

THE GOSPEL & HOW THE GOSPEL RELATES TO SEX, MONEY, & WORK

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THE GOSPEL AND WORK

Tyler David

*1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

*3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.*

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (ESV)

Genesis 1:1-4, 31

Introduction

God cares about work. That job you do for forty to seventy hours a week, God actually cares about it. He made you to do that job. He has called you to your profession, field and industry.

But in the church, it's often portrayed that God only cares about pastoral ministry. Pastors are 'called' to ministry, but business people to industry? Preachers are called to speak, but teachers to educate? When do you ever hear someone say God called them to be a plumber?

We have a great misunderstanding about how someone is 'called'.

People will say they had a moment when they knew God had called them to a certain profession or ministry. As someone who feels called to what I'm doing, I can relate to this. I had moments where my desire to



pastor and teach the word of God was almost palpable.

However, the clarity of these moments fades away. More often than not, your calling is a gradual process that is solidified over time.

I remember two moments that convinced me that I had to be a pastor. First, my wife and I were at a coffee shop doing our Pre-Marital Counseling homework. It was the first time we realized that I had a great desire for pastoral ministry. Another moment, on our honeymoon, my wife is on the beach and I'm in the room reading Jeremiah. I was reading through it, longing with everything in me to teach the word of God like he was doing.

But as I pursued this job, those moments faded. I've even had times where I questioned it. I didn't have any other amazing moments, a word from the Lord or a vision. What happened was over time I became more convinced of my desires, abilities and opportunities.

Your calling is determined over time, as you process what you want to do, what God has gifted you to do and the opportunities He's placed before you.

So why do we think this calling is just limited to pastors? Can you not go through the same process to be an engineer, a stockbroker, or a stay-at-home mom?

Think about the Scriptures and how God called His people to all different types of vocations. Not just ministry.

When God brought the people back from slavery in Babylon, He needed a wall built. He needed an engineer and someone to manage the building. He called up Nehemiah and appointed him to the task.

As Moses and the people were wondering in the wilderness God wanted a tabernacle where His presence would dwell. He wanted it to be perfect, beautiful and detailed. So He called up some artists to create



it.

In the Scriptures, God paints a very different picture of work than we're used to. There is no sacred and secular divide for Him. He creates and calls all of us to different professions and vocations. He calls some to pastor and preach, but He also calls some to be entrepreneurs, businessmen, custodians, construction workers, artists and doctors.

He calls all of His people to their professions, because work is important to Him. This is evident by looking at the larger narrative of the Bible.

The story of history is broken into four main categories:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption
4. Restoration

God created everything good. Then we fell and sin ruined all that was good. But Jesus came and redeemed us and will one day restore everything to the way it should be.

Let's look at work through these four categories. We'll discuss the creation or work, how the fall affected work, how Jesus redeems work and how He will ultimately restore it one day.

Creation of Work

One of the first things you learn about God is that He is a worker.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. Genesis 1:1-4 (ESV)



The first thing you see God doing is working. He's creating, molding and shaping the physical world from nothing. The world was without form and void, meaning there was chaos. He comes in like a master craftsman and makes it into something useful and beautiful. He takes the chaos and turns it into rhythm and beauty.

As He does this, you learn two things about His work. It's characterized by joy and service.

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
Genesis 1:31 (ESV)

When you read the creation account, you see God blessing His creation, enjoying His work. He's expressing joy in what He's doing. He looks back at all that He's made and says, "Its very good".

God made the world to display His glory, but He didn't need it. He was already happy forever in Himself. Him creating the world was not out of a lacking in Him, but rather a fullness in Him. It's for the benefit of His creatures, so that we can see His glory. His creation and work is in service to us.

God is a worker who works in joy and service.

When He makes image bearers, to reflect who He is, He makes them workers. He gives Adam and Eve jobs to do. As humans, we were made to work; it's part of who we are.

You weren't made to sit around all day and accomplish nothing. You were made to work, to build and accomplish things. You're a worker, because God's a worker.

Work is not given as a consequence of sin. Work was given as a gift.



The first job God gives is wasn't to be a pastor. It was to be a gardener, called to take care of the earth, to tend and cultivate the land. Adam and Eve were shaping the physical world with their hands, so that the rest of the image bearers they would create together would have places to live.

