

“How to Avoid a Bad Night  
In the Bedroom”  
Song of Solomon 5:2-8

- I. Understand the desire for love may fail because of bad timing. (5:2)
  1. Work may cause the problem.
  2. Words may not cure the problem.
  
- II. Understand the details for love may feel like too much trouble. (5:3)
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  1. Tell others of your love.
  2. Tell your mate of your love.

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Introduction:

“Lawyers can’t cope as divorce epidemic sweeps the United Kingdom,” reported the London Observer, Jan. 9, 2000. An outbreak of “matrimonial millennial madness” has led one of Britain’s leading divorce law firms “Lloyd Platts & Co.” to refuse to take on any new clients. Said Vanessa Lloyd Platts, “...if couples continue to separate at the current rate, there won’t be anybody left to divorce in 10 years.” Feminist writer Natasha Walter argues, “this means people don’t want to put up with second best anymore! Marriage isn’t keeping up with the way we conduct our relationships and what I see much more of is that a lot of men and women are looking for love but not necessarily within the framework of one partner for life.” Julia Cole, a spokesperson for Relate, said that the beginning of a new century had prompted a new scrutiny of relationships. Sexual problems, always uppermost in people’s minds ...seem especially widespread. “There is an expectation that along with the perfect lunch, the perfect presents, the perfect New Year’s Eve, there will be lovely, perfect sex. The contrast between expectations and reality is often enormous.”<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, far too many people are experiencing significant disappointment with their marriage, and problems often find their way into the bedroom. However, most problems in a marriage do not begin in the bedroom, but many problems in marriage do end up in the bedroom. And, no marriage will be all that God intended if the intimate life is not meaningful, satisfying and enjoyable.

Proverbs 5:18 says, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth.” Notice it did not say “in your youth”! In Feb. 1999, the National Health and Social Life Survey completed what was identified as the most comprehensive study of American sex lives ever. The results were published in JAMA with some interesting findings.<sup>2</sup>

- A. Sexually active singles have the most sexual problems and get the least pleasure out of sex.
- B. Men with the most “liberal attitudes about sex” are 75% more likely to fail to satisfy their partners.
- C. Married couples by far reported the happiest satisfaction with their sex lives.
- D. The most sexually satisfied demographic group of them all: married couples between 50-59!!!

Oh, but the news gets even better. A Nov. 29,1999 news release noted, “When University of Chicago researchers set out to discover which religious denominations have the best sex they learned that the faithful don’t do all their shouting in church. Conservative protestant women, their 1994 survey found, report by far the most orgasms: 32% say they achieve orgasm every time they make love. Mainline protestants and Catholics lagged five points behind. Those with no religious affiliation were at 22%. (Unitarians may not wish to read any further.)

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<sup>1</sup> *London Observer* (1-9-00).

<sup>2</sup> *World Magazine* (2-27-99).

So, Newsweek may run a story that asks: “Was it virtually good for you? Sex: the best lovemaking of your life is now just a few nanobots and a body suit away,” touting the virtues of techno, virtual-reality sex!<sup>3</sup> And Cosmopolitan may challenge us with “Cosmo’s 20 Favorite Sex Tips Ever,” which claims “we have the wall-shaking, earth-quaking moves that’ll make your bed end up across the room.”<sup>4</sup> (This, by the way, was one of their more calm articles on this topic I came across!) However, if you really are interested in the best sex possible, based on the data, find you a born again babe and keep her around into her 50’s because the best is yet to come!

However, as we have seen, too many couples are suffering the hurt and disappointment of too many bad nights in the bedroom. When those bad nights come, what do we do? How should we respond? Might I offer a suggestion: let’s follow the Word. Let’s allow God to provide guidance on how we can avoid bad nights in the bedroom.

I. Understand the desire for love may fail because of bad timing. (5:2)

Shulamite, Solomon’s wife, is in bed. Perhaps she is dreaming or half-awake, tossing and turning out of anxiety and disappointment. The issue is quite simple: he is late again. The flow of the text hints that she may have been hoping for, or expecting, a night of romantic intimacy with her lover, her husband. However, he was out again and her desire had been dashed. Why did this happen? What can be the cause of a bad night in the bedroom?

