

Good Sex
Genesis 2:18-25

Things sure are different now. When I was growing up learning about the birds and the bees sex was not as openly discussed as it is now. Back then sex was a hush hush subject. And whereas our children get their first dose of official sex education in the fifth grade my generation didn't get any of that kind of education until the seventh grade. To be frank, the film, the diagrams, the descriptions in our so called sex education were about as dry as the Sahara Desert. Not much information at all. It was more like a diagram of an engine's car, devoid of conversation about feelings and emotions. And the information we got at church was about as sparse. The church's contribution could be summed up as: You teenagers should not have sex.

Yes, the times they have changed. Way back when I was an XY chromosome becoming a young man concerned about pimples and body hair why the most titillating, scintillating thing that crossed my eyes was lingerie ads in the newspaper. And by lingerie I'm not referring to Victoria's Secret. As one of you have commented, Victoria has no secrets. No, the ads I saw in the Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel and the Sears and Roebuck catalog were of very modest lingerie. These days sexual images are plastered all over the television screen, the newspaper, and magazines and not much, not much is left to the imagination. Let me tell you, if you want some sex education just stand in the checkout line at the grocery store and look at the covers of the magazines.

It seems sex is being discussed everywhere except the Church. Well, I think the Church has a duty, a responsibility, an obligation, to speak out about sex, particularly when it comes to teaching its young people about sex. We need to do our best to make sure our teenagers know about good sex. More on that in a minute.

First, though, permit me to share two footnotes. Today's sermon and next Sunday's sermon deal with sexuality. As with all sermons, you can't say everything that needs to be said. Today I especially want to speak to our teenagers. Next Sunday I will be sharing why I do not believe homosexuality is a sin. But there are other sermons that could be preached: "Sex and the Senior Years", "Being Single and being Sexual", "Love, Fidelity, and Sex", "Thou shalt not Lust: The Impossible Command", "Celibacy: The Case For and Against", or my personal favorite playing off one of the Apostle Paul's comments "Do Not Neglect Each Other For a Season: Was Paul referring to a Football season, the deer hunting season or Basketball season or the T-Ball season?"

So the first footnote is that the topic of sex is too large to fit into one or two sermons.

A second footnote is that just as we Wedgewoodians have a diversity of opinion on all sorts of issues I'm sure our views and practices on sexuality are just as broad. I'm not interested in making people feel bad about their sexual practices or preaching the final authoritative word on sex. I am excited, though, about getting the discussion started. Please take my remarks as a prayer, a prayer for each of us, particularly our youth, that we will have good sex.

The first part of my prayer for our youth is that they will have good sex because they know that sex is a gift from God. Think about it. God could have set things up differently, but God didn't. God chose to create us male and female. God chose to make us sexual beings. God looked at creation and said, It's good. It's very good. And that included sexuality.

Of course, the Bible has its share of verses pointing out how our sexuality can be misused, how it can get us into trouble. But---that should never be taken to mean that our sexuality is bad.

So teenagers underline this. You have been created as a sexual being. You have been given hormones. The feelings and urges and anatomical features you have are given to you by God. Consider it a nice gift.

A seminary professor of mine said something once that captures what I am trying to say. His name was Dr. Bland and many students accused him of being bland. He was a walking, talking bibliography, not the type of professor you would imagine being an expert on sex. Anyway, he taught Christian Ethics and when we came to the subject of sex Dr. Bland said something that was profound, that actually made us sit up and listen. He said, I believe couples after having sex should sing the doxology. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

My prayer for our youth is that when they have sex it will be such a wonderful experience they will sing the doxology.

Of course, I need to quickly say to our youth that sex can get pretty messed up. Even us adults mess it up, don't get it right. Rather than sex being a wonderful experience, sex can be a painful experience full of hurt and confusion and regrets.

That's why I'm also praying that when you have sex it will be later in your life and with the person with whom you want to share the rest of your life because that's what sex is about: a relationship. If you want to have good sex, well you need to have a good relationship with the person with whom you are having sex. For good sex to happen there has to be a relationship of caring, a relationship of listening, a relationship of mutual respect, a relationship of give and take. So the question is not, Who's good in bed? The question is, Who's good with relationships?

The following letter was sent to Dear Abby: "I am a 23-year-old liberated woman who has been on the pill for two years. It's getting pretty expensive and I think my boyfriend should share half the cost, but I don't know him well enough to discuss money with him." (Abigail Van Buren, *The Best of Dear Abby* (Kansas City: Andrews & McMeel, 1981), 242. Having sex with someone with whom she can't have a discussion. That's not good sex.