Work was for their joy and the service of others. God gave them a real role to play and real work to do.

But then we fell.

Fall of Work

God had an amazing plan for us, but we rebelled. The rebellion against God and the path of self-discovery ruined everything. All the goodness was taken away, including from our work.

Working is an integral part to being human. When God judged Adam and Eve for their rebellion, the main thing He cursed was their work.

16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." 17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:16-19 (ESV)

In Genesis 1, God gives Adam and Eve two main jobs; to make image bearers and to cultivate the earth. He tells them here in Genesis 3, that those two jobs just got incredibly more difficult. Their rebellion just ruined their work.



They can't reflect His image like they used to. They were designed to work in joy and service. But now they've sinned, their work is characterized by pain and selfishness.

Work was meant to be a joyful exercise, but now it's just a task of utility. It was meant to serve other people, but now it's about bettering ourselves.

The fall ruined all God created work to be.

Then God sent His son.

Redemption of Work

Jesus came to be what Adam failed to be; a perfect image bearer of God.

In Romans 5, Paul talks about Jesus as a second Adam, whose come to be a perfect representation of God on earth.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
Colossians 1:15 (ESV)

Jesus is the true and perfect image bearer of God. He came to be all we failed to be. And just like Adam, Jesus was given a job to do. He was going to show us how to be image bearers, even in our work.

Jesus' first job was not as a preacher, teacher, leader or healer. His first job was as a blue-collar worker. For twenty years, the majority of His life, He worked an ordinary job, as a carpenter.

The God of the universe is on earth, wrapped in flesh, here to save His people from sin, and the first thing He does is work an ordinary job, in an ordinary town, with ordinary people.

Do you think Jesus wasn't called to that job? Do you think maybe He



hadn't been praying enough? You think that job was a sign of God's small plan and little affection for Him?

Of course not. That job was a testimony that what it means to be human is to work; to work in the mundane. Jesus worked for twenty years and no one noticed He was God in the flesh. He was showing us what image bearers look like.

We were made to work, but we are not defined by our work. Jesus' work, His title, His salary didn't define Him. His Father defined Him. His Father gave Him value. Because of this, He could enjoy His work.

This is hard for most of us to imagine, because we define ourselves by our work, title, salary or status. We're always frustrated, thinking of the next job, climbing higher up the ladder; more benefits or less work will make us happy and satisfied.

That is not true. We're not supposed to be defined by our work.

But we are still made to work.

If the Son of God can get off His throne and work in manual labor for twenty years, we can get off the couch and get a job. There is no job that is below us.

Jesus eventually transitioned out of this job, showing that your job is not forever. He transitioned into teaching, preaching and healing. But, ultimately, toward the cross, the most difficult job ever. All the while, His work was defined by joy and service. Even at the cross, we see joy and service as Jesus' driving motivation.

2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

The joy set before Him motivated Him to do His job. He endured the



cross for the joy He knew would come, but also for service, to build a faith for other people.

Jesus was the worker we should be.

Do you feel underpaid or underappreciated at your job? Consider Jesus. He was the most underpaid and underappreciated worker in the world. Yet, He stayed faithful, because He knew God would take care of Him.

When we lack joy and service in our work, we need to remember the Gospel. We need to go back to Jesus and His word to be reminded of who we are, what's true and how He feels about our jobs. He cares about it, even when no one else does.

Until Jesus comes back, we're going to struggle to have joy and service in our work. This world is still in sin. The curse is still on work, making it feel futile, difficult and sometimes impossible.

We're still only in the third act of the story. Restoration is coming, but its not here yet.

Restoration of Work

So when it feels impossible to keep on working and you can't find any joy in it, remember you're not home. God is not done with this world yet. There is still one act of the story to come.

Jesus will come back and restore everything. God will be on the earth with His people and we will reflect His image properly, the way we were meant to in the garden. He will redeem work to the way it should be, where it will be fruitful and things won't fall apart. Where it will always be a joy to us and in service to others.

What Are You Called to Do?



What do you want to do? What do you have the ability to do? What opportunities has God given you?

You need to the answers to these questions.

There will be seasons when these questions of desire, ability and opportunity don't line up. When you're not working your dream job. Remember that no job is forever. There are seasons. Your job doesn't define you.

