

KAY ARTHUR



*Return
to the
Garden*

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EMBRACING GOD'S DESIGN FOR
SEXUALITY

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DAY FOUR

THE BEAUTY GOD INTENDS

It's so incredible, so awesome. Becoming one flesh is what sex is by God's design. When God made Adam and Eve distinctively male and female, He designed them anatomically so they could physically become one flesh in the act of sexual intercourse.

God formed us to know no greater ecstasy than when a man and a woman literally merge into one flesh. Hormones, nerves, sensory receptors, and other specific physical characteristics are all part of His divine design for our pleasure. An ecstasy beyond exquisite. A oneness washing over you, a wave of passion carrying you weightless to a sea of delight. Passion that loses consciousness of anything else. Exhaustion that leaves you spent, drained of tension and filled with satisfaction, total satisfaction. Spent—and able to rest.

Sex has a beauty all its own and—wonder of wonders—God invented it!

Do you realize that God didn't have to make sex so pleasurable? He simply could have given the instructions: "In order to be fruitful and multiply first do this, then that, and follow with this. Be careful of such and such. Hopefully nine months later you will produce a child. If there are no indicators that the process has worked, repeat again until successful." No feelings, no passion, no exhilaration—just mechanics!

But God designed sex to be more than just mechanical; it's to be deeply satisfying, comfortable, fulfilling, and at times very passionate. True intimacy involves not only truly belonging to another but also being comfortable and secure, free from performance, and knowing a oneness that you have with no other until death parts you. It is to be pure, holy, and free from condemnation and guilt.

This, beloved, is what God intends sex to be. We'll study it more later, but know this—if guilt is written all over your sexuality, you can experience forgiveness, restoration, and purity. But for now . . .

HIS COVENANT RELATIONSHIP AND A DIVINE ROMANCE

Have you ever thought how God used the marriage of the very first man and woman, their oneness, as an illustration of the faithfulness and oneness He desired with His chosen people Israel, to whom He referred as His wife? He used His Son's union with His bride, the church, as an example of how a husband and wife should relate to one another.

From beginning to end, the Bible is about a divine romance. It opens with the account of a man and woman becoming one flesh. It ends with the Holy Spirit and the bride inviting others to join God's forever family. The Old Testament shows us the joy of fidelity and the heart-wrenching pain of adultery. We watch as God took the canvas of the Old Testament and painted the picture of His love affair with Israel—all on the basis of an everlasting covenant: a solemn binding agreement to fulfill His oath to His chosen people, a people chosen above all other nations.

In Ezekiel 16 God sketched the picture of Israel's birth, abandoned in a field, her little body unwashed, squirming in her blood, her cord uncut. Our hearts are touched as we observe His care, raising her as His own until it was the time of love. For a moment God paused, a smile crossed His face as He remembered through Jeremiah the prophet the devotion of her youth, the love of their betrothal, the way she followed Him through the wilderness (see Jer. 2). Then the day came: "I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord God" (Ezek. 16:8).

A covenant is a solemn binding agreement between two parties, whether lesser and greater or of equal status, who commit themselves to each other under certain conditions. Once a covenant is made, it is never to be broken. In a covenant relationship two become one and no longer live independently of one another. They are now bound to protect and

defend one another, share everything in common—no more *yours* and *mine* but rather *ours*. Each party is to be there for the other until death.

Such agreements are so solemn that God becomes the sovereign administrator of every covenant—watching to make certain its conditions are fulfilled. He not only comes to the defense of the violated one, but He also deals retribution against the violator. Pause and see what the prophet Malachi, whose name means “messenger,” said about marriage—and why God was not responding to His people.

First read the passage aloud and then mark the text.

MALACHI 2:13-16

- ¹³ “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.
- ¹⁴ “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.
- ¹⁵ “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.
- ¹⁶ “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Now read it again. This time color-code references to *you* in orange, for instance, and all the references to the LORD (*God*), including pronouns, in yellow or with a yellow triangle.

When you finish, list what you learn from marking *you* and what you learn from marking references to the LORD.

YOU

THE LORD

A LIFE-CHANGING COVENANT

Whenever I come across the word *covenant* in my Bible, I always color-code it because everything God does is based on covenant. The New Testament word for *covenant* is *testament*. Thus the Bible has two main divisions: the Old Testament (covenant) and the New Testament (covenant). I color the word *testament* red and then box it in yellow. Why red? Because the words *made a covenant* mean “cut a covenant.”³

Genesis 15 tells us that when God made (cut) a covenant with Abraham, the blood of animals was shed. Exodus 24 records that when the children of Israel entered into the covenant of the Law, again animals’ blood was shed. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke of the covenant in His blood.

