexuality is so much more than just the propagation of the species; it is, to use the words of a friend of mine, a mingling of human souls.

- **One sociologist pointed out** that human beings are the only ones who procreate face to face... because for us, it’s not just biology; there is something happening soul to soul.

And when we go back to the very beginning, we find that God designed human sexuality to teach us about **himself**, and **what his love** is like.

- *In sex, one person loses themselves in another and becomes one with them.* The two, though separate and distinct, become mysteriously one, which is like the Trinity, says Paul. Different persons; one essence.
- (That’s **my new pick-up line** for Veronica, btw: *Would you like to study the Trinity together tonight?*)

We’re going to look at this mystery over the next few weeks.

- Next week we’re going to talk about singleness and dating, and we’re going to see **that Jesus had a very different view of singleness than what the world teaches!**
- The week after that we are going to **ask some questions about same-sex attraction...** because I feel like things have been entirely too peaceful around here... *Is it really wrong? If so, why? It’s not harming anyone, is it?*
- After that we’ll talk about **why** divorce can be so devastating, **how to avoid it**, and **how to deal** with it when you’ve gone through it.
 - *A few weeks ago I said, “If love is a dream, then marriage often functions like the alarm clock...”*
 - *Doesn’t have to be that way.*

- And then, finally, to wrap up our series, we're going to look at friendship, a **gift that our culture**, with all its obsession with sex, has obscured.

Let me tell you why I really want to get into this now:

- Many of you listening to me each week are **engaged in sexual sin**. You think it's no big deal. "Oh, we're adults... we love each other and we're going to get married someday." But God says in his word says that you are bringing his curse upon your lives. Heb 13:4. You think it's not a big deal. It is.
- For others of you, **pornography, is destroying your soul...** And I'm talking to both men and women.
- For others, your craving for **romance and sex is so out of balance** that you have become obsessed with being married, or getting into a new marriage, and that idolatry is ruining your life.

I am asking God to speak life into this area of your lives... my life. Pray together for that over the next few weeks. When this area of your life comes under the Lordship of Christ, it becomes a source of blessing to all other areas.

Today, PROV 5... the power of sex... Tim Keller says that **our culture both undervalues and overvalues sex.**

I. How We Undervalue Sex

Our society wants to believe sex is just physical.

- *It's like food*: when you are hungry, you eat.
- **Or a sport**. Find something you enjoy, figure out what position you are good at, and then play. Like tennis, or wrestling, or tackle football, where you tackle each other and just stay on the ground for a while.

And so the really **only important questions** are, "What do you enjoy?" "What satisfies you?"

- And the **idea of strict rules about sex seems terribly Draconian**, because if certain kinds of sex are a crime, they seem like victimless crimes...

But let me ask you some questions I heard once:

- ***If sex is just physical, why is rape so much more harmful to a woman than simply being beat up?***
 - Women will report physical abuse much more often than they will rape.
- ***Why is it that when a child is sexually abused, when they are an adult and connect the dots, it is so difficult to shake off?***
 - It's not just that "an authority figure betrayed them." No, that wound goes much deeper.
- ***Why is adultery so devastating to a relationship?***
- ***Why is it that men with the deepest sexual issues often had uninvolved or missing fathers?***¹
- ***Why is it that most people's greatest regrets are usually sexual?***
 - When somebody comes to me and says, "Pastor, I have to tell you something I have never told anybody else..." It's almost always sexual.

Everything in our experience screams out that **sex is not just physical**. Something much greater is at work.

Solomon says in **Proverbs 5:15-19**: ¹⁵*Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.* A cistern is an image of female sexuality; you went into a cistern to get water. He continues: ¹⁶*Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?* Now he switches to a male image for sexuality, springs. I'm not going to explain that any further. If you don't get it, well, ask your campus pastor. That's why we pay him the big bucks.

