

Series: “Single. Married.” (Part 6)  
“Sexual Intimacy”

I want to talk today about sexual intimacy as it relates to being single or married. I realize some of you may think we shouldn't talk about sex in the church, at least not in sermons. Whenever I have preached about sex usually someone gets upset!

As I was preparing to preach this series in another church a few years ago I received a letter, unsigned, that in a rather nasty tone told me I shouldn't be discussing sexuality in this series of sermons, and that it was inappropriate. Well, I thought I recognized the handwriting! So I went to the person I thought might have written the letter, and this individual admitted that it was true. This was a leader in the church! Not only did I disagree when this person said the subject should be avoided, I was very dismayed that this church leader never came to me and was honest enough to tell me what was on their mind!

We're getting messages about sex all the time – through advertising, films, TV, magazines, the internet. It's just hard for me to understand why some think the *church* should be silent on this subject, and that we should let the *pagans* and the *perverts* do all the talking! It's so important to hear what our Creator says about our sexuality through His Word.

***The Bible tells us that sex is a good thing. God created us sexual beings.*** In Genesis 1 it says God created us male and female, and then God tells the man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:27-28a). At the end of chapter 1 in Genesis God looks over all that He has made (including our sexuality), and “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

The Song of Solomon in the Old Testament gives us a beautiful and graphic picture of sensual love.

***Sex has two purposes. The first is procreation (to reproduce and have children).*** We cooperate with God in the fashioning of a new human being – and in this sense sex is a mysterious, beautiful, holy thing. When each of our 3 children were born it was a humbling, awe-inspiring experience, to realize that my wife Nancy and I had played a part with God in creating a new life!

***Secondly sex is meant for bonding.*** It says this in Genesis 2:24-25: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Here it says that the man is to leave his father and mother and “cling to” or “be united to” his wife as one flesh. This is a reference to sexual intercourse.

A study was done by scientists in Scotland at the University of Edinboro. It found

that when couples are intimate, there is a chemical in the woman's brain called oxytocin that is released – a chemical that causes a sense of bonding. However, this does not happen in men's brains. This could be one of the reasons why men and women experience sex in different ways. Isn't it marvelous that scientists are just now discovering what God told us in His Word long ago – that the act of sexual intercourse is meant to bond a man and a woman together.

God created sex to be a wholesome, beautiful experience, but it's hard to fulfill God's plan for this area of life because of the human condition: we are sinners! We have a way of messing up what God intended to be a gift and a blessing. This is brought out in the Genesis account, where first it says Adam and Eve were naked and felt no shame (Genesis 1:31). But after they sinned, the naturalness and innocence is gone: they are self-conscious and cover themselves up (Genesis 3:7)!

As sinful, fallen creatures, we struggle with sex. In its ugliest forms, we abuse this gift through rape, incest, prostitution, pedophilia, and sexual harassment. We also distort this gift through things like pornography, using sex in advertising to sell products, and promiscuous sex.

***God has put boundaries around sex, so that it can be wholesome and life-affirming. The Bible talks about sexual purity.*** For example, there are these words in 1 Thessalonians: “As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God...it is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 3-7).

Notice the Scripture says, “It is God's will that you should be sanctified” (verse 3). To be “sanctified” means to be “set apart for God”, “dedicated to God”. God wants us to dedicate this area of our life to Him, and honor Him in what we do.

Let's think about sexual integrity as it relates both to those who are single and those who are married. First of all, ***to those who are unmarried.***

Again, the words found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.” The word translated “sexual immorality” is the Greek word “pornea”. We ran across that word in last week's sermon. It is a general word for various types of sexual impropriety. But, in some versions of the Bible it is rendered as “fornication”. We are to avoid fornication.

This is an old word, not used much today. Historically, Christians have used the term fornication to mean sex between people *who are not married*.

I don't think I need to tell you that sex among unmarried people is a common practice today! And it's not just teenagers having premarital sex! I have had single people in their 30's or 40's tell me that the first thing someone wants to do when they go on a date is to get you into bed. I remember an elderly man in a church that I served. He developed an illness that became chronic. He came to my office one day and told me that his girlfriend left him because he couldn't be sexually active anymore. As he related this to me, he gave no indication that he saw anything wrong with the sex he had been having with his girlfriend. More and more couples are living together prior to marriage, having babies, then perhaps getting married.

One of the most distressing things about all of this is that *many who say they are followers of Jesus see premarital sex as acceptable also*.

You may say, "Harry, are you so old-fashioned that you still believe this?" I like what Adam Hamilton says in his sermon on sexual integrity. He says, "Our culture is so immersed in confusing views about sexuality that what I am about to share with you may seem quite Victorian or even ridiculous. Yet no matter what you may think of it, what I am about to tell you is a timeless truth. It is a truth that will give you a glimpse of what sexuality was meant to be, rather than the cheapened, watered-down imitation presented in the media."

***There are reasons why God intends sexual intercourse to be reserved for marriage.***

***For one thing, a lot of pre-marital sex is selfish.*** It is often just using another person to get what we want. It's more about pleasing *me* than it is considering the other person's needs. Many teenagers reach *biological maturity* before they reach *emotional maturity*. When teenagers get pregnant, often you have a child raising a child.

***A second reason why premarital sex is not very wise is that there is the risk of disease.*** Not much is said today about sexually transmitted diseases. And yet the Center for Disease Control (CDC) calls this a "hidden epidemic." Most recent CDC statistics indicate that 20% of the U.S. population (1 in 5 persons) had a sexually transmitted infection on any given day in 2018 – 68 million people - costing the American healthcare system \$16 billion that year. Almost half of the new STD's that year were among young people ages 15–24. Each of these infections poses a threat to a person's immediate and long-term health and well-being.

