

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Bridge Group. Our last meeting will be Tuesday, June 17. We'll resume in the fall. I've been so blessed to see many new people come and be a part of our group.

School Supplies Drive. We will be collecting various school supplies for our Daycamp kids to organize into backpacks and give to those in need: crayons, coloured pencils, rulers, erasers, pens, pencils, markers, pencil case, sharpener, notebooks, DuoTangs, highlighters, water bottle, sharpies, geometric set, glue stick, scissors. Please drop them off at the kiosk in the main foyer on Sundays or downstairs at the lower lobby on Sunday, June 15 or Sunday, June 22!

Short-Term Missions. We're sending three teams this July: Germany, France, and Japan. They will be sharing the Gospel, serving our Christian brothers and sisters overseas, and supporting our mission partners and long-term missionaries. You're invited to come learn from the mission teams. While you're learning, you'll enjoy delicious appetizers, refreshments, and snacks for a taste of the different nations our teams are going to. Even if you're not going on this trip, you can still partner and support our Great Commission efforts. Here's the link to register:

<http://willingdon.org/events/july-stm-teams-fundraiser-night>

1 Corinthians 7:1–16

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ 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. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. What's something you regularly need and can't do without, like a type of food, hobby, or activity?

Although my wife has lived in Canada for over half her life, she still regularly needs East Asian cuisine. If she eats Western food for a while, she'll crave sushi, Taiwanese noodles, Korean BBQ, or something along those lines.

My cousin went to university in sunny southern California. He moved to Seattle after graduating, but couldn't stand all the gloominess and rain in the Pacific Northwest. Now he's happily living in Los Angeles, where it only rains 36 days a year (compared to 150 in Seattle and 169 in Vancouver).

In this week's passage, Paul acknowledges that a lot of people have sexual desires that need to be fulfilled.

2. What's something you find easy or hard to share with others?

It's interesting to see what people find easy or hard to share. My wife's friend's husband comes from a culture where people only eat what they order at a restaurant. He refuses to share with his wife. "If you wanted to eat this, then you should have ordered it!" His wife was baffled by this because in her culture, people usually order dishes to share.

Some people easily share their homes, inviting people over all the time, even letting people spend the night. Others want to keep their space for themselves and can't imagine anyone else staying over. Some find it easier to share money, time, or personal space, while others find it difficult.

In this week's passage, Paul writes that husbands and wives share their bodies with each other for the other's benefit.

3. What depiction of a married couple influenced you growing up, such as in a TV show or a book? What stood out?

Vinh mentioned Lucy and Ricky Ricardo from *I Love Lucy*. It was the most watched show for four years while it aired! But there have been so many more. Did you see a more traditional family like June and Ward Cleaver in *Leave It to Beaver*, or one that was a littleooky like Gomez and Morticia Addams from *The Addams Family*, or Herman and Lily Munster in *The Munsters*? You may have grown up watching a blended family. Depending on your generation, it was Mike and Carol Brady in *The Brady Bunch* or Frank Lambert and Carol Foster in *Step by Step*.

Growing up, I watched Carl and Harriette Winslow in *Family Matters* and Philip and Vivian Banks in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. My parents are from Taiwan, and in that culture, parents don't really share about their vulnerabilities or struggles. But I was struck by how these couples had heart-to-heart conversations with each other and their families.

In this week's passage, Paul gives some principles for how married couples should relate to each other sexually.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. When you were growing up, were sex and sexual desires something talked about in the church? Why?

As Pastor Vinh mentioned, the church has often had a hard time dealing with and talking about sex. All I remember was hearing that having sex as a teen was bad and you were bad if you had sex. "You know so-and-so's daughter is sleeping with her boyfriend. Her mom should be so ashamed!"

Years ago, my car mechanic talked about his struggles because, growing up, his church and community never talked about sex. As an adult, he had a lot of hang-ups about sex and eventually pursued counseling.

I don't remember hearing any positive angle about sex. Or how to have healthy sex. Growing up, sex was this forbidden pleasure. When I was at another church, I once sat in with the youth group. The speaker talked about pornography, and an innocent 12-year-old girl was sitting next to me, saying, "What's pornography? I don't know what pornography is." And I sat there, desperately looking around the room for an adult woman. As a grown man who wasn't her parent, I couldn't think of any appropriate way for me to sit her down to talk about sex and pornography. I also wondered what would be the best way to explain sex and sex-adjacent topics (like pornography) to a young person without getting them to fear sex or get too curious about it. You don't want to let them know too many details to get them excited to Google it. But if you don't tell them enough, they might go Google it anyway, which would end in disaster.

5. How do society and the church see celibacy and sex?

You all can probably come up with many examples in your day-to-day lives. Just to make things interesting, I've included some historical perspectives.

