

Title: Souls with Bodies: Healing and Goodness

Biblical Text: Song of Songs 4

Teaching Series: Whom My Soul Loves

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Song of Songs 4

Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain

sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices— a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

We're continuing in the Song of Songs today. It's a book many spiritual communities have entirely avoided. I've heard several of you share that you've never read or listened to a sermon on this portion of Scripture. *Me either.* And, in all likelihood, if you've been journeying with us the past few weeks ... you know exactly why. This is hard. Exploring human sexuality through a gospel lens is exposing. It's reframing. It brings up a lot of questions and pain.

- We've looked at love. *Love is a joy that longs to be expressed physically and is communal*—perfectly embodied in God the Son, in the flesh, united with the Father and Spirit. That's love.
- Then we looked at sexuality. *Sex is for us, but it's not about us.* We see this through the lens of our social and genital sexuality, which also points us to the diversity and unity within the Trinity.

- And last week, we looked at our desires. *Desires are meant to lead us to Shalom—peace, wholeness, and flourishing.* Even if that *Shalom* doesn't come until the age to come.

Now, we've explored all this, not because the writer of the Song has made definitive statements about sexual ethics or morality. Nevertheless, we're learning about God's truth and beauty as we do throughout the Bible, albeit in a much different way than many of us are accustomed to. Song of Songs, the Psalms, or the opening of Genesis are very different from Matthew's Gospel or Romans. In a book like Matthew, we're reading a story; truth is revealed through characters, circumstances, and development. In a book like Romans, we read a doctrinal statement in letter form; truth is taught through propositions and instruction. But in a book like Song of Songs, we're reading a poem; truth is painted with nature, emotions, cadence, order, and structure. When all these stories, letters, and poems come together, we see a clearer picture of God. They all uniquely participate within the vast tapestry of God's Word.

I think this is helpful to remember today as we consider our bodies. The groom is going to look at his bride and describe her physically. Her beauty. This is the first of four physical, even erotic, descriptions in the poem (see 4:1-7, 5:10-16, 6:4-6, 7:2-8). Each serves as a prelude to lovemaking. But if we're not careful, we'll read his description as some archaic and even draconian standard of beauty. But, of course, *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*. It's deeply personal. OT scholar Duane Garrett explains, "***He is not describing so much how she looks but how he feels***

when he looks at her" (404). It's poetry. It's not teaching us doctrine. It's not describing a standard. The Song is painting a picture of marital, sexual, and physical bliss. *What if it feels like*. Yet, even as he gazes upon her, his enjoyment of her beautiful body comes within a holistic, relational commitment. He says, "**You have captivated my heart**" (4:9). Beauty isn't just about the body. Beauty calls for the heart, mind, soul, and body to be fully captured. That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about beauty. I want to talk about our bodies. I want to talk about our visible selves and how they are inseparably linked with our invisible selves.

Here's how we'll organize our time ...

- The *design* of the body.
- The *distortion* of the body.
- The *healing* of the body.

Movement 1: The Design of the Body (vv.1-7;8-15, Genesis 1:27;2:7,21-22,24-25)

Let's read as the groom beholds his bride and speaks adoration over her body. **Read Song of Songs 4:1-7 ... Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among**

them has lost its young. Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. Notice that the groom's celebration of the bride's body is contained within a general confession of love and exclusivity of their relationship and the holistic nature of her beauty. This is true from the broader context as well as the immediate surrounding passage.

- In the previous stanza, the bride speaks the language of the soul four times, "*him whom my soul loves.*"
- In this passage the groom begins by saying, "*you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful!*"
- He ends by saying, "*You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.*"
- By the end of the Song, the bride exclaims, "*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.*"

Between these immediate bookends, the groom moves from her eyes to her breasts. Along the way, he describes what he sees and feels, beyond the purely physical, through poetic description. Her eyes are like doves, conveying *tenderness and gentleness*. Her teeth are like a flock of sheep. He pays careful attention to the fact

that her teeth are white and she hasn't lost any of them. Both scarce qualities in the ancient world, *conveying cleanliness and health*. Her lips and mouth are lovely, and there is no doubt he wants to kiss her (she conveyed a similar urge in 1:2). Her neck is a tower, *dignified and wondrous*. Her breasts are fawns and gazelles among the flowers (see also 7:3). The meaning of this metaphor is less obvious, but it's clear her breasts heighten his desire to have sex with her. In fact, in each of these four physical descriptions in the Song, the speaker stops when they arrive at the object of their "sensuous attention" (Longman, 141).

