

Sermon Transcript from July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
Song of Songs: The Sex Talk  
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[Gerald Griffin]: So, Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. Here we go. We're going to do an overview of it and tonight's going to be kind of fun because we're going to do it in two parts. I'm going to do part one and then part two will be the one and only Miss Bethany Allen. So, I'll just hurry up so we can get to the good part. Okay? If you've ever read this book before, there's a lot of question about it. What is this about? Is it this allegory, this metaphor for God's love for Israel or, as followers of Jesus, God's love for the Church? Basically, what we have come to understand and how we're going to teach it is actually, no, it's mainly this beautiful, well-crafted love poem celebrating sex and marriage. That's what we think it is.

So, it's also debated: is this an engaged couple looking forward to their marriage or are they married? I think they're married. You'll see why in a couple seconds. So, let's jump in.

Song of Songs 1:1. It says, **"Solomon's Song of Songs."**

And then notice in your NIV it says "She" right there. So, this is the female voice.

"She

**"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you!"**

Apparently a lot of women love this guy.

**"Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers."**

Then look below that. The friends speak now and they say:

"Friends

**"We rejoice and we delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine."**

So, it jumps right in. It's like, "Whew." It starts with this woman's voice. She's the first speaker and she's unashamedly expressing her love and desire for her man. She's like, "Let him kiss me. His love is amazing. His name is amazing. His fragrance is amazing. It's no wonder all the women love you."

Then, verse 4, she's straight up, "Take me away with you. Let's go to the king's chambers."

Basically she's saying, "Come get me and take me to bed."

That's what that means. Then, the friends – and this is all poetic, okay? So, there's a lot of metaphor. Everything's poetry. So, we've got to work within that. It's not a narrative. It's not like, "First, he went and did this then they went..."

It's not a straight line. It's like a spiral. Okay? So, just remember that. It's poetry. Did I mention that? So, there's a couple voices. There's her voice, the woman, then there's the friends' voice. So, this is this group, and as the poem progresses through stanzas you'll realize this is a group of young women that are probably not married. And their voice is just celebrating this couple. So, that's why they say, "Hey, we rejoice and we delight in you. We praise your love more than wine."

They're like, "Hey, you guys are in love. You're excited about being together and we think that's cool too."

Alright? Skip to chapter 2. We're going to just keep blazing. Okay? You with me?

Song of Songs 2:2. Then he speaks up. The dude. And he says, **"Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women."**

And then she says:

**"Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste."**

So, again, poetry, metaphor. But, you get this pretty clear idea that these two only have eyes for each other and they've singled each other out. She, like the rose among the thorns. He, like the apple tree among this big forest. Right? They've singled each other out and they've chosen to set their affections only on each other. Chapter 3. Flip to that one.

Song of Songs 3:1: **"All night long on my bed I looked..."** – this is her, by the way. She speaking.

**"I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up and go now about the city, through its streets and its squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but I did not find him."**

So, in these different poems, you'll see a couple different themes. One, they just express their love and desire for each other. Two, you see that she, in particular, is trying to find her dude. And at times they find each other and then they're separated and she's looking for him again and it's this beautiful expression of their desire for one another. She loves him. This is her bridegroom and, when he's not there, when she wakes up and he's not there, she's like, "I have to find him. Where is my man?"

Right? So, there's kind of this building intensity to it all. And then, chapter 4 is one of these beautiful descriptions. So, what he basically does – and she does this for him, but we don't have time for everything tonight, guys – is he's going to describe her, head to toe. Are you ready? Here we go.

Song of Songs 4:1: **"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead."**

Now, pause for a minute. Needless to say, this is in the ancient Near East thousands of years ago in a different culture with different ways to compliment your beloved, okay? You have to remove yourself from Portland 2016 and go way back in time and unpack. These are actually compliments. Okay? So, how do they work? What do they mean? So, we're going to go through this and just kind of unpack these metaphors. Okay?

So, first, in Song of Songs 4:1, "How beautiful are your eyes, they're like doves."

Honestly, even reading scholars on this, it's not super clear what it is that's so attractive in the eye that's like the dove. Is it that there's a softness there? Is it the color? Does it represent purity? It's not exactly clear, but it's definitely a compliment. Actually, this is one of the compliments that she says about him and he says about her. So, apparently if your eyes look like doves, it's a really good thing. Okay?

Next one in the second part of that verse. It says, "Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. You're like, "What the...?"

Well, here's the thing. First of all, Gilead in that time was a super beautiful, awe inspiring place. So, that's the setting of this compliment. Then he says, the visual imagery, picture this: a flock descending down a mountain where each individual member blends together to form a dark, streaming, smoothly moving motion down into the valley. This flowing movement reminds him of her hair and she's like, "Really? Like goats? Thank you."

