

Sex and Relationships

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[0 : 00] Now I would like to use this SAM this evening as a base foundation for what I'm going to come to later on in the sermon. This is part of a series of sermons from the SAMs based on topical issues.

The young people then go and meet up together with the identity and they have some questions to discuss based on what we said. Sometimes that will expand on what has been said from the pulpit.

So this evening's theme is sex and relationships and I would expect that there will be a rapt attention this evening for this particular subject.

I just hope it's not like sex is so often a huge letdown for so many people. It's a vast area to kind of summarise in a sense and deal with.

And obviously then we're just going to look at some basic principles. We're going to try and put it in its biblical context and then I'm going to come round to this particular SAM and the theme of the SAM.

[1 : 17] But why is there such an interest in this subject? Why would we be rapt by a subject like this and maybe not by some other subject, some other theme?

I think part of the reason is because God has made sex such a huge part of life, such a huge part of all of our lives one way or another.

It's a powerful basic instinct in every human being, maybe for some more powerful than for others. And it's a powerful instinct for good.

So God intended and created it as we'll go on to see. But we also recognise because of sin in the world and because of the fall and the brokenness of this world, it has also become a powerful instinct for bad, for evil as well.

And so much of what's connected with sex and sexual behaviour and sexuality has become a reason for division and for hurt and for loneliness and for isolation and for an exposure of vulnerability that is the very opposite of what God intended for it as it is God's gift.

[2 : 39] So what I want to do to begin with is put it in the biblical context positively. Because I think there's an image, there's a thought that Christians in the Bible is negative about sex and negative about sexuality.

It's a kind of, it's a necessary evil. That's not the biblical teaching. It's not what the Bible sees it all. Sex in the Bible is a great gift from God.

And right from the very beginning, it's put in its context. There's one very simple phrase right from the very beginning when it speaks about Adam and Eve coming together in marriage, that they are, the two will become one flesh.

And that's absolutely, fundamentally, categorically speaking about them coming together as individuals, psychologically, spiritually, emotionally and physically as well.

And that is absolutely part of what God's intention was for humanity. And there was this unashamed nakedness right at the beginning where there was nothing to hide, where there was no duplicity, where there was no lust and impurity.

- [3 : 50] And it was an absolute, honest, completely open relationship between each other in a marital context. And that was God. Sex was part of God's gift to humanity at that level.
- And even throughout the Bible, we see it as something that is and can be celebrated. We can look at the, for example, the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. A fantastic love story and a celebration of marriage and love and sexual activity within that.
- And, but always, from the beginning to then, and I'm not going to say anything new or radical tonight, so I'm sorry if I'm going to disappoint you at that level.
- But always and fundamentally is the centrality of marriage for the experience and the enjoyment and the outworking of sexual behavior.
- It's the sexual experiences home territory marriage. That's where it is. That's where God gives its parameter to be within that context.
- [5 : 04] Because it's the expression of something deeper, a deep and meaningful. You know, there's lots of talk just now about marriage and there's always been, I guess, lots of talk about marriage in negative and sometimes in positive terms.
- But it's this hugely significant relationship of love. That's to be lifelong and to be committed. It's to be a relationship of honesty and vulnerability and openness and respect.
- A hugely loving relationship that is to be the company of and the grounds where sex is to happen.
- And it's to be in the context of giving to one another. It's central to the whole concept of marriage within the Bible. Of that loving, caring, respectful, gracious relationship between two people.
- And it's the expression, the physical expression of that. So it's within that context. See, that's hugely important. I'm not talking about legal barriers or parameters.
- [6 : 22] I'm talking about the relationship, the depth and the value and the significance of the relationship, the loving relationship within which the context of sex is to happen.
- It's to be that exclusive pleasure related to that relationship. Okay? That's how God has intended it. That is safe sex.
- That's the relationship that He's given. And He's given us complementary bodies in order to enjoy that, in order to express that, in order to be vulnerable with one another, to be open with one another, to be respectful to one another within that relationship.
- And if we divorce it, and this is where the problem begins to happen, if we divorce it from that loving commitment to one another, then it becomes slightly absurd. It becomes detached from the parameter and the environment in which it flourishes.
- Because not only are we to be naked with one another in that kind of relationship physically, but also spiritually and emotionally, if the heart is not naked also, then it becomes an absurd. I want to quote something which I often quote in the marriage course, in the relation to this quote from a book called *The Mystery of Marriage*, Mike Mason.
- [7 : 50] To be naked with another person is a sort of picture or symbolic demonstration of perfect honesty, perfect trust, perfect giving and commitment. And if the heart is not naked along with the body, then the whole action becomes a lie and a mockery.
- It becomes an involvement in absurd and tragic contradiction. The giving of the body, okay, but the withholding of the self. It is in effect the very last step in human relations, and therefore never one to be taken lightly.
- This is really important. It's not the step which establishes deep intimacy, but the one which presupposes it. And that's hugely significant for us, because many people who are in sexual relationships are looking for intimacy, but they're looking at it, they're coming at it from the wrong angle, and they're looking at it from a physical point of view.

