

THE PLACE OF SEX IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS
The Christian and Sexuality
Dr. George O. Wood

I want to speak tonight on the theme, The Place of Sex in our Relationships. Would you unite with me in a moment of prayer?

Our Father, we ask again tonight as we open again the council from your heart to us that you would give us exactly what is in your heart tonight. We feel again the wonderful sense of the Spirit is among us. Guide us. Give me voice, Lord, to speak for you we ask in your name. Amen.

The previous two evenings we've looked at the theme Christian heresies on sexuality. I deal with the two chief themes that sexuality is something we don't talk about. That in itself is a heresy. All the world's talking about it. We, as Christians, need a response. We believe God created human sexuality, therefore he must have had a meaning and purpose for it and it is time that we talked about it.

The second heresy we looked at is the heresy that says sex is evil or of the devil. Again, we looked at the scripture that God created man and woman and he declared what he had created as good. Paul tells us that all of God's gifts are to be received with thanksgiving. That they are all good.

Last week we looked at the theme of femaleness and maleness as being made in the image of God. Or a message on the theology of sex in which we said male and female together equal man made in the image of God. That simply the male does not reflect fully the image of God. Nor does the female. But together in the Genesis passages (we quoted three of them) whenever man is described as being made in the image of God it's "male and female created he man."

We also looked at the fact that our spiritual, emotional and the physical union of husband and wife bear witness to the personality of God – a communicating God, a celebrating God and a creating God. We then looked at the fact that the awareness of God and his intention for sexuality then controls our use of sexuality, we really begin to look at our use of sexuality in the message tonight. Next time we're going to look at dealing with sexual temptation and the final night is a night of healing – healing the brokenness in our human sexuality.

Tonight, the place of sex in our relationships. This message has three points. First of all what do we hope to get out of our relationships? When I ask this question I'm not only talking about the husband and wife relationship or a sexual relationship. I'm talking about all human relationships. Family relationship, friendship relationship, relationships within the body of Christ. What do we hope to get out of relationships?

I don't necessarily have anything terribly profound to say on this but it seemed to me that as I looked at the relationships I have in life that there were at least three things that I look for personally in relationships. There are probably more than this but these three especially stood out to me.

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One is I seek companionship. Loneliness is the first thing that God calls *not good*. And it's still not good. If you are in a lonely place you know what a lonely, depressing, debilitating experience that is.

I recall twenty years ago I came to go to Fuller Theological Seminary. I had arrived from this small college, Evangel College where I was in everything, class officer. I knew everybody. There just wasn't a moment of loneliness in my life. I came to Southern California and didn't know a soul. I settled in a place in downtown apartment, a bachelor apartment. Kind of a run down testament. I'm the kind that when I'm by myself I can never fix my own food. I don't eat by myself. Even today, I'll go to a restaurant when Jewel is gone. I've got to be with people. A well meaning older couple took compassion on me, brought me a beautiful lamb casserole. They didn't know this but lamb is my least favorite food. There was no refrigerator in the apartment. I needed to tell them how thoughtful their gesture was and how good the casserole tasted. But I could not eat it. Day after day I passed it setting there on the sink. Two weeks later it had so much growth on it! And had become such a symbol of my loneliness in LA I think I was almost willing to chuck everything and go back to where I knew people. I even said during that time, I will never have close friends again because it hurts so bad to be separated from your friends. I don't ever want to be hurt like this again so I never want to have any more close relationships.

That's how you feel when you're lonely. I've gotten over that since then but I still don't eat lamb casserole and don't eat alone.

There are two kinds of loneliness. There's the loneliness of insulation and the loneliness of isolation. Isolation is the kind of loneliness I had in coming to LA. I was removed physically from friends. But there is another kind of loneliness and I think it is more deep and insidious is the loneliness of insulation. That's where you're in the group, in a marriage, in a family and you are alone. You feel like you cannot reach out and touch or be touched and though you are surrounded with people who know your name and know things about you, you are lonely. The Lord has appointed relationships to help us with our loneliness. He created us as people who move in society. We are other face seeking people.