Right? Song of Songs 4:2. It says, **"Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,"** – and "shorn" means trimmed. They just got buzzed. Right? – "coming up from out of the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone."

So, he's complimenting her teeth and, basically, dental hygiene in the ancient Near East was nothing like what it is today. And he's basically saying, "Your teeth, you have all of them and I'm very happy."

They're matching and that's beautiful to him, okay? Song of Songs 4:3: **"Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;"** – so, that kind of works today, right? Like, these beautiful, thin lips. Scarlet red is probably this sign that the color red evokes desire for him. That works, right? That's beautiful.

Next one. Song of Songs 4:4: **"Your neck is like the tower of David,"** – what? – **"built with courses of stone; on it hangs thousands of shields, all of them shields of a warrior."**

Okay. So, this one I don't think is visual, because to say that her neck was like this tall tower would probably be like, "Your neck's like a giraffe." That's insulting, right? That's not it. I don't think it's a visual comparison. Instead, I think it's to elicit power and dignity. It seems that the way she carries herself reflects integrity in her character and that it breeds this healthy respect. Right? But, the next one's your favorite.

Song of Songs 4:5: **"Your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies."**

Now, yeah. Remember, he's going head to toe. He's working his way down and he gets to the chest and he says this. And what does this exactly mean, right? Apparently it doesn't take much insight that they're like twins. That kind of makes sense, right? Right? That's what he's saying. This is the Bible, guys. Alright? My job is just to help explain it as best I can. I did find a quote that might give some insight into this too. Listen to this:

"The baby deer is soft and gentle and everyone seeing these little deer longs to pet them and play with them."

Right? You've seen baby deer. You're like, "Oh." Thus, when he compares her breasts to two fawns, he's really saying that he longs to caress her soft and tender breasts. And that was from a Biblical scholar, guys. I didn't make that up. You know, when I was a teenager, I avoided going to church. But, if they had talked about this, I probably would have been there.

At this point, I would say they're definitely married. I'm thinking they're married at this point in this. But, what's happening here is there's this buildup. He's describing her body. He's like excited about it. And look what he says in verse 9. Skip down.

Song of Songs 4:9. He says, **"You've stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;"** – and "sister" was a term of endearment. It doesn't have anything to do with incest. Okay?

He's like, **"You've stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice!"**

So, he's like, just one look from her eye and he's ravished in love with her. One jewel from her necklace reminds him of her and he's absolutely smitten. Turn to chapter 4. A couple verse down to verse 12.

But, he says, **"You are a garden..."** – metaphor, metaphor – **"...locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain."**

If you're thinking that sounds sexual, it's because it is. When he talks about her garden he's talking about her very most intimate, sexual parts. Please don't make me say more. You know what I'm saying? And he's like, "Hey, I love you. I want to be with you. You've stolen my heart. But, you're not open to me right now."

However, verse 16. Relax, guys. It's building up. I feel the tension, too. I feel it.

Song of Songs 4:16. She says now, metaphor, **"Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread everywhere. Let my..."** – I know – **"...beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits."**

Yeah.

Song of Songs 5:1: **"I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;"** – I'm just reading the text, guys – **"I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb**

and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk."

So, in other words, they're definitely married. Okay? It's been consummated at this point. Every metaphor there is, drink the wine, taste the honey, he's like, "I did it all. I did every one of those."

And then the friends, look what the friends say. The friends say, **"Eat, friends, and drink; drink your fill of love."**

So, if it wasn't clear by now, this is actually a celebration of sexual enjoyment in marriage. And this is crazy. This is in the Bible from God. This is the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus lived by. And Jesus was a celibate dude, by the way, and so was Paul. Both those guys weren't married. But, this is like clearly in the Bible from God. And some of us, maybe you've heard in church, "Don't have sex until you're married," which is true. But, what you heard was, "Sex is dirty. So, save it for someone you love," which doesn't make any sense at all.

But, I think if we're honest, the church isn't known for being a group of very erotic people. Like, I don't get people from the city that email me and they're like, "Hey, you're a pastor. Can you give me some advice about my sex life?"

That's just not how people view the church. But, you read this book and you spend any time in it and you start unpacking these metaphors and it's absolutely this erotic celebration of sexuality in marriage in this covenant relationship. One man, one woman, for life. This book tells us that sex is wonderful, mysterious and greatly to be enjoyed. It's this intoxication that God invites us into. And this fits into the wisdom of God, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Job. This fits into the wisdom of God in that there is a flow of life. Remember the Hebrew word for wisdom is "chokmah." This is chokmah. This is the way that sexuality works well in God's universe.