When you're in a job that you don't like, remember that it's the job where God has placed you. We need to show the world that God cares about our work. The way you work shows Him to other people.

There is not a JV calling or role. Whatever job God has given you, in whatever season, for however long, it is a gift to you. So do your job well.

About the Author



Downtown Campus Pastor at The Austin Stone Community Church. Tyler's role is to serve, equip and lead his campus in pursuing God on mission with his people. From creating and casting God's vision for his church and city to the messy ground of implementation, Tyler loves getting to be a part of it. Tyler lives in Austin, Tx with his wife Lauren and daughter Ellerbe.



THE GOSPEL AND MONEY

Halim Suh

My prayer for myself, my family and our church is that God would change our generosity to reflect more closely His generosity in giving us His Son. I pray that He would make our generosity as a church, look more closely like His in giving us His gospel.

What is the Gospel?

We're not just talking about money today, but rather, how the gospel addresses money. So its important that we know what it is.

The gospel is good news. Jesus, the Son of God, was born. For thirty-three years He lived a perfect life, fulfilling every righteous requirement of the law that you and I fail to keep. He lived a perfect and sinless life. Then at just the right time, while we were still sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. He died on the cross, to be the once and for all, perfect sacrifice for the sins of His people. Then on the third day, the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead. Death couldn't hold Him anymore.

What we see in the gospel is the life that Jesus lived, the death He died and His resurrection.

These are the major factual and historic components of the gospel. Most of us would say that we believe these truths of the gospel. We believe they are important to us and we try to live in light of these truths.

But is there anything in this world that can cause you to give up the gospel? Is there anything in this world that you desire so much, that you would be willing to take the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and trade it in, exchange Him for your desire?



Story of Judas

Judas was one of the twelve disciples. He lived and experienced the life of Jesus. He was there when Jesus preached with authority, when He healed the lame and the blind. He was there when Jesus raised people from the dead.

But when it came down to it, Judas was willing to take the life of Jesus and exchange it for money. He traded Jesus' life away for thirty pieces of silver.

Let's not quickly discount this story, fooling ourselves into thinking that we're better than that. There are many who walk the path of Judas.

I was visiting a church in Israel. They had portrait paintings of the twelve disciples. Each one had a distinguished, noble look about them. Except for Judas. He looked like the wicked witch of the West.

When Jesus got His disciples around the table, He said one of them was going to betray him. Did the disciples immediately point to Judas, knowing it was him, saying he always had that look on his face? No. They looked around at each other and asked Jesus whom He was speaking about. By all external evidence, Judas looked like, acted like and spoke like all the rest of them. But when it came down to it, he was willing to take the life of Jesus and trade it away.

Some argue that it was because the disciples really weren't changed until they experienced both the life and death of Jesus. However Scripture says differently.

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for



fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Matthew 28:1-8 (ESV)

These guards are stationed at Jesus’ tomb at the request of the chief priests and Pharisees. They were afraid that His disciples would come, steal Jesus’ body and tell everyone that He had risen from the dead. Then the Maries come and the earth shook. The Angel of God appeared in great light and spoke.

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.”

If anybody saw Jesus rise from the dead, walk through the stone it would have been those guards. They would be the only ones to see Him physically rise from the dead. But even if they didn’t, they did see the Angel of God appear in great light as the earth was shaking. They saw him with their eyes and heard his testimony that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Who is the person in your life that seems to have the hardest heart, who seems most against believing in Jesus? What if the Angel of God appeared and told them that Jesus was real, that He died and rose again, what would happen?

The very next section of Scripture tells us these guards went to the chief priests and told them all that they had seen and heard.

11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient



sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. Matthew 28:11-15 (ESV, emphasis added)

Even though they knew Jesus had actually risen from the dead, they were still willing to trade it all away and exchange it...for a sufficient sum of money.

The scary thing is that many of us are chasing that sufficient sum of money. What if it was promised to you? What would you be willing to give up, in order to get it?

We have the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all the major workings of the gospel. As weighty and critical as these truths are, God is showing us the inclination of the human heart. The willingness to throw it all out the window, to exchange it for money.