Solomon continues: ¹⁷*Let them* (these treasures) *be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.* ¹⁸*Let your fountain be blessed,*

¹ I owe these questions to Andy Stanley from his *Designer Sex* series.

and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. I think I saw some of you guys, for the first time, **underlining something in your Bible.**

You might not realize how counter-cultural this passage was... In ancient cultures of the time, there were really **only two reasons** you got married:

- **Economics:** you married strategically into another family so yours could become wealthier
- **OR Fertility:** you wanted to have children.

But here, you have Solomon talking about **sexuality in terms of finding erotic delight** in a partner you've given yourself to for life.

- In Proverbs 2 he calls a wife, "the *companion* of your youth." (The word in Hebrew: *halup*—means something like soul mate).
- **That was far beyond how Solomon's culture saw sex**, who saw it functionally or as the satisfaction of an appetite.

Let me take you to another passage where Proverbs talks about this again: **Proverbs 30:18–20**, **Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:** This is called a **3–4 poem** in Hebrew, and it was a literary device used to express wonder. **Three things are awesome... but the fourth blows me away.** (By the way, that word "wonderful" is a **Hebrew word (pa-law)** meaning mysterious, incomprehensible... almost divine. That name was given to Jesus himself: his name shall be called 'Wonderful.'²)

Here are the 3: (19) the way of an eagle in the sky; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship on the high seas; (The **air is mysterious, invisible**, but the eagle glides effortlessly through it; the **snake has no legs**, but it slithers magically up a rock face—how does that work? **A ship, weighing thousands of pounds**, soars across the

top of ocean. These things to other creatures seem like magic. There is a special, mysterious design at work.

But then he comes to #4, his big, ultimate mystery: **...and the way of a man with a virgin.** (Now, there's a little **tongue and cheek** humor there you don't want to miss: **Just like the air, the sea and a rock face** seem unmanageable to most creatures, so *the woman also is mysterious and unmanageable.* (Guy yells, "Amen." Bro, that's not a time to yell Amen... that's why you're still single."))

But just as the eagle seems designed to mysteriously work in the air; so there is a **wonderful mystery taking place** between a man and woman in a sexual relationship.

The next image, vs 20, is deliberately jarring: **20 But this is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done no wrong."** Here, by contrast, you have a woman for whom sex is like sloppy eating. "I had an appetite; I ate. After I'm done, I wipe my mouth and get rid of the traces. That was it. It was just a snack. No deep mystery here."

But that totally misses the incredible wonder God built into sex. In sex, **the two become one.** (Physically, you can imagine that.) And that oneness, he says, is to be achieved in a context where everything else in their lives has become one, also... (In marriage, your lives have become one; your finances are one; your families are one; your futures are one.

- **Sex outside of marriage separates the physical oneness** from the oneness of everything else. You are saying to the person, "I don't really yet want all of you yet... at least I'm not willing to commit to all of you yet. I just want your body for now."
 - **C. S. Lewis had a great analogy for this:** the guy who wants to have sex with a girl without marrying her feels about the girl the way the bulimic feels about food. The bulimic loves the taste of food, it brings pleasure and comfort to her, but she doesn't want to carry around the

² Isaiah 9:6

calories and fat of the food in her body so she tastes it, and then vomits it back out. That's what the guy is doing. I love the taste of you, but I don't want all of you yet, so we'll have sex but I won't fully unite myself to you.

- Some of you may say, "Well... I'm not married to my partner, but I love them, and I do want all of them." **Then why haven't you gotten married yet?** I'm not saying you don't love them or are not on some level committed to them, but just admit that you haven't given yourself to them yet... and you and I both know that **as committed as you feel today**, you retain the right to walk at any minute.
 - **Let me be very clear on this** (since there is some confusion)— **According to God's word, sex before you've made that lifelong commitment** in marriage is sin—that means during the serious dating stage; during the engagement stage; that kind of power is only to be experienced after the indissoluble covenant of marriage has been made.

