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GOD'S PURPOSES FOR OUR SEXUALITY

The theme of this book is becoming the sexual man God called us to be. A premise, offered earlier, is that to become that man, we need a vision for what he will be like. I suspect that if we were to put Joe Christian on the spot and ask him to describe what kind of sexual man God would have him be, he would come up with something like this: "I'd be a man who was totally faithful to his wife; we had a wonderful sexual life together, one that brought great pleasure to us both and that truly expressed our love for one another; and oh yes, produced some children."

That's a good vision—as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. I believe it sells short what God wants for us in our sexuality; that He wants to bless us so much more lavishly than Joe Christian has described here.

I want to explore with you the depth and breadth of what I have come to believe God wants for us as sexual men; in other words, God's purposes for making us sexual men. My overall premise here is that God placed certain desires or longings in our hearts, longings that will lead us to more fully reflect His Image in us, and will lead us to more fully experience the sonship that is His destiny for each of us. And further, I believe that consistent with His word, while we will find our ultimate fulfillment of these desires in Him, in this life, in the physical realm, they will find their greatest satisfaction in the one flesh union of husband and wife.

This is a tall order, isn't it?. And it may sound a bit abstract or theological, but bear with me. What I will be describing are longings placed in every man's heart, longings that you may not have heard described before, but longings with which most of you will readily identify.

SEX IS GOOD

Before we get into the longings and their fulfillment through our sexuality, I want to make clear that we are not talking about sexuality simply as a means to an end. No, in God's perfect plan, means and ends are always totally compatible, none of the tension is present that we experience between means and ends in other parts of life. And in God's realm, both His means and His ends are always good. Sex is the means. God's purposes for sex are the ends, and both are good, very good. In fact sexuality is one of the Father's greatest gifts to you, and He longs for your sexuality to be truly alive, a positive force on the earth. He is the inventor of nakedness. He is the designer of touch. He is the originator of sexual arousal and orgasm. Sex and sexuality were not concocted in the dark of Satan's lair with ingredients that God could not or would not duplicate. Rather, they are God's invention, gifts He has given to you for good.

Of course, as the Maker and Giver of the gift of sex, the Father has also given us guidelines by which to use the gift. Just as a good father who gives a bicycle to his son and teaches him how, when, where and with whom to ride, so our Heavenly Father instructs us through His Word where sex will flourish and where it will bring death.

THE POWER OF SEX IN MEETING NEEDS

If our sexuality is from God, then why are sexual desires so powerful? Why are sexual temptations among the most difficult to overcome? Why does sexual pleasure feel irresistible at times? Human beings are complex creatures and any simple answer to these questions would probably fall short of providing a complete picture of the intricate make-up of our sexuality. But this can be said with certainty—sexuality is about more than just the physical act of sex, and those things that drive us towards sex are more than just the physical pleasure we derive from it. Sex and sexual activity certainly can provide some of the most pleasurable and euphoric sensations this side of heaven, but these sensations alone are not responsible for what makes sex so nearly irresistible. If pleasure were all there was to sex, most men would be able to fully satisfy their desires with masturbation.

At the core of every man are elements that cannot be removed. These elements are what make up the *Imago Dei*, the image of God, in us. And no matter how we might like to define ourselves differently, no matter what we might believe about ourselves to the contrary, these elements remain. They are like the colors used in a painting. Take away the colors and you no longer have the painting.

Connection, *Completion*, and *Creation* are three of these elements in the core of man, and they are all three longings that God has placed in our hearts that fuel our sexuality like embers fuel a fire. And they will continue to burn no matter what a man does to quell his sexual desires. In an effort to avoid sexual sin, a man may try to deny his sexuality, or to quench it, or starve it. While self-restraint and self-discipline are valuable in our pursuit of sexual purity, they cannot extinguish the embers of desire for connection, completion and creation. Remember, that which fuels the longing for sex has to do with more than simply sex.

As we look at these embers, these longings, we will see why sex is so powerful, and we will start to discern God's purposes for our sexuality.

The First Longing: Connection

Sex is, at its core, about connection—bringing together two separate beings and joining them into one. This is the essence of relationship. God made Adam, and said, *It is not good that the man should be alone* (Genesis 2:18).” And in answer, God made Eve and the two “became one flesh”

My friend and the current leader of Regeneration, Josh Glaser has a theory as to why God made Eve only after Adam had been created and lived temporarily alone. Josh believes He did this so that we would know clearly that a man's property and work (Genesis 2:15), his authority and dominion (Genesis 2:19), and his understanding of and obedience

to God's commands (Genesis 2:16-17) are all not enough for man. Something in the make-up of man leans towards these things and that's good, but man needs something more. Man needs relationship, and God wants us to know it clearly. Make no mistake, union with woman was not God's fallback plan. He didn't create Adam hoping he would be alright on his own. He created Man knowing that he would be partner to Woman. And He made Woman knowing that she would be partner to Man.