Companionship seems to me involves three characteristics –

A shared presence – you are with me. You're here. One of the most important things people can do in grief by the way is to come and just be present. Don't play Job's counselors. Don't try to tell a person why God took a loved one. You don't know. Being there is the most important thing in the world you can do when a person is hurting.

When I was younger I didn't understand why older people after maybe forty or fifty years of marriage their spouse would die and a short time after that they would remarry. Now I realize the importance of that. People that are in a loving relationship the loneliness is something that's horrendous. They know the value of seeking relationships. It's a healthy sign.

Companionship not only involves a shared presence, it involves a shared communication. We talk to one another. We touch each other. There are five levels of communication – the cliché level - “Hi how are you? Fine. Thank you.” We report facts about ourselves or about the day. Another level is when we talk about our ideas and our judgments “What do you think of...” The fourth level is when we get to know one another well enough that we share our feelings. Not too

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many relationships to people open up and begin to get that fourth level of feelings. There's a fifth level that involves honest, open, total intimacy of caring and sharing of heart to heart kinds of relationships. A shared communication is important in companionship. More especially at the feelings and the absolute honesty and openness area. Part of not being alone.

Of course a shared experience is important too. We feel like we go through something together. Shared experience in companionship allows us to have the same values and interests. A shared experience can lead us to empathize with each other, to rejoice when others are rejoicing and be sorrowful with others who are sorrowful. Empathy. The shared presence, the shared communication, the shared experience led to the zenith, the top, the peak of companionship. That is intimacy. Intimacy may not always be sexual. Intimacy is the profound feeling that you know and understand the heart, spirit and soul of another person.

To know if you're in companionship and how deep your companionship is with someone you might ask yourself, Who do I most feel free to reveal my true self with? When you answer that question, you know you've got a companion.

A second purpose for relationship is affirmation. We need people who will remind us of our worth. In their eyes and also hopefully in God's eyes. Dr. Dobson points out that our adolescent culture today thrives on the two critical questions of self worth – are you beautiful? And are you smart? So many people do not feel affirmed because they don't like the way they look and they don't like the intelligence they feel they have. The Lord knows that we need affirming towards one another. The person who is a non-affirmed person easily begin to withdraw, to feel a low sense of self worth and that then becomes infectious. As you feel a low sense of worth about yourself and project that it almost becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Others begin to feel that towards you. We seek people who will affirm us.

That is the reason by the way, I believe, for premarital sex in teenagers is this need to feel affirmed. Someone has come along and said, You're beautiful or you're wonderful or you're just what I need. A person who doesn't have a great deal of self confidence or maybe does not feel beautiful or smart, it's amazing to me how some of the most outwardly physically attractive teenagers are the very ones that sometimes have the very lowest sense of worth. A sexual relationship seems to promise that you're worth something. But it is something that boomerangs. Because the experience actually winds up destroying and working against the feeling of self worth rather than enhancing it.

We do need affirmation. I need affirmation.

Positive relationships build us up, inspire us and help us to fulfill our potential.

From a Christian perspective relationships help affirm the true self versus the untrue self. I'd use as a model for the true self, the affirmation we need is the affirmation from the fruit of the Spirit. "I am a loving person, I am a joyful person, I am a peaceful person, I am a persevering or patient person, I am a kind persons, I am a good person, I am a faithful person, I am a gentle person, I am a self controlled person." True Christian affirmation seeks to bring that out and develop that in one another. Whereas the untrue self focuses on both the wrongful use of sex and the wrongful use of anger as can be seen as looking at the works of the flesh. I think it can be basically subdivided into these two groups – fornication, impurity, debauchery, orgies. These

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are not my true self. Wrongful use of anger, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissention, factions, envy – these are not my true self. These move me away from God toward the enemy.

Christian relationship will foster the development of the image of Christ in us. It will affirm Christ Jesus to us. And we need to be affirming one another. That's why in a family relationship where people are tearing one another down, it is so destructive because God has intended the family relationship to be companionship where we affirm one another and seek to know one another. That doesn't leave out correction that's needed from time to time but a basic positive mood needs to be set.

The third reason why I think we seek relationships is out of altruism – other people. Being devoted to people and interests outside yourself. I would use it here of relationship in the sense that a relationship accomplishes a good that can not be accomplished by a person acting alone.

