



TIME OF GRACE®

Sexpectations: Sex Is Good

Study Notes

Summary

Sex was not patented by the devil. Rather, it was invented by God himself! In the beginning, when everything was very good, there was sex. God's idea. God's invention. God's gift to husband and wife. In a world where too many of us have been victims of sexual sin or victims of an anti-sex church culture, we need the reminder that sex, by God's design, is still very good.

- Why talk about sex?
 1. Because the world _____.
 2. Because parents _____.
 3. Because God _____.
- **Genesis 1:27,28,31:** ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." . . . ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
- Sex is _____!
- **Song of Songs 1:2,4:** ² She: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. ⁴ Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers. **Friends:** We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.
- **Song of Songs 7:7,8:** ⁷ Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. ⁸ I said, "I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit."
- Sex is _____.

Points to Ponder

1. What did your parents and (if applicable) your church teach you about sex when you were growing up? Do you feel they prepared you to honor God with your body?

2. Kids in America will be exposed to hardcore pornography, on average, by age 11. What would you want to teach your children/nieces/nephews/etc. about God's good gift of sex before that moment arrives?

3. Read Song of Songs and underline all the passages that prove sex is a good gift from God.

Homework for Next Week

Read Ephesians 5:21-33.

*"By trying to grab fulfillment everywhere, we find it nowhere."
—Elisabeth Elliot*

Time of Grace Ministry
Sexpectations: Sex Is Good
Genesis 1: 27, 28, 31; Song of Songs 1: 2, 4
August 8, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

For the next four weeks here in church, I want to talk to you about sex. And you heard that right; four weeks, church, sex. Which sparks a very honest and a very good question: Why?

That's a really good question, which is why before I just jump into the Bible, I want to give you three really good answers to that really good question. Why talk about sex in church? If you're taking notes in your program, let me give you three reasons why I want to do this for the next few weeks.

Number one is because the world is; the world is talking about sex. If I don't say anything in church about sex, it's not like you and your nephew and your niece and your kids and your grandkids are not going to hear anything about sex; it's just that you hear a lot about sex that doesn't come from the Bible. If you use social media, if the kids have Snapchat, if you're ever on YouTube or Facebook, if you have a Netflix account, if you listen to the radio, if you turn on any sitcom or watch any movie, you will come up with some expectation of sex. It just might not be true or biblical or healthy or good for you.

In researching for this sermon series, I just Googled the top 10 songs that are on major radio stations these days and I studied each of their lyrics and can you guess that many of the songs - rock songs, hip hop songs, country songs - were about sex? And do you know what they're teaching us to expect about sex? Not good things. To be a real man, like a man who deserves respect from other men, it's not like you really love one woman and have lots of sex with her. No, a real respectful man, according to lyrics, is someone who has sex with lots of women who he hasn't loved or served or respected for more than two minutes. He saw her at some club and they hooked up and that's a man. Go to female popstars and do you know what they say? That if you're going to be a strong woman, an independent woman, then you should imitate the sins that men have been making for centuries and engage in lots of sex with lots of different people; be sex-positive and confident in your body.

Reason number two, not just because the world is, but because parents aren't. Maybe I wouldn't feel this burden as a pastor to teach you about sex if I assume that your mom and your dad knocked it out of the park on this topic but I have a feeling that has not exactly been your experience because that's what you told me.

I sent a survey to our church family a couple weeks ago and asked some really basic questions about sex and church and home. And the first question was, "Do you feel like your parents adequately prepared you to appreciate God's gift of sex?" And 56 people responded to that

question and you want to guess what they said? Six people said, "Yeah, you know, I think my mom and my dad did a really good job." Eight of you said, "My parents brought it up but the only thing they told me was 'don't' or 'wait' or 'watch out.' Like, that was all we heard about the topic during the talk." Which leaves 42 of you, the vast majority, who said, "My parents didn't teach me anything. It was taboo, we didn't talk about it. They felt awkward, I felt awkward. We didn't touch it." But guess where that left most of us when it came to doing life in this broken world?

