

# The Fire of Love

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**Sermon Series: Live  
Faithfully**

**Song of Solomon 8:6-  
7, 14**

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Well, I was out of town last week so I don't know how many times Pete mentioned the word sex in his message. I do know that he told me that the room was "strangely quiet" as he was speaking.

I know that some of you have squirmed just a little through the last couple of weeks, and today may be no different. Sex is fun to talk about but hard to talk honestly about. Sex is easy to joke about but hard to talk seriously about.

This odd little book called the *Song of Solomon*, or *Song of Songs* in some versions, is, as far as I can tell, a flowing soliloquy about love, sex and human relationships. But, as many of you know, commentators have gone to great lengths to allegorize these verses to get the sexual overtones off the page. Pete talked about this last week. Origen, who lived in the 2nd century, actually wrote an 18-volume commentary about how this book was actually about Jesus' love for the church. Now, I find it ironic that there has been no similar endeavor to get rid of the biblical stories of murders, lying, rape, war, cheating, slavery. But God help us if we actually talk about the beauty and desire of sexual relations. (I guess it's going to be pretty quiet THIS week as well!)

I will tell you that a couple of years ago our small group here at the church spent about ten weeks studying *Song of Solomon*, and I can attest that few of us wanted to miss those studies. Of course, it may have helped that it was a VIDEO series. A lecture video—come on now—where are your minds going? Okay, at least we got things loosened up a little now.

Christians, on the whole, are decidedly uptight about sex. I have no empirical evidence to support that claim, but I would gladly welcome any challenge to it.

Former Pastor Joe Beam has started a ministry called Family Dynamics and he is going all across America teaching seminars at churches. His basic message is that Christian husbands and wives ought to have better, hotter, steamier sex. Now can someone turn up the air conditioning please! Not surprisingly, Joe has met with some strong opposition from conservative Christians. I saw Joe's interview on the Today show a few weeks ago, and I was really impressed with what he had to say. I encourage you to go on to MSNBC and watch the video of his interview and tell me what you think. I especially encourage you to read some of the viewer responses, one of which goes like this: "I agree with what he is telling his couples, but I am resistant to the fact that

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he's telling them so openly. I don't know why. It just seems so vulgar to a conservative Christian. But I don't know who else should be telling these couples to have fun in their marriage if not their pastor."

So, as your pastor, I'm standing here this morning encouraging husbands and wives to steam things up. Of course, that sounds like something a guy would say! I can't help the fact that I am a male. But verse 14 this morning says, "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices." Friends, this is not her asking him to make a trip to the grocery store! I know that far too many of you out there today are in marriages where a trip to the grocery store is both more common and, sadly, more exciting than a trip to the bedroom.

Guys, many of you are sexually starved, and you're using your computer and other inappropriate resources to find an answer that cannot satisfy your desires. Ladies you long for someone to truly connect with you and love you in the way you want to be loved, and you're filling your closets and calendars with substitutes for that intimate connection you need to have with your husband. Excuse me for getting personal and messy this morning, but I can't do it any other way. I have heard a library full of excuses as to why couples are not experiencing the intimacy they want. And rarely have I heard any that held water. If there is a barrier that's inhibiting your sex life—and I don't care if that barrier is fatigue, boredom, emo-

tional distance, pornography or just plain inhibition, then I personally challenge you to get rid of that barrier before this series ends in two weeks.

I know that some of you are parents with young kids, and you don't have any family in the area. You need time to yourself, and you need a trustworthy adult to keep the kids. Lynne and I have been blessed with wonderful surrogate grandparents here. I would love to challenge one of our older adults to start recruiting surrogate grandparents who can develop loving relationships with our young families. Maybe some of our older folks might not be getting as much out of this five-week sermon series, but here's a HUGE way you can help our young families. Those of you who are parents with young kids, let me tell you that it's really hard to be good parents if you cannot be good lovers. The BEST thing you can do for your kids is to have a strong and vibrant marriage.

But enough on sex for now. Let's switch gears for a moment and look at "love" – which, ideally, is the precursor to sex. In our world today, far too many people use sex to search for love—and far too often that search leaves one disappointed. Verses 6 and 7 are an eloquent expression of love. "Love is as strong as death...flashes of fire...many waters cannot quench love...." I don't need to tell you that our culture has a pretty anemic and simplistic view of love. We look at love as the rhyme of poetry on a Hallmark card when, in reality,

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it is more like the weekend errand list. We look at love as the beautiful displays in the floral department when, in reality, it is more like the thirty-seven color swatches we've rejected trying to pick the right paint for the living room. We look at love as the sparkle of a Zales diamond ad—when it is more the spots on the bathroom mirror. Am I right about this? We want love to be idealistic like the young man who said to his father at breakfast one morning, "Dad, I'm going to get married." "How do you know you're ready to get married?" asked the father. "Are you in love?" "I sure am," said the son. "How do you know you're in love?" asked the father. "Last night as I was kissing my girlfriend goodnight, her dog bit me, and I didn't feel the pain until I got home."

Many of us can remember those days—some of us long to experience those days. But those days of enrapture are not what REAL love is all about. Hear me on this!! Real love is NOT an emotion. REAL love is an act of will—a commitment of the MIND more than a tug of the heart.

Our text for today talks about the lovers being “sealed” on heart and on the arm. A seal is used as a symbol of commitment. Rulers would use wax seals on documents to certify their authenticity, which was an official way of demonstrating their commitment to what was written on that paper. Just last week, I got a gift certificate from Bazin's restaurant—my favorite hangout. It was printed in black

ink on plain paper—easily duplicated—except that the gift certificate had a raised seal on it. That seal could not be duplicated. It was permanent. I could scratch and rub that seal all day and it would never disappear. The only way I could get rid of that seal would be to cut it out. And that's what love is all about.

In our relationships, we get scratched and clawed, we just get rubbed the wrong way. But if our love is an act of will, not an emotion, we can withstand those challenges. The text says that love is a fire that a flood cannot drown and water cannot quench. Emotional love can get quenched with a snap of the fingers, a curt glance or a condescending remark. Volitional love is a SEAL of commitment.

Noted author Scott Peck says, “The person who truly loves does so because of a decision to love. This person has made a commitment to be loving whether or not the loving feeling is present. If it is, so much the better; but if it isn't, the commitment to love, the will to love, still stands.”

C.S. Lewis says, “Love anything and your heart will surely be wrung and broken.” What's that old saying: “You only hurt the ones you love.” Friends, love is NOT emotional, it is volitional. And right now, some of you are in relationships where it is taking every act of will you can muster to love the other person. And that is why God wants this sacred act of sexual union to be part of a commitment. When we give of ourselves freely, when we open up our bodies to

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each other, we are exhibiting incredible vulnerability. And the only way that we can be fully open and vulnerable is when we feel SAFE in the commitment of the relationship.

Just being “in love” is not enough! You can fall in and out of love faster than the 'Skins can lose a game. Love is an act of the WILL. And when we know that our lover is choosing to love us then, AND ONLY THEN, can we open ourselves fully and freely to them.

Let us pray...

Lord we are grateful that you design us to be in relationship with others. Some of us here today are deeply DESIRIOUS of a healthy and loving relationship where we can be fully open and intimate with each other. Lord, break down those barriers that challenge our love. Remind us continually that love is an act of the will and not an easily quenched emotion. In the name of Jesus who loved us enough to offer himself for us. Amen.