In this covenant relationship where there's safety and security that a man and a woman can give entirely of themselves like they do with no one else. Where it can be celebrated and the Scripture says, actually, in Proverbs 5, that it's intoxicating and it's this beautiful, intoxication that God invites us into. But, what about those in the room right now that aren't having sex? If you're married you're like, "Oh, this is awesome. Yeah!"

And then, if you're not, you're like, "Oh, man. That's cool. But, that kind of sucks for me right now."

Some of you guys here are in a marriage that is sexless. And, if that's the case, I just want to challenge you to, on the way home tonight it's going to be awkward. But, you probably need to talk about that. If you're married and you're not having sex, you need to talk about each other's needs and agree upon how regularly that needs to be implemented into your relationship. That sounds weird, but you know what I'm saying. And if you're in a sexless marriage and you've tried that, then you might need to get therapy and get help. But, some of you guys are single and you're following Christ in your singleness and celibacy. Some here tonight are struggling with same-sex attraction. "What does this mean for me? How do I follow Christ in a way that's honoring Him in celibacy?"

And some of you, maybe, are here and I'm talking about sexuality and you've just started to deal with abuse from your past and this is the last thing you want to hear about. So, what about those who are not having sex? To you, I say this: sex is amazing. But, sex is not the center of the universe. You know, the Sun in our solar system is 333,000 times the mass of Planet Earth. And it's because of that weight and mass that it is able to hold all the other planets in our solar system in their proper place. And likewise, each of us here tonight, we have a center of our own personal lives and of our own universe, if you will. There's something in the center that holds into place, hopefully, our desires, our relationships, and our sexuality.

And if you put sex as the focal point of your life and as the center of your life, it does not have the weight and the gravity, it wasn't designed to be the focal point and the greatest and most important thing about you. So, if you put it as the center, everything else, your relationships, your desires, your sexuality, those planets of your life will go flying into chaos and into destruction. Heartbreak, relational failure and pain. The only thing that has enough gravity and weight to hold all the planets of my life and your life in place is Christ. He's the exact representation of God in bodily form. He's the alpha and the omega; the beginning and the end. He is the Word of God who created everything that exists. And in Jesus Christ, all matter holds together. Everything was made by Him and exists for Him. And He will never leave you and He

will never forsake you. He is constantly good and always for you. And only Jesus has that weight and that gravity to hold the rest of my life in its proper place and order.

And as a single person, whenever I would, in the past, put my sexual desire as the most important thing – really as an idol. But, whenever I put it as the center of my life, everything in my life would fall out of place and relationships would go into shambles. And now, even as a married man, if I put my desire for sex as the center of my life, it wreaks destruction and pain. When I live with Jesus as my center and I seek Him and His Kingdom first, all of these other things find their proper place.

And tonight, I simply want to say that sex is absolutely amazing, but it's not everything. Jesus is everything. So, with that said, would you please welcome up for part two, the one and only Miss Bethany Allan.

[Bethany Allen]: You're the best guy in the world. Sort of. Well, hi. Hello. Hey. This is a kind of fun way to do this. You know, when the guys sat me down and they were like, "Hey, we'd love for you to teach something," I was like, "Great. Yeah. What do you want me to teach?"

They're like, "How about Song of Solomon?"

I was like, "Mm mm. Mm mm. Really? You're having sex, I'm having none. So, are you sure, God? Okay."

So, I say that to say I'm happy to be here and so thrilled to be talking about Song of Solomon. Just a little background, I grew up in the "True Love Waits" generation. "I Kissed Dating Goodbye." And there it went. Huh? Yeah. Some of you know what I'm talking about. Some of you are like, "What is that?"

It was a period of time in the church where there was people really encouraging groups, predominantly of teenagers and college students, to save sex until marriage. And there were rallies that they did frequently and they gave out rings and you signed these weird cards at the front and you committed to God and to the people around you – maybe your parents, even – that you would save sex for marriage in that covenant thing. And while I know it can sound a little bit lame, because it was in some ways, the point these people were trying to make was that sex is important. And that, in fact, it was more than important, it was a gift and it was a gift that you gave to someone at the right time.

While I know this was really good and I know a lot of people who were impacted by it really powerfully and in good ways, I also know there were a lot of people who were impacted by it negatively. Because, just like any good movement, in the church specifically, it wasn't perfect. Out of that movement came things around sexuality and around God and the Bible that weren't helpful for us as a generation. And, in some cases like I said, they were hurtful. So, I'm really glad, actually, that we're in this weird book of ancient poetry tonight together. Because, I actually think it's really important. It's about so much more than a love sick, wild woman running over the hills looking for her boo. It's also not about a man who's just talking his woman up and down with all things fruit and wildlife.