1. Work may cause the problem.

The Bible says “his head was covered with dew, and his locks (or hair) with the drops of the night.” This is an example of Hebrew parallelism. The point is clear. It was late, near or after midnight. Like many men, he probably had to work late. Struggling to make things come together in the tough, cruel world of a king required long hard days. Sometimes those days turn into nights. Time is, and has always been, our most precious commodity. You can only spend it one time and at one place. On this particular evening, work won out over the wife and the stage is set for a confrontation, a showdown in the bedroom.

2. Words may not cure the problem.

In the ancient near east it was the custom for a husband and wife to occupy separate bedrooms. Solomon is tired, but not too tired. He was, after all, a man! The fact is he was probably in need of both emotional and physical support and intimacy with his wife after a long, hard day. A report notes that “for men the secret of a happy marriage is emotional support and an active sex life. While women would just like their husbands to take more interest in them ... Women said, they just wanted husbands to take a greater interest in

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<sup>3</sup> *Newsweek* (1-1-00).

<sup>4</sup> *Cosmopolitan* (Jan., 2000).

their opinions and a more active role in their social lives. Sheron Li Yuet-Yi, marriage counselor at the advisory council said, “sex plays an essential role in building up a successful marriage. We have seen newlyweds who do not have any idea how to do it and we have some middle-aged couples who are either too lazy or too tired.”<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the picture is not very pretty.

Solomon’s approach is gentle and sensitive. Perhaps he sensed some tension. A locked door to the bedroom might tip a guy off! Note his 4 names of affection and the 4 uses of the possessive pronouns “my”:

My sister – (cf. 4:9) emphasizes the permanency of their relationship.

My love – (cf. 1:9; used 9 times and always by Solomon) speaks of the one in whom I delight and take pleasure. It is often used in the context of acknowledging her beauty.

My dove – (cf. 2:14) was perhaps a pet name. It describes her gentleness.

My perfect one means my flawless or blameless one; the one whom I know is wholly mine and no other’s.

I am convinced Solomon is sincere in his compliments and words of praise. Of course this is not always the case with husbands, and our wives have become quite the experts in deciphering some of our “code” phrases. A radio station in Louisville had some fun at male expense when they talked about “what men really mean when they say...”

- A. “It’s a guy thing” really means... “there is no rational thought pattern connected with it, and you have no chance at all of making it logical.”
- B. “Can I help with dinner?” really means... “why isn’t it already on the table?”
- C. “Uh huh”, “sure honey”, or “yes, dear” really means... absolutely nothing, it’s a conditioned response.
- D. “It would take too long to explain” really means... “I have no idea how it works.”
- E. “We’re going to be late” really means... “now I have a legitimate excuse to drive like a maniac.”
- F. “Take a break, honey, you’re working too hard” really means... “I can’t hear the game over the vacuum cleaner.”
- G. “That’s interesting, dear” really means... “are you still talking?”
- H. “That’s women’s work” really means... “it’s difficult, dirty and thankless.”
- I. “We share the housework” really means... “I make the messes, she cleans them up.”
- J. “You know how bad my memory is” really means... “I remember the theme song to ‘f troop’, the address of the first girl I ever kissed and the vehicle identification number of every car I’ve ever owned, but I forgot your birthday.”

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<sup>5</sup> *South China Post* (11-16-99).

- K. “Oh, don’t fuss. I just cut myself. It’s no big deal” really means... “I have severed a limb, but will bleed to death before I admit that I am hurt.”
- L. “Hey, I’ve got my reasons for what I am doing” really means... “and I sure hope I think of some pretty soon.”
- M. “I can’t find it” really means... “when I look in the refrigerator I can’t move the milk jug because if the ketchup is not behind it then the milk jug won!”
- N. “What did I do this time?” really means... “what did you catch me doing?”
- O. “I heard you” really means... “I haven’t the foggiest clue what you just said and I am desperately hoping that I can fake it well enough so that you don’t spend the next three days yelling at me.”

