

Solomon on Sex - Marital Sabbath
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April 1, 2012

Good morning Faith family. We are in week 12 of the *Solomon on Sex* series. Before we jump into the text, I want to take a little excursus on the importance of rest, the importance of Sabbath. In the Genesis creation story, we are given an important principle. God created everything in six days, but on the seventh day he rested. He stopped working. He enjoyed the creation.

After creation, the principle of the Sabbath was part of the life of Israel. God's people were commanded not to be like their neighbors around them that worked seven days a week. They were commanded to take a day off to be refreshed personally and in their relationship with God. That is why it was a day when people went to the temple.

Sabbath rest, in the Old Testament, wasn't just one day a week. There were numerous holidays in ancient Israel. There was the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Passover, just to name a few. These were extended times of rest from work. They were times when families were refreshed because they had an opportunity to be together. They were times when their relationship with God was refreshed because God's people remembered key events of their history, similar to how we remember Christmas and Easter.

Every 49 years was a year called the year of Jubilee. All debt was forgiven and people were to enjoy a rest from the heavy burden of financial debt. How many of us would like a year of Jubilee today?

All this to say, we are not designed to work all the time. We must take time to rest, take time to enjoy God's creation, and take time to refresh our relationship with family. Just like we need regular times of refreshment in our relationship with one another, we need regular times to refresh our relationship with God.

As part of this discussion, I should tell you that the official day of the Sabbath in the Old Testament is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. You might wonder why we worship on Sunday, the first day of the week. That is a great question. The answer revolves around Jesus. As you read the Gospels, you find Jesus consistently in trouble with the religious leaders of his day because he was healing on the Sabbath. They thought he was working too much by healing people on the day of rest. They expected him to conform to their rules of what the Sabbath should look like. Unfortunately, the religious teachers of Jesus' time twisted the Sabbath from being a day of rest and rejuvenation into a day of rules and regulation. Jesus refused to bow to their life-taking rules. One of his famous sayings is, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath is a gift from God to refresh us, not a set of rules to control us. As part of God refreshing people, Jesus provided great refreshment to many people on the Sabbath by healing them. So Jesus' healing on the Sabbath was completely in line with God's original purpose for that day. It was for refreshment and rejuvenation. Healing is appropriate for the Sabbath. In fact, you can consider Jesus as the true Sabbath. He is our source of rest and refreshment from God. Salvation is a choice to rest in Jesus.

How did we come to worship on Sunday, not Saturday? The second part of that answer moves from Jesus' life to his resurrection from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, a Sunday. According to John 20:28, the second appearance to his disciples was exactly one week, after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to doubting Thomas. That makes it a Sunday. Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, happened on the first day of the week, which is a Sunday. Acts 20:7 tells us the early church met on the first day of the week, in honor of Christ's resurrection. Remember, they didn't have the day off from work. It was a work day. They probably met at 5 a.m. for worship, then went to the office. The early church kept the principle of the Sabbath, but they kept it on a different day because one day a week was set aside for refreshment from work and refreshment in Christ. The early church met on Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection.

Is the resurrection a big enough event to change the Sabbath day? Yes, it is. Sabbath is about rest and refreshment, especially from God. Who is the forgiver of our sins? Who brings us into a relationship with God? The Sabbath day of rest points us to Jesus, who is our Sabbath. Yes, the resurrection, that we will celebrate next week at the SAMI Center, is such a big deal that it changes the Sabbath day. The seventh day of the week was a Sabbath in celebration of the old creation. The first day of the week is the celebration of something greater than the creation event. It is Jesus being the first of the new creation. That is a big enough event to change the day.

So while the day of the Sabbath was changed by Jesus, the principle of the Sabbath remains. We need times to stop for refreshment. We need refreshment personally and we need refreshment of our relationships.

