

STUDY GUIDE FOR
SEX AND THE SPIRIT

THE ROMANCE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY VERLEE A. COPELAND
AND
DALE B. ROSENBERGER



CLEVELAND, 2014

Chapter 1

- ❶ What passages from the Bible immediately occur to you regarding your sexuality?
- ❷ What do you think it might mean to become a Song of Solomon Christian?
- ❸ What good news do you hear in the idea of Song of Solomon sexuality?

Chapter 2

- ❶ The author asserts that our God is a sexy God. Does this surprise you? How does this alter your personal picture of God?
- ❷ How can erotic love connect us with a deeper intimacy with God?
- ❸ What might contribute to anxiety or reluctance discussing erotic pleasure and closeness to God in the same breath?

Chapter 3

- ❶ How do you respond when someone tells you that our Christian faith is against sex?
- ❷ When might we experience sexuality and spirituality at odds with one another?
- ❸ What does it mean to make love from the inside out rather than the outside in?

Chapter 4

- ❶ When can sexual fantasy support a relationship, and when can it hurt a relationship?
- ❷ If sex is a good thing, a God thing, where can we begin to let go of our guilt and shame?
- ❸ How do we draw the important line between fantasy and reality in the practical world of everyday relationships?

Chapter 5

- ❶ When a couple reaches a sexual impasse, how can they begin to move forward?
- ❷ How can a couple create safe places to bridge the gap between male and female sexual experience?
- ❸ Much has been written here about the language of love. How do we say to our beloved, "What I really want is you!"?

Chapter 6

- ❶ What helps us feel safe enough to open sexually to one another when the door to intimacy has been closed?
- ❷ When we resign ourselves to tired sexuality, where do we find hope?
- ❸ How do anger, fear, and grief block sexual intimacy for couples who long for something more?

Chapter 7

- ❶ What is your read about the status of marriage and its viability today?
- ❷ How have your ideals about marriage changed across time?
- ❸ What advice would you give to a Christian couple to keep the home fires burning?

Chapter 8

- ❶ What instances have you heard of in which over-sharing about one's sexual history has cast a shadow over a relationship?
- ❷ What questions might we ask ourselves before spilling out sexual secrets from our past?
- ❸ What do we have to gain or lose with our partner by withholding information about our sexual history?

Chapter 9

- ❶ How was the topic of masturbation addressed in the household where you grew up?
- ❷ How does the message differ in your household today?
- ❸ What surprised you in this conversation about self-pleasuring?

Chapter 10

- ❶ The Song of Solomon lovers desire one another as a feast for the eyes. What happens when our self-image is more like "leftovers"?
- ❷ What would we need to change about our way of life to make room for a vibrant sexuality?
- ❸ Take a moment to visualize a favorite seduction scene from a movie or book. What makes that scene so erotic?

Chapter 11

- ❶ What are your impressions about why men are unfaithful to their wives when it seems like such a very bad idea?
- ❷ Do you see the old double standard for men and for women around adultery changing? How?
- ❸ If you had the courage to speak the truth in love, what would you say to a husband who has been unfaithful?

Chapter 12

- ❶ At what point does a friendship with someone to whom you are also attracted become unfaithful to your partner?
- ❷ Under what circumstances might an attraction to someone besides your partner strengthen your marriage? How do you know when it's time to walk away?
- ❸ Practically speaking, how does one draw the line when affection becomes desire toward an otherwise committed, and deeply valued friend? What factors determine these choices?

Chapter 13

- ❶ How can attentiveness to sexual variety within a marriage become a kind of preventative therapy for couples?
- ❷ How is it helpful to think about our sexual practice as having different seasons, such as garden variety, banquet and questing sex? What other seasons would you add to the repertoire of sexual practice?
- ❸ There's a certain comfort to familiar patterns, ways that we feel loved and cherished, a private language between lovers that communicates affection and desire. Discuss the benefits and risks for couples to experiment with a greater variety of sexual practices.

Chapter 14

- ❶ It has been said that when we're dead in the pew we're also dead in the bedroom. What's a starting place to crack open a frozen heart?
- ❷ When we become emotionally, physically or spiritually stuck, how can our partner in life and our God in heaven help us out of the mire?
- ❸ How do passions like those for truth and justice and cuisine and beauty connect with sexual passion? How does this vary from person to person?