It's not about that. It's so much more. And as Gerald said, it's this beautiful window. It's like we're getting to peak into God's heart for sensuality and for sexuality and for intimacy. We get to see how He invites us in to this expression of ourselves. And He actually says it's good and He says that His design and the way that He's designed things is actually, particularly around sexuality, it's not just good, but it brings freedom to people. Not bondage. So, if you're encountering sexuality in a way that brings bondage, then you know it's probably not His design. Right?

So, there's all these really good things that we can see in the book. Like Gerald said, it's a book of actual wisdom literature. So, it's hard to read. Like, I mean, listen. Gerald and I – I just couldn't even text him the stuff I'm reading. That quote I read six times and was like, "No. I don't know. I don't know what we're going to teach on."

But, this book is actually wisdom and it's like this big, big, echoing boom to the people of God that God really cares about you having really great sexual fulfillment. He really cares about you having good, healthy relationships. That He's for it and He's designed it for you to flourish in. And at the same time, as I've read the book and studied the book, particularly over the last week and half, I'm so keenly aware that while He's telling me, "This is really good and sexuality is really good and I made it and I'm on board like 100%," there's this other beautiful thing in the text where He says, "I get what it's like. I understand that innate

desire in you; that longing for love; to know and to be known; to give yourself to someone. I totally get it."

So, it's beautiful. It's weird and it's beautiful. So, I'm here really just to give you the one, two, punch. So, that's what I'm going to do. Sound good? That was weird. I don't know why I said that, actually. Anyway, I'm going to talk to you more about the Bible. There's two things that I want to talk to you about. I know, bless my heart. There are two things that I want us to hit tonight. I promise we're going to wrap it up. Thank goodness you weren't at the last teaching, because you would have been – well, you could still be here if they had let me keep going. It was a long teaching. So, this time we're going to try to keep it a little bit shorter.

Maybe you noticed it, maybe you didn't notice it because I know you're all doing your Year of Biblical Literacy along with me. But, when you read this book or when you've read it in the past, maybe you noticed it, maybe you didn't, but there's this theme – and Gerald alluded to it just a second ago. But, there's this overarching theme woven throughout the book of a garden or of a vineyard or whatever your translation says and there's these specificities that he draws out. Like, "You're like a lily among thorns."

"Thanks."

"And you catch these little foxes that are going to be in your garden and you need to take care of them. Nip it in the bud. Then there's lilies and trees. You're like an apple tree."

So, I get it. There's all this beautiful garden language. And that's not odd to us, because we are people who kind of get the paradigm of the garden. Right? We know that's where we started the story. So, it's not super strange in Hebrew literature to have this. But, one of the things I would say to you is the original readers, people who were reading this and read the garden thing, would actually stand out to them a little bit more than it would to us. Because, gardens in the ancient days were just this space and place where celebration and beauty and art and expression was had. It's like kind of a sacred space that they've set aside specifically for art and beauty.

Now, there's these hanging gardens of Babylon if maybe you've done anything with history or watched TV. I don't know. But, it's like this is like a wonder of the world and that culture really cared about it. So, the author's saying, "Pay attention to this thing about the garden, because there's significance."

I don't have time, because I shouldn't take the time, to elaborate more on the garden thing. But, there's a few things I'd like to say. As I've studied the book, things I've pulled out around the garden are this: the garden, obviously, represents some kind of sexuality, right? It represents, in Gerald's language, the woman's sexuality. And when we read it more and more, we see that it's this broader thing. It's the sexuality, the union of the man and the woman. It's the place where consummation happened; where sexual expression was happening.

So, what's important? Well, as I've read through the book, I've seen a few things. The thing about this garden – and we joked about it earlier, how this girl had her garden on lock, which I appreciate. And I think about this emoji. Do you know what I'm talking about? Some of the girls are like, "Ah, yeah. I've sent that."

Yeah, you have. That's it. It's like that. She had her garden on lock. And he uses this great language. They're talking back and forth right before the consummation. He's like, "Your garden's locked."

And she's like, "Yo, boy. I opened it up."

And he's like, "I got the key."

And she's like, "Cool. Let's do it."