We were made for relationship, for connection. We see this clearly in sexual intimacy between a man and his wife. There, in the marriage bed, there is vulnerability, there is trust, there is commitment, there is faithfulness. In that union, there is learning, there is informing, there is giving, there is receiving. In that place, there is similarity and there is difference, there is gentleness and there is passion, there is restraint and there is abandon. In those moments, there is seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, and hearing. There is heightened awareness. There is pleasure and there is anticipation. There is potential. There is intuition and sensing, there is tactility and there is mystery, there are words and there is silence. There is patience and there is urgency. There is sacrifice. There is drawing into, and there is letting go of. There is knowing and there is being known, there is loving and there is being loved.

Whether a man seeks to be sexually satisfied with pornography, a prostitute, or his wife, deep in his heart he is seeking the relational connection of oneness with another human being. Granted, some of these provide only an artificial and temporary sense of this, and even sex within marriage does not necessarily or automatically provide a man the kind of bond his heart is ultimately after. Still, that relational connection is part of the real appeal of sex. Its capacity to provide feelings of connection and intimate relationship—however real or counterfeit the feelings may be—is an irresistible part of why we find sex so alluring.

The Second Longing: Completion

Every man has a longing in himself for completion. At first the longing is for completion of himself as a man, and this longing energizes and directs his growth into manhood. A little boy sees his father or another man who might be a father figure to him, and if that man is responsive and presents a positive image to him, the boy, in his search for his own identity, wants to be like him. Looking at the masculine qualities in the man, the boy wants those qualities for himself. This is why, when my son Stephen was only four or five years old, he would bend his arm strain and ask me to feel his muscle. In his mind "men are strong" and my exclamation of "awesome" affirmed his budding sense of manhood and gave him great satisfaction. All through adolescence, striving for completion as men remains a central focus in life for most boys. And as their world expands beyond the confines of the home, they seek affirmation of this budding manhood from other men, especially their peers.

Then, once a boy starts to establish a sense of manhood—usually in early adolescence—although it is not yet clearly formed nor totally affirmed, he starts to sense that, even when he is complete as a man, there will be things he lacks. He starts to look beyond himself and those who are like him, starting to observe the other half of humanity. He

looks to girls and sees in them a whole different set of qualities, qualities that are also attractive to him. He doesn't want these qualities to be a part of himself—for then he would not be a man—but in some way he still wants to “possess” them. Sexual attraction has started.

The essence of sexual attraction is “otherness”. As men, we are drawn to those qualities in women that are “other”, that are not found in men, especially those qualities that distinguish women from men, their breasts, the softness and smoothness of their skin, even their hair and their lips as they are made to symbolize women. Opposites do attract, but at a more fundamental level than most of us have realized. This longing for what women have is a longing for completion.

There is a strong spiritual dimension to this longing. Scripture tells us that God removed a part of Adam to create Eve, but I believe that God took more than Adam's rib, He took the major portion of the qualities that we know as “feminine” and posited them in Eve, and left the major portion of the qualities we know as “masculine” and left them with Adam. Thus we see the masculine initiation predominate in men, and the feminine response in women; the masculine outer directedness in men, the inner directedness in women; the masculine focus on the physical and material in men, the feminine focus on the relational in women.

What man lacked, women had, and vice versa. This became a part of the attraction to otherness. We experience it as complementarity, the wonderful fitting together of man and woman, not just in the physical sense, but at every level of their being.

God as the source of all that is, has in Himself both the perfect masculine and the perfect feminine. Of course, He is neither man nor woman, and He has chosen to reveal Himself to us primarily in masculine terms. This is because we were meant to see Him first of all as Creator and Ruler, distinctly masculine qualities. But as giver and sustainer of life, He also embodies the feminine. When we read, *in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them* (Genesis 1:27), we gain a sense the man and woman together more fully reflect the image of God than can man separately or woman separately. Thus, the redeemed man, seeking to more fully become the image of God, will have a natural and spiritual longing to reunite with the feminine. God gave man this longing for completion and He made its fulfillment possible through the gift of sexuality, that *they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24).

The Third Longing: Creation

Sex is, at its core, creative. We see the ember of creation burning at the heart of sex by sex's capacity to create closeness, shared secrets, a sacred place, and a sense of security and oneness between a husband and a wife with a healthy sex life. This is tied closely to the ember of connection we talked about above. And again, this creative capacity in sex is so powerful that it can create a *sense* of these things even when the sex is between two strangers or between a man and a cascade of images on a screen.