Jesus Spoke Often of Money

You should now be getting a sense of why Jesus spoke about money so much. He discussed it more than he did faith, prayer, and heaven & hell combined.

What is it about money that makes it so dangerous? Money promises to give us everything that our hearts' desire.

Anything and everything, money promises to give it to us. Money promises security, power, comfort and approval. We love money because we love the idols it promises us it will give us.

Jesus doesn't treat money as a harmless benign thing, because it has a mastering and consuming effect on us. We have an insatiable desire for



it in our hearts. It's a master that desires exclusive worship and servanthood.

When God commands us to give it's not because He wants your money. He wants your heart. When He commands us to be generous it's not because He wants to take things from you. He wants to give you Himself.

God doesn't want the money out of your pockets. He wants the idols out of your heart.

Giving money should be the hardest and the easiest thing in the world. The hardest because you have to get rid of the idols in your heart. The easiest thing because you're giving to the One who has given you everything.

How Much to Give

Well how much exactly does God want you to give? Where does tithing 10% of your income come from? If this is the line of questioning, we're missing the point.

Tithing was a command God gave His people in the Old Testament, to offer a tenth of all that God would give them back to Himself.

Everything comes from Him in the first place, so why would He ask for it back? So that we would know that it all came from Him.

When we give a tenth back, we're saying that we know this. The tithing command asks you if you believe God gave you all that you have.

8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And



thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. Malachi 3:8-10 (ESV)

God tells His people they're robbing Him. They're refusing to give Him what belongs to Him. They're refusing to believe that He gave all they have to them.

So He asks them to put Him to the test. He is not a stingy father who wants to take from them. He's a father who wants to give. So he tells them to test Him, to bring their tithe so that He will open up the floodgates of blessings upon their heads. But he gives a condition that they bring the whole tithe. He's not a father that will give in negligence.

As a father, my heart is to give as much as I can to my kids. I'm not trying to withhold from them. My heart is to give them anything and everything they would ever want. Malachi, my son, is into Lego Hero Factory. My heart is to give him every one that has been produced. But, if after I buy him a few, I see him refusing to share them with his little brother or hitting his sister because she messed up the pieces. If I see his heart growing greedy and loving things more than people, it would be negligent for me to keep buying him more of these toys. On the other hand, if I hear him playing with his little brother and sister and giving away his toys to friends who don't have any, it makes me want to buy him more.

That's the heart of the father.

However, the Old Testament doesn't apply to us today. The principle of Malachi 3:8-10 is to obey God, give and then you will be blessed.

This is not the principle of the New Testament.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)



We received such a blessing in Christ, because of the gospel. We received the gospel, not because we obeyed and gave the right amount commanded of us, but rather...

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

The Old Testament says give and then you will be blessed.

The New Testament says you have been blessed, therefore give.

God is not withholding anything from you. He didn't even withhold His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. How would He not, along with Him, graciously give us all things. How should we respond to a truth like that? What should our giving look like in light of that truth?

New Giving

Should our giving remain the same as the Old Testament? Should we just keep on tithing at ten percent, because that's what He commanded back then? That would communicate that nothing has changed, nothing new has happened. Should we argue about tithing and how its just an Old Testament thing? If our questioning still remains to how much, we're still missing the point.

The gospel ought to change our question from how much should we give into how much should we keep.

Have you ever asked yourself why God has blessed you so much? What does He want us to do with all of it?

Just like we talked about last week, sex is a physical reminder that points us to the gospel, so is giving. Giving is a physical pointer, a



demonstration, to the gospel. We give to missions because the gospel says when Jesus died on the cross He had people in mind from every tongue, tribe and nation. The Bible tells us that we are blessed so that we may be a blessing. To the nations. We give to the church, because Jesus gave to the church. We give up our first fruits and tithe because God gave His first fruits, His Son, to the church. We give to orphan care, because we're reminding ourselves that while we were orphans, Jesus came to take us to the Father. We give to the poor and needy, because we're pointing to the truth that says when we were poor Jesus came to meet our needs. When we give to the point that it hurts, not just out of our excess, we're pointing to the truth that Jesus, though He was rich, gave it all up, so that we would become rich. By giving, we're pointing to the reality and the truths of the gospel.

The question is what kind of gospel are we pointing to through our giving?