So this one flesh that Jesus, that God talks about, and that Jesus talks about in the New Testament, is all-encompassing. It is both physical and spiritual and emotional, and it is a practical giving of one another in that exclusive pleasure of sexual involvement within that marital context.

And maybe it goes without saying, but I think it's worth saying that within that loving, secure, respectful relationship, sex is to be enjoyed as a pleasure, as an expression, and also as a procreative act, okay?

[9 : 33] And I think that goes without saying at one level, but I think today there's almost an embarrassment about that. It's almost as if it's an annoying kind of biological addendum to the act.

It's like, oh, sometimes you end up with babies. What a pain. What an annoying addendum to that whole pleasurable experience. And that's a reflection of the tragedy of misunderstanding the relationship, the society of marriage, the commitment, and the union of marriage, and the reason for marriage is not only, and it's one that's been really missed out in all the discussions in society over these last number of months about marriage being offered to gay couples.

Nothing has been mentioned about this fundamental and core aspect of coming together in community and society, which is for the procreation of children. And the interesting thing is that along with this act of great love and pleasure and commitment, we become and can become creators.

We become image, as image bearers, we become image makers. We become in that act, and I'm careful in what I say, legitimately like God, because we become parents, we become fathers and mothers and image makers, and we begin to create a new community in family.

And you'll know that as anyone who has family that there's immediately a new community that wasn't there before. And it is borne out of this loving, respectful physical relationship and commitment to one another, so you're committed to each other, so you will be committed to your children.

[11 : 26] And the characteristics that you bear will be passed down to your children also. And the sacrifice and the giving and the responsibility and the privileges are passed down.

So that also is part of God's purpose, that there's this generational movement, there's this generational continuation, and the loving and protective and respectful relationship is the one that God intends us to bring up our children in.

And He does that through our sexual behaviour and enjoyment and involvement. It's great, you know? He could have done it some really other random way.

He could have done it in a really boring way, just as he could have done it with eating. He could have made eating really dull and boring. And kind of, you know, it does what it has to do. You somehow got the energy of the food, somehow you're just opening something in there, putting it in.

No enjoyment, no pleasure. But the interesting thing is that when we take sex out of its context and out of its environment, it's a little bit like taking eating out of its context and environment.

[12 : 41] It's a bit like when we engage in sex without the parameters and without the love and the security and the belonging. It's a bit like eating in our mouth and enjoying the taste of it, because it's enjoyable, but then spitting it out.

And isn't that kind of an absurd thing to do? To take a meal and enjoy the taste of it in your mouth and then just spit it out completely. I'm not going to swallow it, because you only like the taste bit.

And a lot of people think the same way about sex. They just like the kind of pleasure of it, but they've taken it out of the context that God intends it to be blessed and to be used in our lives.

So that's the kind of core reality of what God has given to us. And you all know that. I presume you all know that in many ways.