Sex is not about sex. Sex is not a separate component of our existence. Sex is about relationship.

Now those magazines on display in the checkout counter at the grocery store and those ads on our televisions will try to convince you otherwise. And teenagers, many of your peers

will try to persuade you that sex is no big deal, that everybody is doing it, and if you want to fit in you've got to do it. Society is coming at you left and right with the message that your identity is wrapped up in having a lot of sex and with how good you are at sex. Sex, it seems, has become a contest. How many people can you do it with? How sexy of a body can you have? How athletic can you be in bed?

I need to inform you that Cosmopolitan and those other magazines are giving you misleading, false information. They say read this article and you'll learn 10 ways to send your partner to sexual ecstasy. Maybe. Maybe not. People like different things. But my point is sex is mostly about relationship, and less about learning the latest and greatest technique.

Listen to the testimony of Allen Verhey, professor of Religion at Hope College. Verhey writes, "Sex is not a bowl of buttons. That sounds like an unpromising place to [write about sex], but many Sunday afternoons ago I would play with the bowl of buttons my mother kept in her sewing and mending cabinet. I would dump the buttons out and try to flip them like tiddlywinks back into the bowl. Sunday afternoons were boring in the house-hold of my parents, I thought, and it was sort of fun. The fun was in the technique; it took a certain amount of dexterity and skill. Now sex is not like that; it is not a bowl of buttons. It is not simply a technique for getting some pleasure in the middle of a boring afternoon. It is not mainly a matter of dexterity, a matter of skill. Sex has meaning beyond the quality of its performance. Yes sex as skill, as performance, as dexterity, as a bowl of buttons, is the vision of sexuality one frequently sees in our sex-saturated society. The proper technique and presto: fulfillment.

But how about these questions: But will you love me tomorrow?-----How much do you love me?-----How long will you love me?

I'll say it again. If you want to have good sex, you need to be in a loving, committed, ongoing relationship. And this is why teenagers, if I could decide for you, I would have you decide to wait, to reserve the sharing of your most intimate sexuality until you are prepared to make a commitment to one person.

Now if you haven't waited, please don't judge yourself harshly and don't hear me judging you. Simply hear me wishing the best for you. Simply hear me praying that you never have to deal with an unwanted pregnancy or the trauma of an abortion or AIDS or venereal diseases or boyfriends or girlfriends who use you for their sexual desire and dump you by the wayside.

Teenagers, I am praying for you. I am praying that you will be in a loving relationship described in Philip Gulley's novel, *Home to Harmony*.

Now let me set this up. Allow me to introduce you to three characters. The first character is Pastor Sam. He is the Pastor of the Harmony Quaker Meeting. Pastor Sam is the narrator.

A second character, the one I praying out teenagers will be like, is an elderly man named Frank who is a widower. Frank has been hired to work in the church office.

The other character is Dale Hinshaw. Dale is the busybody know it all church member that gets on every body nerves.

This excerpt is a bit lengthy and it's going to be a few minutes until we get to the sex part, so stay with me.

Here's the excerpt. Pastor Sam is the narrator.

It has been said that patience comes with age. Whoever said that never met Frank. He does not entertain fools gladly. When Fern Hampton called to complain about our worship service, Frank listened for one minute, then hung up the phone.

Complaining about the service was a weekly ritual for Fern, a deep joy, almost a sacrament. During worship she would sit in the sixth row and scribble furiously. At first I thought she was taking notes, but what she was doing was gathering evidence. She'd phone the office every Monday morning and complain for ten minutes. She'd start with the prelude and work her way through to the benediction. I used to listen to her entire harangue. After a while I learned to set the phone down, do my paperwork, then pick up the phone ten minutes later just as she was winding down.

She complains about the hymns and the sermon and about people sneaking in church announcements during prayer time. Bill Muldock is notorious for that. He stands during prayer time, bows his head, and intones, "Lord, we just ask Your blessings on our men's softball practice this Tuesday night at seven o'clock at the park." Fern glares at him from across the meeting room.

Then one Monday I wasn't at the church office, and Frank answered the phone, and she hasn't called back since.

It's like Frank told me, "Once you've been to war, you learn what's important. A good war would do wonders for Fern."

Frank has a sign over his desk that reads:

I can only make one person happy each day
Today is not your day.
Tomorrow doesn't look good either.