I'm afraid that the American church is pointing to a sad gospel. The average American church member gives away 2.58 percent of their income. 25 percent of the average church member gives nothing at all.

What kind of gospel is that pointing to? We have to preach a better gospel.

Our giving starts, not when we get jobs. It starts when we get saved.

There's beauty in giving when you feel like you have nothing.

41 And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put



in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:41-44 (ESV)

God doesn't need your money. If he did, he would be much happier with large sums of money. But because His desire is not your money, but your heart, He sees the widow and is more pleased with that.

We look at the widow and see her being foolish and reckless, to give all that she has to live on. Jesus looked at her and thought it was amazing. She gave out of her poverty, because she knew that her treasure was found in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy.

There was once a small band of believers, two thousand years ago. History would say they flipped the world upside down. Unbelievers would write about them, calling them crazy, not caring about their money, selling their possessions to care for the poor. Why were they able to do that? Because they knew they had been blessed in Christ, because of the gospel, with every spiritual blessing. They were full and able to give.

So with their giving, they pointed to an awesome gospel. What if we did it again? Let's flip the world upside down.

About the Author



Halim Suh and his wife, Angela, have three kids and live in Austin, Texas, where he is an elder and Pastor of Teaching and Theology at The Austin Stone Community Church. Halim has a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from Texas A&M University and a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.



THE GOSPEL AND SEX

Matt Carter

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (ESV)

Ephesians 5:31-32

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (ESV)

Genesis 1:27-28

Introduction

As long as there has been sin in the world, there has been sexual sin. It's not new to the church either. I'm not one of those preachers who get freaked out and all up in arms when non-Christians are doing non-Christian things.

Jesus said that was going to happen. But something has occurred in our culture over the last year that deeply concerns me.



There was a book released in 2011 that has become unbelievably popular in our culture. I won't name the book, there's no reason to give it any more publicity. I haven't read it, nor am I going to. But I read a synopsis from another author who wrote a critique on it.

This book is full tilt erotica. It's not a harlequin romance. It's not a love story. It is pornography. The stuff the characters get involved in is messed up. The message of this book is satanic.

There's nothing new about pornography or erotica, they've been around forever. But what's shocking about this book is that its one of the best-selling books in history. On Amazon (UK), this book sold more copies than all the Harry Potter books combined. In the United States, it broke the record for the number of weeks on the USA Today Bestseller List.

One of the best-selling weeks for this book was the week before mother's day. It's estimated the vast majority of its readers are women. When I heard this, I remembered a quote from one of my professors. He was teaching through the book of Amos. It's one of the only times in Scripture when God is speaking directly to the women of Israel. He is calling them out on their morality, calling them cows of Bashan. My professor said, "Women are always the last bastion of morality in any culture. When the women of a culture quit walking in morality, the culture is in a lot of trouble".

That's what's going on with us.

When we see tens of millions of women, a lot of whom are in the church, looking at this book as an acceptable picture of sexual expression, then we've fallen a long way from God's view of sex.

This book is the kind that would have been relegated to porn shops just a few years ago. But today it's in the front kiosk of every single bookstore in the country.



This reveals just how far we, even as a church, have fallen from God's view and purpose for sex.

We need to understand why God created sex. Man did not think it up. God created it for a very specific purpose.

Sex for Procreation

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it..." Genesis 1:27-28a (ESV)

One of the basic purposes for sex is procreation. God gives Adam and Eve a commandment to go have sex and make babies. For centuries, the church argued that procreation was the only purpose for sex. But theologically, that has been disproven.

If that was the only reason God created sex, then why did He create sex the way He did?

Physical Aspect of Sex

God could have designed procreation to occur by a man and a woman staring into each other's eyes for forty-five seconds. He could have designed it to be a secret handshake.

But He didn't.

Matt Chandler says God designed sex in such a way that we, human beings, are the only mammals in which the primary sexual position for us is face-to-face, with our entire bodies touching and mingling.

Why did God create sex for us like that? Just anatomically speaking, not even going into Scripture at all, you begin to see there is a deeper purpose to why God created sex.



You see glimpses of this greater purpose in Song of Solomon. You can tell that there is something else going on besides just procreation.