Someone says: "OK, I get it, sex is better in marriage. But what's the big deal if we have a little fun?"

- **Woody Allen:** "*Sex without love is an empty experience, but as empty experiences go, it's one of the best.*"
- **Katy Perry,** "I don't even know your name, it doesn't matter. You're my experimental game, just human nature." (How does he know that ong...?)

But that's it... Because you are human and not an animal, it is more than just nature. And it is never just an experiment. I've told you before about a book called *Hooked*—it's not a Christian book, but a scientific study written by a couple of neurologists showing **what having** multiple sexual partners, especially when you're young, does to your brain—it actually rewires your brain, they say, in a way that makes genuine, lasting, selfless relationships much more difficult. They say,

"The individual who goes from sex partner to sex partner is causing his or her brain to mold in such a way that eventually accepts that sexual pattern as normal... The pattern of changing sex partners therefore damages their ability to bond in a committed relationship."

"The kind of attachment damage caused by repeated sexual encounters is, in many respects, more devastating than (unwanted) pregnancy or STD's... repeated sexual encounters hinder our abilities to form lifelong and satisfying relationships."³ The authors use the metaphor of "tape," which you have probably heard...

(Not pastors, but scientists!)

They conclude, "*You can no more 'try out' sex than you can 'try out' birth. The very act of sex produces a new reality that cannot be undone.*"⁴

Let me talk for a minute here about the damage of **PORNOGRAPHY**. Looking at pornography, perhaps to an even greater extent, kills your capacity for lifelong and satisfying relationships.

First, it causes you to start looking at the opposite sex as commodities... Let me talk to men, specifically, though this issue plagues both men and women. When you gaze at pornography, you are looking at an image of a woman whose body you just want to use. And that trains your mind to see women a certain way and that's how you start to relate to women.

- *When you look at pictures of women with no recognition they have a soul, your mind starts to see the real women in your life as objects.*

³ McIlhaney and Bush, *Hooked: How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children*, 48. The non-italicized portion of this quote is from the a review in the *Journal of Human Sexuality* by Christopher Rosik, and includes some of my own paraphrase: http://narth.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/JournalofHumanSexuality_Vol2.pdf

⁴ Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*, 123.

- You say, **‘No... I can keep it separate.’ That’s where you are wrong.** Looking at **porn rewires your brain**
- They say that **the way that many Germans got comfortable with committing the worst atrocities** against Jews was by hearing them talked about for years as sub-human. And so they became ok with the pain and suffering of Jews. They weren’t monsters; they just started thinking of Jews in a certain way.
- **Men, if you have pornography, for the sake of your relationship with all future women, you need to get rid of it today.** Just like if you have on your playlist a song in which a woman is referred to as a “bitch” or a “whore” it needs to be erased from your playlist by tonight, because how you train your mind to think about women is how you will begin to see them.

The second thing pornography does is destroy your own capacity for sexual fulfillment. Andy Stanley says that every time you look at porn

you rewire your soul to believe 3 things:

- a) A **real body** isn’t good enough.
- b) **Only one body** isn’t good enough.
- c) Your **wife’s body** isn’t good enough.

No woman, no matter how beautiful can live up to what you see in porn. Naomi Wolf (*Not a Christian...in fact, a super-radical feminist*) “[For most men] real naked women are just bad porn.” **No man has ever gorged himself on porn and then put it behind him after marriage because his wife met all his porn fantasies. Instead, the opposite happens...**⁵

- **Men, if you’re not willing to address this in your life then I challenge you to tell your girlfriend/fiancée that you are bringing all these three things with you into your relationship and that she will never be able to satisfy you. Tell her that now and give her the option to opt out now before you break her heart later.**⁶

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⁶ Andy Stanley. “The Gentlemen’s Club.”

I directed a lot of this issue toward men, but in our society it has become just as much one for women. In the wild success of *50 Shades of Grey*, or its coming sequels, *50 Shades of Gross* and *50 Shades of Gonorrhea*... You see soft porn for women made mainstream. Those things are not romantic; they are destroying you. If you took your wife to see those things you need to repent to God and apologize to her.