Chapter 15

- ❶ Do you know any couples who have defied the stereotype that romance and sex must diminish over the years?
- ❷ What do you imagine is their secret? How is this lively passion communicated, and what impact does this have on those who witness their love?
- ❸ What can we tell couples where one partner has resigned him or herself to less passion and the other steadfastly refuses to give up?

Chapter 16

- ❶ If someone were to ask you how Christians make love endure, what would you tell them?
- ❷ What makes marriage a loving gift from a good God? What's sex got to do with it?
- ❸ What cultural stereotypes do you observe in the media? Why do you imagine that popular culture is relatively anti-marriage as a context for full and lively eroticism?

Chapter 17

- ❶ What can we say to friends who are attracted to the wrong people for the wrong reasons?
- ❷ What do you think about the idea that we might be hard-wired through the evolving of our species to make blind, mistaken choices about a future mate?
- ❸ To what extent are we more in command and competent choosers in our attraction to the opposite sex than the author describes?

Chapter 18

- ❶ What does our sexuality have to do with prayer and with our openness to a relationship with God?
- ❷ If prayer is our love language with God, where do we experience that love in our bodies?
- ❸ How do our sexual priorities and practices change relative to our age, health, personal commitments, or stage of life?

Chapter 19

- ❶ Do women generally find the quiriness of male sexuality more endearing or more disgusting overall? In what ways?
- ❷ How do you feel about the notion that much of our sexuality as men and women is not something we choose but is something we are dealt?
- ❸ What can make sex funny or comical?

Chapter 20

- ❶ Marital fidelity seems simple, yet this chapter claims that faithfulness in marriage can be complicated. How has this chapter changed your understanding of marital fidelity?
- ❷ Calling it “due benevolence,” the Puritans asserted that sexual intimacy is at the heart of marriage. How can a marriage still be marriage without sex?
- ❸ How can we affirm the essential nature of our sexuality to living and to loving without creating yet another set of imposed rules that define how sex should be? What are the boundaries of faithful sexuality experience?

Chapter 21

- ❶ Did the author go too far in writing a chapter on the sexuality of Jesus? Share your comments.
- ❷ How does this chapter change your view about Jesus and God’s mission for him, for good or for ill?
- ❸ To what extent does your faith tradition emphasize Jesus’ humanity? How might his sexuality have been expressed?

Chapter 22

- ❶ We may not be used to thinking about our sexuality as a gift from God. What scares us about fully receiving this gift of sexuality?
- ❷ Talk about the intimate connection between our spirituality and our sexuality as described by writers such as Hildegard of Bingen and Thomas Keating.
- ❸ What would be different for us if we affirmed the “yumminess of God” and the holiness of our sexuality as a way of life?

Chapter 23

- ❶ How do you imagine God responds to the deep rift in both our desire for God and in our desire for one another that so many people experience?
- ❷ Has this book helped you reconcile the spiritual and sexual parts of yourself such that you feel greater peace? How?
- ❸ What has provoked or disturbed you in this book?

Chapter 24

- ❶ What are the potential consequences of modern distinctions between hooking up, having sex or making love on long-term intimacy, capacity for commitment, and healthy sexuality?
- ❷ What do we lose when we separate acts of sexual intimacy from the context of a loving, committed relationship?
- ❸ What assumptions do we make about our sexual and faith practices when we describe sex and the spirit as the romance between heaven and earth?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allender, Dan B. and Tremper Longman III, *Intimate Allies*, 1995, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995.

Allison, Celia A., *Sexual Paradox: Creative Tensions in our Lives and Congregations*, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991.

Anand, Margo, *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy*, Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989.

Arnold, Johann Christoph, *A Plea for Purity: Sex, Marriage, and God*, Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing, 1996.

Barback, Lonnie, *The Erotic Edge: Erotica for Couples*, New York: Plume Books, 1994.

Barnhouse, Ruth Tiffany, *Clergy and the Sexual Revolution*, Washington D. C.: Alban Institute, 1987.

Beck, Aaron T., *Love Is Never Enough*, New York: HarperPerennial, 1988.

Bell, Rob, *Sex God*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

Bird, Joseph and Lois, *The Freedom of Sexual Love*, Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1970.

Boteach, Schmuley, *The Kosher Sutra*, New York: HarperCollins, 2009.