Mark the word *covenant* in the segment you just read from Malachi. Then write out what you learned from marking it. When you look at words you mark in the text, it is always good to ask the five W’s and an H: *Who, what, when, where, why,* and *how* and see how many are answered in that text.

For instance, **who** made the covenant? With **whom**?

What kind of a covenant was it?

When was it made? **When** was it being talked about?

Was **where** mentioned? **Why** the response? **How** was it happening?

O, precious lady, I would love to teach you so much about marriage, about covenant . . . about studying the Bible, but this is enough for today. I want you to bring today to a close in prayer. I don't know where you are or where you have been in your sexuality. But I know what your Creator wants you to know: What His Father's heart has for you as His daughter, or daughter-to-be, is good—so good you cannot comprehend it.

Voice your thoughts, fears, and frustrations, your prayer to the only One who is God and the only One who can truly meet all your needs.



DAY FIVE

HOLY TO THE LORD

Let's go back to God's love for His covenant nation, Israel, which He likened to marriage, and then we'll get to you because you can learn much from God's dealings with Israel.

Nothing was too good for His wife. He adorned her with ornaments, putting bracelets on her hand, a necklace around her neck, and a beautiful crown upon her head. Her dresses were of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. She ate the choicest foods. Exceedingly beautiful, she advanced to royalty. Ezekiel 16 tells us all about how God bestowed His splendor on her and her fame spread. Then it happened.

DAY ONE

A GLIMPSE INTO PURE INTIMACY

Today as we look at courtship and marriage the way each should be—a man and a woman enraptured only with one another and not ashamed to let it be known—let’s begin with this illustration.

We were going over a proposal and couldn’t make sense of the dollar figures.

As I sat at the conference table, staring at the numbers, trying to figure it all out, I found myself suddenly bathed in the luscious fragrance of perfume. Wondering where it came from and why I hadn’t smelled it before, I looked up from the papers spread before me into the softness of breasts cradled in lace. My associate was bending over the table, trying to explain to me where the mistake was!

It was over. From that moment on, I couldn’t think of any other problem than how I was going to get home and get the kids in bed early so I could have sex with my wife.¹

This, beloved, is the way it should be—a one-woman man! His wife was on his mind—not the woman who was bending over him. His wife’s breasts, not those of a stranger, are to satisfy a man (see Prov. 5).

What can we learn in this final week that will help our husbands keep *us* on their minds? And what if we have failed to meet God’s standard in the areas we have studied over the past four weeks? Well, dear one, we will cover that as well so that you will finish this course with the knowledge that all is well between you and your Father God and that it is going to get even better with your husband. What if you are still single?

Is there anything for you? Of course, there is; if you don't have an earthly bridegroom, you have a heavenly one and a wedding to come.

THE BEAUTY OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

God has included an amazing book in His holy Book. Song of Solomon gives us a glimpse into the intimacy God intended for us when He created us male and female and brought the woman to the man. It tells the love story of King Solomon and his Shulammitte bride.

Here is a love to be rejoiced in, extolled, for the Shulammitte (Song of Sol. 6:13) has found one whom her soul loves. The resulting “Song of Songs”—the best of songs (1:1)—is primarily a dialogue between the bride and the bridegroom, with choruses interjected by “daughters of Jerusalem” (v. 5). This dialogue provides insights that will keep us on our husbands' minds. If you study the Songs inductively, you will want to carefully mark the book to know who is speaking and when.

In this study our focus is only on the portions pertinent to the beauty of sex in marriage. In the first two chapters we glimpse their courtship; then in 3:6–5:2 we join the wedding party and read of the consummation of their marriage. From there to the end of Song of Solomon we see “love tried and triumphant.”

As you come to the word *love* anywhere in the text, mark it throughout these days of study. Also underline the word *beloved* as you come across it.

At one time or another, the overwhelming majority of women dream of marriage. We dream of love, kisses, and _____. You fill in the blank.

“May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” (Song of Sol. 1:2). She wanted to be kissed! How well I remember that longing. Once I experienced the wonder of my lips touching those of my husband, it was hard for me to think of anything else. And my kisses were special to him!

Solomon and his beautiful woman felt the same way about each other. Quite possibly she had never kissed another man. Listen to their

conversation. Follow their words closely; notice how they expressed their desires and their appreciation of each other.