No, sometimes words, even our best ones cannot overcome bad timing and prevent a bad night in the bedroom.

## II. Understand the details for love may feel like too much trouble. (5:3)

Shulamith was perhaps mad, certainly hurt. The most basic needs of her heart had not been met. Bob Turnbull in “What Your Wife Really Needs” reminds us guys that our wives will dry up and wither on the inside without 4 things:

- A. Time – the currency of a relationship; clearing space in your calendar for her says you are valuable to me.
- B. Talk – this is how she connects with you. It is also a way she handles stress (men on the other hand, walk or take flight).<sup>6</sup>
- C. Tenderness – it feeds her soul when she is nourished and knows she is cherished.
- D. Touch – non-sexual, affectionate touch is crucial to a wife and, if she only receives it as the pre-game to sex, she will begin to feel used, like a marital prostitute.<sup>6</sup>

Whether he meant to or not, and he probably didn’t, Solomon failed the 4-t test, at least in the eyes of his wife. This, however, does not justify how Shulamith responds, and her response is selfish and especially insensitive to the fragility of the male ego. An evening that once held promise for both the husband and the wife is about to go down the drain. What can we do to avoid this?

### 1. Guard against silly priorities.

Her response in 21st century America would translate, “Not tonight; I have a headache.” “Not tonight; I’m too tired.” Several Bible teachers note “I have taken off my robe” suggests she now lay naked and unclothed beneath the sheets. Is there perhaps a little dig hinting at “what you will miss because you stayed out too late?” I

<sup>6</sup> Karen Peterson, “To Fight Stress, Woman Talk, Men Walk” (*USA Today*, 8-7-99).

<sup>6</sup> Bob Turnbull, “What Your Wife Really Needs” (*Marriage Relationship*, Fall 1999).

like, as a better response, what Jeff York shared in Reader's Digest: "My wife decided to put a spark back into our marriage. Knowing how tired she gets at the end of the day, she pre-arranged a solution to a potential problem. When I came to bed, I found this note on my pillow: "I'm feeling romantic. If I'm asleep, wake me up and remind me." In essence, Shulamith says, "My comfort is more important than your needs or desires. I waited, it's late. So sad. Too bad. If you can't get home at a decent hour, don't expect any special attention from me."

## 2. Guard against being a selfish person.

Washing the feet was an oriental custom before eating a meal or retiring for bed. Shulamith was washed up and ready for bed. To have to get up, put on her robe and get her feet dirty was too much trouble. Self-centeredness is a deadly sin. It can and will destroy anything that gets in its path. It is also foolish, because it never gives a truly accurate picture of reality.

In this context, let me address one new and specific danger to our marriages that has come recently onto the scene. Computers are one of the marvelous inventions of the 20th century. They have produced much good in many areas of life. Marriages, however, have suffered far too often from pornography, cypersex and illusionary and unreal online romancing. In "Letters of the Century: America 1900-1999," 412 letters were compiled to show us something about our personal perspectives during the 20th century. The very last letter selected came from the Shirley Glass AOL Electra Column. It was picked because it captured best the last decade and illustrated how the complexities of the computer age have changed us. Listen to it.

"Dear Dr. Glass,

I met a very interesting man online a couple of weeks ago, and have talked to him on the phone several times as well. He is enchanting, charming, and everything I could possibly want. The trouble is that I'm already married and all the way across the country from Mr. Wonderful. I really think I love this man, but what can I do?

Sincerely,

Confused and Charmed.

Listen also to Shirley's wise and direct counsel.

"Dear Confused and Charmed,

Your "Mr. Wonderful" may be somebody else's philandering husband. Internet relationships create a romantic mystique because you can create exciting fantasies about the other person. Add a little dose of secrecy, emotional intimacy, and sexual innuendoes, and you've got a full-blown emotional affair. It is easy to be charming when you are not dealing with the everyday irritations of leaking roofs and noisy kids. The love that you feel for this man is based on romantic idealization, whereas your marriage is based on reality. Furthermore, stable long-term relationships are seldom as exciting as stage 1 (the honeymoon) relationships. What does your online search for companionship and romance indicate about your marriage? Talk to your husband about your wants and needs and try to put some energy back into your marriage."