Now that is, of course, hugely significant for us today, because we stand alone when we believe that today. What makes this sermon really difficult?

[13 : 42] What is it? What is it having stated what the Bible's ideal is for us? What makes a sermon like this make me really nervous and very ill in both in preparation and in preparing to share it with you?

Why is it so difficult to preach a sermon which gives this ideal? Because I know my heart and I know the reality of brokenness.

Not just in this congregation, but in society. Why is it so difficult to preach and speak about something like this? Because here and in society which we live, there are many single people who are longing to get married and who find a sermon like this speaking about the virtue and beauty of marriage.

Very difficult. There's people who are married, who are miserable and have a rubbish and miserable sex life, and who may be having an affair to try and make up for what they're not getting at home.

There's couples that can't have children. There's couples who are drifting apart, who look at the ideal and scoff at what is being said. There's people who are gay, people who are struggling with same sex attraction, people who are in relationships with other people who are not Christians and who don't share the vision that the Bible gives about marriage and about sex and about sexuality.

[15 : 11] Who don't share that worldview and who don't share that. There's people who are married unequally yoked with people who are not Christians and struggle and battle with it. There's people who have no self-esteem, who have eating disorders or who are finding themselves in hugely difficult situations.

There'll be people here who are addicted to porn, who sense a huge amount of guilt because of sexual sin in which they're engaged.

There's sexually active outside of marriage and yet professed faith. You're guilty for whom sex is crouching at the door.

People who are in abusive relationships or have been in abusive relationships or have been raped. People who are struggling to marry the beliefs and ethics of Christ and the Gospel with what they see every day and what they feel in their own hearts.

I mean that's the reality isn't it? Let's stop just thinking that we're all looking good and feeling good and smiling nicely and that everything's well in our world and that we don't have any problems with sexuality.

[16 : 24] Yeah the Bible's fine, it's no problem. That's easy for me. Is that what we're going to be like? Is that the kind of nonsense that we're going to tell ourselves and others that we're all fixed? We're all together? We don't have any struggles? We don't have any problems? We've perfect marriage, 2.4 kids. Everything's going swimmingly.

It's great. Is that what we're going to be in our singleness or in our married lives? If we're not honest with each other is it not that it's a world of brokenness? Do we not recognize we live in not only a world without parameters but our hearts without parameters?

And what the world sees as the norm for sexual behavior, Christ Jesus sees so often as a consequence of sin. And what does he do? He weeps. He weeps at the brokenness. He weeps at the mess.

He weeps at the broken relationships and the broken hearts and the broken sexuality and the twistedness and the way we've taken it from its context and divorced it and abused it and made it a self-satisfying gratification.

So in kind of bringing everything together, what can someone like me say tonight? Do we have all the answers to sexual relationships? Tell your issues? Tell your marital problems?

[17 : 42] Tell your children problems? Lack of children problems? Relationship problems? Sexual problems? Can I say tonight? Can we go around all of these issues and deal with them in a clean-cut manner?

No problem, easy answers. Go home, it's all done and dealt with. Now all I can do tonight, all I can do is point you to Jesus and do what David did in the psalm.

And he prayed because remember he had it all. David was a man after God's heart. David had all that he needed, all the beauty that he needed, all the love that he needed, but he got lazy, he got lustful, he got ugly.

And he took someone that wasn't his to take and having abused her and slept with her, he then wanted to cover that up by murdering her husband.

As if that would make it right, you know? He stole what he wanted. He coveted and he stole and he took and he messed up in his pride and in his idolatry.

[18 : 49] And in his thinking, I don't need God anymore here, I can cope and I can have what I want. I can have what I want and I can have it now. And that's very much the sexual morality of today.

I want, I will have and I can have and I can have in the privacy of my own home and I can have all that I want. And I should have that, it's my right. And it wasn't until God spoke.

I mean, it's just, if you have time, if you have time go and read the passage, 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Go and read it, it's absolutely classic. It's absolutely classic because his response was to be self-righteous and to kind of hide the problems that he created and to point the finger at other people so that someone came, the prophet came and told them about a poor man who had only one lamb and this poor man's one lamb was stolen by this rich man who had lots of lamb and it was stolen by him.