And so, they do. They do it. I don't know who I am, but that was awesome just there. I don't know what that was, but yeah. More of that, God. So, there's this beautiful thing. But, what I want you to see is that the garden thing was really specific and it's beautiful. This metaphor is about this garden or sexuality, our sexuality an intimate thing, a private thing and a thing that's actually sacred. In the book, we can joke and be flippant like, "Yeah," and it's funny. And it is. But, here in the text, the author's telling us that your sexuality's an important thing. And he's not just talking about virginity. He's talking about much more, that this act, this consummation, this security that comes with making love and being connected to one

another within the confines of a covenant is a beautiful declaration of goodness.

And the text is telling us that. So, this metaphor of garden is just something I want you to pay attention to. I want you to drop it in conversation, you know, when y'all are talking about Song of Solomon at the water cooler or whatever it is that you cool kids do. Just drop it. "There's this cool thing about the garden. I'm sure you didn't notice, but I did."

And it's this. The metaphor speaks to us and it says, "God's aim for our relationships – all kinds, but particularly our sexual relationships – every marital relationship should be exclusive."

This woman and this man were with one another and not other people. The internet wasn't involved. The TVs weren't involved. This was a private union that they had together. It should be considered holy and separate. All throughout the book, we're pinging and ponging back and forth. The tension is about to kill me. I mean, like, "Ugh. Oh. Ah." I'm like falling along. Anyway, it's weird. I don't know if I should've been doing that, but I was like in it. And there's this tension created and the tensions is meant to point us to the sacredness of the act that's about to take place. They're describing each other because they're in love and it's not foreplay, it's this idea of this growing affection for one another and it's telling us, the readers, that this is an important moment in time. Pay attention. This is a sacred act.

This metaphor is telling us that your sexuality should be expressed freely. Because, listen, she says, "Let my beloved come into his garden."

So, it was just his. His alone. And he says, "I came into my garden."

Yeah, brother. Good. And there's no like, "Things were a little bit awkward at first." There's none of that. There's this beautiful breath, this beautiful expression that it was good and their friends are even like, "Yeah. It was really good. I mean, I heard it was good."

So, there's this great thing happening. So, this metaphor is beautiful. It's all throughout this book and I love it, because it's teaching us a ton about sexuality. You know, Gerald talked about sex is good and that it's not the center of the universe and all that and that's good. But, the text goes on here to say other things and it's saying sex has these parameters around it. It's meant to be a private thing. A one-person thing for life thing and not like a boring thing, but an awesome thing. And there's a reason God has these parameters built around it, and that's what we should pay attention to particularly as we read this book.

Now, this is poetry. And, in poetry, everything works out really well and really perfectly. And I prefer life to be that way. But, it's actually not. Right? In the text, our man and our woman, they weren't perfect and they didn't have everything figured out on the first night and, you know, they might have fumbled a little bit. I don't know. I don't know how it went. But, what we see here, what's important for us to focus on, is that they were freely able to express one another. There was a freedom in their love for one another and it was marked by these parameters that God had set. And it focused, more important, if you read it really closely, on giving to one another. What they kept private, separate, sacred and secure is the very thing they were able to give.

And that's sort of like the Kingdom of God in a lot of ways, right? But here, we see it beautifully displayed in the text. So, our hope and our aim and our ambition as people who follow Jesus is that we would be a people marked by freedom too, and freedom that's able to give to others, to consider others better than our self, and that includes our sexuality.

Okay. So, did you get the point on the garden thing? Do you think you're clear? Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Mmhmm. Okay. We're going to look at one more thing. Can you handle it? Okay. You actually have to open your Bible for this. Are you ready? Bible drill. Just kidding. Some of y'all are like, "Mm mm. I'll beat you. Nope."

I was in a lot of clubs and they all included the Bible. Yep. On the market.

So, Song of Songs 2:7. Let's read. It says, "**Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.**"

If you flipped over to Song of Songs 3:5, you'd read almost exactly the same version of

that verse. And then, if you flipped over to Song of Songs 8:4, you'd see once again there's this exhortation to not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. Now, when I read the book, I'm like, "Man, this girl's a bit redundant. She keeps saying it. We get it."

What's it all about? So, the first question we have to ask is who are the daughters of Jerusalem? And Gerald alluded to this a little bit earlier. These are the girls who would have been hanging out with the engaged girl or the bride depending on where you pick up in your reading and they would have been hanging around her like her bridesmaids or something. But, more importantly, they would be girls who were not yet where she was. Right?

These were women who weren't yet engaged or betrothed to anyone. They weren't in marriage relationship. And here she is and she's got something to say. Now, ordinarily, this would frustrate me a tiny bit as I am a single woman and people often feel they have a lot of things they need to say to me about my singleness. Which I appreciate not ever. Hardly ever. I never do. So, let's be clear, right?

So, when I read this the first time like, "Oh, what's this girl got to say? Come on, girl."