Of course, the most obvious evidence that sex is creative at its core is the most natural end result of shared sex between a man and a woman—pregnancy. We might downplay this inherent part of sex, but it cannot be ignored. Our culture has attempted to create a picture of sex in which pregnancy is only a minor player, even a nuisance—like ants or mosquitoes are to a picnic. But creation of a new life has always been one of the primary purposes of sex.

In fact, contrary to popular belief, I believe the possibility of pregnancy is in truth a part of the allure our hearts feel towards sex. The creative ember within us burns in yearning to conceive something in our image, just as God conceived man and woman in His. There is no greater expression of the creative capacity of human beings than the conception and birth of a son or a daughter? This desire to create is part of our heart's desire for sex. If you are a father, perhaps you have felt there is something different about sex—something exciting, wonderful and good—when you and your wife are open to the possibility of becoming pregnant.

Think of the beauty of this, God's idea—that new life springs forth from the committed love of a man and his wife as they express their love physically. And the new life is conceived with euphoric pleasure and without effort. Did you ever wonder why God attached the wonderful sensations of arousal and orgasm to sex? Perhaps it was to help us understand the great love and joy He felt when He made us. Perhaps it was because our lives—yours and mine—sprung forth from His committed love without effort and with euphoric pleasure. At its core, sex is creative.

THE LONGINGS BECOME FULFILLED

We must go a step further in understanding God's purposes for our sexuality. Our longings for connection, completion and creation fuel our sexual desires, but to guide them in the direction God would have them go, two more elements are needed; they are love and surrender.

There must be another, a woman, with whom we connect, in whom we find our completion, and with whom we can create. But if our longings are to find their greatest satisfaction, the other cannot be just any woman. If she is a figment of our fantasy or a picture on our computer screen, or even a woman we have bedded down after meeting her at a singles bar, our hearts know that we are experiencing only pseudo-completion and pseudo-connection, and creation is not even in the picture. To meet the true desires of our heart, she must be a real woman and she must be a woman whom we *love*. Love brings true life, excitement and lasting joy to our encounter with the woman.

But for all of this to occur, still one more element must be present—surrender. Connection, completion and creation can be experienced in their fullest only if we give our self to the woman, we pledge to her, before God, our faithfulness so long as we both shall live. Then, and only then, connection and completion come together as *union*. We become one. *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.* As Scripture says, this is a mystery, a profound one. (Ephesians 5:31).

Just as true union can be experienced only with surrender to God and to the woman we love, so creation requires a surrender. For the joy of creation to become manifest in our lives, we surrender our fertility—our seed—to God and to the child who may be created through our act of love. And speaking as a father, in this we find another source of incredible joy and fulfillment.

THE HISTORY CHURCH VIEW: UNION AND PROCREATION

Where we have come to with all of this is the church's traditional teaching that the two purposes of sex are procreation and union. I took this somewhat circuitous route getting here because I have found the theological concept of union to be difficult to take hold of, easy to spout off, but not something that readily resonates in our lives. However, looking at union as something that satisfies very recognizable human needs—connection and completion—the concept takes on greater clarity.

And as regards creation, we are speaking of procreation, it is not just anything that we are creating; it is a child, and the proper word for the creation of a child is procreation.

PLEASURE AS A PURPOSE FOR SEXUALITY

Many in today's church state unequivocally that sex has three purposes in God's plan for mankind. To union and procreation, they add pleasure. A popular—and very good—book on sex and marriage was published a few years ago: *Intended for Pleasure*. There is a good chance that the author chose this title to help counter the widespread sense in the church that somehow sex is dirty, and he was emphasizing that sex is God's good gift. However, the title may have fed into the concept of pleasure being one of sex's primary purposes.

So, is pleasure a purpose for our sexuality, one that should rank right up there with union and procreation? The sheer pleasure of the sexual act is purpose enough for most men—Christian and non-Christian—to want to have sex. For the secular man, it is very often the only justification needed to engage in sexual activity.

God is certainly the one who made sex so profoundly pleasurable, and He blessed us with so many other things to delight the senses—the incredible variety of colors and shapes and scents found in flowers to use just one example—might He not have given us sexuality for the sheer pleasure that it can bring us?