***In the third place, sex outside of marriage ignores one of the intended purposes of***

***sex – that is to be co-creators with God.*** Many people today are glued to a *recreational view of sex* – they want the fun without the commitment, or any thought of producing a child. In the whole Playboy scenario you never hear of sex in connection with bearing children. Adam Hamilton comments that , “We aren’t prepared to have children, yet we want to pursue the one act associated with their creation.” God intended that children be conceived in a setting where two people are committed to each other in a loving, stable, permanent relationship.

***In addition, sex outside of marriage also undermines the second purpose God for which created sex - that is, for intimate bonding and becoming one flesh.*** In premarital sex, we haven’t made the commitment through the bonds of marriage, and yet we are joining ourselves at the deepest level to another human being. First Corinthians 6:15-16 relates to this: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them to a prostitute? Never! 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.’”

When you give yourself to another person sexually, it’s not just a *physical act*. Not just a romp in the bedroom. It is a union of souls. We expose our most intimate self to another. “Casual sex” is often not “casual” – it cuts deeper. For instance, an unmarried couple become sexually active, saying, “We love each other,” or, “We plan to get married.” But often these relationships don’t last. We have given the most intimate part of our being to someone, then we break up! It’s like a divorce of the soul. Or, perhaps you’ve given yourself to someone, and then you discover that this person only wanted your body, and had no interest in *you* as a person. It’s like some deep part of you got stripped away. Since sexual intercourse is the deepest, most intimate, bonding of two persons, God wants it reserved for that situation where two people have committed their *entire selves* to one another in a lifelong relationship.

1 Corinthians 6 also reminds us that if we are *Christians* our body is a temple or dwelling place of God’s Spirit. We don’t violate this holy space by giving our body away in casual manner, or to someone not a Christian believer.

Adam Hamilton tells of getting a letter from a 38 year old woman, who wrote that she was still a virgin, saving herself for the man she hoped God would bring into her life. But, she wrote, “Sometimes I wonder, is there something wrong with me?” Adam wrote back, “No, there is nothing wrong with you; it is the rest of the world that is confused. You are a remarkable woman who is pursuing God’s plans for this part of your life. You have seen sexuality as Christians are meant to see it: as a discipleship issue, a place to serve God, to trust God, to pursue God’s will. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul was encouraging.”

I realize, if you are unmarried, it's hard to be sexually pure in a culture saturated with sexual stimuli, and in a culture where premarital sex is accepted as the norm. Generally speaking, people marry today at an older age, so there is more time spent as a single person. We will need God's help in this! It's important to have a game plan. Determine *ahead of time* what you will do or not do if you date. The time to set boundaries and limits is not when you're all steamed up and in overdrive. *Save yourself* for that one person whom God has in mind to be your lifelong partner!

***Let me say some things to those who are married.*** Ideally, the physical act of sex should bring us closer together. But sometimes it separates. For one thing, there are basic male-female differences in how God wired us for sex. Men tend to want to get to it, finish, and move on. Women tend to take it more slow, and need an atmosphere where there is tenderness, affection, and a sense of being cared for. One guy told me it's like men are microwaves, and women are crock pots!

Also, our own sexual needs, desires, and expectations may differ from that of our partner. These differences can cause hurt feelings, misunderstanding, and a sense of frustration and isolation. A letter was put on my desk prior to starting this sermon series when I did it before. It was unsigned, but from a man expressing a deep longing that his wife would be more responsive in the area of sex. He shared that he and his wife had a very happy relationship, and yet his words conveyed a great sadness that this area of their marriage was not what he had hoped. He wrote the letter, he said, so I can add this to my sermons. At the end of his letter he wrote, "Good luck in your sermons."

In marriage we may bring stuff from the past that may hinder our sexual functioning as a husband or wife. It could come from earlier sexual experiences, or what we may have learned about sex growing up. Besides this, because we are sinners and tend to be self-centered, even sex *in marriage* can be selfish and hurtful. There are also age factors and health factors that affect our sexual desire and functioning.

What can we do if this is an area in our marriage that is not going well? The most important thing is: *communicate!* It's hard for some married couples to even talk about sex. But it is so important to talk to each other, and *listen* to each other – without feeling hurt or getting defensive. Tell each other what you want, what you need, what you like, what you don't like.

If there are differences in our sexual needs, this is a place where loving our partner can mean we each consider each other's sexual needs, and try to go the extra mile to meet our partner's needs.

The Apostle Paul was very realistic about this. He writes this: "The husband should

meet his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should do the same for her husband...don't for her husband...don't refuse to meet each other's needs unless you both agree for a short period of time to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come back together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

God gave the gift of our sexuality so that in the deepest sense, a husband and wife can be "one flesh", sealed with a deep bond of love that lasts a lifetime!

Just a closing thought. I doubt that any of us have been totally pure in regards to our sexuality - whether in our thought life, or actually acting out sexually. It's important to remember that Jesus was no harder on those who failed sexually than He was on those committing other sins. In fact, He seemed to be more condemning of those guilty of religious pride and self-righteousness than those guilty of sexual sins.

The good news is that through Christ we can be forgiven and get a brand new start when we surrender our past to His mercy and commit ourselves in the present and future to doing His will!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.*  
*Community United Methodist Church*  
*February 13, 2022*