You know? Because there's always those women who are like, "Hey, sister. Listen. Your time is coming."

And I'm like, "Sorry. I'm sorry. You're blinding me with your big diamond. I can't see. What did you say? I cannot hear you. What did you say?"

And I'm like, "Listen, woman. You just need to sit down. Okay? I love you with the love of the Lord and it is running out."

So, when she wrote this I'm like, "This woman's crazy."

But, as I read it and studied it, I see this: our woman says these things to these women, who are not yet married, not in a pious or arrogant way, but in a way that's actually meaningful. She's actually speaking with wisdom. Because, each time this woman speaks, she's speaking from a place of experience and it's always different. She's in a different stage in her relationship with her husband.

So, here she is and she's saying, "Listen, don't awake and arouse love," and she's like, "Because, I can't stop myself. I love this man. Okay? And I am committed to seeing this through."

You know? She's like, "My garden is not unlocked, but the chains are loose. And I'm ready to go all the way and it's hard."

So, what she's saying to us is not like, "Your time will come, girl. Your time will come."

It's like, "No. Listen, it's hard. You awaken this part of yourself and it's not something that can easily be shut."

And some of you know what I'm talking about. And she's saying, "So, don't awaken or arouse this love until the time is right."

And then she goes on. She's in an anxious spot. She can't find her beloved. She's stressed out. She's freaking out and she's having every emotion under the sun and she says, "Listen, girls. Don't awaken or arouse love until it so desires. Because, this is hard. There's an emotional pain and turmoil that comes in connecting and joining your life with another. And then at the end in her euphoric, good space she says, "Listen, wisdom would say, 'Don't awaken or arouse love until the right time.'"

So, how would I say this to you? There's a lot that can be taken out of that text. But, if I was simply to put it one way, I would say this: this means to wait for the right person in the right time. Wait for the right person at the right time. If love isn't awake – hear me people. If it is not awake, snooze button's been hit – that seems to be my thing – don't go a-knockin'. If love hasn't been awakened, it's not your job to awaken it. It's time for you to trust God and His timing and what He wakes up.

And listen, I hate waiting as much as the next girl. But, I take her exhortation not just as an encouragement to me, but as a warning. And in an ability or a space to place value on the commitment that she's talking about. She's saying, "Don't be flippant about love."

Don't be indifferent. Don't be like, 'Well, I mean, he's sort of a Christian.' Or, 'She's nice, and a little crazy, but that's not a big deal.'"

Like, it's a big deal. And she's saying, "Listen. You need to pay attention to who and what you're giving yourself to, who and what you're leaning into." She says, "Be wise about your investment of people."

How are you giving yourself? You need to pay attention to that. Don't be open to something that's not marked by a commitment or a covenant. Why? Because, once you open that can of worms, you can't shut it. It's not super easy. It's not like, "Hey, no big deal. We just went this far and I'm connected in every way to you and nothing's going to happen."

Like, there's weird stuff that happens when we awaken or arouse love until the right time. And some of you know it. The Scriptures say that our heart is deceitful above all things. Who can understand it? And listen, I've done women's ministry long enough to know that I do not understand it, women are crazy and men are crazy. I mean, we're all crazy. Some of y'all I'm like, "You know what, I'm trying to follow you, but I'm not actually sure. Are we talking about you or me or who are we talking about now? I don't know."

It's a crazy thing. The reality is the exhortation this woman is giving for all of us, "Don't awaken or arouse love until the time comes," is going to look different for each one of us. But, the big idea is this: that we are wise and intentional and that we decide ahead of time in the matters of the heart. We make a decision tonight to not awaken, to not go to places we have not been invited to go to, to not wake up people and things and stuff we have no business waking up. We're deciding tonight not to settle, not to stay in a relationship we shouldn't be in. We're deciding tonight not to be flippant about the time we're spending with these people who are not trustworthy, not good, not safe, not sacred. We're saying we're not going to invest our time and our energy in things that lead us to lust, to fantasize or to act out sexually with someone who is not our husband or our wife.

Do not awaken love with another person's husband or wife. Do not awaken sexual love with a man or a woman that is not your husband or wife. Don't awaken love by watching sexuality exploited on the television or computer screen. Don't awaken affections with someone of which you know the commitment and covenant is not there. Guard your heart because – hear me, and my mom says that to me all the dadgum time – premature love is not what you want. Premature love is not the love that we long for. So, do not awaken or arouse love until it so desires.

