

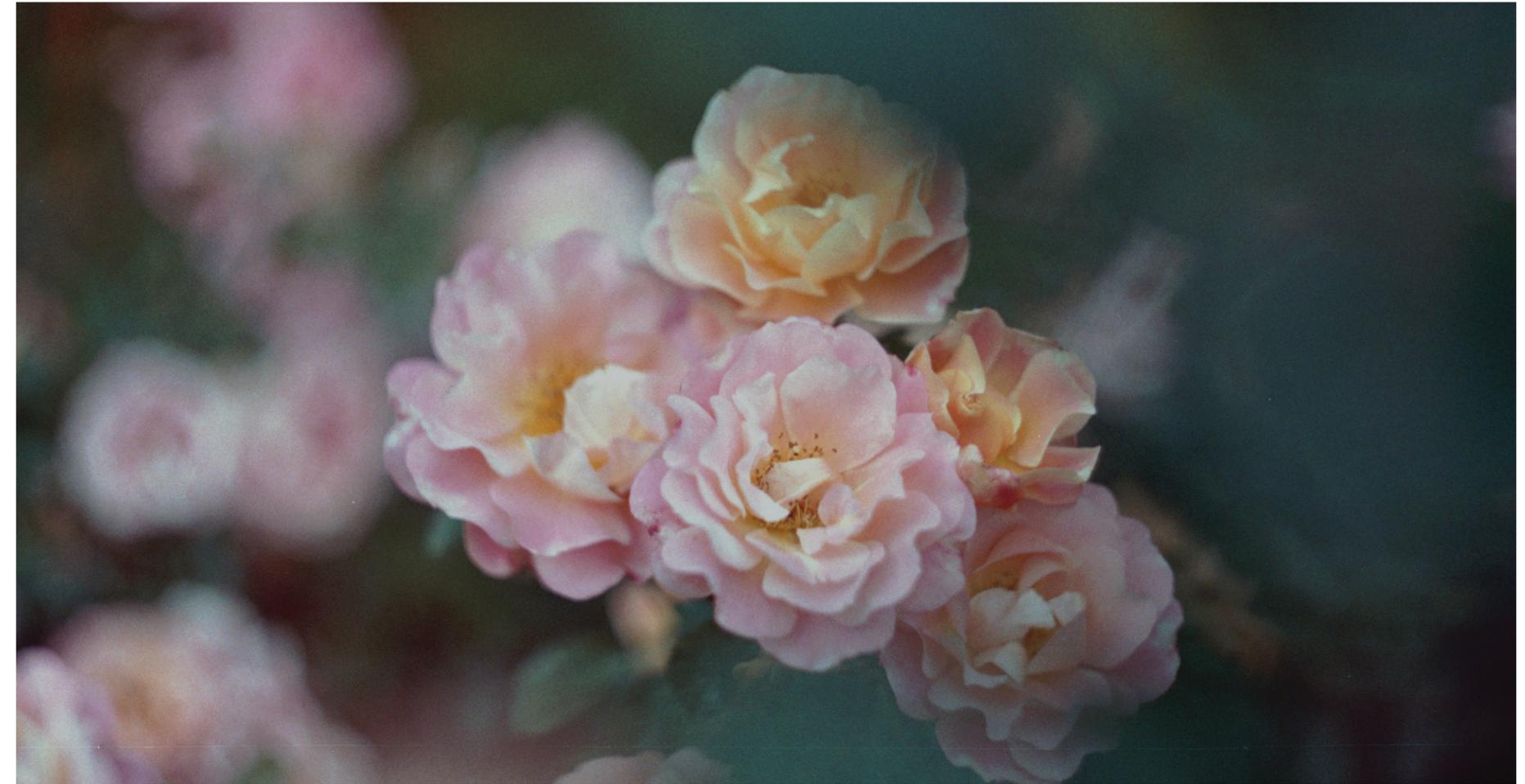
A blurred background image of two people in winter gear looking at a snowy mountain range under a cloudy sky. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an overcast day. The mountains are rugged and covered in patches of snow. The people in the foreground are out of focus, their forms silhouetted against the lighter sky.

## The Wisdom of Sex

There is an enduring misconception when it comes to Christianity's view of sex. If you were to ask the "average" person you meet what the Bible has to say about physical love, there is a good chance the answer would boil down to "God hates sex." Mind you, this is the sort of thing that can only reasonably be held by someone who has not read the Scriptures all that carefully. God is the inventor of the practice, after all.