All this is just a set up to help you understand a big problem. We have national holidays that help us Sabbath from work and spend time with extended family to refresh those relationships. We have a weekly day of worship to be refreshed in our relationship with God. There is another important relationship that desperately needs sabbath, but there is nothing in our cultural or church calendar that helps us put that needed sabbath in our life. Can you guess what that relationship is? It is our marriage relationship! Even more important than stopping work for a holiday is stopping the pace of life so you and your spouse can spend time together to be rejuvenated.

Just like working seven days a week without rest will tear apart the very fabric of your body, living without any times of sabbath for your marriage will tear your marriage apart.

All that is to prepare us for our text this morning in the Song of Solomon. Let's pick up the story. Solomon and his bride are in the midst of marital struggles. He loves her, but he isn't giving her enough time. As a busy king, it appears he is putting in 14 to 16 hour workdays. When he does come home, like most guys, he is stressed and hoping for the comfort of his wife's embrace. She, on the other hand, after being ignored all day, is not in the mood. She would rather sleep with her arms crossed than wrap them around her husband.

In previous weeks, we covered her dreams of revenge. We followed her decision not to punish him and tear their relationship apart but to love him and try to pull their relationship together. Last week we peered through the window of the text to see her plans to entice him home from work. She literally performed a marital striptease for her husband. She danced in front of him with almost nothing on.

That burned God-honoring images of her into his thought life that he just couldn't forget. In fact, those images of her aggressive love for him brought him home from work as fast as he could get out of the office. Last week's marital striptease was only the first part of her plans to get their relationship off the rocks. This morning we have a window into the second part of her plan.

Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; Song of Solomon 7:11 (ESV)

She tells him they need to get out of town. They need a weekend away at a bed-n-breakfast in the country. They need a marital sabbath. Not a sabbath from their marriage but a sabbath for their marriage. They need to get away from life, the house, and the pressures of work so they can enjoy each other and refresh their relationship. Remember, just like today, there are times built into their calendar that help them find refreshment with God. There are times built into their calendar that help them find refreshment with extended family. There are no pre-scheduled marital sabbaths. Just like us, they need to create them or they won't happen. If you don't create a marital sabbath, you can expect your relationship to tear apart, just like what happened between her and Solomon.

As we work through this text, I want to wrap most of what we talk about around this principle of marital sabbath. The text gives us cues on what it takes to enjoy a good one.

Look for spontaneous marital sabbaths.

Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; Song of Solomon 7:11 (ESV)

One of the first things we notice in this verse is the phrasing. The Shulamite is not talking about putting this particular marital sabbath on the calendar six months in the future. She is looking at their calendar and realizing they have a free weekend. She wants to seize the moment. She says let's go and let's go now!

Sometimes this happens in our home. All of a sudden, Cindy and I realize we are home alone. Deanna is over at a friend's. Daniel and David are at a sleepover with their friends. We stare at each other in amazement because the house is quiet. When that happens, we give one another a high-five and say, "Let's get out of here! We can at least go out for pizza or Chinese." It is a chance to break the routine of life and do something special as a couple. As I was writing this sermon, Cindy stopped in the church office for a moment. I looked at my wife. I looked at my watch. I looked at my lunch and said, "Do you want to go on a surprise date to Jimmy John's?"

Escaping to a restaurant together may not sound important to you, but if you are trying to feed a family of five and two of them are growing boys, you don't go out to eat.

Unplug from life in your marital sabbath.

let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. Song of Solomon 7:12 (ESV)

We know from this verse that the Shulamite's invitation to get away is in the spring. She is a country girl. She loves the smell of the buds. She also knows her husband. She knows he is interested in taking a marital sabbath, but first he wants to visit the office and get things in order.

Guys, what happens when we visit the office? First, it always takes more time than we expected. Second, the more we are in the office, the harder it is to not take our work with us. This lady is smart. She tells him they need to get out of town in the morning so they can enjoy the whole day together, not just part of it. While it isn't wrong to unplug from life for an hour or two, a good marital sabbath means you completely disconnect from life. You need to stop checking e-mail. You need to stop answering phone calls and text messages. You need to unplug.