And David's incensed and he said, bring with that man, he's got a couple of justice. And he says, you are the man and he exposes his heart before God.

God knows his heart. God knows his heart, you know? Because nobody, I can't see anyone, you can't see my heart, you can't see each other's hearts. But God knows our hearts and he knows what we're like and the psalmist is broken. And he's dying in his silence as he stays away from God with this until he comes to God.

[20 : 28] And he confesses his sin and he cries out in this Psalm, he'll create in me a pure heart. Verse 10, oh God, renew a steadfast spirit within me. Don't cast me from your presence, take your holy spirit, restore to me the joy of your salvation.

So what I'm saying to you, with your sexual needs and your relationship issues, go to Jesus Christ and ask Him to create in me a pure heart.

There's one place to go, there's one place to go, it's to Christ because he redeems it. And do you not think sexuality comes under his redemption? Do you think kind of sexuality is completely different?

That he's kind of in an ethereal way, so we're floating up here, he saved your soul. Kind of everyday stuff about bitterness and greed and avarice and pride and sexual lust and impurity, that doesn't really matter.

Of course not, he's come to redeem us physically, spiritually and in every other way. And that includes our sexuality and our thinking about it. There's one place to go, he redeems us, he's the author of life, sex is his idea, he knows the parameters, it marriages his idea, relationships are his idea.

[21 : 36] And we have to be brought back to that place. He has died on the cross because of the sexual perversions and abuses that are in our minds and our hearts and in our experiences.

And so I'm saying to you tonight, because I'm having to take to myself, go to Jesus Christ with your sexual problems and your sexual issues and your relationship issues and your struggles in marriage.

And all of these things, what's the point of struggling away on your own with these things? He says, go to Christ, do you think he doesn't know? Of course he knows. Tell him, that's what he wants. He wants us to recognize that he's the one that will transform our hearts and change our understanding in our lives.

Tell him about these things. He is king. And tell him when you're full, you know, especially tell him when you're full of guilt and you think you've just messed up so much sexually that there's no hope for you.

He says, I don't really, I can't live in this congregation. I can't live with these Christians. They're kind of all good living. And that's the greatest misnomer at one level of Christianity that there's ever been when people say, Christians are the good living people.

[22 : 51] Yeah, I know, I know we have to be holy and I know these things. But the reality is we've come to Christ because we're not good living. Is that not right? We've come to Christ because we need him because we need his cleansing and we need to set up an ongoing basis and we ask him to create and a clean heart.

And you know, the thing about David was he was forgiven instantly. I'm not saying there wasn't consequences. I'm not saying he didn't have human regret at some levels.

But he was forgiven. He was given a fresh start. Create and a clean heart. Tell him. He knows us. Go to him. Know his mind. Know what he's saying in the Bible about how we're to live our marriages and to live sexually and to live singly and to live in going out with people.

Find out from what he says and be healed and recognize it's a heart issue. Isn't it? Create and me a pure heart. Can you go to anyone else for that with that request? Will anyone else give you the answer? Can anyone else give us a clean heart?

It's only Jesus that can do that. And he is good. And he wants to recreate and realign us. Realign us in our relationships and our sexuality and all of these things that were kind of prudish and kind of embarrassed and tittering and giggly about.

[24 : 09] He wants us to take them and speak to him about these things. It's a heart issue. It's about going to him for purity, not prudery. He's not a prude. And it's not prudish thinking. It's about pure thinking.

It's about seeing sex in its right perspective. It's about seeing the consequences of abusing his model and his pattern. And it's recognizing that he knows you struggles. You're single. You're desperate. You're burning. You're longing.

And it's all just the touch of a button. And he's saying, I know these things. He asks that you go to him for a steadfast spirit and go to him so that you can pray to see, for example.