While we might be uncomfortable with this specific and sensual description, this is anything but prudish. He's not objectifying her. He's enjoying her. Not only will she soon describe him similarly (5:10-16), but he also respects and acknowledges boundaries. As we've mentioned, physical pleasure comes within the boundaries of committing their whole selves. Not only so, but his physical impulses and visual stimulation are surrendered to her permission to receive him. Listen as he continues. ***Read Song of Songs 4:8-15 ... Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain***

sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices — a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Notice, though he is beholding her body physically, he's also surrendered. Her body and relationship with him is a "*locked garden*" or "*locked spring*" or "*sealed fountain*" (see v.12). In Hebrew literature, springs and fountains illustrate male and female sexuality. He's not forcing himself upon her or manipulating her. He's seeing her body through the lens of her soul. Their impending physical union is part of a more holistic humanity; it's a mutual surrender, self-giving, and covenant.

Here's where the *design* of our bodies comes into focus.

From the beginning our bodies were *designed* good. After God makes the first humans, Adam and Eve, he called them "*very good*" (see Genesis 1:31). There's intrinsic value to humanity's physical nature and form. Adam was made "*of dust from the ground and [God] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*" (Genesis 2:7). Eve was physically made from Adam. While he slept, God "*took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman*" (Genesis 2:21-22). When Adam sees Eve, he beholds, describes, and rejoices in her beauty. *She's bone of my bone, she's flesh of my flesh. She's very good.* This beholding is a prelude to their lovemaking, too. In marriage, they

“become one flesh,” and have no shame (Genesis 2:24,25). Our bodies are good and beautifully physical. Yet, we sense more going on too, *don't we?*

The way the Bible speaks about this *design* of the human body is through the term *the image of God* (see Colossians 3:10). We're told, ***Read Genesis 1:27 ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*** The divine image helps us understand how our spirituality (what's invisible) is in harmony with our sexuality (what's visible). Author Debra Hirsch has written a really helpful book called *Redeeming Sex*. She describes our bodies and being through the uniqueness and interdependence of our sexuality and spirituality. Spirituality is *"a vast longing that drives us beyond ourselves in an attempt to ... understand our world ... to know and be known by God."* On the other hand, sexuality, she says, is a *"longing that drives us beyond ourselves in an attempt to connect with that ... which is other than ourselves ... a longing to know and be known by other people"* (*Redeeming Sex*, 26). We image God or reflect and represent him on earth, through our connection with him and each other. Through body-soul relationships. That's our *design*.

Our spirituality is our desire to be seen and loved by God. It's our souls. Our sexuality is our desire to be seen and loved by others. It's our bodies. The image of God, then, is the union of these two desires and forms. Being whole is about being seen—equally and simultaneously—body and soul. The groom enjoys the bride's whole being. He desires her physically within the boundaries of her worthiness, autonomy, and mutual commitment. Her body is for his beholding because they've

given their souls to each other. His body is for her beholding because they've given their souls to each other.

Much of what it means to be human is missed and harmed when we neglect our the *design* of the body; when we disconnect body from soul. That's the *distortion*.

Movement 2: The Distortion of the Body (1:6,

Matthew 5:27-28, 1 Corinthians 7:2,8-9)

This isn't the first time the bride's body has been a subject of observation. If you remember, back in chapter 1, she confessed a deep self-consciousness because her body was judged by society and abused by her brothers. *Read Song of Songs*

1:6 ... Do not gaze at me because I am dark because the sun has looked upon me.

My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!

In this case, her body is viewed without consideration of her soul. Her black skin was judged undesirable. Her able body was overburdened by anger. Her physicality was detached from her sacredness. That's the *distortion* of the body.