God designed marriage to be a creating experience where two people come together and it is more than simply for companionship or affirmation. It has an altruistic aspect of others become involved. Something comes out of the relationship that could not have happened with one person alone.

These three traits of relationship flow out of the character of God. And out of his relationship to us. God himself seeks companionship. What's amazing about God is he is complete in himself and yet he seeks companionship. He walks with man in the Garden of Eden. Christ communes with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. The two most famous gardens of scripture there you will see God. There you will see him in communion. God is an affirming God and God loves to be affirmed. That's the whole language of praise. When we praise God we are affirming God. We're saying back to him what he is. When we praise another person we're affirming them. God seeks that in a relationship. And God is an altruistic God and he's taught us to be altruistic. Out of our relationship with him we are to do things for example like feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoner and give water to the thirsty.

By now you might be saying what does all this talk about relationships have to do with sex? It has everything to do with sexuality.

What the world does in its treatment of sex is to bypass so often the development of relationship in a shortcut to get to sex. But sex was not made to be the foundational base of a relationship. Two diagrams you have in your bulletin. One shows a triangle with the base to be understood as relationship, companionship, affirmation, altruism. Sex is the peak. It's kind of the capstone. For a healthy and normal sexual relationship to take place the relationship must be firm. The world comes along and tries to tilt or invert the triangle so that the relationship is based upon sex. But the other aspects then of the relationship can not go ahead and develop. The deeper needs we have as persons go unmet and we wind up frustrated. The brokenness of marriage and sexuality we have in our culture is a witness to the fact that sex was never designed to fulfill all the expectations that are invested in it by people in our day.

We may wrongfully expect sex to meet all of our needs that are not being met elsewhere. In premarital sex often it's boy gives love in order to get sex while girl gives sex in order to get love. Neither can come to a healthy relationship.

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Relationships are vital and sexuality cannot be the basis of a relationship.

What models of sexual experience fail to fulfill the need of relationships? Models of sexuality that fail to meet our deeper need for relationship.

Fornication. This is the term used throughout scripture. It's a Greek word *porneie*. In modern language we use the word "pornography". Pornographic literally means a fornication writing. Fornication literally means sexual intercourse before marriage. Although in scripture sometimes fornication can be used to describe all immoral sexual activity. But most often it refers to sexual intercourse between two persons before marriage.

There are two kinds of fornication. Casual fornication and fornication that has some measure of commitment between two people. Our age is filled with both.

Casual sex. This totally fails to meet the deeper needs for relationship that we just talked about. It does not affirm the true self. And it is certainly not altruistic. All it seeks is what can I get out of this experience.

Furthermore when you look at God's design for sexuality you see that God's intention for intercourse be a life-uniting act. Paul in speaking about casual sex said in 1 Corinthians 6 "Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her. For it is written the two shall become one flesh." Paul's saying the reality of this act, which is unfelt and unnoticed by the participant, is it unites them body and soul to each other. It unites them in the sense of one flesh. It violates the inner meaning of the act itself. Where people are engaging in a life-uniting act without a life uniting intent. And God intended that the act be met with the intent.

Sex with some degree of commitment is practiced by many. It may temporarily meet the needs of companionship. It may help end some of the isolation aspect of loneliness that is one of the deep relational needs. But the prospect of sex in the relationship must involve the deeper need of the relationship getting in a superior position. Even in a live-in relationship, which may involve some measure of commitment the biblical model still cannot be realized for companionship. Because the true self can never be deeply affirmed. A live in relationship is not conducive to the development of the true self which the scriptures talk about is the fruit of the Spirit. It cannot produce the person made in the image and likeness of Christ. It cannot meet the long-term demands of companionship. Because it is performance oriented. It is not grace oriented. Therefore when the performance is no longer satisfactory in the relationship splitting occurs. And it cannot be at its deepest level altruistic since basically it exists for two self-centered people to meet the needs of each other. Instead of one person being selfish it is two people being selfish simultaneously. The greater good that God has designed for the relationship is not accomplished.