Celibacy is often seen in modern society as undesirable. They've made so many movies about guys trying to lose their virginity. People who have lots of sex are looked up to as the cool people. Alpha Males surrounded themselves with beautiful women, with the assumption that they're having sex with them. Virgins, on the other hand, are losers who can't get a date. Even in the church, people look down on adults who are "too old to be single" and assume there's something wrong with them. That wasn't always the case. Many ancient church leaders thought not having sex was better than sex and/or marriage.

Jerome, a Christian theologian born in the 4th century, wrote "... all who have not preserved their virginity, in comparison of pure and angelic chastity and of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, *are defiled*." (Against Jovinianus, 1.40). He interpreted 1 Corinthians 7:5 as saying sex prevents prayer, "But if we are always to pray we must never yield to the claims of wedlock for, *as often as I render her due to my wife, I incapacitate myself for prayer*." (Letter 48.15).

Augustine, a Christian theologian also born in the 4th century, wrote, "And [marriage] we do not so call a good, as that it is a good in comparison of fornication: otherwise there will be two evils, of which the second is worse" (Of the Good of Marriage, 8). Marriage isn't inherently a good thing. It's just good compared to having sex out of marriage.

Gregory of Nyssa, yet *another* 4th-century Christian theologian, wrote, "So the one sufficient way of praising virginity will be to show that that virtue is above praise, and to evince our admiration of it by our lives rather than by our words." (On Virginity, 1). Virginity is *so good* you can't use words to describe it. The only way to show the awesomeness of virginity is by being one. He sounds like a 1990s church youth abstinence campaign.

Sex isn't a dirty word, and it isn't a merely functional act. We even have a book in the Bible that celebrates sexual pleasure. It opens with "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (Song of Solomon 1:2). There are lots of sexual metaphors and sexy descriptions, but the groom flat out tells his bride, "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies." (Song of Solomon 4:5). He uses the same description in 7:3. Then it escalates, "Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine." (Song of Solomon 7:7-9). Wow, is it just me, or is it getting hot in here?

Although nowadays we view sex as both for pleasure and procreation, many ancient writers believed sex was only for making children.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who was born a little after Jesus' death, wrote, "That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature hath appointed, of a man with his wife: and that *this be used only for the procreation of children*" (Against Apion, 2.199).

Philo, a Jewish philosopher who died just before Paul wrote this letter, wrote, "for those men are devoted to pleasure who are not influenced by the wish of propagating children, and of perpetuating their race, when they have connection with women, but who are only like boars or he-goats seeking the enjoyment that arises from such a connection. Again, *who can be greater haters of their species than those who are the implacable and ferocious enemies of their own children?*" (Special Laws, III.112). People who have sex for pleasure are haters of their species! Elsewhere he calls them "enemies to God" and "enemies of nature" (Special Laws III, 36).

Lactantius, a Christian writer who was born in the 3rd century and advised emperor Constantine, wrote "There would be no adulteries, and debaucheries, and prostitution of women, if it were known to all, that *whatever is sought beyond the desire of procreation is condemned by God.*" (Divine Institutes, V.8).

But here in this passage, Paul never devalues sex or says it's wrong. It's bad when it's outside the confines of marriage.

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

6. Pastor Vinh said, "Lust is going after the body. Love is going after the person." What's the difference between lusting after someone's body and loving them?

Here are some possibilities.

One-Way Street. When we're lusting, we only care about how that person can satisfy our desires.

But if we're loving, our priority is what we can do for them.

Concerns. If you're lusting, you only care about their physical bodies. What do they look like? Are they shaped the way that excites you? What are they willing to do with you?

But if you're loving them, you're also concerned about so much more. How are they feeling, or what's on their mind? What are their goals or aspirations? What do they get out of this interaction, sexual or otherwise?

Goals. If we're lusting, once we're done having our fun, we're done. Our goal is accomplished. Thank you for your service. Time to move on to the next goal.

But if we're loving them, we're concerned about them holistically. How can we serve them (sexually or not)? How can I encourage or build them up in the time we're not having sex? Even if we aren't satisfied, we still pour ourselves out to love them.

7. How is sex part of restoring the unity and uniqueness of marriage?

Here are some suggestions:

Unique Experience. Almost everything we do with our spouses, we can do with other people. You can watch a movie or go to dinner with your friends. You can share a living space with roommates or talk about your emotions with close friends. You've probably shared a bed with your siblings or cousins.

But sex is completely exclusive to your spouse and nobody else. It's not even a spectrum, like you can have slightly sexual interactions with others and only do really sexual stuff with your spouse. Everything and anything sexual is only for your spouse, full stop. It's a reminder that you have a unique relationship with your spouse that you don't have with anyone else on the planet.