SONG OF SOLOMON I:9-11

- ⁹ “To me, my darling, you are like
My mare among the chariots of Pharaoh.
¹⁰ “Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with strings of beads.
¹¹ “We will make for you ornaments of gold
With beads of silver.”

This is Middle Eastern talk from more than two thousand years ago. In those times men were as attached to their horses as men today are to their cars. They decorated their steeds with ornaments that jingled, jangled, and flashed in the sun. You might compare it to American cars of the 50s and 60s—revved-up, painted with lightning streaks, and decorated with fuzzy dice dangling from the rear-view mirror. Even today men equip their cars with all sorts of tires, hubcaps, and electronic gadgets that cause other guys to say, “Whoa man! You’ve got it all!”

Well, Solomon, the groom, had it all—an outstanding horse and an outstanding woman! His mare showed up the mares of Pharaoh and his darling was “the most beautiful of women.”

And what about this young maid standing at the well where he watered his flocks? Listen to her describe the man who had captured her heart:

SONG OF SOLOMON I:13-14

- ¹³ “My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh
Which lies all night between my breasts.
¹⁴ “My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
In the vineyards of Engedi.”

Solomon sweetened her life; the thought of him was nothing but pleasant. He brought a fragrance into her life, like that of myrrh and henna.

Oh, how people love to be around others who make them feel good about themselves! How does your husband sweeten *your* life?

And what did he think of his wife? Watch how he responded: “How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves” (Song of Sol. 1:15). Solomon loved her eyes, describing them as dove’s eyes. He loved hearing what her eyes see. Did you know that doves’ eyes focus only on one thing? Let your husband know that you have dove’s eyes when it comes to him. Don’t compare him with others, dear one, unless he comes out on top!

Did you notice that before Solomon talked to the Shulammitte maiden about her body, he talked to her about her eyes? Today in our sex-obsessed society a woman often evaluates herself based on the size of her breasts, the tightness of her abs, or the flatness of her stomach. Sallie Foley, a sex therapist and one author of *Sex Matters for Women*, has observed, “Generation X women are having dramatic problems being satisfied with the body they bring into the bedroom. Gen X women have internalized this sense of the body perfect, and that is an impossible ideal. They think if they have a perfect body, they will have better sex, and that shows a profound misunderstanding about sexuality. It’s simply not true that women who have infomercial bodies are having better sex.”²

IN HIGHEST ESTEEM

The Song of Solomon is a classic because it’s not about the body, although the bride and bridegroom greatly appreciated one another’s bodies. Rather, it is about love as God intended it—for pleasure, but not in a tawdry way. In this book love is not smeared on the streets or in the locker rooms; its purity and sacredness remain untainted by trash talk. And there is no comparison.

This woman was appreciated for who she was, as she was. She didn’t feel cheap, like a sex toy or a porn star. She felt valued. How important feeling valued is to a beautiful sexual relationship!

In some marriages the wife feels devalued, often for reasons that need to be corrected and dealt with. If you want your physical relationship to soar, hold your beloved in the highest of esteem. Love begets love, and

gracious words produce more gracious words: “How handsome you are, my beloved, And so pleasant!” (Song of Sol. 1:16).

Isn't this what we want and need to hear—that we are special in the eyes of our beloved, that we ourselves are beloved? Twenty-seven times she referred to Solomon as beloved. Many hearts long to be called *beloved!* Women tell me over and over again how much it means to them for me to address them with that term. “No one ever called me that before.” Men need to know they're beloved too, special to someone. *Beloved* is used throughout the epistles as men of God wrote to the people of God. Do you have a term of endearment that lets your husband know how special he is to you?

As we continue reading in Song of Solomon 2, listen as this bride-to-be reveled in her uniqueness. Observe as she delighted in how special they were to each other. What a difference a healthy self-image makes in a marriage!

Mark the words *I* and *me* in one color for the woman and in a different color for the man.

The woman was speaking:

“I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys” (v. 1).

He agreed and responded:

“Like a lily among the thorns, so is my darling among the maidens” (v. 2).

She had chosen him! He had won the prize! What an ego builder to a man, to think that the woman he is about to marry is incredibly special—and what a wonder this awareness was to his bride. This is the kind of a man a woman wants to cover, sustain, and hold her.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:3-6

- ³ “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the young men.
In his shade I took great delight and sat down,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
- ⁴ He has brought me to his banquet hall,
And his banner over me is love.
- ⁵ Sustain me with raisin cakes,
Refresh me with apples,
Because I am lovesick.
- ⁶ Let his left hand be under my head
And his right hand embrace me.”

