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THE SACREDNESS OF SEX

July 22-23, 2017

This Sacred Home Part 7

God's dream for marriage is simple. He begins with two people. Let's call them Joe and Flo. They share much in common. Equally cherished by God. Joint heirs of heavenly love. Uniformly essential in God's plan. Yet, though similar, the two are starkly different. Joe is a male. By nature he provides and protects. Flo, a female, excels in nurturing and comforting. In God's plan, the two complement, complete, and attract each other. Her femininity--translated: sensitivity, softness, shapeliness--widens his eyes. His masculinity--translated: strength, kindness, confidence--turns her head.

When Joe meets Flo and Flo meets Joe, something stirs deep within them and the two know--they will be better together than apart. So the two covenant to live for each other. Flo will have eyes for Joe. Forget Bo and Mo and *So-and-So*. Joe is her guy.

And Joe resolves identical devotion. Running to and fro will be no mo'. He has Flo. He knows where to go. So Joe and Flo covenant to become one person. And, when they do, their Maker smiles.

God made them different: male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 NIV)

The gravitational tug between the two was God-inspired. Adam did not drool when he saw the elephant or the giraffe. But one glimpse of Eve and he placed his hand over his rib-depleted side and declared: "At last!" [Adam] exclaimed. "This

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one is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man'." (Genesis 2:23 NLT)

As God brought Adam and Eve together, he brings Joe and Flo together. "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh. The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame." (Gen. 2:24-25 MSG)

Marriage begins with a "leaving." Parental love-lines linger but the umbilical cord is severed. Marriage develops with a cleaving. The Hebrew term means "glued together." The merging is not instantaneous. Note the words of Moses, "They *become* one flesh..." Not "they *became* one flesh." Oneness is not created overnight, even a honeymoon night. Marital oneness is a lifelong quest, fostered:

Spiritually: giving worship.

Emotionally: giving strength.

Sexually: giving bodies.

Yes, sex is a part of God's plan for a healthy marriage. Sex is not the secret for a happy home. Nor is sex absent from God's plan for a fortified family. Sex is a strategic, delightful, and sometimes frustrating element in God's plan.

If you find it odd to hear the topic of sex discussed at church, you are not alone. Chaplains at the University of Nebraska surveyed incoming freshmen with this question: How much influence did your church play on your views of sexuality? Two percent said that their church had anything to do with their views of sexuality. Some of their comments included:

"People in my church don't believe in sex."

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"Our church is boring. They don't talk about sex or dating or marriage. It's probably just as well; they'd make that boring, as well."

When I asked our staff if they heard sex discussed in their church growing up, one said, "Our church didn't talk about sex; it might lead to dancing."

If it's true that the church doesn't talk about sex, then we are the only ones who don't. Can you make it through a movie, novel, or night of television without sexual suggestions and innuendos? Can you make it through a day at work or school without jokes and coarse humor?

Sex deserves our attention because it has commanded the attention of the world. But even more, sex deserves our attention because it is a source of confusion, conflict, and pain in many homes and hearts. It doesn't have to be. Consider this message: Honor marriage and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex. (Heb. 13:4 MSG)

Two phrases in this passage headline God's plan for sexual intimacy: "honor marriage" and "guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy." Honor the plan and protect the privilege.

I. Honor the plan of marriage.

Accept God's order of events. Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh. The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked but they felt no shame. (Gen. 2:24-25 MSG)

Marriage begins with "leaving"—a man leaves his father and mother. Marriage begins as we turn away from the old strength and support system and engage in a new one. We call this "dating" or "courting." According to God's plan, sexual

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intimacy is not a part of the dating phase. Most movies and books will tell you it is, but don't listen to them. Premarital sex does more damage than good.

Jimmy Evans' research led him to write: "People who live together before marriage experience more abuse, more infidelity, more break-ups, more disappointment, more problems in every category—than people who do not cohabit before marriage. A couple that lives together before getting married is 50% more likely to divorce after marriage than a person who did not cohabit."¹

It's easy to understand why. Courtship sex stunts healthy relational growth. It shifts the attention from the study of the soul to fascination with the body. Necessary friendship creation is neglected. Essential communication tools go underdeveloped. Most of all, spiritual intimacy takes a back seat to physical intimacy. The purpose of courting is to know each other's souls, not bodies.

Sex, rightly positioned after the "leaving" and "cleaving", is a delightful wedding gift that can be opened innumerable times in a marriage. Consider the setting God envisions: two children of God make a covenant. They "leave" – they disable the ejection seat. They burn the bridge back to momma's house. They "cleave" – they "super-glue" themselves together. They fall into each other's arms beneath the canopy of God's blessing, surrounded by the security of the tall fence of fidelity. Both know both will be there in the morning. Both know both will be there, God willing, as the skin wrinkles and vigor fades. Both are in this thing for the long haul. Both are giving the other, exclusive for-your-eyes only privileges. Gone is the shame. Gone is undisciplined lust. Gone is the morning-after insecurity. What remains is a celebration of permanence, a tender moment in which the body continues what the

¹ (Our Secret Paradise, pg. 110).