The sad thing to say is the reason I think there are so many live in relationships today is there rare so many models of bad marriages. People have said, I don't want to get into permanent commitment if it's going to turn out like my folks' marriage or someone else's marriage that they will point to. But we cannot use someone else's broken model as our own model. We must use

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the model that God designed for us in his word. People say, We must live together for a while to see if we're compatible. If we're sexually compatible theory is then we'll be compatible.

Adultery is another sexual model that fails to meet the deeper needs of relationship. Adultery and sexual intercourse with someone other than your married spouse. In the areas of companionship and affirmation it may appear for a while to really be meeting needs. In fact if a person is caught in a marriage where there's not much companionship, one of the persons is always preoccupied and never has time for them and never affirms them. All of a sudden someone else comes along.

The problem though with adulterous relationships is that they all involve people escaping from relationships that they bear some responsibility for. Rather than seeking a cure by going outside the relationship there is a cure by staying in the relationship and working for change. Adultery can never be a model of the image of God. God is always faithful to the relationship that he is in. That is the central message of the book of Hosea. God remains faithful to his people.

Unhappily married persons are really looking for companionship, affirmation, and altruism. Adultery seems to promise these things but it cannot since the cure it proposes is an external change rather than an internal change. It only changes the place of residence, one person for another. It's an external rather than an internal change.

Adultery reduces people to guilt, being an object. It destroys the kinds of things that God meant for relationship.

C. S. Lewis in Screwtape Letters says this "Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure that is healthy and normal in its satisfying form we are in absence on the enemy – God's – ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same time it is his invention not ours. He made the pleasure. All our research so far has not enabled us to produce one pleasure. All we can do is encourage the human to take the pleasure of which our enemy has produced in times or ways or degrees in which he has forbidden."

Another broken model for meeting the deeper needs of relationship is homosexuality. There's a tremendously sophisticated emphasis on homosexuality today. Somehow today it's looked upon as good, that someone comes to their "true self." Homosexuality is becoming very subtly to convey that it's somehow an act of honor, a badge of courage, a badge of morality to affirm what you really are. The enemy in making us open to divisions will make it look very, very good and it becomes all the more deceptive. That's why he is called the devil, the deceiver.

The problem with homosexuality is as I said last week. Ontologically shoe is a shoe. The soul is the soul and the upper is the upper. God made man male and female. The two fit and belong together to express the one model of man that God created. The problem with homosexuality is ontologically it is uniting soul and soul. Paul said that anatomically (that is, in terms of the anatomy) it is not fitting.

Homosexuality cannot meet the deeper needs. Although it may seem for a while to meet the needs of companionship. But most all the studies indicate that the greatest majority of homosexuals are involved in passing relationships. Not deep relationships. The few deep relationships themselves deteriorate over a period of time. Homosexuality in the last analysis

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cannot meet the altruistic needs that God designed for the family, the bringing of children, the creative sense.

Homosexuality cannot affirm the true Christian self, which is described in Galatians as the fruit of the Spirit.

I want to talk about another area. That is the area of masturbation – a sexual activity that does not meet the need for relationship. Probably in all my life I've never heard anyone from the pulpit talk about masturbation. Although I'd suspect that probably among Christians it is near the top of activities that bring guilt and remorse and bondage to Christians. All the psychological studies that have been done by anonymous tests on Christian college campuses show that to be a major problem among Christian young people and Christian adults.

Masturbation is simply solo sex or fantasy sex or sex with self. I want to consider some things about it.

First of all there is no scripture on the subject of masturbation. There is scripture on adultery, there I scripture on fornication, there is scripture on homosexuality. There is not a single passage in the scripture on masturbation. There are scriptures in regard to lust. There are no scriptures on masturbation.

The one scripture that is sometimes has been taken as referring to masturbation in Genesis 38 where Onan was to have a child with his deceased brother's wife. But that is not an act of masturbation. But simply that he interrupted sexual relationship because he did not want to father the child. There is no scripture on the subject.

There is also a difference between fornication, adultery and homosexuality in that in masturbation no other person is involved. There is a difference.

A third thing that needs to be noted is that masturbation has especially become a problem in an industrialized society where marriage is at a much later age. We have now adolescents becoming mature at a younger and marrying later. Whereas even a hundred years ago adolescents were maturing later and marrying younger. In our culture is a tremendous time gap now between the age of thirteen and twenty-one.