I certainly believe that we are to enjoy the pleasures of sex to their maximum in relationship with our wives. I have no doubt about that. But I believe that we are closer to God's truth when we view pleasure as a *secondary purpose*, or a *by-product*, or a *result* of sex. It may sound like I am splitting hairs or arguing semantics here, but I believe it is both unwise and inaccurate to consider pleasure as a purpose for sex—at least a purpose on an equal level with union and procreation. In fact, it could be downright risky. Here are three reasons why:

1. Viewing pleasure as a purpose for sex perpetuates the view of the fractured man whose sex is broken off from the rest of him. Let's face it, when we speak of pleasure in this context, we almost certainly mean physical or bodily pleasure; the wonderful physical feelings that come from nerve endings in certain parts of our bodies being touched, from the rush of physical pleasure that comes from ejaculation, and even from the comfort and relaxation that comes to our entire bodies when the physical act is completed.

These are a wonderful reality, but I believe that God intends for our pleasure to go far beyond these things, that becoming "one flesh" is meant to be a far wider and deeper thing than the intertwining of two bodies, that to just focus on the physical joining it is to settle for a meager reward. The greatest pleasure from sexual activity comes when physical sex is integrated into the total relational coming together of a husband and wife. Stated differently, physical pleasure is a part of union, and when we come together as man and woman in total love and giving to one another, we find the highest pinnacle of pleasure.

If we have as a goal to reign in our free floating sexuality, and restore it to becoming more a part of the total man, then we are wise to focus on the total joy and pleasure of our relationships with our wives, of which bringing physical delight is just a part.

2. Viewing pleasure as a purpose for sex focuses on *my* body and *my* pleasure.

Many who view pleasure as a primary purpose for sex would be careful to avoid advocating pure hedonism, and would speak of "giving and receiving pleasure", but even that has the connotation of a contract. "I do what she likes, and she does what I like, and wow, it feels great!" The pleasure centered approach can make my focus on "having sex" rather than on loving my wife. It makes sex something I do, rather than being a physical manifestation of a deep spiritual and emotional commitment.

3. Viewing pleasure as a primary purpose of sex makes us vulnerable to rationalizing sin. When pleasure is a primary purpose, it becomes much easier to justify all kinds of non-relational sex, such as masturbation, viewing pornography, even commercial or casual sex. It is probably safe to say that most modern churches that have come to condone such behavior, years ago bought into the belief that experiencing pleasure is a primary purpose for sex. And as was said earlier, for the world, pleasure is all of the justification that is needed for sex.

You may think that your beliefs about sex and sin are too clear and too Biblical to allow you to succumb to this kind of thinking. Don't be too sure. Speaking from personal experience, I have seen how in the midst of sexual temptation, the voice of our passions can very effectively speak the ancient words of our enemy, "Did God really say.....". Or, tired of the battle, the voice of self-pity can whine, "I deserves some little bit of pleasure in this life." Or our "enlightened" reasonable voice can say, "Sure, technically this is wrong, but it is really small potatoes in the big picture of things." The concept of pleasure fosters an attitude of entitlement which weakens us in the face of sexual temptation.

So, without denying—and enjoying—the enormous physical pleasure that God made for us to experience from sexual intercourse, let's stay with union and procreation as God's purposes.

DO BOTH PURPOSES HAVE TO BE OPERATIVE?

When we discuss union and procreation as purposes for sex, the question is going to come up: Do both purposes have to be present? Obviously, this brings us to the question about contraception, the use of mechanical or chemical means to prevent procreation or pregnancy.

In discussing the issue, let's first note two things that all, or almost all, Christians agree on. First, procreation or conception doesn't always have to be "possible" for a married couple to engage in sexual intercourse. The woman may be past menopause, or may have had to have a hysterectomy for medical purposes, or the man may be infertile for medical reasons. God still wants such couples to experience the joy of sexual union. Second, union must always be present. There must be a permanent commitment (i.e. marriage) and there must be a joining of hearts, minds and spirits as well as bodies.

Well, what about contraception? This is not, as you may think, a Catholic-Protestant question; Catholics are against it and Protestants say it's okay. In fact, surveys show that most Roman Catholics disagree with their church's teaching on the subject, while history shows that until about 75 years ago, almost all Protestant churches held that it was sinful. The laws against the sale of contraceptive devices that were on the books in many US states, were not put there by Catholics—they didn't have the power—they were put there by conservative Protestants.

Because devout Christian believers disagree on contraception, I must approach the issue with a degree of humility. My views on the subject have changed over the years, and may still be changing. So I will not offer my "doctrinal" view here. In fact, I have, myself, grown and changed tremendously as a sexual man while the issue has remained unsettled in my own mind. I think others can do the same, and I do not want the contraception issue to become an immediate roadblock for readers on their way to becoming the sexual men God wants them to be.

However, I do believe that this is an extremely important question, one that every man, at some point, needs to examine through looking at his own church's teaching and through prayerful thought and study. For those who want to consider the issue now, I have prepared Appendix B. It offers a brief history of where the church has been on his issue, followed by my thoughts.