And that exhortation carries out and is true for each one of us tonight to be mindful of. So, what do we do with what we've heard from Gerald, from me, I talked about the garden a little bit and that was interesting and then this other exhortation. I think we together, as God's people, acknowledge that sex is good and we acknowledge that it's not the most important thing and we commit to live that way. We view our sexuality as a gift and one that we get to express but should be marked by preservation and wholeness, marked by holiness and security. It should be something that's reserved for our spouse and our spouse alone. And, for those of us who are yet to have awakened love, we commit to wait and to wait on God's timing. And all of these things require that we're intentional.

Now, I get to wrap this up. So, I'm going to. So, buckle up for another 30 minutes. Here we go. I have honestly struggled so much this weekend trying to figure out how I was going to exhort you. You know, one, Song of Solomon's kind of weird and two, I just didn't know where to go. Because, I can joke and be cute about sexuality, but I know a lot of you. I'm not naive to the fact that when sexuality's talked about in a room this size, that people aren't radically impacted by it in a negative way. That there are these weird things that start to rise up in us, this condemnation, this shame and this guilt. "I'm not that and I've never been and I don't know."

And I was fearful. "God, how am I going to speak to that?" You know, I mentioned earlier that I was a part of the "True Love Waits" generation. And I am, in fact, wearing tonight on my right hand – because, girl, you don't want to put it on your left. Men get confused. You've got to wear it on your right. There's a certain age where you just switch it over. You're like, "You know what? I think he's confused."

And they're like, "No. He's just not into you."

I'm like, "Oh, okay."

Right? This is the ring my dad gave me when I was 16 years old. It's nothing fancy, but it's super special to me. And when I was 16, I said to my dad, "Look, I'm making a promise to you and to God, that I'll stay pure until marriage."

I might have been the only one on the entire planet, but that silly movement actually helped me genuinely understand that this was part of God's plan for me. And more than it was part of God's plan for me, it was God's best for me. And I'm not always good at waiting, but I have made the choice and I have made it daily to believe that God will do what He said, that His way is, in fact, best. I have chosen to believe Him and just this morning, once again, I have said, "I choose to believe You that waiting's better than acting out, that You actually do have my best interest at heart as my sexuality relates to You and to other people."

And I'm not wearing this ring and telling you all that because I'm some weirdo pastor, goody two-shoes. Which I was and probably, in fact, all of that. And I didn't walk through life unscathed by sexuality just because I'm a tiny bit awkward. I have struggled, much like a lot of you have. And I haven't always been great at drawing boundaries. But, at the end of the day, I chose Him; I've chosen this way of life. My purity is not marked by my self-discipline or my ability to have great willpower in the moment. It is marked and covered by the very grace and protection of God.

I want you to know I'm not talking from a place up here of arrogance or piousness. In fact, I struggled with whether to tell you this part of my life or not. But, I am here to tell you it has been totally worth it and there is a day coming. Y'all need to pray and fast. But, there is a day coming – my lips to God's ears – where I will give myself wholly to the man that God has brought into my life and that I've chosen. And the joy and the pleasure will be all mine. It's a gift I want to give.

Listen, my covenant, my choice to be pure doesn't stem from that decision I made at 16 years old in Daytona Beach, Florida. The reason I've been here, the reason I am here is because I've made the best decision of my life and I did so awkwardly at four years old beside my parent's bed where I said, "I want Jesus to be the most important thing."

My covenant relationship began at four, not at sixteen. And my choice to follow Jesus and to live in His reality, to live into the things that He has said are good started then and there. And I tell you that to say that there's hope. That's what that means. Because, a lot of you in here are feeling all kinds of weird stuff. That shame and guilt, that heaviness and that weird, "Well, I'm not you. Look, you've lived this kind of life and I didn't live that life and you don't know what's been stolen from me and you don't know what's been taken and what they said and how they did that."

I get it. I didn't live that. You're right. It's the grace and mercy of God. But, I know there are a lot of you in here tonight who are feeling that way. And let me say very loud and clear that Jesus wants to heal you, He wants to give you back today what was lost, taken and stolen from you. The reason my hope is rooted in the Gospel or in Jesus is because He's the one who keeps me centered. Not my decision, my sign-up on a purity card. That had nothing to do with it. It was Jesus and Him alone and He's the same God who says to you today that you can choose holiness, that you can choose purity and He will give it to you. This is your inheritance in Christ Jesus. This is what He has for you.

Listen, the garden metaphor, I know it's weird, but the interesting thing about a garden is that when it gets trodden on and ripped up and when leaves die and plants die and it's untended and uncared for and it's terrible, do you know what a gardener can do? He just cleans that field right up and he replants crap and it grows. And it's amazing. Right?