How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. 2 Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. 3 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. 4 Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus. 5 Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. 6 How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! Song of Solomon 7:1-6 (ESV)

The Bible is describing, in very vivid terms, the sexual experience between a husband and his wife. He starts at her feet, works his way up to the hips, and then continues all the way up to the top of her head. He's not trying just to conceive a child. In a very tender and caring way, this is a man who is enjoying and exploring every square inch of his wife's body.

Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. 8 I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, 9 and your mouth like the best wine. Song of Solomon 7:7-9 (ESV)

This is so much deeper and intimate than the act of simply conceiving a child.

What is this deeper thing God has in mind when He created sex?



Spiritual Aspects of Sex

23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:23-25 (ESV)

God created man and woman. He brought them together and married them. The two of them physically and spiritually became one flesh.

Physically, they become one flesh through sex.

Spiritually, they become one flesh by God joining them together in the covenant of marriage.

God takes two people and forms them into one. That is marriage.

That is why Jesus said, 9 “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” Mark 10:9 (ESV)

God takes two people, joins them into one, through a covenant with each other and with Him. The ‘one flesh’ thing is happening both physically and spiritually.

31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)

Back in Genesis, the purpose of the union of the flesh was a mystery. But now its revealed. It is a picture of the covenant union of Jesus Christ and His church. That is why God created marriage.

The primary purpose is not for your happiness.



The primary purpose is not for your companionship.

The primary purpose for marriage is for you and your spouse to be a living, breathing, physical picture to the world of Jesus and His bride.

Marriage displays the gospel.

So Where Does Sex Fit Into This Picture?

We've already talked about how something deeper is going on with sex than just procreation. When you make love for the first time on your wedding night, and every time after that, you are displaying your love for each other. Song of Solomon shows us that. But that's not the only thing going on.

God created sex to be a physical reminder and picture of the covenant we have with God through Jesus Christ. That is why it is face-to-face, intermingled bodies, one flesh.

Yes, He created it for physical needs, to display love and to make babies. But, ultimately, it is to be a reminder of our covenant with our spouse and our God.

Why It's So Important to Know God's Purpose for Sex

This explains why sex is so destructive outside of the covenant of marriage, creating emotional turmoil and baggage. God did not create sex to be experienced between two people that are not in a covenant.

He designed sex to be experienced inside the covenant of marriage with each other and with Him. Sex outside of marriage is a product of the fall. That means it will naturally carry with it the consequences of the fall.

Before sin entered the picture in the garden, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. But then sin entered the picture and suddenly they



were flooded by shame and guilt and recognized their nakedness.

Sex outside of the covenant of marriage is almost always accompanied by guilt, shame and remorse. Only in the context of the covenant of marriage can we too be naked and unashamed. In its right context, it can provide warmth and comfort. One of the most fulfilling and amazing things you can ever experience.

But as a lot of you have discovered, sex outside of its intended purpose, can be horribly destructive to our souls.

Young men, who are single, need to take the lead in that. You have to guard your girlfriend's soul. If you are pressuring her physically to have sex before the covenant, what you are saying to her is that you care more about your physical needs than you do her soul. That is breaking her in ways you won't realize until years later.

Ladies, you don't marry a man that cares more about his physical needs than he does your soul. That will come back to bite you in ways you have no idea.

A sexual experience that is purely physical, but doesn't also have the spiritual, is at best a mere shadow of what God created it to be.

The best sex you will ever have is not when you are experiencing just the physical pleasure of sex, but it's when you're also experiencing the spiritual purpose of it.

Our culture doesn't get that, nor believe it.

If you were to ask who has the best sex life in America, the generation before us would have said Hugh Hefner. Maybe the generation now would mention the characters in the book I was mentioning earlier.

To our culture, those people have reached the pinnacle of the physical aspect of sex. Hugh Hefner lives with five or six women with perfect



bodies, sleeping with a different one every night. The world looks at that and says he has found the best sexual experience that life can offer.

Some of you might be thinking you are missing out, because you know that you will never experience what he has.

Hugh Hefner's sex life, the characters in that book, is at best a shadow. On the best day, it's just a fraction of the fulfillment that married believers can experience in Jesus Christ. Hugh can only experience the physical, he cannot experience the spiritual.

But God created sex to be both.