And this is hugely important to see people as image bearers themselves or born in the image of God, not objects. Isn't that a greatly important thing? I'll say a little bit about that in a minute, about pornography.

It's objectifying mainly women, but not always and increasingly not. It's objectifying people, seeing them just as objects, taking them completely out of this relational concept that God gives, and love, and security, and respect, and gentleness.

[25 : 37] Pray that we will see people as broken, but broken image bearers of God, to see that sex. Pray that we'll see that sex is a gift that can't be taken back.

And it is not a raw biological function that just has evolved within us for our self-graphification. Because isn't that so often what it is for us that we see it in these terms?

We see it as for me to enjoy and for me to get pleasure from, whether it's individual or with someone who happens to be there.

To see it differently. You're struggling with pornography. Who's not struggling at one level? Or another with pornography at different areas and different ways? What are you going to do about that? I don't know.

But one thing I can encourage you to do is pray for the people that you're looking at. Pray for the girls or the guys that you're tempted to watch. Pray for them because they're enslaved.

[26 : 36] Pray for them as they give and sell, they're prostituting their body for hundreds of people. At two hundreds of people on a monthly basis. Pray for them as they fear disease and as they are engaged in the objectivisation of their own gender.

Pray for them as they're getting old and will be thrown on the heap. Pray for them, for often they'll be violated and abused and they'll be drug users.

It's not glamorous. It's not freedom. It's not joy. It's enslavement. Pray for them. Pray for them and it'll be hard to look at them. Hard to look at them.

Pray if you're here in your longing and your marriage for children and you can't have. Pray if you're longing for a partner in your singleness. Pray about that. Cry out to God. Wait for him. Look for him.

Value who you are in your singleness. Don't jump into any kind of bed or any relationship just because it's available. And recognise the danger of temptation but especially temptation and opportunity.

[27 : 43] When these two come together they're a powerful, powerful mixture. Temptation is one thing we all are tempted but temptation and opportunity. Man when they come together they're powerful, really powerful.

And pray against that and pray if the opportunity comes maybe to get into a dangerous relationship, an ungodly relationship, or a sexual relationship, or an abusive relationship, or you're in one and you can't get out, or you want to...

Whatever it might be I don't need to enlist it. Pray about that. Pray about these things. Pray when we're far short of the ideal as we see it scripturally. And we think everyone else has it. It's okay for him to speak about that.

He's married with kids. It's okay for him to think about that. But recognise that we all have burdens to bear. We all have struggles. We all have difficulties. Be honest about these things.

Be accountable to one another. Think about them. Recognise them. Pray about them. Know that none of us get all that we want. None of us have that and don't be embittered when others do have it.

[28 : 50] All of us want to always be thin. Always want to be healthy. We all want to have enough money to disposable income to get things. We all want things. Very often we don't get them. And we need to commit that. Submit to God in all of these things.

But not only do we run to Jesus Christ. We must do that. No one else can do it. You need to go there because he's the only one that can change your heart and change your sexual desires and change the sinful heart that we have.

But also we have a responsibility to have that willing spirit that he says grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. And that's where we flee from sexual sin.

If we were to run to Jesus, we also have a responsibility to run away from the things, the temptations, the sexual immorality that is a problem for us. And 1 Corinthians 6, 18 says that.

Flee from, run away from sexual immorality. And the great picture of that in the Old Testament is Joseph, isn't it? He had temptation and he had opportunity, a really beautiful woman who was rich and empowered and could have really helped the situation.

[29 : 59] She was offering him her body. Man, what a temptation. Temptation and the opportunity. He could have really used that man. Absolutely.

But what did he do? As she grabbed his clothes to have sex with him, he just left them behind and legged it. He just ran away, probably because there was great temptation there for him.

And that was the only, he probably just ran straight for the shower, cold shower. It was the only place he could go. Get out of the way. Wherever there's a cold shower, I'm going there. And that was a great help to him. Run away.