Selfishness and self-centeredness is death to a relationship. It will never build up, but only tear down. It is unrealistic. It is harmful. It is sin. And, it is almost always filled with regret. It is certain to produce a bad night in the bedroom, and potentially, many lonely ones as well.

### III. Understand the denial of love may flower only temporarily. (5:4-7)

Six times in verses 2-8 Shulamith calls Solomon “beloved.” She does so four more times in verses 9-10. She has been angry with him, but she does love him. His tender words have worked their way into her heart. Now Solomon, being the typical male, follows up with one last advance. He gently places his hand on the latch (the opening of the door.) Because of the poetic, symbolic and erotic nature of this book, numerous scholars have noted the male hand is sometimes used euphemistically for the sexual parts of a man (cf. Is. 57:8, 10; Jer. 5:31; 50:15). If this is so, the latch or opening corresponds most certainly to the female counterpart. What is the response to this kind, sensitive and sensual overture?

#### 1. You may reconsider saying no. (5:4-5)

“My heart” (“the core of my being; “my pounding heart” – NIV; “my inwards seethed”) is used as we would use it today, though some scholars again see a beautifully veiled but clear reference to her sexual urges as a woman. “She arose,” she moves into action. The “I” is emphatic. She now wants to make things right. “The Myrrh” is: 1.) Perhaps left by Solomon as a sign of his love and regret that things had gone sour, or 2.) Perhaps on the hand of Shulamith who quickly prepared herself for the now desired sexual rendezvous. She wanted her man as much as he wanted her.

It is a tragedy in many marriages that the bedroom becomes a war zone and a battlefield because wives are convinced their husbands always want sex and husbands are convinced their wives like to say no as often as possible. A friend of mine who does marriage counseling told me about a woman who came to him who was having marriage problems. The issue was sex. It seemed to her that sex was all her husband was interested in, and he was constantly putting enormous pressure on her to have intimate relationships. She was just about at the end of her rope and so she came looking for help. My friend is a very insightful and wise person, and he gave the lady a very interesting assignment. He asked her to go back home and for the next week to become a “huntress” in her relationship with her husband. He told her to track him down again and again, several times a day if she could, and engage in sexual relations. He asked her to call him at the end of the week and tell him what the results were of this plan. Well, my friend did not get a call at the end of the week. He received a phone call just two days later. The woman said, “I think your plan worked. My husband is lying over in the corner of our bedroom waving a white handkerchief! In fact, this whole day, when I come into a room where he is, he tries to get out as fast as he can!!!” She went on to tell him that they both felt very foolish.

They had, after 15+ years of marriage, come to realize that their sexual appetites, though not identical, were quite similar and definitely compatible. He was always pressuring her because he thought she always wanted to say no. If he didn't turn up the heat, they would never have sex, he thought. She, on the other hand, was in the "resistance mode" because she thought having sex is all he ever wants to do, and if I don't say no at least some of the time we will be having sex all of the time. Better communication could have saved this couple years of stress and hurt. Better communication can save us from these things as well.

## 2. You may reap saying no. (5:6)

Studies now offer preliminary evidence that actual physical changes occur during marital conflict. For example, marital conflict affects the heart rate. New studies show that marital fights can weaken the immune system (especially in women), raise blood pressure, and speed up the heart rate. For women, simply discussing angry feelings leads to these stressed-out body reactions. For men, the stress seems to be accompanied by the act of talking louder and faster. The greatest benefits regarding health and long life come to those who are happily married. Those who are happily married seem healthier overall than any other group.

Marital conflict, indeed has the potential for suffering and sorrow in many areas. Our text addresses two.