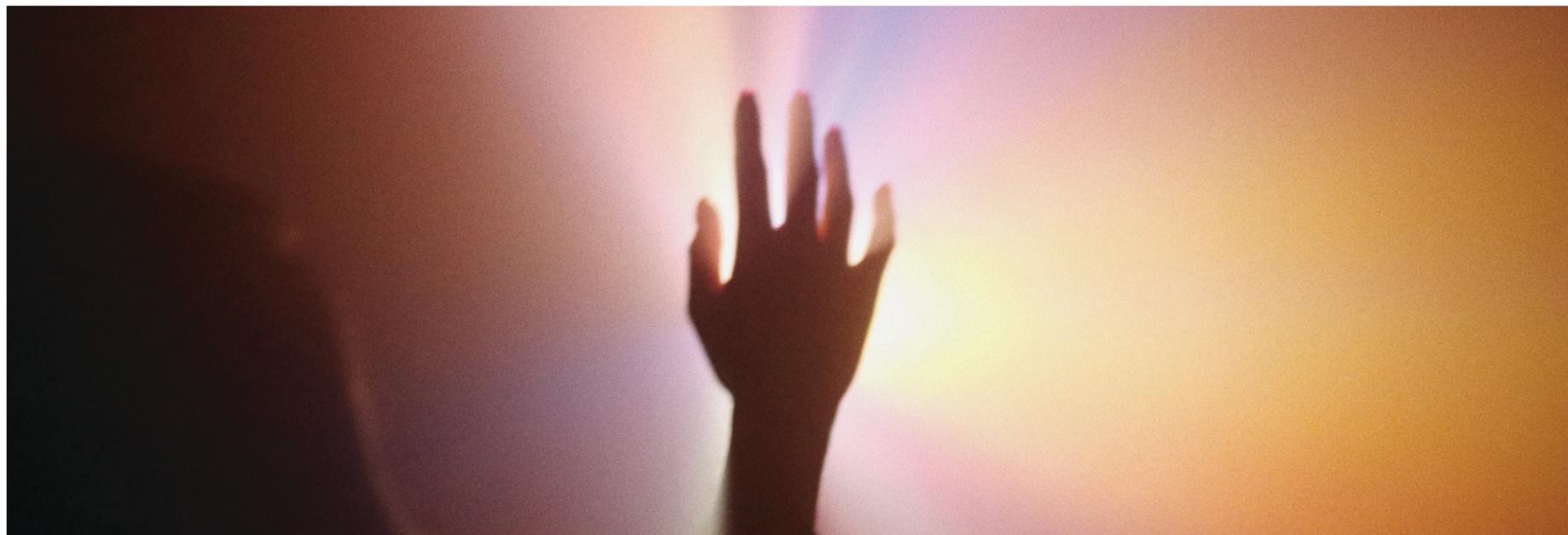
That being said, perhaps this is a moment for the Church to be honest about something. Whatever the Bible might say, and whatever formal principles may be held by Christian orthodoxy, there are believers, both now and in the long ages of the past, who have spoken of sex, even of humanity's biological nature, as though it were something unseemly. Too many Christians have treated this whole realm of life as something dirty, even shameful.

This is a far cry from the celebration of the marriage bed found in God's Word. Consider this. Throughout the course of the Bible, the image of "Bride and Groom" stands out as one of the primary metaphors for our relationship to God. We are talking about a book which begins with the wedding of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and ends with the marriage supper of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem.



God is not embarrassed by our physicality, nor does His Word shy away from discussing issues of sex, whether the beauty or the heartache. The Christ who, in John 2, turned 120-150 gallons of water into the finest wine as a wedding gift can hardly have been annoyed at what the celebration was leading up to. Nor does it make much sense to see Christianity as against sex when we have Paul warning his married listeners in I Corinthians 7 not against conjugal relations but against avoiding them, or in I Timothy 4 and Colossians 2 seeing that he derided those who would teach against marriage.

These New Testament comments are mild compared to the way the Good Book speaks of sex in the Old Testament. The most obvious example of this is the Song of Songs, an entire book of the Bible devoted to the joys and passions of marital love. This work is so graphic that for millennia people have tried to find a way to slip it from the pages of the Scriptures. The portrayal of physicality in this wisdom book is no mere allowance for ardor but closer to an order.



Yet, this is not the only time we see a divine mandate to indulge. Consider for a moment God's priorities when speaking to the human race. The very first thing He says to Adam and Eve after creation, and the very first thing He declares to Noah after leaving the Ark is not a series of rituals and rites, much less a list of rules to avoid breaking. No, God's first command to humanity in each case is to "be fruitful and multiply." While we naturally most often link this to growing the human population on the Earth, let's not forget the means by which such growth occurs. God's "prime directive" to His image bearers intimately involves the very activity which too many people think Christianity is against.

This is a message that the Book of Proverbs is particularly good at conveying. Rarely does it couch its warnings against extramarital relations in terms of rules to be broken. Instead, it speaks of the harm to come to your life, to your well-being as a human being, should you part from the pattern God has set. Repeatedly throughout its 31 chapters we see sporadic warnings against the temptations of adultery and prostitution, but these can stand in for any deviation from the husband-wife relationship.



The author acknowledges that the pull to self-indulgence is strong, but it always ends in death. Perhaps not literal death, though that is possible, but certainly death to relationships, to self-respect, to flourishing as human beings. Recall the language used in Proverbs' warnings in chapter 6:27-28, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" These are not the words of someone worried that someone might have too much fun but that a loved one would come to harm through self-destructive behavior. This theme is most potently, and graphically, illustrated in the previous chapter. Rather than the episodic nature of much of the Proverbs, 5:15-19a elaborates on the glory of marital love. "Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe."

As with the Song of Songs and the rest of Holy Writ, the call in Proverbs is for the man of God to see his wife not as a casual

conquest or an object of lust but as an equal partner with an equal share in the joys of the marriage bed. She is to be for him the focus of his love and fulness of his loyalty. For him to part from her for the arms of another makes him both a fool and a slave, all for the sake of a moment in a lifeless dream. As a living metaphor, the sexual relationship between man and wife tells God's people of His love for them and the emptiness of seeking the love of false gods, whether the stone works of ancient times or the ideological fabrications of our own days.

The reason that people, both Christians and non, so often get this wrong about the Faith is it is perilously easy to take the shallow approach and see the Scriptures' prohibition of disordered desires as denial of those desires entirely. Contrary to expectation, the Scriptures do not speak in this way as an arbitrary rule or as a "kill-joy" but as a means to preserve our joy. What we see in the Bible is a celebration of marital love as a foundational blessing of God.