A fourth thing that I need to say is that Christian theologians are widely varied on what they feel Christian teaching on masturbation should be. It's interesting to read the viewpoints.

Charlie Shedd's books are widely read among young people. He's said masturbation is a gift of God. The reason why he says this is it is a preventer of fornication. Therefore it is God's gift to young people.

Middle ages regarded masturbation as worse than fornication or adultery. Because in masturbation there was no possibility of procreation of children therefore it was worse. Persons were executed if discovered.

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Others say it is sinful or not sinful depending on the fantasy that is involved. Weatherhead says that masturbation is sinless if the picture on the screen of the mind can be shown to the Lord without shame. Interesting concept. Physical release rather than being associated with lust.

Snead says masturbation is wrong when it passes from casual release to regular escape.

I think C.S. Lewis puts it best. "For me the real evil of masturbation is that it takes an appetite which in its lawful use leads the individual out of himself to complete and correct his own personality in that of another and finally in children and even grandchildren and turns it back. Sends the man back into the prison of himself there to keep a harem of imaginary brides. This harem once admitted works against his ever getting out and really uniting with a real woman. For the harem is always assessable, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no real woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is always adored, always the perfect lover, no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself. It is not only the faculty of love forced back upon itself but also the faculty of imagination. The true exercise of imagination in my view is a) to help us understand other people and b) to respond to and some of us produce art. But it also has a bad use. To provide for us in shadowy form a substitute for virtues, success, and distinction, etc which out to be sought outside in the real world. Masturbation involves this abuse of imagination in erotic matters, which I think bad in itself and thereby encourages similar use in all spheres. After all almost the main work of life is to come out of ourselves, out of the little dark prison we're all born in. Masturbation is to be avoided as all things are to be avoided which retard this process. The danger of that is coming to love the prison."

In masturbation the self is locked within the circle of self. Masturbation works against companionship. It drives one further into loneliness. Drives one further into guilt, away from affirmation and drives one away from altruism. But in a dynamic relationship the circle is broken and we are going out. We are no longer locked up within the prison of our own mentality and sexual activity.

I personally don't see masturbation as a gift of God nor do I see it in the category of fornication or adultery or homosexuality, which are explicitly condemned in the scripture. I think depending on the person and the fantasies that are involved masturbation may belong in the category of adultery or it may belong in the category of over eating. I do not know of any persons who have masturbated who have felt good or without guilt about it which may in itself be sharing something with us. I think one of the things that needs to be done in respect to this matter of masturbation is somehow in family relationships we need to cross the threshold where we've never been willing to talk about things. In Christian community I think one of the greatest things that could break the guilt that young people especially feel in respect to masturbation is if we can honestly open up with another person and authentically relate what is happening in us, how we feel and that we need another person a parent or an older person, a model, a friend, who is a sympathetic and spiritually mature person who can pray with us who can help us see ourselves through times of tremendous sexual tension and frustration.

To simply see that this is not God's answer to the deeper needs of relationships because it does not bring companionship. It does not bring affirmation. It does not bring altruism therefore it

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something which is less than what God desires but it should not be seen by the person as an act which cuts one off from God and off from service.

I think the way to keep in a place of wholeness is keeping honest with the Lord and being honest with one another.

The final big question for tonight what models of sexual experience are meant most to fulfill the needs of relationships?

Remember again we started with the premise of relationships. They're for three purposes. For companionship, affirmation and altruism.

There are two models that best fit. One is the Christian single life. The needs of companionship, affirmation and altruism can all be met except for the sexual relationship in the Christian single life. Paul says you should consider the Christian single life if you sense that that is God's gift for you. If you are single it may please God that you remain single. You do not need to be married to experience deep companionship, deep affirmation and tremendous altruism. Some of the people who have influenced the world the most have done it as Christian singles.