A good marital sabbath involves something to look forward to.

let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved. Song of Solomon 7:12–13 (ESV)

Now this may be a little too ramped up for some of our tastes, but let me remind you that what we just read is biblical. God put it in the book, not me. The Shulamite knows their relationship is in desperate need of a marital sabbath. She has options about how she can approach her husband about their need for

time away. The first option is she can nag. When she is done nagging, she can whine about how they never have time together. She can whine about how she can't stand his schedule. As we learned that week, that really doesn't help. It is beating your spouse with a stick when it is much wiser to use a carrot to motivate change. Instead of whining and nagging, she decides to use a carrot.

She just performed a marital striptease with her husband that left his eyes as wide as saucers. Solomon is seriously praising God for his wife. He is motivated to come home from work early. What just happened in their bedroom left him with a marital moment he will never forget. Now she uses the vividness of that experience to help motivate him to get away for the weekend. She tells him that when they are walking in the fields, she wants to make love to him outdoors.

Now before you freak out on this, I want you to know I checked with the scholars. Yes, that is what it says in English and in the Hebrew. Second, you need to know this is not taking place in Iowa during the winter. Their relationship may be hot, but I don't know any relationship that is hot enough to handle that. Third, if you choose to use this idea, don't get caught. Fourth, if you get caught, don't mention my name.

While outdoor sex may not be an option for all of us, how do these verses apply to us? She promises their weekend of marital sabbath will not be intimacy as usual. Last week, we saw their marital intimacy was fresh and creative when she decided to have a marital striptease for her husband. Do you think her

creativity caught Solomon's attention? I am sure it did! It was unexpected and it was a marital moment he will never forget.

Now she promises him that on their weekend away, she has more creative ideas up her sleeve she is waiting to try. If Solomon has any testosterone in his body, I am willing to bet his suitcase was packed before she finished her sentence.

The point is that she knows how hard it is to get Solomon away from work so she does a little marital flirting. It is good to flirt with your spouse. She promises him something to look forward to on their weekend away. For Solomon, it required some heavy enticement to get him out of the office. For some of you guys, your wife just has to promise that you can visit Best Buy to look at a new big screen television. The point is that we need to help our spouse take marital sabbaths by giving them something to look forward to when they get there.

Marital sabbaths often require planning.

...which I have laid up for you,... Song of Solomon 7:13 (ESV)

Earlier we talked about seizing unexpected moments for spontaneous marital sabbaths. If that is the extent of your refreshing times together, it will not go well. One of the things we see the Shulammite did was planning. She has things which she has *laid up* for Solomon. These are creative ideas she put in her mental savings account. She plans to cash a few of those creative ideas in on their weekend away.

Plan when you will take marital sabbaths.

Plan one weekend a year to get together with your spouse. We need to plan times to get away to reconnect.

Don't just plan full weekends away, plan mini marital Sabbaths into your life. Since the weekend is the busiest time of my week, Cindy and I don't have a chance to escape town. About a year ago, we began enjoying a little marital sabbath over the lunch hour. We go to the gym for exercise. It is just the two of us. No kids. It is not just a time to exercise. It is a time to talk about life, the church, and the kids. I come to the office in the afternoon refreshed. Cindy has her stress out before the kids come flying in the door. It is a very good idea.

I realize not everyone can enjoy the gym over lunch. With the spring, you can go for a walk together. You can bring a picnic lunch in your backpack. You can stop at a coffee shop. There are many options. The key is you need to plan marital sabbaths into your life. Plan larger sabbath weekends and smaller mini marital sabbaths into your week.

Plan activities for marital sabbaths

One of the problems we have is when it comes time for a marital sabbath is sometimes we don't know what to do together. We stare at each other without an idea in our head. To solve this, it takes a little work. You need to start to study your spouse. You listen for things they like to do and write them down. I like to use my iPhone. I have a program called Evernote and another called DayOne. Evernote is where I keep my notes and lists. DayOne is my daily journal for my thoughts. When I hear Cindy mention something she would like to

do, I write it down. When it comes time to think of what she wants to do for our marital sabbaths, I have a list! I encourage you to begin keeping a similar one.