Carr, David M., *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Chester, Laura, *The Unmade Bed: Sensual Writing on Married Love*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Chilstrom, Herbert W. and Erdahl, Lowell O. *Sexual Fulfillment: For Single and Married, Straight and Gay, Young and Old*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001.

Clapp, Steve, Sue Brownfield, Julie Seibert, *A Christian View of Youth and Sexuality*, Sidell, IL: C-4 Resources, 1981.

- Dillow, Joseph and Linda, Peter and Lorraine Pintus, *Intimacy Ignited: Conversations Couple to Couple*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.
- Dillow, Linda and Lorraine Pintus, *Intimate Issues: Conversations Woman to Woman, 21 Questions Christian Women Ask Us about Sex*, Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1999.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, *The Hearts of Men*, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1983.
- Eisler, Riane, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*, New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Farley, Margaret A., *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Farley, Margaret A., *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006.
- Ferder, Fran and Heagle, John, *Tender Fires: The Spiritual Promise of Sexuality*, Chestnut Ridge, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.
- Freitas, Donna, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Friday, Nancy, editor, *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies*, New York: Trident, 1973.
- Friedman, David M., *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, New York: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Gardner, Tim Alan, *Sacred Sex: a Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*, Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2002.
- Godsey, Heather and Lara Blackwood Pickrel, editors, *Oh, God, Oh God, Oh God: Young Adults Speak Out about Sexuality and Christian Spirituality*, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010.
- Gray, John, *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion*, New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

- Griffith, R. Marie, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles Press, CA, University of California Press, 2004.
- Griffiths, Paul J., *Song of Songs: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011.
- Hart, Archibald D., *The Sexual Man*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994.
- Hart, Archibald D., Catherine Hart Weber, Debra L. Taylor, *Secrets of Eve: Understanding the Mystery of Female Sexuality*, Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998.
- Hays, Richard B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
- Hendrix, Harville, *Getting the Love You Want*, New York: Harper and Row, 1990.
- Heyward, Carter, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989.
- Hooper, Anne, *Kama Sutra: Classic Lovemaking Techniques Reinterpreted for Today's Lovers*, New York: DK Publishing, 1994.
- Johnson, Robert A., *We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983.
- Kamitsuka, Margaret D., editor, *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Kelsey, Morton, and Kelsey, Barbara, *Sacrament of Sexuality, The Spirituality and Psychology of Sex*, Rockport, MA: Element, Inc., 1986.
- Kerr, Walter, *The Decline of Pleasure*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962.
- Lee, Victoria, *Soulful Sex: Opening Your Heart, Body and Spirit to Lifelong Passion*, Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1996.

Lewis, C. S., *The Four Loves*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988.

Love, Patricia and Jo Robinson, *Hot Monogamy: Essential Steps to More Passionate, Intimate Lovemaking*, New York: Plume Books, 1995.

Martin, Dale B., *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

May, Rollo, *Love and Will*, New York: Delta Publishing, 1969.

McMinn, Lisa Graham, *Sexuality and Holy Longing: Embracing Intimacy in a Broken World*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass-2004.

Meredith, Lawrence, *The Sensuous Christian: A Celebration of Freedom and Love*, New York: Association Press, 1972.

Nelson, James B., *Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience*, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983.

Nelson, James B. *Humanly Speaking*, Cleveland, OH, The Board For Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ, 1995.

Paglia, Camille, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Quayle, William H., *Song of Songs*, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1910.

Reuben, David R., *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*, New York: Bantam Books, 1969.

Rosenau, Douglas E., *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of Sexual Intimacy*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002.

Rouner, Arthur A. Jr., *Struggling with Sex: A Serious Call to Marriage-Centered Sexual Life*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987.

Schnarch, David, *Passionate Marriage*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

Shedd, Charlie W., *Letters to Karen: On Keeping Love in Marriage*, New York: Avon Books, 1965.

Shedd, Charlie W., *Letters to Philip: On How to Treat a Woman*, Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1976.

Sheehy, Gail, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman: Pursuing the Passionate Life*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2007.

Tanenbaum, Leora, *Slut!: Growing Up Female with a Bad Reputation*, New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, *Human Sexuality: A Preliminary Study*, New York: United Church Press, 1977.

Wallace, Catherine M., *For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Walsh, Carrie Ellen, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

West, Christopher, *Heaven's Song: Sexual Love as It Was Meant to Be*, West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2008.

Winner, Lauren F., *Real Sex: the Naked Truth about Chastity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005.