Now, at this point, I know there are some of you **feeling overwhelmed because you have made those kinds of mistakes**, or maybe you feel trapped in them now... I want to tell you

- Not one of us stands before God in purity, clothed in righteousness of Christ!
- The blood of Jesus can make you purer than before you sinned; the resurrection of Jesus can make your soul more whole and alive and healthy than before you fell!

Sin defiles you, and stains your soul, but *Oh, precious, is the flow that makes me white as snow; no other fount I know! Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

- Come now, and let us reason...
- Romans 8:1
- 2 Cor 5:17
- Romans 6:3–4
- Heb 7:24–25

Jesus was butchered and killed so that his blood could wash away the deepest sin, and God resurrected him from the dead showing he can put back together anything broken by sin.

- But you have to repent.

Well, that’s how we undervalue sex. Here is...

II. How We Overvalue Sex

Proverbs 11:22, “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without (character) discretion.” **(you can read that: character)**

- This is Solomon at his finest. **Here you have a gold ring...** Problem is that it has a big old nasty hog attached to it. But the guy wants the ring so bad he figures he'll put up with the swine as long as he gets the ring. So every night he has the satisfaction of having this ring but he's got to sleep with a big old hog in his bedroom. **You say, "What idiot would do that?"** And Solomon says, "The person who thinks that sex and beauty are everything..."

Our culture overvalues sex and beauty, giving those things entirely too much weight in what makes for the good life.

First, many of us feel like physical beauty is all that matters, all that gives a person value.

- *A lot of people put way too much emphasis on physical looks when they are dating. They'll settle for hog-like character if they get the gold ring of physical beauty.*
- Men, you would **do well to remember this... When Prov 31 describes the ideal woman**, the woman who blesses you year after year and your children call her blessed... it never once talks about beauty! In fact, when it does talk about beauty, it does so disparagingly: **Prov 31:30 "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."**
 - *Beauty is good; character is better.*
 - **I remember the first time I saw the girl who is now my wife...** I thought she was physically beautiful. Breathtaking. But I also remember I watched her worship. Counselor, not a camper. When she led worship, she made me want to repent. I remember our first real talk... what we both liked and disliked about Calvinism. (cold chills) I thought was so sexy... I was totally hooked. Interested in people. Supported me. **She's still beautiful**, but I see a woman who has sacrificially devoted her time and her body to having and raising our four children... She can't devote herself all day long to herself anymore. **That makes her more beautiful to me than the day I met her.** (Oh man, there is nothing as beautiful as a beautiful spirit. Because

in the midst of tragedy, I know that she'll be there—she's the one I want when I walk through pain, or when I get old and I have 6 chins... because I know she'll be there.)

- **Beauty is good; character is better**
- **Some women think physical beauty is so important that they feel worthless without it.**
 - And a lot of girls will do really **destructive things** to their bodies to try and look good. Anorexia and bulimia are often built on the assumption that your primary beauty and identity is established by your shape and size.
 - Did you know: **Eating disorders are 3–5 times higher among women of industrialized nations** than among non-industrialized nations. They are 2 times higher among college students within those nations than they are among the women at large. **Tim Keller says that this means that the closer you get to the heart of Western civilization**, the closer you get to the culture-forming womb, the more women are bombarded with the message that all that matters about you is your looks, and your character doesn't matter.⁷
 - **A lot of women get depressed as they age.** When their physical beauty is gone, so is their identity and their happiness. It is all they had.

Physical beauty is good... a person who walks with God has a beauty that lasts forever!

Another way we overvalue sex is we convince that the "good life" is impossible without romance and sex, and we're willing to give up anything to have that.

