

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion”
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Naked And Unashamed

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Genesis 2:18-25

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to the Genesis 2:18-25; that’s on page 2 in your church Bibles. As was just mentioned a moment ago, this morning we are going to be talking about sex, because sex is a part of how God designed us as human beings. Now you might say: “Pastor! It’s Mothers’ Day! Shouldn’t we be preaching a sermon on mothering?” Well, we did a sermon on Mothering last year and we’ve already done two sermons on parenting in this series, so I felt like we would be better served this morning by looking at this last scene in Genesis 2 – where we find Adam and Eve NAKED and NOT ASHAMED.

That phrase is very instructive.

Does talking about sex make you embarrassed?

It shouldn’t.

Sex is part of the created order. It isn’t something that we encounter AFTER THE FALL – it is something associated with our original design, so we shouldn’t be embarrassed to talk about it. We NEED to talk MORE about sex in here because I assure you, our young people are learning about sex at school, in the locker room and on the internet, so the CHURCH NEEDS TO SAY

MORE, not LESS, when it comes to sex. Psychologists and sociologists will tell you that we are currently experiencing a SEX CRISIS in our culture. It's not getting the attention it deserves – but it is a REAL PROBLEM. Many of you will be shocked to discover that young people today are having FAR LESS SEX than young people did 20, 30 and 40 years ago. And I'm not just talking about teenagers – because I think we would say “GOOD” to that bit of news – no I'm actually talking about young people – from 20-35 – in their childbearing years. Those people are having LESS SEX than ever before – whether they are married or not. That's not my opinion, that is sociological FACT. Jean Twenge for example reports that:

“Married younger adults are also having sex less often – 20 fewer times a year in 2021 than in the early 2000s.”¹

There appear to be a variety of contributing factors to this disturbing trend. There is a lot of gender and role confusion in our culture, and then, of course the internet has created a massive disruption. Twenge quotes one young man in her study as saying that:

“The internet has made it so easy to gratify basic social and sexual needs that there's far less incentive to go out in the ‘meatworld’ and chase those things.”²

And it's not just out there in the culture – this is a problem in the church. The number of young men – and young women – addicted to pornography in here would shock you. And the number of sexless marriages in here would shock you – as indeed it shocks and saddens me.

So we need to talk about this. Is Mother's Day the best time for this discussion? Probably not, but it is the day when this topic has appeared on our calendar – and it is in the Bible and so we trust that it will be helpful to everyone present this morning, both men and women. With all that being said, hopefully you have your Bible open by now to Genesis 2:18-25. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed

¹ Jean Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents – and What They Mean for America's Future*, (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 292.

² Jean Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents – and What They Mean for America's Future*, (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 371.

every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:18-25 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

What an incredible picture; and what an interesting place to end this story! The origin story for human beings doesn't end with the man and the woman working away in the garden, or writing hymns of praise to God – rather it ends with them NAKED and NOT ASHAMED. Which is a reminder that whatever awkwardness we may feel when it comes to talking about sex has more to do with US than it does with the standards and norms of the Bible.

The Bible has a very straightforward and no-nonsense perspective on human sexuality. The message is basically this: INSIDE the boundaries of covenant marriage, sex is GOOD. It is PURE. It is INNOCENT. It is APPROPRIATE. It makes us happy and it results in little babies – praise the Lord!!

But OUTSIDE the boundaries of covenant marriage sex is BAD. It is rebellion. It represents a lack of trust. It is selfish and exploitative. It invariably leads to negative outcomes – particularly for women and children.

INSIDE MARRIAGE GOOD. OUTSIDE MARRIAGE BAD – that's the biblical perspective on human sexuality in a nutshell and you can see that perspective reflected in the inspired poem in the Bible that celebrates the delights of marital love. In Song of Solomon 4:12-15 the King speaks of his bride as a private garden. He says:

12 A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.
13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard,
14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices—
15 a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.
(Song 4:12-15 ESV)

Now the Hebrew word translated as “sister” there sometimes throws us off. It actually just means “close one” or “beloved” – so he’s not married to his sister, he is just saying that LOVE with his CLOSEST ONE – his INTIMATE PARTNER - **is like a locked garden**. Outsiders cannot come in. It is for the two of them alone. And inside those walls there is a world of intimate delight.