I suspect Dale hired Frank to spite me. He thought Frank would be a burden, but that hasn't happened. People are so afraid to call the office on the off chance Frank will answer---my workload has dropped considerably.

People call and ask me to visit someone in the hospital. Frank asks them, "Why can't you go? Are your legs broken? Why do you want Pastor Sam to do your Christian work for you?"

Dale Hinshaw was the worst offender. Fearing I might have a spare moment, he would phone me daily with suggestions of things I could do. Frank put up with this for one week, then said, "Dale, if you spent as much time doing the work of the Lord as you do fishing, we'd all be better off."

Frank's greatest contribution to date came during the August meeting of elders. Miriam Hodge opened with prayer, read through the old business, then asked if I had anything to say.

I turned to Frank and asked him to read my to-do list. Frank squinted at the list through his thick glasses.

"It says here you need to talk with Dale Hinshaw about sex," he said.

The room grew quiet. The elders raised their eyes and looked down the table at Dale, wondering why Dale needed to be talked to about sex. What had he done? Was there something they needed to know?

I asked Frank to hand me the to-do list.

"No, Frank, it says for me to talk with Dale about a secretary. I abbreviated the word *secretary*. That's *s-e-c*, not *s-e-x*. I needed to talk with Dale about a secretary.

Dale looked vastly relieved.

Frank said, "Maybe you ought to talk with Dale about sex just the same. Everyone's talking about sex these days, except for the church. Maybe that's why we're so messed up about sex. The people who should be teaching about it, aren't. Maybe we ought to teach about sex."

Then he paused and said, "Golly, I sure miss sex. I miss the holding part."

Dale reddened and Miriam blushed. I was relatively certain that in our hundred and seventy years of existence, sex had never been the focus of an elders' meeting at Harmony Friends Meeting.

Dale sat bolt upright and said, "I think Frank is right. Someone needs to talk about sex to our teenagers. Just the other day I saw two of our kids kissing in the church parking lot. Pastor, why don't you talk with those kids?"

Frank said, "Dale, how come you want Pastor Sam to do everything? Why can't you talk with the teenagers?"

So that's how Dale Hinshaw came to talk with the youth of Harmony Friends Meeting about the birds and the bees.

The next Sunday, Dale and his wife came to church armed with pictures of flowers, of pistils and stamens. He spoke at length about pollination. Then he asked if there were any questions. There weren't.

Dale reported back to the September meeting of elders. He said, "Well, I got them squared around. We won't be having any sex problems in this church. You can bet on that."

Frank asked him what he had talked about, specifically. He wanted details.

Dale said, "Pistils and stamens. They got the message."

Frank asked, "Did you tell them about the holding part? How the holding part is the best. How it's sweeter over the years. How they need to wait until they're married. That when love and commitment aren't in it, it'll leave you feeling empty and cheap. Did you tell them that?"

Dale said he implied it.

Frank erupted, "Good golly, man, you got to put the hay down where the goats can get it."

That's when Frank volunteered to talk with the youth of Harmony Friends Meeting about the birds and the bees.

I went with him. He didn't bring any pictures of flowers or pistils and stamens. Mostly, he just talked. He talked about his wife Martha, and how they met, and how tempted they had been, and how they waited. He spoke of how he missed her during the war, how he kept her picture in his shirt pocket, next to his heart. He hung his head and wiped his eyes and told how much he missed her now. Then he told them sex was a gift of love from God and that's what made it sacred. And how it's our job not to cheapen it.

Then he asked if the kids had any questions.

One boy raised his hand and asked if it was all right to pick flowers from a neighbor's garden.

Frank asked him what that had to do with sex. The boy wasn't sure, but that's what Dale had told him----not to pick flowers from your neighbor's garden.

Well, that's how things get done in this place. We put things off and put things off until someone like Frank gets fed up and wades in and gets the job done. And if that doesn't work, we wait until Dale Hinshaw goes fishing, and then we do it.

But there are some things that shouldn't wait, things we need to talk about right now. Making sure our children know right from wrong and good from bad is one of them. I wrote it on my to-do list: Talk with yours sons about sex.

Dale lent me his pistil and stamen pictures. Frank said if I had any questions, he'd be happy to help.

Here's my prayer for everyone, especially Wedgewood teenagers. I pray that you will have a wonderful sexual relationship with the person you marry, if you marry. I pray that you will enjoy the holding part. I pray that what was written about Adam and Eve will be true for you.

“They were both naked and they were not ashamed.”