If you remember, the moment Adam and Eve sinned, the beauty of their beings was swallowed by shame. They no longer saw their bodies through the lens of the soul. They no longer thought their bodies were very good. They realized they were naked, and they covered their bodies. Pastor Rich Villodas notes in his book *The Deeply Formed Life*, "*sin distorts their vision, ironically, by opening their eyes.*

*Prior to this moment, they saw with the pure eyes of God. Now they see with the marred vision of human fallenness" (134). Their sexuality was ripped away from their spirituality. You and I still carry this burden. Priest Ron Rolheiser describes us as children of a painful divorce. Despite the beautiful oneness of spirituality and sexuality in the Garden, they have now gone their separate ways. Rolheiser says, "**Religion got to keep God and the secular got to keep sex ... [and we] find ourselves torn between the two, unconsciously longing for the two to come back together again**" (*The Holy Longing*, 34). Our bodies and souls are separated. This is why we never read or teach Song of Songs.*

This *distortion* of the body shows up and wreaks havoc in a few primary ways in our cultural moment. I'd like to consider three of those ...

- The first is a visual distortion. We behold bodies without beholding the souls. In a word, we *lust*. Jesus explains it this way, **Read Matthew 5:27-28 ... "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** Our world is highly visual. We see someone else's body as they walk by us at work or the gym, and we lock on, reflect, and imagine their nakedness or having sex with them. There's no spirituality, only sexuality. Our screens are over-saturated with pictures of bodies disconnected from relationship, mutuality, and sacredness. Sex therapist Dr. Ursula Ofman told *New York* magazine that pornography is drawing young men, in particular, into "compulsive

behavior” that disables them from having relationships with women (*Not Tonight, Honey. I’m Logging On*, October 20, 2023). When we behold bodies without souls, we harm the soul.

- The second is a relational distortion. We give our bodies without giving our souls. Paul teaches the church in Corinth that ***Read 1 Corinthians 7:2,8-9 ... because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband ... To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*** Marriage is giving ourselves, body and soul, to another. This union is meant to tell the story of how Jesus offers himself, body and soul, for his Bride, the Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33). And how the Church gives herself, body and soul, to Christ (see Romans 12:1-2). The temptation or the burning of passion Paul is talking about is the desire to have sex when you're not married. Sex before marriage is giving your body without giving your soul. Sex outside of marriage is giving your body without giving your soul. It's separating your sexuality from your spirituality. *Now, allow me two brief tangents on this point because a lot of us have been asking about this ...*

- Here's the first: while Paul is employing the Bible's overarching sexual ethic to make his point to Corinth, he's also using a particular term: *sexual immorality*. *What's that?* Well, in the NT, it's the Greek

word *porneia* ... where we get the root word for *pornography* (it shows up over thirty times in the NT). It's an inclusive term that means *unlawful sexual intercourse* or sexual sin of any kind, like fornication or adultery or prostitution or Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5. Professor Sam Storms says it about as plainly as you can: "***Every Greek lexicon or dictionary of the NT is in agreement, that porneia refers to any form of sexual activity before or outside the relationship of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman***" (*The Problem of "Porneia,"* May 2018). That's the meaning of the term.

- This leads me to my second tangent ... when we give our bodies without giving our souls, we, in essence, commodify the body. It's sex as transaction. According to the Bible, sex isn't about self-expression. It's not even about self-gratification. It's not about status. Sex is a radical self-giving. Anything and everything else is a ***distortion***. Now, you may say *that's offensive. I may not be married but I love the person I'm with sexually, I care for them beyond their body, we have given ourselves to each other. We just don't have some silly piece of paper that says we're married.* To that, I would say, of course, you absolutely may be in love, and with the whole person. You may even be engaged. And yet, without marriage, you haven't actually surrendered your life. You haven't become one in promise, vow, and covenant. Without marriage, without covenant, we remain in a

consumer-based relationship predicated upon our respective feelings and happiness and satisfaction, not our promises, not our souls.

- The third is a distortion of value. We assign value to bodies without valuing the soul. While we might agree that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, there's a particular social expectation (especially of women) about how someone should look physically. A society defines beauty together. This, of course, is not new. The story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel shows us this. Jacob was a pretty dissatisfied person, and he started looking for marriage and being with someone to make himself feel better and whole. So, he goes to a man named Laban to marry one of his daughters. *Read Genesis 29:16-18a ... Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel.* By cultural standards of beauty, Leah didn't measure up. Rachel did. She was beautiful. Jacob wanted Rachel because of the value assigned to her appearance. And as the story progresses, suffice to say ... it doesn't go well. We do the same thing. When looking for a partner, we may joke about our high standards, but we ought to consider if our standards are righteous. It's not wrong to be drawn to someone's appearance. But it's a distortion to ascribe to a cultural ideal of beauty without considering the soul.