The Gospel-Centered Approach

This was a major step for my wife and I. When we began to view our marriage in light of the gospel and began to act toward each other and treat each other in light of it.

When I was a college student and was getting engaged, I had a self-serving view of marriage and sex. I had this idea I would come home from work and Jen would be waiting for me, naked, at least five or six times a week. Then we would have mind-altering sex until the wee hours of the morning.

I looked at my wife as a person who is supposed to give to me and meet my needs. Then if she is doing that, maybe I would cherish her and return that love to her.

Then over the last few years, I began to understand the gospel like never before. I realized I'm supposed to love and treat my wife in light of how Christ treated me. When I did not deserve it and had not earned it, Jesus still pursued me, loved me.

Jesus came to me first.



That is why we say we love because Christ first loved us. So I have begun to act out and view my marriage in light of this truth. I love her first. I give to my wife, serve and cherish her even if she is not giving to me or serving or cherishing me. I don't take from her emotionally, physically and spiritually.

It's been amazing how my wife has responded to this. After sixteen years of marriage, we are more in love today than we have ever been. We're just silly in love with each other. The gospel has made our love for each other blossom in a way I didn't know it could. And sex has become what I never could have imagined it could be.

Jennifer had wrong misconceptions of sex while she was in college too. She thought I would be a cross between Mr. Darcy from *Pride & Prejudice* and Noah from *the Notebook*.

Everyday I would look at her and say, "You have bewitched me body and soul", and then we would go on a canoe ride together with swans. I would cook her dinner by candlelight and we would have warm and intimate conversation until the wee hours of the morning.

She got married to me and that didn't happen. Those expectations she had were somewhat selfish too. I didn't meet her standards and created disappointment for her too. But God began to do a work in her heart and reveal that she also was to display the love of Christ to me through our marriage and sex life, regardless of how romantic I was being.

She wrote a letter to the women of the congregation a while back about what God was revealing to her:

Women, let me encourage you to use this amazing gift of God, this blessing as a tool to minister to your husband. You are the only one that can do that in all the earth. You were given this precious gift from God as a means to minister to your husband in the way that speaks love to him,



possibly better than any other way. Use it to cherish him, to comfort him in times of trial and grief. For there are many biblical examples of this. Use it to show him your love and admiration. Use it to guard him from temptation.

Most of all, use sex to remind him of the covenant the two of you have before God. As you do it, it will bring glory to God. God has created women to enjoy sex, but somehow in our minds it has become a duty and we forget that He has created it for our enjoyment too.

So as Hebrews says, throw off the sin that so easily entangles you, whether it is your past sexual sin, your past disobedience, your insecurity or your current bitterness, throw it off. Run the race, fix your eyes on Jesus.
- Jen Carter

Those are not just words from my wife. She has lived out, very consistently, that picture of the gospel. She has ministered to me in ways I cannot articulate to you.

Through this Gospel-centered approach and view that she has taken towards our marriage and sex life, she has created an environment where it is an absolute joy for me to love her like Christ loved the church.

It's because of the Gospel. You've got this guy who is saying he will love you, serve you and cherish you first no matter what. At the very same time, you've got this woman who is saying the same thing.

When this happens, the gospel being the center of what you do, that is a recipe for an amazing sex life and God glorifying, satisfying marriage.

It all starts with the Gospel.



God's absolute best for your life is not found on the New York Times Bestseller list or on the front kiosk of a bookstore. God's best for your life is found in the Bible.

Let's let all of our life be viewed and acted upon through the lens of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

About the Author



Matt Carter serves as the Pastor of Preaching and Vision of The Austin Stone Community Church, which has grown from a core team of 15 people to more than 7,000 Sunday attendees since the church began in 2002. He desires to see the church become an advocate for the welfare of the city of Austin has led to the creation of a network that exists to actively pursue the redemption and renewal of the city for the advancement of the gospel. The For the City Network provides a platform for organizational collaboration by offering physical space to local nonprofits and creating a funnel for volunteer engagement. In addition to pastoring at The Austin Stone, Matt is a cancer survivor, co-author of For the City, Creation Unraveled: The Gospel According to Genesis, and The Real Win (with NFL Quarterback Colt McCoy). Matt is also an active speaker for camps and conferences nationwide. He holds a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Matt is married to Jennifer, and they have three children.