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mind and the soul have already begun. A time in which, “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Gen. 2:25 ESV)

No one appreciates the gift of sex as much as God’s children do. This isn’t just my opinion. Boy, was America shocked when USA Today ran an article which said: “several major research studies show that church ladies (and the men who sleep with them) are among the most sexually satisfied people on the face of the Earth. Several years ago....the results of the most “comprehensive and methodologically sound” sex survey ever conducted was released, [the University of Chicago] reported that religious women experienced significantly higher levels of sexual satisfaction than non-religious women.”²

(I’m thinking this article would be an effective evangelism tool.)

Scripture gives a second admonition: first we honor the plan. Then we

II. Protect the privilege. *Guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy.*

The big point is the most obvious one: God regards marital sex as sacred. A gift that is unique and set apart for a special purpose. Marital sex is not dirty, not a duty, but a gift from God to strengthen a marriage.

Here are some ways to keep sex sacred in your marriage.

1. Consecrate your sex life to God. Consider your bed a holy place. Kneel beside it and pray: “God, may what happens in this bed bring honor to you and joy to my mate.”

2. Put your spouse’s desires above your own. Take a servant spirit into your sex life. See the marriage bed as a place for you to honor one of God’s children rather than satisfy your desires. This happens as you

² USA Today, February 11, 1999, William R. Mattox Jr.

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3. Accept sexual differences. Men and women are different. We love that. Men and women are different. We hate that! Love or hate the differences, let's understand them. You husbands should live with your wives in an understanding way. (1 Pet. 3:7 NCV). Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. (Eph. 5:22 MSG).

Wives, understand that your husband sees sex as a primary need. Men, understand that your wife sees sex as optional. When men were asked to rank the importance of sex, they consistently scored it 1, 2, or 3. (I think some scored it 1, 2, and 3.) Women, on average, ranked sex in the number 13 slot—right behind “gardening together.” Apparently the presence of a good garden indicates a restless husband.

Men and women are different. Men categorize the sexual experience. The husband can have a horrible day, be anticipating World War III the next, hear a tornado outside, and still enjoy sex right now. The mind of a man has compartments.

The mind of a female is spaghetti. Everything is interrelated. She doesn't as quickly detach or disentangle from the demands of life. And she may take offense that her husband does. “How can you think about that at a time like this?”

His response: “It's easy.”

She thinks he is insensitive.

He thinks she's a prude.

Neither is right. Both can understand the other better. “It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong” (Proverbs 24:3 NCV)

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Here's an example. Men, your wives indwell a beauty pageant world. Everything they see tells them that they are as valuable as their waistline is thin or figure is curvy. Our society measures the value of a woman in her looks. She needs you to treasure her heart. She needs to hear from you, not just in moments of romance, but throughout the day- "I love you and I'd marry you again if given the chance."

Wives, when it comes to sexual stimuli, your husbands live in a Las Vegas light show. Telling him not to think so much about sex is like telling him to ignore donuts in a Krispy Kreme shop. It's everywhere...magazines, billboards. Why, companies use curvy models to sell bass boats. Be patient and pray for him.

Let's serve one another. Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy. (Heb. 13:4 MSG). If you do, you might enjoy a marriage like the one described in Ann Landers' column.

Dear Ann,

Last weekend, we celebrated my parents' 50th wedding anniversary. This morning they left on a long-awaited trip to Hawaii. They were as excited as if it were their honeymoon! When my parents married, they had only enough money for a three-day trip 50 miles from home.

They made a pact then, that each time they made love, they would put a dollar in a special metal box and save it for a honeymoon in Hawaii for their 50th anniversary. Dad was a policeman, and Mom was a schoolteacher. They lived in a modest house and did all their own repairs. Raising five children was a challenge, and sometimes, money was short. But no matter what emergency came up, Dad would not let Mom take any money out of the "Hawaii account." As the amount grew, they put it in a savings account and then bought CD's.

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My parents were always very much in love. I can remember Dad coming home and telling Mom, "I have a dollar in my pocket." She would smile at him and reply, "I know just how to spend it." When each of us children married, Mom and Dad gave us a small metal box and told us their secret, which we found inspiring... Mom and Dad never told us how much money they managed to save, but it must have been considerable because when they cashed in those CDs, they had enough for airfare to Hawaii, plus hotel accommodations for 10 days and plenty of spending money. Before they boarded the plane, Dad winked and said, "Tonight we are starting an account for Cancun!"

Ann, I thought you'd enjoy this story about 50 great years of intimacy in marriage!

From a loving daughter in Abilene, Texas³

Today, whether you're single or married, a child or a grandparent either make or re-affirm your allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Honor his plan of marriage.

Protect the privilege of sex.

In doing so you'll discover the sacredness God intended.

³ (Dave Stone "What Your Spouse Wants You to Figure Out!" Southeast Christian Church "Sex by the Book")