Plan times of marital sabbath into your home.

In addition to planning marital sabbaths out of the home, trying planning marital sabbaths in your home. I suggest going to bed when your kids go to bed. Try to begin relaxing at 9 p.m. My only recommendation is that you don't turn on the television. A marital sabbath is a time for the two of you to talk and listen, not watch football. Guys, ask your wife about her life and pray for her. Another idea is to read to each other. When Cindy and I were preparing this series, I had some books with hilarious illustrations in them about marriages gone goofy. We rested in bed at night and I read them to her. We couldn't help but laugh. You can't do that with television. Try reading together.

A little public affection is a type of marital sabbath.

Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. Song of Solomon 8:1 (ESV)

Now this sounds weird. It sounds like things are getting too interbred in this culture. It sounds like an incest thing. Actually, once we understand the culture, it makes good sense. In that culture, P.D.A. was totally unacceptable. A husband and wife could be together in public, but they couldn't touch. As you can guess from what has transpired so far with the Shulammite, she is quite interested in making physical contact. She would also like to give him a kiss in public.

In that culture, it was acceptable for brothers and sisters to display affection. If your family is healthy, you know how this works. Before our kids go to bed at night, Deanna gives her brothers a little kiss on the cheek. The boys sometimes do the same for her. This even happens in public. They are family. That kind of kissing in public is part of being family.

The Shulammite tells Solomon she wishes they were family so they could kiss in public. As we saw earlier, she is interested in doing much more together in private. Now in our culture, we are a little more open about P.D.A. than they were in theirs. I encourage you to display a little public affection. It is appropriate to hold hands. It is appropriate to put your arm around your wife. It is even appropriate to do moderate kissing. It lets people know your marriage is healthy. I didn't say start groping each other in the pews. That is where I draw the line!

Cindy and I have fun with P.D.A.! After we work out at the gym, before we get back to work, I give her a kiss before she gets in the car. Since that kiss has to last me until evening, I try to make it quality. At first, Cindy was a little embarrassed. People could see us kissing through the windows. I told her not to worry about it. It is what a Christian marriage looks like. It is a form of evangelism. A little public affection is a form of marital sabbath because it refreshes your relationship.

I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother— she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate.
Song of Solomon 8:2 (ESV)

One quick comment on this. Sex education begins at home. In that day, they didn't farm it out to the school for health class. It was done in the home. Mothers talked with their daughters about how to be a godly wife. Fathers talked with their sons about how to be a godly husband.

The problem with sex education farmed out to the school is that parents ignore their responsibility for it. The school will teach children about the sexual functions of their body, but it will not teach our children the biblical qualities of what it means to be a godly wife or husband. The school teaches children that our sexuality is there to serve ourselves outside of marriage. It is only parents who teach their children that our sexuality is a gift given from God to serve our spouse inside of marriage.

Sex education began at home for the Shulammite. Her mother taught her how to be a godly wife to her husband when times were hard in their marriage. Her mother is probably the one who taught her how to love her husband in marital difficulty, not to hurt him. That is more important than the biological portion of any sex education class.

There is much more in this verse but you can't get me to talk about it. You can do your own research on it.

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me! I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Song of Solomon 8:3-4 (ESV)

This is the third time she has used this line. When you keep saying the same thing over and over, it is either because you have Alzheimer's or you are

trying to make an important point by repeating yourself. My guess is Alzheimer's is not the issue.

She is pleading with her girlfriends and she is pleading with us, save yourself for marriage. She says intimacy is fun, exciting and new, but unless you are married, it is not for you.

Before you go, I have three homework questions for you to work on today.

Homework questions

1. Plan short marital sabbaths into your week. Plan at least one extended marital sabbath into your year.
2. Create a marital bucket list of what you want to do together.
3. What can you say or do that would entice your spouse to take a marital sabbath? Have fun following your plans!



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