There's this email I saved from a woman who connects with us through our Time of Grace media ministry; I want to read to you just a snippet of what she said to me. She said, "I grew up in a strict Lutheran home and growing up we never talked about sex ever. So I turned to other forms of educating myself. By the end of age 11, I delved into the world of pornography. The insistence from my church that sex was shameful outside of marriage since I was a baby nailed me with so much anguish and guilt and self-hatred that I could not forgive myself for what I had done, so much so that I continued to live a life of promiscuity because I believed I was damaged. I believed there was nothing left of me; that I was ruined and could no longer be freed in God's eyes."

Now if that quote was the only thing that came into my inbox, and there were dozens of stories like that, I could care less about offending church people because we cannot let that happen. We cannot let people that Jesus loved and bled for and rose from the dead so they would not have to live with guilt and self-hatred; we cannot let them think that the church does not have a message of freedom and forgiveness for people who struggle with sexual sins. And so if parents aren't telling kids that sex is beautiful and it's difficult and we're going to stumble and fail and there's a Jesus who died for sexual sinners, then the church has to, we must, because our community, our people, need to hear it.

But the third reason is perhaps the most compelling: Because God does. God does talk about sex. For the next few weeks, I'm not going to be quoting from Cosmo but from Jesus Christ. I'm not going to bring a Maxim magazine up here on stage; just the message, the Bible. The Bible that God gave to us. The Bible that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and all of it would be useful for teaching us and correcting us and encouraging us in the faith.

So we're going to open up a Bible like we do every week. And we're going to talk about things that God cares about like we do every week and one of those things that he cares so much about is sex. So that's our roadmap. So what do you think? Are you ready to go? Let's do it.

Some of you know the story about the night I thought I was being a Good Samaritan but I was actually picking up a prostitute. I was down in Madison, Wisconsin. I just played some church basketball, went out to a Mexican restaurant. I was leaving, it was a bitterly cold Wisconsin winter night and I was just about to turn right onto like Main Street in Madison when I looked left and I saw a woman huddled over, shuffling down the sidewalk, frigid cold. And I cracked my window and I said, "Hey, are you okay?" And she said, "No, actually. My car just broke down; it's over there at the gas station." I said, "Oh, my goodness. Can I help you? Can I give you a ride?" And she said, "That would be incredible." So she jumps in the passenger seat, I

introduce myself, "Hi, I'm Mike." And my turn signal is not even off when she says, "So, Mike, are you a freak?" I said, "Excuse me?" She said, "Mike, do you like to have sex?" I'm going to tell you in just a second how I answered that question but just so you're not distracted for the rest of the message, let me tell you how the night went. I told her that I was pretty committed to sex with my wife and in fact, seriously committed to that. She tried to pressure me a little bit; I said it wasn't happening. I don't know if it was wise or not, but her car actually did break down so I gave her a ride home. We ended up talking about our children; I remember about our children's favorite breakfast cereals. And midway through the ride home she asked me, "So, Mike, what do you do for a living?" Oh, I wish there was like footage of that moment because I said, "Actually, I'm a pastor." And she stared at the dashboard and said, "Just my luck." I invited her to our Christmas Eve worship service and the next morning as I was brushing my teeth next to my wife, I said, "Hey, if I tell you a story, do you promise not to get mad?" So good, isn't it?

I want you to think about her question for a second though: Do you like to have sex? How can a Christian answer that question? Should a Christian blush? Dodge it? Plead the fifth? Or can a follower of Jesus say with an exclamation point at the end of the word, "Yeah!" It might seem like an awkward question for most of us in the church, right, because lots of us growing up heard that, you know, God's really cautious about sexual sin and so "don't" or "wait" or "be careful," those are the only messages we hear and it's kind of one side of the story but it's not the whole picture, which is actually a very dangerous way for a Christian to grow up.