So again, whether you are meeting this idea in Genesis 2 or in Song of Solomon 4 the picture is the same. Inside the locked garden of covenant marriage sex is something to be celebrated and enjoyed. While OUTSIDE the garden sex leads to degradation, exploitation and shame. It’s all about INSIDE and OUTSIDE in the Bible and so we’ll use that basic dichotomy as the framework for our discussion this morning. We’ll talk about what’s inside, what’s outside and what hope there is for those who have crossed the line.

Let’s start with what’s inside.

What is Inside?

When we enter into the locked garden of marital delight – what should we expect to find there?

4 things come immediately to mind; first of all, and I think most obviously, given the passage we just read, we should expect to experience:

1. Intimacy

Genesis 2:24-25 says:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:24-25 ESV)

Everything about those two sentences is intended to convey the sense of sexual intimacy. They are becoming “one flesh” – they are “naked”. The word “nakedness” in the Bible is regularly used as a metaphor for a person’s “private sexual space”; so Leviticus 18:8 says:

“You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.” (Leviticus 18:8 ESV)

Your father’s wife is HIS NAKEDNESS – that is HIS LOCKED GARDEN OF MARITAL DELIGHT. Don’t go in there. That is his intimate area – not yours.

So this passage is saying that Adam and Eve were in their private sexual space and they were perfectly at home there. They were happily, openly, sexual. That is supposed to be characteristic of covenant marriage – but sadly it often isn’t.

I mentioned a moment ago that it saddens me as a pastor to discover how many sexless marriages there are in “the church”. Sometimes it is because of long standing arguments, sometimes it is because of simmering resentments, sometimes it is because one partner simply doesn’t see the necessity – but whatever the reason and whatever the justification, it is a tragedy. A sexless marriage is a departure from the biblical design.

Now, I want to be sensitive to issues of health and also to issues of abuse. If a man is beating his wife, he has lost all right to enter the garden. And I will say as well, that if a man has a definition of sex learned from pornography – then he has absolutely no right to expect his wife to GIVE him whatever he thinks that is. He needs to go to counselling before he is re-admitted to the GARDEN.

But those reasonable considerations aside – and all other things being equal – there ought to be no such thing as a sexless marriage – particularly between Christian people. A marriage IS by definition an intimate – in the sense of sexual – relationship between a man and a woman. It should be a place of openness, honesty, acceptance and mutual comfort – because that’s how God

made us. A biblical marriage should be characterized by intimacy and, according to the Apostle Paul, it should also be characterized by reciprocity.

2. Reciprocity

You've heard me say before that what Paul says about sex within marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 is widely considered the most amazing and revolutionary thing ever written by anyone in the ancient world on the topic. In 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 he says:

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 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. (1 Corinthians 7:3-4 ESV)

Nobody in the ancient world had ever said that before! In the Roman world a man had absolute sexual rights to the body of his wife. She did not have the right to refuse him – and she did not have the right to expect anything back from him– but that is not what is taught in the Bible.

Paul says it explicitly here in 1 Corinthians 7 but the same viewpoint is expressed poetically in the Song of Solomon. In Song of Solomon the bride and groom BOTH sing songs expressing delight in their partner's body. The song of the husband mentions 10 body parts and the song of the wife mentions 10 body parts – meaning that sexual delight is supposed to be equal and reciprocal. This won't appear on the screen because I just stumbled on this on Friday while reading a book on Old Testament literary structure, but the author, after pointing out all of these poetic parallels says:

“The structuring techniques underscore the point that the two lovers are equally in love, equally adore one another, and are equally ready to initiate, to suggest, to invite.”³

He goes on to say:

³ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis – Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 213.

“the Song of Songs represents a surprisingly high view of women and a remarkable vision of the equality and delightful reciprocity in the marriage relationship.”⁴

Isn't that wonderful? In the Bible sex is a gift that we DELIGHT to give to each other. In every other ancient culture sex was something men TOOK from women – but not in the Bible. In the Bible sexual delight is supposed to be reciprocal – which means “goes both ways.” The wife gives to the husband and the husband gives to the wife – the wife receives from the husband and the husband receives from the wife. That is what you should expect to find within the locked garden of marital delights.

And then thirdly, you should expect to find generosity.