The other model of Christian relationship that fits the need is the model of the Christian married life. The Christian marriage makes a triangle. At its base is *phileo* – friendship love, a caringness for one another. At the other side anchoring it is *agape* love. When persons first meet they often meet simply on the *phileo* level. Perhaps there is an erotic attraction. But for a good relationship to develop it's going to need to develop [among friends. The *phileo* and *agape* work together and the closer the relationship comes in courtship the more one become prepared for the erotic nature of the relationship. And there is nothing wrong with *eros* as a manifestation of love. It's only wrong when it's fulfilled outside marriage. *Eros* is sexual love. God intends for sexual love, *eros*, not to be the foundation of a marriage. Rather *agape* and *phileo* must be the foundation because they combine the companionship, the affirmation and the altruism. Sex rather is the capstone. Whereas *phileo* and *agape* are the foundation stones.

Marriages run into problems when sex is divorced from the relationship factor of companionship, affirmation and altruism. People begin to feel used or people being to use other people within a marriage.

I think one of the reasons why there is so much emphasis in technique in sexual relationships today is to some degree a sign of the lack of emotional and spiritual vitality between people in a marriage relationship. I'm somewhat bothered when I see Christian books that almost totally concentrate on sexual technique rather than on the deeper underlining factors of relationship. I don't think in this age ought to turn our back on what God was saying in his word about the marriage bed being undefiled. But we can never substitute love with technique.

Sex is not everything in marriage. But on the other hand sex is not nothing. It is not everything on the one hand and it is not nothing on the other hand. It is something in between. There will be variations in marriage, from marriage to marriage and within marriage from time to time. Sometimes sexuality in marriage will be a thermometer of the relationship. It will reflect the level of commitment that two people will have toward one another. Other times sexuality must be a thermostat to the relationship. A thermostat is where you set the degree and you know by

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setting it the whole temperature of the room will come up or go down to where the thermostat is. Sex in marriage can be either of these two things. It can be a good thermometer or it may mean the thermostat needs to be adjusted.

Sexuality in marriage models the character of God. And matches our need for relationships. God's character I communicating, celebrating and creating. In our relationship needs match to a tee. He is communicating – our relationship needs are companionship. He is celebrating – we need affirmation. He is creating – we need altruism. God designed sexual relationships within marriage to be the capstone of a companion, affirming and altruistic relationship. /

I hope this is helpful to you and that we can put sexuality in this broader context of relationship with other people.

Next week we're going to be looking at a very sensitive area. Each week we've been able to be a little more frank and authentic as we've gone alone. Next week we'll be especially looking at the subject of dealing with sexual temptation in our life. My prayer is that this series will be a help in your Christian life. If I said things that are new to you or you have questions about please feel free to talk with me or I'd be happy to respond to written questions. You can sign it or not sign it.

Prayer:

Lord, I want to thank you for the relationships you've given to us in life. For mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Extended family, members of the body of Christ. How we need those relationships. As we look at all of our relationships help us to protect them to preserve them, to nurture them and care for them for they are precious. Develop in us Lord a special sensitivity toward one another. There are married people here tonight who needed to hear again that we really are companions to one another. We really are to be affirming each other. Marriage is not just to fulfill our own needs but to fit into a larger perspective that you have for us in your world and kingdom. Remind us ever of that. Father, I pray for each of us as we are tempted in the area of sexual temptation. Some here are never tempted or tested in that area. Maybe theirs is in a totally different field altogether. But many are really tested in this area. Help us to understand Lord that when we are tested sexually that most of the time, the real temptation is not evident to us. But we are susceptible to the temptation because of our need for other things. Our need for someone to just says to us in a non-sexual way, "I really care about you. You're important to me. I think you're wonderful." God, when we are tested in that way with sexual temptation, help us to remember that if no one is around to be a companion to us at that moment, to affirm us, help us to remember that you are there. You're putting your arm around us and saying, "I love you. I care about you. You're wonderful in my sight." Help us Lord not to trade in our deeper needs to sell away all of our assets of relationship for something which can never possibly fill the bill. Or meet the deeper need. Help us not to take the treasure of a lifetime and spend it on the event of the moment. Let us be whole in our sexual beings. Truly made after your image, waling in love and in purity and light. Give us Lord continually what our true self needs. The presence of your love, your joy, your peace, your patience, your goodness, your kindness, your gentleness and your self control. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.