Do you hear the conversation, the admiration as she leaned on him verbally, expressing her delight in his provision? Yet in all their verbally expressed passion for one another, they were aware that they must be cautious. The Shulammitte and her husband-to-be knew what desires waged war in their flesh. Love was not to be awakened until it was time. Listen to his caution: “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” (v. 7, NIV).

Variations of this phrase are repeated both in Song of Solomon 3:5 and 8:4. Solomon urged the daughters of Jerusalem to remain pure, to not awaken love when it could not be fulfilled. He admonished them—and us—to be vigilant against any compromise that would taint the relationship with the opposite sex. Love is to be expressed sexually in only one place and that is in the marriage bed.

GUARDING YOUR HEART

In the same chapter note a similar warning in the verse concerning what the foxes want to do to the vineyard: “Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, while our vineyards are in blossom” (v. 15). Watch out for the foxes that want to steal your fruit!

How I wish I'd heard and heeded this advice in my youth! I wish I'd been warned about the little things that would steal the beauty of

innocence. It's hard for me to believe that I became an immoral woman. Sensuality was in my mind from childhood because of the things I saw and imagined, but purity was my desire. It would have been so wonderful to have known only one man all my life, to have realized what I longed for in a marriage, what I saved myself for. Being the perfectionist I am, it is a grief I battle, especially when I write books on sexuality or marriage. I have to continually bring my grief and regret in submission to all I know from the Scriptures: "Forgetting what lies behind [and what I can never change] . . . I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

The Shulammitte would never have to deal with such things, and I pray you won't either. However, if you do, I can tell you there's victory if you will do what God tells you to do.

If you want to know the pure beauty of being one flesh with your husband, do everything you can to protect your mind and your eyes; guard yourself from sexual experiences that aren't according to God's plan. When you wait, when you guard your mind, when you don't permit your eyes to watch others in immoral acts—then you come to the marriage bed with no expectations, no comparisons. You have known no one else, so you and your husband can explore and discover together. If you catch the foxes before they eat your innocence, you will have the high and unique privilege of initiating each other into the wonder of love. And while it may take some time to know how to please one another, it will be beautiful because it is untainted by the world.

THE WEDDING DAY

In chapter 3 we come to the marriage as Solomon and his companions—60 mighty men—go to get his bride. It is the day of their wedding. "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart" (Song of Sol. 3:11).

No shame. No guilt. No child in the womb. A white dress and purity. There is gladness of heart, for at long last they will know each other in the fullness of the word.

The day is marked forever in their minds and hearts, a day set apart and awaited. This is the day she will give her bridegroom the gift she can give only once, and he will know he is the first—and the last. This is the day they will become one flesh in the literal sense of the word.

Now he talked to her of love and of the beauty of her body in words that seem strange to us in our culture and times, but they were beautiful to her and not smut, filth, or Internet chat-room talk with someone she'd never seen. His words extolled who she was, what he knew of her. She would cherish these erotic but pure words for a lifetime. He chose these words to awaken love, for now it was in God's time.

The "Song of Songs" is devoted to the beauty of an undefiled marriage bed. Written and preserved for a thousand generations, its timeless truths never change. This is God's textbook for those who would listen to His precepts and keep them, those who would experience the beauty of becoming one flesh.

Now, beloved, if you are single, reflect on what you want on your wedding day. What kind of a woman do you want your bridegroom to have? What kind of a bridegroom do you want? Write some thoughts here or on a separate piece of paper, as a special reminder for when that day comes.

If what you wish for is not possible because of your past, be patient as we will deal with that circumstance near the end of this week. You can have a new beginning—as good as God can make it. And remember, He is the Redeemer.

If you are married, you cannot change your wedding night, but you can take the truths we've seen and apply them. So stop and review what you're read and then list some things you want to do or remember so that your marriage is the best you can make it—whether or not your husband cooperates.

And what is your prayer? Write it here.



DAY TWO

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Do you realize that Song of Solomon is the only time God ever takes us behind closed doors into a bridal chamber? Listen carefully to what Solomon said in chapter 4 to his darling bride as he consummated their covenant of marriage.

Color-code every reference to the wife in chapter 4. (Remember, much of this is Middle Eastern language over 2,000 years ago!) Underline the various references to her body that Solomon mentioned and notice what he said.