We've got to flee away from it. We've got to heed the warnings of Scripture. It's all very well talking about these realities and the temptations of our heart. And if we just stick in the mud and stay where the temptations are going to be overpowering, if we watch the things that are going to inflame us, if we don't heed and don't avoid temptations, if we don't learn the enemy's ways and move out of temptations' way, then we will struggle.

If we constantly drink too much, our guard is down and our sexuality becomes an issue, then stop drinking too much. We shouldn't be doing it anyway.

[31 : 12] We're guards down. Don't linger with your eyes. Don't linger with your conversation. Don't linger where there's opportunity and temptation coming together.

Work on the pit, as an old friend of mine, preacher used to say, work on the picture house of your mind. What you're imagining, what you spend your time imagining, where you go.

What you fantasize about, be alert, run from these things, run to Christ. So it's a spiritual relationship that's core to everything, but also a practical, putting it into practice in our lives by running away from the things.

And that applies in any context, not just in this context, and then be those who believe in spiritual joy.

A lot of us are looking for in sexual behavior the joy of life, the joy of sex. That's what we're looking for, joy and fulfillment.

[32 : 20] It will never come on its own and it will never come away from Christ. And David recognized that, restored to me the joy of your salvation. That was one of the things that had gone badly wrong in his life.

The joy of his salvation, of his relationship with Jesus. I'm not saying it's a substitute for sex. That's just a bizarre and a crazy thing to say.

But it's a deeper spiritual reality that puts sex and everything else in its context. And we must have that joy. If we don't have the joy of the Lord, we're going to struggle at every level and we're going to look for it in other places.

And we've got a wrong impression of what Christianity is, if joy isn't at the very core of it, and if we're looking for joy elsewhere. Jesus, he's so good at putting things well. And again in his book, Mere Christianity, he talks about joy and he says, Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, not too strong our desires, but too weak.

We're half-hearted creatures, he says, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

[33 : 40] We are far too easily pleased. Is that not an absolutely brilliant picture? I think that's brilliant, but I don't know if you do. But we're often just making mud pies in the slums because we won't allow the imagination of grace to take us to where he wants us to be.

To have a holiday by the sea, believe in the joy of the company of God in our lives. Put him first and all these things will be added to us.

It's about perspective and alignment, and when we get that relationship with him, I'm not saying get it right, but when we're focused on him, we take all the wrongness that we have and all the bitterness and all the pain and all the suffering and all the guilt and all of these things that come on.

Let's be honest tonight, we all have. Take them to the cross. Let's not be people who scupper around spiritually and say one or two week kind of platitudes and at the end of the day say, Lord forgive my sins for Jesus' sake, amen.

With no concept of who we are and of the sins and lusts and impurities and realities of our hearts and the desires which are far from him. So it may be that I don't have the answers.

[34 : 58] I'm going to use conference next week to speak with Katrina on relationships. We don't have the answers. I've been doing it for talking about relationships for years and years.

And you know, it doesn't get any easier and it doesn't, you don't become any more expert. But the great thing is I can point people to Jesus because he's the expert because he made us and he knows what we need and he knows our pain and he knows that we need a new heart and a pure heart.

And I'm so glad about that. Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly and pray. Father God, we ask that you would take your word and apply it to us. And this difficult and sensitive subject help us to know what your model and your ideal is for us in Christ.

And help us to remember that there are greater and more important things even though sometimes, especially in this world in which we live, you would sometimes doubt that by the way we act and the way we think and the focus of our minds.

Reminders of the brokenness, of the emptiness, of the starvation of the tremendous needs that are in this world around us. We may not be obsessed with our own rights and our own feelings and our own needs but we come to Christ and just worship you.

[36 : 23] And thank you for what you are. And thank you that we don't need to be absolutely self-obsessed and self-demanding and claiming our rights.

We know the rights that we have been nailed to a cross and that we are servants of the Most High and that we have a life of eternal bliss to look forward to. And may we just serve you in our singleness, in our marriage, in our childhood, in our old age, in our brokenness, may we find healing.

Keep us from being judgmental and help us rather to be part of other people's healings also. We do pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.