So if all you heard from mom and dad and church is "sex, sin, sex, guilt, sex, shame, sex, don't, sex, wait, sex, watch out," one day you take a vow and say, "I do," do you think somehow you crawl into bed and you think, "Sex? Great gift from God!" No. And too many Christians who were raised in purity culture get to that point when God is saying go for it! Enjoy it! You're welcome! And they can't because they've been taught all their life that to be naked with another person is to feel shame. And some of the people that God wants to bless can't.

Which is why I have to tell you today, the Bible says way, way more about sex than just "be careful." In fact, the very first message that the Bible gives us about sex is the opposite of that. And you don't have to read books of the Bible or even chapters of the Bible to get there. Do you know where the Bible first talks about sex? On the first page. Let me show you what God says about sex in Genesis 1. In verse 27 it says, "So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them, male and female, he created them."

So God in the very first chapter of the Bible, he creates people. He creates man and woman and it says he created them in his own image, which is just a fancy way of saying that the human beings that God created originally were perfect. That God doesn't have a physical body so to be in his image doesn't mean, you know, that it had God's eyes or his hair color or stature. It means that just like God was pure goodness, Adam and Eve were purely good. Just like God had no sin in his heart and mind or life, so Adam and Eve were exactly the same. These were perfect people who, until Genesis 3, would not do a single bad thing. So God creates in verse 27 and can you guess how many verses it takes him to talk about sex? One. The very next verse after the creation story says this: "So God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it,'" which is hilarious to me. Out of all the things that God could have

started with, he turns to Adam and he turns to Eve and he says, "Be fruitful." Have sex. Enjoy it and you are welcome. We go from creation to procreation and recreation in one verse. And it's not bad! And God's not blushing when he says it.

In fact, just three verses later as the chapter ends, Genesis 1:31 goes on to say, "God saw all that he had made and it was very good." The people that God made were very good. The world that God made was very good. And the sex that God gave them was very good. If you're taking notes, here's the very first thing the Bible wants to teach you and me about sex; that sex at its core, at its very nature as a God-given gift, is good! The first thing that Christians should think when they think about sex is good because it comes from a God who's perfect. Now this should be totally obvious to longtime Christians or anyone whose brain is functioning. Some of you grew up in church where you have confessed the ancient Christian creeds, like the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed. Some of you grew up maybe in a Lutheran church where you had to memorize exactly what those creeds meant like the "What Does This Mean?" And do you know if you have confessed the historic Christian creeds, you have actually talked about sex; that you believe it.

Remember the opening words? "I believe in God the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth. The one who created all things, visible and invisible." What does that mean? Well, Martin Luther used to explain it like this: "I believe that God created me and all that exists. He gave me my body and soul, my eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities." And guess what that includes? Sex. Alright, so here's the cool part where you get to participate in today's message. I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to answer with the word "God" if it seems right to you. Are you ready for it? Who created you? God, right? Who created your body? God. Who created - a few of you answered that one; it's getting awkward already, isn't it? Who created all your body parts? God did. Who made a man's body? God. Who made a woman's body? God. Who made sex? God. Who made sex feel good? God.

Well, there you go. It seems - who else would have created it in the beginning? There was no Satan to tempt, there was no sin to corrupt; there was just God and his good creation and God made sex. But wait just one second - in Genesis 1, God said "Be fruitful; fill the earth," which means maybe God's original intention for sex wasn't this like spontaneous, pleasurable, enjoyable thing; maybe it was just to populate the earth. Maybe sex is primarily about procreation and not recreation, which is what some Christians over the years have assumed but which Christians who read the Bible cover to cover know can't be right. And that's just because the way that God created the body that some parts of it are simply for a man and a woman's pleasure, but also because there's a little book tucked in the middle of the Old Testament called Song of Songs or Song of Solomon. Have you ever read it before?

There's a Jewish tradition that like Jewish kids weren't allowed to read it until they turned age 30, which makes me think they took like their blankets and a flashlight and would read it and when their mom and dad were sleeping. But it is a book that is not at all about kids but it is very much about sex. Right after a very brief verse one introduction, let me show you how Song of Solomon starts. In verse two, this wife, this future bride, says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love," - and the Hebrew word there is for making love - "is more delightful than wine." That's in the Bible and then it gets more passionate.