### A. He may walk.

It has been well said, "more belongs to marriage than 4 bare legs in a bed." Though men like that idea, their needs run so much deeper. Yvonne Turnbull, in "What Your Husband Really Wants" notes 4 things a husband longs to receive from his wife:

1. Being his cheerleader – a man thrives on his wife's approval and praise.
2. Being his champion – A wife's respect and encouragement lifts a man's spirit and his sense of self-worth.
3. Being his companion – A man wants his wife to be his best friend.
4. Being his complement – A woman is necessary to complete a man.<sup>7</sup>

A single friend of mine says, "Being single makes for lonely nights but peaceful days." A married man longs for both peaceful days and intimate nights.

### B. He may not talk.

"Wounded males almost always go into a shell." Most husbands will not fight their wives physically or verbally. They walk and they won't talk. Marriage

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<sup>7</sup> Yvonne Turnbull, "What Your Husband Really Wants" (*Marriage Partnership*, Fall 1999).



counselor Howard Markman has said, “Men don’t want to spend their lives fighting, so they start withdrawing, that’s a typical pattern of development of marital distress.”

3. You may regret saying no. (5:7)

This verse should be taken symbolically of her own disappointment in herself. It is the pain she feels not from her mate, but from herself and, I believe, from God’s spirit. If our spouse hurts us, wrongs us, we should give God some time to work in their heart. He will do a much better job.

A. You may be alone.

John Gottman, a nationally respected marriage counselor and professor of psychology at the University of Washington, says men and women kill their love with criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling, and the failure to repair the hurt caused by these harsh styles. If this is not corrected, you’ll possibly end up alone.

B. You may be ashamed.

“Her veil is taken away.” She feels as if everything valuable and important to her is gone. Why? Because God has worked in her heart. Distance has made the heart grow fonder. Without the interference of a griping, whining, and nagging mate, the Lord had done what only He can do. The stage is now set for reconciliation and reunion.

IV. Understand the drive of love may flame with testimony. (5:8)

Daughters of Jerusalem are the chorus group who appear throughout the book at strategic times. They are called and charged as solemn witnesses to what she is about to say. These will be important words, words from the heart and words she hopes will be trumpeted throughout the land.

1. Tell others of your love.

Here are the right words from the right heart at the right time and yes, to the right persons. She is his cheerleader and he is her champion. This speaks loudly to his male ego, who and what he is as a man on the inside. Herbert Stein raises the issue, “why a man needs a woman” and writes: 1) She is a warm body in bed to cuddle and comfort; 2) Intimate conversation (interest, understanding and trust); 3) She serves his need to be needed. “To this woman you are irreplaceable at any price.”<sup>8</sup> In the context of sex, Douglas Wilson, in Reforming Marriage, says “that there is a sexual relationship at the center of the home which should be obvious to all who live there – hugs, kisses, and romantic attention... there is nothing wrong with children knowing that their father is male and their mother is female and that they have a sexual relationship. There is something wrong with them not knowing.”<sup>9</sup>

2. Tell your mate of your love.

it has been said, “the tragedy of love is indifference.” Alphonse Kerr said it well, “Love is the most terrible, and also the most generous, of the passions; it is the only one which includes in its dreams the happiness of someone else.” Shulamith is saying in verse 8: I can’t last another day without you. Am I too weak or disinterested to make love to him? Don’t be foolish. How could I not want more? I have lovesickness. The only remedy is you!

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<sup>8</sup> *Readers Digest* (Dec. 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Reforming Marriage* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon, 1995), 109-110.

### Conclusion:

“In marriage, the eye finds, the heart chooses, the hand binds and only death should loose.” Psychologist Howard Markman, speaking at Duquesne University in Oct. 1999 said, “It’s not how much you love each other, but when conflicts arise, (it’s) how you handle them that determines the success of your marriage or relationship.” George Worgul, Associate Director of Duquesne’s Family Institute and a theology professor adds, “many people want to have good relationships and enjoy a happy marriage. Love, however, is hard work.” You know what, they’re right. It is hard work. But it is worthwhile work and when the work is pursued following God’s guidelines and for His glory, you’ll enjoy a Christian marriage and discover a Christian bedroom: one that is satisfying, liberated, sensual, erotic, intimate, and pleasing both to God and one another. With a commitment to Jesus and one another, and the courage to stay with it no matter what, we can find the joy God planned for all of us.