- **You find a guy in his 50's** who leaves his lifelong companion and his kids for a younger, sexier woman, even though it destroys his

⁷ Keller, *"The Temptation of Beauty"*

family and his finances. He is thinking, “At all costs, I’ve got to have that ring; who cares about the hog of a ruined family.”

- **I read a book one time where a guy listed out all the things that would happen if he committed adultery...** and I made my own list.
 - I would cause untold hurt to Veronica, and I would have to endure the loss of her respect and trust, and would likely forfeit my relationship to her
 - I would cause deep hurt and confusion in Kharis, Allie, Ryah, and Adon, who may never understand why I traded them for a thrill. My relationship with them would never be the same.
 - I would bring shame on my mother and father
 - Shame and endless judgment on girl I commit adultery with...
 - I would cause shame to you, my church family
 - I would enable the laughter and blasphemous smugness of professors at UNC, Duke and NC State who disrespect God and mock him in the classroom
 - I would follow in the footsteps of men I know whose immorality forfeited their ministry and causes me to shudder with horror
 - Most importantly, I would grieve my Lord and Savior and one day I will have to look him in the face and explain why, after all he had given to me, and after all the beauty he had put into my life, I had to have something else.
- It’s just not worth it...
 - You say, “I have sinned sexually. Can’t I be forgiven?” Yes you can. And like I said, the power of God’s grace is amazing...” But you of all people should want people to understand how devastating and powerful these things are...
 - **And I feel like some of you may be here for me to warn you...**
 - I take it seriously. I won’t go to lunch or do private things with other women... I don’t travel alone. It’s just not worth it. You say, “Overkill?” I know power

of sex and weakness of me, and I’m not playing Russian roulette with my family

- The gold ring of beauty is not worth it! Some of you are forfeiting your soul!!! This is the issue that keeps many young people from full surrender. You’d forfeit your soul, God????
- Some people overvalue sex in that they **feel like they couldn’t be happy if they are not married**; or if they are married that they need to have a different marriage, a better one, to be happy. They always find themselves envying other people’s relationships and imagining how much better they’d be in a new situation.

Beauty and sex are good, but they are not the most important things. Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is... the way of life;

In the commandment, Solomon says—that is, in a relationship with God—is life. Not in sex; in God.

- Think about this: the **most joyful, fulfilled, fully alive person** who ever lived was single, and a virgin. And, according to Isaiah, he was not that physically attractive.
 - Every time you pray, you pray to a 33 year old virgin.
 - But he had the love of the Father, and in his love (not in marriage) he found fulfillment and pleasures (not in bed) forevermore (Ps 16:11)
 - Listen: The **arms you seek** in romance are his arms.
 - The love you seek... **known and loved.**
- **Beauty and sex are good**, and it is **fine to desire** them, but you do not need them to live!
- Beauty and sex are good, but **the love of Jesus is better!**

(MUSIC)

And notice... when you are alive in him, you will be free of captivity to sex... **Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is... the way of life;**²⁴ **It preserves you from... the smooth tongue of the adulteress.**²⁵ **Do not**

desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes...

- How can you be free of sexual desire consuming your life? **Get captured by the love of God.** The way to escape the captivity of sexual desire is to be taken in by a stronger captivity.
 -
- **So how do you escape that captivity?** It's not just by working up the willpower. You are freed from sexual captivity by being taken in to a greater captivity; captivity to the love of God.
- **The arms you seek...** Your soul is thirsty, but it's not ultimately for human love, it's for God.
 - **Sea of loneliness**

Invitation

Heads bowed: This issue, as much as any other, reveals what is broken... if you are **unhappy**; chances are it connects to this; if you feel **broken**, it's about this; if you are weighed down by guilt, chances are it connects to this.

The gospel is that **Jesus died** for your sin... forgiveness; God **raised him** from the dead showing that he can heal any brokenness, his love can satisfy your soul. Get that?

- He died: forgiveness
- He rose: healing
- He loves: that satisfies your soul

It's a gift you must receive. Not what you do, but receiving what he's done.