Hear me when I say that's what God wants to do around your sexuality tonight. He's saying, "You are not a garden to be disposed. No. Whatever has happened, whatever's been taken. Whatever. I want to replant and I want to grow an abundance. Beyond what the first thing was, I can grow exceedingly and abundantly beyond what you ever asked or imagined and it can happen. It's offered here tonight."

Now, listen. I know this is a long conversation. I know this is a big one. You're like, "You don't know where I've..."

You're right. I don't. But, I can tell you tonight that Jesus has impressed upon me and

other people and will continue to that He wants to bring healing and life and freedom to you. When you say "yes" to Him, you say "yes" to all that is in Him. Just like Gerald said, the fullness of God, we get to participate and function in that.

So, where do we start? We start right there. Tonight, we say that sexuality isn't the most important thing about us and sex isn't the most important thing of the universe. Jesus is. And that it's from there that we sit a while and we receive from God and we hear what He has to say and we allow Him to work in our gardens and to restore and renew and bring healing and life and freedom.

Here's another beautiful thing that I have to say to you because it's really important: you know, we all have this deep, deep, unique desire to be loved and to be known. All of us. No matter who you are, whatever you struggle with, whatever. It doesn't matter. We all have this desire and that's not a bad desire. In fact, all this sexual intimacy, the stuff we've been talking about tonight, actually points us to a greater thing that we were actually designed to feel. There's this beautiful imagery in the Old Testament, and particularly – well, let's start in the New – in the New Testament where the people of God are actually called "the bride of Christ." Don't let that freak you out. We're not weirdos.

But, there's this imagery that says you're the bride of Christ. And in us, no matter how good our sexual relationships are, no matter how good my marriage is and my husband is and no matter how good I am at certain things or not at certain things, no matter what, on the best day of my life, on my wedding day or my wedding night, there's still going to be something in me the morning I wake up that will say, "This is not everything. There's more."

And I think Alex even talked about it last week. There's more than this. And Jesus says, "Yes. It's me."

Again, we're called the "bride of Christ." And why is that? Because, in the book of Revelation, which is the book of the end when all the things happen and I don't know how to do all of that, but it's kind of weird, it's about the end. Anyway, just don't read it and just wait until John Mark talks to you about it.

But, we talk about it all the time. Right? The age to come. The now and the not yet. That's when the not yet happens, when all things are made new. When Jesus comes in full to His people and we, His Church, we say, "We've been waiting for you," and He says, "I know."

So, when He came, it's like He said, "Here's the engagement ring," and we said, "Yeah. I'm choosing you."

And there's this thing in Revelation and it's called the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb," and I don't actually know if that's what it's supposed to be called, but my Southern Baptist roots tell me that it is. It's the marriage supper. I mean, it's supper. I mean, I don't know. That's weird. Supper of the Lamb. And it's at that thing where we say, "We celebrate in full. We will, together, all the longings of our being will be fulfilled in Jesus."

So, whether you're having sex, you never have sex again or you never have sex ever, whatever it is, there will be a day when you will be fulfilled in every single way and it points directly to Jesus. The one who wants to give you, now, all that He has for you and the one who says, "I promise I will fulfill every longing of your heart if you will let me."

I want to end just with this real quick: there's that day, and that day we look forward to. I was thinking like, "Man, what's a beautiful thing to speak to you about that end time?"

And in Song of Solomon 2, there's this great language where he says, **"Arise, my beautiful one, come away with me. Look! The winter rains, they are past; and the spring rains have come and gone. The blossoms appear on the earth; the time of signing has come, the sound of the dove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs; and the vines are in blossom, emitting fragrance. Arise, my darling, and come away with me."**

This is what He says to us, Church, at the end. Winter is gone. Spring has come. And it is time for you to step into all that is yours in Jesus. Here and now and in the age to come. This is what we have to look forward to. This is what we long for. This is what we hope for. My prayer tonight is that you would know: one, Jesus is for you, that these longings in you are good and that He has a plan to fulfill them one way or another. And there is hope for

us. There is hope.

Would you pray with me?

Jesus, just thank You for Your Word. Thank You that it speaks better words than we could dream up or imagine. I thank You for Your Spirit that's been here and I thank You, Jesus, that Your Spirit is at work moving in the hearts and lives of my friends tonight. And Father, I just pray right now in the name of Jesus, whatever was spoken tonight that wasn't from You, I pray it would just fall away. God, what was from You, I pray You would stir up and repeat over and over again over your kids in here tonight. Because, there are some, Holy Spirit, I just sense, that need to hear from You, that need to hear You say, "You are my beloved and I am the lover of your soul."

So, Jesus, come in might, come in power, speak a better word than what the enemy would try to say to any of my friends. Holy Spirit, we're here waiting on You. We're here to listen to You.