3. Generosity

The Apostle Paul talked about this as well in 1 Corinthians 7. He said:

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 7:5 ESV)

To “deprive” means to fail to give or to hold back – Paul is saying, “Don't do that! The only conceivable reason why you might hold back when it comes to giving sex to your spouse, is because you have set aside a few days for concentrated prayer – other than that, you should be happy to give whenever there is want or need.”

Now, again, we would want to remember that in the Old Testament, consideration of a woman's biological rhythms is assumed – so Paul is not ignoring that principle, he is assuming it, so I think we could easily expand on this to say that: “Unless you are physically indisposed or engaged in a season of fasting and prayer, your garden gate should always be UNLOCKED for your intimate other. You should be generous in terms of how you love and serve one another.

And then lastly, if you do these first three things, I imagine that you will experience great joy.

⁴ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis – Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 213.

4. Joy

Again the Song of Solomon is such a helpful corrective to the unbiblical PRUDISHNESS of the modern day evangelical church. The King is rejoicing in his garden; he's climbing the trees and squeezing the fruit – and the Bride is rejoicing in his interest and reciprocating his interest. Everyone is delighted – even the neighbours are rejoicing, as bizarre as that is to say. The heading before Song of Solomon 5:1 in my Bible says “OTHERS” – as in the other people celebrating the marital delight of the bride and groom. Apparently the neighbours are outside the garden yelling:

“Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!” (Song 5:1 ESV)

That would make me a little uncomfortable – I'm not going to lie - but the point is that no one in this story is ashamed! No one is acting as if marital love is gross or icky. Everyone is celebrating this good and gracious gift from God. And so should we be.

Friends, maybe if we spoke MORE often about the goodness of the marital garden, we would see fewer of our young people looking for love in all the wrong places. That was exactly the approach taken by King Solomon with his young son. In Proverbs 5:18-20 he says to his son:

15 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.
16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?
17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.
18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.
20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? (Proverbs 5:15-20 ESV)

I love what Tremper Longman III says on this passage, he says:

“The father encourages the idea that the best defence (against committing adultery) is a strong offence (revelling in the joys of marital sex).”⁵

That’s good advice.

Dad’s are you talking like this to your son? Are you telling him to get married young, to lock himself in his own garden and to rejoice in the wife of his youth?

You should be.

Because REVELLING in our PERMISSION is a great guard against the temptation to go snooping around outside.

That’s true for our kids and that’s true for us.

If you are not reveling then you are at risk.

So open up. Enjoy one another. That’s not just “advice from your pastor”; that’s the pattern and design for human sexuality in Holy Scripture. O God help!

So that’s what is supposed to be going on INSIDE the garden of marital delights – but there is “an outside” to this story as well. There are things that are forbidden, there are places we are told not to go, so let’s spend just a few minutes talking about that.

What Is Outside?

The first form of forbidden sex that we should probably mention is:

1. Prostitution

⁵ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* in Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom And Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 158.

In the Book of Proverbs the Wise Dad warns his son about the danger of consorting with prostitutes, whom he likens to a DEEP PIT in Proverbs 23:27. If you get into that kind of thing, he says, you will have a very difficult time getting out.

In the New Testament we find the Apostle Paul sounding very much like a wise dad. He says to his people:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Flee from sexual immorality.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-18 ESV)

Sleeping with a prostitute is sexual immorality – Paul uses the word *porneia* there from which we get our word “pornography”. Pornography is a digital form of prostitution. It is TRANSACTIONAL SEX. It victimizes women and it degrades men. It is not what we were made for. It is OUTSIDE of God’s good design – have nothing to do with it.

Alongside of that, the Bible frequently condemns:

2. Adultery

In fact, in The Book of Proverbs, the Wise Dad says that adultery is EVEN WORSE than sleeping with a prostitute. Twice he says that:

“the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life.” (Proverbs 6:26 ESV)

“For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress is a narrow well.” (Proverbs 23:27 ESV)

So sleeping with a prostitute is BAD, he says, but sleeping with another man’s wife is even worse. The consequences of that are almost past finding out.

Now, you might say: “Wait a second pastor, I thought all sins were equal? So how come you are saying that one type of sexual sin is worse than another?”