Just a few verses later, she continues. She says, "Take me away with you - let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers." She doesn't want to play Monopoly; she wants to make love. But then her religious friends find out that she's pretty excited about this sexual encounter so do you know what all her church friends say? Well, that's in the Bible, too.

Later in that passage, it says, "We rejoice and delight in you. We will praise your love more than wine." The church says, "Yeah! Enjoy it! Have fun. We're excited. You know, some of us got you wine glasses for your wedding but God got you something so much better so we delight in it, we rejoice in it, we as a spiritual community love it." Why did they say that? Cause sex is good.

In fact, creative, spontaneous, flirtatious sex between a man and his wife is very good. Now parents, the next passage I'm about to show you is about as edgy as the sermon series is going to get but it's not something I'm going to say; it's something that God says. Song of Solomon 7 has one of the husband's responses. He says to his bride: "Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, 'I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.'"

Which is just outstanding, isn't it? No, you're not allowed to choose that as a life verse, gentleman. That's in the Bible! That's in the Bible! And if you'd read Proverbs where the smartest men in the world were inspired to write Scripture, there are many warnings about sexual sin but there's also verses just like this: "I hope you delight in the wife of your youth. I hope you love her body; you cherish it, pursue it, and love her and make love to her until death do you part." That's sex in the Bible.

And we're going to talk about the warnings and the dangers and the cautions and the be careful but immediately, especially you young people, I hope you believe this. Plant this deep in your heart that sex is a good gift from a great God. So where does that leave us as a church community? I'd like to speak to three specific groups of you today before I say "Amen." I want to talk to those of you who are single, then I want to talk to those of you who are married, and finally, I want to talk to those of you who are parents.

For those of you who are single, let me say this: God wants you to be cautiously excited about sex; cautiously excited. You know, cautiously because if you cross the line sexually, you can have some real damage in your life. Just like a fire that's out of place, out of the fireplace. But God still says be excited! I know many Christians start to view their sexuality as so dangerous and so shameful and so sinful that it kind of messes with them for many years to come. Instead, when you feel sexual desire, I want you to think of that as a good thing from God. I mean, when I'm meeting with a couple for premarital counseling, I hope it's really, really hard for them not to have sex because what's the other option? We're not interested at all; it's like a bad thing. No, be cautiously excited about the gift of sex. Pleasure is a gift from God. Sexual pleasure is a gift from God. So when you feel that longing, don't try to stuff it or suppress it. Be self-controlled and be wise but see that it's a good gift. Your heavenly Father created you, your body, your mind, your emotions and your desires. Be carefully excited; be positive about the gift of sex.

To married people, I say the same thing, just without the cautiously. Be excited about sex! In fact, something that many married Christian couples don't do is to talk about sex. We can talk about the kids and we can talk about communication, we can talk about the weekend plans, but many husbands and wives - even though sex is very much a part of their relationship - they don't talk about it. But I want to give you full permission on the car ride home, as long as the kids are in the backseat, talk about sex. What do you think about it? What's scary to you? What are you curious about? What makes you feel good? What aren't you ready for just yet? When something is taboo and secretive, it rarely gets better. And so whether your sex life is knocking it out of the park or really struggling or you're sexless, talk about it. It's okay! It's a gift from God. It's not a shameful thing from the devil; it comes from your Father. So communicate openly about sex.

And finally, for you parents - parents, I want your kids to know that you have sex. Which might seem awkward, right? Your kids don't need to know the details of your sexual life; you should definitely lock the door when they're in the home. But a kid growing up, even a teenager, should know that mom and dad have sex and they like it. And some of you are avoiding eye contact right now or smiling sheepishly but think about that! I want the first impression your children have about sex to be that it happens between a man and a woman who've committed themselves to love and respect. When your children hear the songs on the radio or see the token sex scene in a movie, I want it to feel off to them because from the youngest years, they have learned something different and more beautiful and better about the context where sex happens. Parents, they might make it seem awkward but they're listening. And you give them a foundation that will make all the pornography and pop culture in the world seem shallow and weak and not worth it. Give them a better vision for sex.