Vulnerability. Other than our doctors, there are parts of our bodies we never show to anyone. It's intimate. It's special. And by giving our spouses access, we require vulnerability. They see the parts of our bodies we may prefer to hide. Our cellulite, love handles, and more. In our world filled with unrealistic expectations for perfect, smooth, wrinkle-free, toned, fit bodies, we reveal our imperfect bodies to our spouses. We hope that they won't focus on our imperfections, but still love, enjoy, and appreciate our bodies.

8. Pastor Vinh said, "Jesus owns you, and so does your spouse. You have given up your rights for those two people. You have been set apart for Jesus and your spouse."

If you're married, how does this shape your relationship with your spouse?

If you'd like to be married someday, how does this affect how you pursue a spouse?

Here are some places to start thinking about this question.

Expectations. This should affect the goals, purposes, and expectations for your current or future spouse. Instead of trying to use the relationship for your own benefit (e.g., sexual fulfillment, someone to make you happy, a source of validation), you want a husband or wife whom you can lovingly serve and glorify God. Your expectation is for you to serve and love and give, whether or not you get it back. (Of course, we all need support and encouragement. If we're not getting that from our spouse, we can receive it from the church family and pray that God would shape our spouses to be loving as well.)

Criteria. Lots of people ask, "How do I know if he or she is the right one?" We'll say, "Well, she's really beautiful and her teeth are like the stars in the night sky ... yellow and separated by a sea of darkness." Ok, maybe not exactly. There's nothing wrong with finding a guy or girl who's physically appealing, but we need to make sure there's also the spiritual part to it.

Are we looking for someone who has also given their lives and bodies to Jesus? Are we looking for that special guy or girl that we can give ourselves to? Can you imagine sacrificing yourself for them? And will they honor that sacrifice by mutually giving themselves to Jesus and you?

9. How can the lack of sexual desire (or singleness) be a gift?

Most people have sexual desires, but some don't. Since getting married and having sex are often considered the norm, people without sexual desires have sadly been painted as weird or aberrant. But Paul found his asexuality a gift and helpful.

Focus on Serving God. People can often use a lot of energy thinking about or trying to fulfill their sexual desires. But if you're single and don't have those desires, you can use that time, effort, energy, and money to serve God and others.

Later in this chapter, Paul writes that the single person can focus on serving God, while the married person has to worry about their spouse (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). I've seen many young adults serve the church fervently who stopped serving once they found a relationship or got married.

Different Perspective. Sometimes being different allows people to see things from a unique perspective. I went to the University of Miami, a place notorious for clubbing and excessive drinking. I've never been into drinking, because I'm way too sensitive to the taste of alcohol. As an outsider, I saw clearly how crazy and harmful that culture was while the people in it just thought it was totally normal.

People without sexual desires can better see how the world is oversexualized or note when people around them are idolizing romance. Love messes with your brain chemicals. Having that sober-mindedness is an amazing asset.

They can also minister to and have compassion for those who are single amidst a sea of couples. In my mid-30s, I was looking for a curriculum to use at church. I saw some material from one of the biggest publishers in the States, and it was broken down into lots of groups: toddlers, kindergarten, G1-12. Then, young single adults. Then, married adults. I thought, "Hey! What happened to non-young non-married adults? Don't we exist?"

Free from Potential Sin. Yes, marriage can help fulfill sexual desires, but it can't guarantee complete fulfillment. Husbands and wives are still tempted to cheat on their spouses, or at least lust after other people. Look at all the scandals that keep popping up!

If there is no sexual desire, then there's no risk of sinning in this area. That's one area they don't need to worry about. Our hypersexualized culture won't have any effect on them.

10. How can Christian husbands and wives minister to their non-Christian spouse?

Our church has lots of mixed-faith couples. It's a special opportunity to serve God. Here are some suggestions:

Be a witness. Set an example of what following God looks like. There are many examples of non-Christian husbands and wives coming to believe in Jesus because they witnessed the life-changing impact on their spouses. We can demonstrate God's love, forgiveness, patience, and passion for His kingdom. Often, seeing this in action can lead the spouse to be curious about Christianity.

Teach the Kids. Find opportunities to share what you're learning and how you're growing. Demonstrate to them what following Jesus looks like in how you treat your spouse, your kids, your friends, and your neighbors. Bring them to participate in the church family. Many unbelieving parents learn through their kids or interact with other believers through children's programs at church.

Pray. Pray for your non-believing family. Pray that God would open their eyes to see Jesus. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel. Pray that you can set a good example.

11. What is God calling you to commit to in your marriage or singleness?

Pastor Vinh gave a list of options:

- Sexual Purity
- Restoration
- Forgiveness
- Affection

Which one is God placing on your heart right now? What can you put into action?