Well first of all, I’m not saying it, the Bible is saying it, so we need to hear it. We need to understand that while all sins are equal in terms of separating us from God and placing us in need of redemption – all sins are NOT EQUAL in the sense of social consequence and that is what Proverbs is saying here. The Wise Dad is explaining to his son that committing ADULTERY comes with MAXIMUM social consequences. It will blow up your family, it will blow up the family across the street and it will affect the entire community. So don’t do it. The cost is WAY TOO HIGH.

That’s a good word and a much-needed warning.

The third type of forbidden sex that we need to mention here would be incest.

3. Incest

We won’t say too much about that, other than to point out that historians generally credit the BIBLE as having introduced a whole new way of thinking about marriage. Prior to and apart from Judaism and Christianity, most societies encouraged a variety of what we would consider incestuous marriages. Marrying close relatives was a way of keeping land within families and tribes. Nobody in pre-Christian Europe married for LOVE – you married for land which probably meant that you married your half-brother so that your father could control and increase his property – but Christianity changed all that. Joseph Henrich – who is the chair of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University writes that:

“The Church dramatically undercut the potency of marriage as a social technology and a source of patriarchal power by prohibiting polygamous unions, arranged marriages, and all marriages between both blood and affinal kinfolk.”⁶

⁶ Joseph Henrich, *The Weirdest People In The World: How The West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous* (New York: Picador, 2020), 167.

Meaning, if you like the idea of marrying for love, and you'd prefer not to be married to your first cousin or half-brother, then you should thank the Church, because that comes from the Bible. It was the outworking of prohibitions such as the one found in Leviticus 18:6:

“None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 18:6 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

The fourth type of prohibited sex, according to the Bible is homosexuality.

4. Homosexuality

Leviticus 18:22 says:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (Leviticus 18:22 ESV)

And despite what you may have heard on the INTERWEB – that is not just an Old Testament thing, we see it in the New Testament as well. Paul described both male and female homosexuality as “dishonourable passions”. He said:

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” (Romans 1:26-27 ESV)

Despite the many strenuous attempts of progressive scholars, there is really no intellectually or spiritually honest way of normalizing what the Bible so intentionally, consistently and unapologetically EXCLUDES. Old Testament and New – homosexual sex is OUTSIDE the boundaries of God's good design.

And then finally, the fifth type of prohibited sex in the Bible is:

5. Bestiality

Leviticus 18:23 says:

And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion. (Leviticus 18:23 ESV)

That is OUTSIDE. The fact that the Bible had to SAY THAT indicates clearly that it was being practiced at the time. There were several forms of bestiality for example that were practiced within the ancient rites of the Egyptians – and of course, everything old is new again, so unpleasant as it may be, it is important for us to name this and to flag this as OUT OF BOUNDS.

Which leads us to our final question for this morning:

What hope is there for the person who has crossed the line?

It is harder right now than it has ever been before to find the lock of marital delight. There is so much confusion and so much corruption out there in the culture. And the temptations are stronger and NEARER than ever before. They live in our pockets. They come at us through our phones! And I'm not just talking about pornography. I'm talking about emotional affairs. I'm talking about flirtation with that handsome guy at work that ends with inappropriate pictures being exchanged. It is astonishing how common this stuff is in the church.

So the garden is getting really hard to find!

Some of us missed it entirely on our first try. Some of us found it and then stupidly wandered away. Some have us came home and found the garden locked. Some have spent way too much time thinking about the garden next-door and some have entered into gardens where they did not belong.

We are ALL sexual sinners to a greater or lesser extent. But there is hope for every single person who has gone astray. The Bible says:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 ESV)

I see two things promised there: FORGIVENESS OF SINS and POWER TO CHANGE.

“...he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins **and** to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 ESV)

I'm sure that some of us today need forgiveness for the wrongs that we have done – and some of us need CLEANSING so that we can live the life that we were created and intended to live. Some of us have been so corrupted by either the abuse done to us in the past or the foulness we have exposed ourselves to in the present. We feel like there is no chance of us ever having a normal sex life because of how THOROUGHLY CORRUPTED we are – but that's not true.

There is forgiveness AND healing in the cross.

So come. Come to Jesus. Wash yourself in his blood. Open your heart to his Spirit. And be SAVED. Saved from your sins, saved from the corruption of the world and saved FOR the joys of the garden – thanks be to God.

Let me pray for us.