So that's what I want you to know; there's our foundation. Sex is a good thing, families can talk about it, couples can talk about it, we can talk about it because it comes from God. But I made you a promise in my introduction that I would tell you one thing this week and every week until the series is over; that sex is not just good, it's forgivable.

In fact, that's so important, I want you to write this down: That sex is forgivable. That maybe this whole topic brings a whole lot of memories because you have a story that involves sex and maybe it wasn't good. Maybe there's sexual sin that you chose to commit or maybe you didn't choose it and it was committed against you but I want you to know, whatever your story and whatever your shame, sex is forgivable and I know that because Jesus said it.

You ever heard the really famous story that Jesus told that we sometimes call the Parable of the Prodigal Son? It was about a kid who rebelled against his father and he didn't just like accidentally run into a prostitute, he intentionally sought out and propositioned many prostitutes. And you could read the whole story in Luke 15 but basically, the bottom falls out on this kid's life and he eventually has to sheepishly go home to his father and he knows that he has messed up. He's dishonored his father, he has sinned against God, and when he comes down the road smelling like pigs and prostitutes, he realizes how badly he's messed up. There's no way that he thinks his father's going to welcome him back to the family table but maybe he can just get a job, scrape by, and make ends meet.

But do you know what happens in the story? The father sees his prostitute-loving son from a distance and the Bible says he has compassion on him. And he runs out to meet him but before he even confesses his sin, he embraces him and hugs him and the kid confesses: Father, I've sinned. I've sinned against God and heaven. I've sinned against you. And the Father is so full of forgiveness, it's almost like he didn't even hear it. He calls for a servant to bring a robe and a wrap around his son; that he would be beautiful in everyone's eyes. He fires up the grill and makes steaks; they have a feast. He hires a DJ and they start dancing. This kid who came home dirty because of his sexual sin, before he's better, before he's changed, that very day that he came to confession he ends up dancing with his father.

And do you know why Jesus told that story? Luke 15:1-2 said, "Now all the sinners were gathering around Jesus and the church people thought, 'Why is he eating with them?'" And Jesus told the story about a father in heaven who'd eat with people just like that. Now I don't know most of your stories but I do know the majority of the stories at our church involve sexual sin. That even for those of us who believe this is a good gift from God, we haven't always done good things with it.

But I want you to know this - that you are welcome here and you are welcome in heaven because Jesus was and is a friend of sexual sinners. He has cleansed you, he has washed you, he has made you pure and perfect so you do not have to be ashamed. You do not have to run away from this place or from the family of God. Because sex is forgivable. So here's what I want you to know today: Sex is good. But Jesus is the best.

Let's pray.

Dear God, I thank you for sex. You could have used storks; you didn't. You gave us families through a really good gift and, God, some of us praise you here today and some of us are still struggling to believe that. And so, I pray that you would give us the kind of minds that can sort through the kind of sex that was destructive and harmful and the kind of sex that you intend.

I pray, God, for our church. I know we live in a community filled with people who haven't done this right and they think the church can't be for them because of their past and their struggles. So, God, I ask you for your love today; that it would overwhelm our hearts. That we would see Jesus as an incredible Savior, a forgiving and a merciful God. I pray, Jesus, that we would live without guilt and shame because you died on the cross and you rose from the dead that we would know and believe deep in our hearts that sex is forgivable.

God, give us good boundaries and wisdom as we talk about this as a church, in our communities, and in our life groups. But help us to believe that just like worry and fear and anxiety, sex is something we can talk about because it's a conversation that you started. We pray all these things with hope and confidence because you're a good God who gives good gifts and we pray it all in Jesus' name and all God's people who believe that sex truly was good, they joined their voices and they said amen.