When we distort the body visually, relationally, or in terms of value, we detach the body from the soul. These *distortions* have done unthinkable damage to our bodies.

After all, too often, our bodies have been violated by someone else. We've been looked at as a body, not a soul. We didn't give ourselves without our souls; our body was taken. We didn't esteem our bodies without our souls, but someone else did. Therefore, our bodies have absorbed lies. In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, d Bessel van der Kolk explains, "*The greatest sources of our suffering are the lies we tell ourselves*" (12). Our bodies constantly carry these wounds in the form of anxiety, discontent, shame, and self-hatred.

We need *healing*.

Movement 3: The Healing of the Body (v.16, Luke 7:37-40;48-50, Philippians 3:20-21)

One day, Jesus visited the home of a teacher of Jewish law. As they were eating, Luke tells us an uninvited guest shows up. *Read Luke 7:37-40 ... And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."* From here Jesus tells them a story about forgiveness and gratitude. Then

he recounts the beautiful affection the woman had shown him. *A woman of the city* was a prostitute. Most, if not all, prostitutes in the Roman Empire were enslaved people. And so, when she walks in the room, even the most spiritual people only see her body, her sexuality. They see her physicality, not her sacredness. Her body was taken without her soul by someone else. Her body was judged.

Luke continues. Jesus speaks to her. *Read Luke 7:48-50 ... “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”* Jesus speaks forgiveness. Jesus speaks peace. Jesus speaks to her soul. He knows what her body has been through, and he brings healing by seeing her ... body and soul. He hears the lies her body has absorbed, and he speaks truth back to the darkness.

- Religion tells us that our bodies will be healed when we *live differently.*
Don't lust after another body. Don't have sex before you're married. Don't commit adultery. Don't succumb to the physical value system of the world. In other words, don't detach the body from the soul. Live within the boundaries of obedience. The problem with this moral solution is, of course, our imperfection. Either we'll be successful and arrogant or unsuccessful and shamed.
- Modern society tells us that our bodies will be healed when we *think differently.* *Souls and bodies don't necessarily belong together. As long as*

there is consent and mutual enjoyment, let your bodies feel pleasure. Reject the boundaries of obedience. The problem with the modern solution is two-fold. Firstly, moral freedom just redefines legalism. It doesn't abolish it. Secondly, it also fosters a different brand of arrogance by making bodily autonomy ultimate. We don't image God rightly because we act more like Creators than creation.

Jesus alone brings healing because he alone sees us body and soul. Marriage, shaped by his love, brings healing. Sex, shaped by his wholeness, brings healing. Friendship, shaped by his holiness, brings healing. Relationships with men and women in which our bodies are not detached from our souls bring healing. When our bodies are seen through our souls and given with our souls and valued as souls, it reorients our view of ourselves and others. The power and basis of all this healing is the incarnation of the Son of God, *the very image of God himself*. You see, the Son of God, who was perfectly spiritual in eternity past, took on a sexuality. The one with a soul but no body, brought body and soul together.

In his incarnation, Jesus brings healing.

But in his death, Jesus brings us healing, too.

After all, on the cross, Jesus' spirit was separated from his flesh. His body was viewed without viewing his soul. His body was taken without the consent of his soul. His body was devalued without considering his soul. Jesus endured precisely what makes our bodies ache and wearied. Jesus heard the lies our bodies have

absorbed and spoke truth back to darkness. And then, three days later ... Jesus rose from the dead with a completely refreshed body. And the Bible tells us his resurrected body is the "first fruit" of our future bodies. ***Read Philippians 3:20-21 ... But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*** Our bodies will be redeemed. Our bodies will be like Christ's—bodies that are healed, whole, and perfectly wed with our souls.

Therefore, the bride and groom tell the story of our healing when they come together. In poetic form, they show us and help us feel the joy of how Christ brings healing to his people. The bride says, ***Read Song of Songs 4:16 ... Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.*** The bride welcomes the groom ... body and soul.