A KILLJOY GOD?

God is not against pleasure!

It’s one thing to have to make that statement to a non-believer, as the very notion of a killjoy God may contribute to their rejection of Him in the first place. But there is also a brand of Christianity that subscribes to this notion. And the lie began in Eden.

In his temptation of Eve, the serpent accuses God of depriving humanity of a positive experience. This notwithstanding that God had created a perfect and beautiful world for them and had also designed a garden home for them on the east side of Eden. (Incidentally, the word Eden means pleasure; Gen. 2:8). A world with no thorns, thistles, pain, or distress was doubtless a sensual paradise.

Then, at the prompting of the serpent, Eve entertained the thought that God may have been depriving humanity of something that would be for their best good. She “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). Based on her independent evaluation, she determined that there was something pleasurable to be found in that which God had prohibited.

To this day, the devil touts the lie that God is decidedly against humanity experiencing pleasure, particularly in the realm of sexuality. The enemy would have us imagine God to be a prude. But nothing could be further from the truth. God created sex and made sure that it would be a pleasurable experience.
Write out Philippians 2:1–11 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, write out Philippians 2:1–5. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
HOW TO ENJOY SEX

Imagine what the conditions must have been in the Garden of Eden; or the Garden of pleasure. As God intended Adam and Eve to experience unbridled joy, let us consider what similar conditions are needed to enjoy fully any experience, but with particular application to sexuality.

No Stress

Adulting can rob us of that carefree exuberance that tends to amplify the intensity of pleasant experiences. Worry and its attendant stress are thieves of joy. And a preoccupied mind cannot fully assimilate the sexual encounter. In fact, anxiety and stress are major psychological factors in erectile dysfunction and infertility. So Christ’s invitation in Matthew 11:28, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” has ramifications for our sexual enjoyment. As we learn to trust God more and worry less, we are better able to enjoy the gifts He has given to us.

No Guilt

The purity and innocence mean that both entering and exiting every experience is not encumbered by negative emotions. Guilt and shame, whether prior to or after an activity, diminish the sense of satisfaction. Indulging in guilty pleasures can only ever be limited in the gratification it brings. When God forgives us (1 John 1:9) and gives us the strength to live in accordance with His will (Jude 24), He frees us to fully enjoy all the things He has permitted. Guilt-free sex is the most fulfilling sex.

Physical Vitality

Whereas a joie de vivre is not inaccessible to someone struggling with physical ailments, it certainly is more challenging to achieve. With respect to sexuality, one may intuit that greater vigor and stamina have a positive impact on sexual gratification. So John’s wish that you would “prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 1:2) has implications for sexual fulfillment.

Of those who have ever engaged in sexual intercourse, most have never experienced the fullness of its ecstasy potential. In fact, only two humans have ever experienced the most incredible sex. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were in perfect physical health, their consciences were clear, and they fully trusted in God. Conditions were optimal for physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction from the sexual act.

Everything that God is doing to restore humanity physically, emotionally, and spiritually, leads to greater sexual fulfillment. Ultimately, the greatest pleasure is attained when we are in perfect conformity with divine design. It is only God who can produce this conformity in our lives as we cooperate with Him (Phil. 2:12, 13).
CONTRACEPTIVE CONSIDERATIONS

In a pleasure-seeking world, contraception and abortion often represent methods of mitigating the risk associated with illicit sexual activity. We will delve into the topic of premarital sexuality in a different lesson, so for our current discussion, let us assume that the parties involved are married.

If sex were meant exclusively for procreation, it would be clear that contraception in any form is unacceptable. Some might argue that since it is God who opens (cf. Gen 29:31; 30:22) and closes (cf. 1 Sam. 1:5) the womb, using contraception is akin to playing God. A rejection of contraception in any form would significantly increase the possibility of conception, leading to large families. However, since pleasure is part of God’s intention for sexuality and sex is not solely a biological necessity for procreation, there are other factors to take into consideration. Here are some principles that a Christian married couple ought to consider in their sex life.

Temperance
As Ellen White states, “True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful” (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 562; cf. Phil. 4:5; 1 Cor. 10:31). The principle is about doing good things in moderation and restricting those things that are harmful. Clearly this translates to abstinence from sexual indulgence for the unmarried, but it also means that those who are married ought to practice moderation in their sexual lives. The purpose of contraception is not to remove the need for self-control even within marriage.

By the same token, while it is a blessing when children are added to loving Christian homes, a couple must consider their ability to provide for the children they are blessed with.

Stewardship
As God’s stewards, Christians recognize that their children are given to them in trust. It is their responsibility before God to ensure that the material, emotional, and spiritual needs of their children are taken care of. The couple must therefore plan to ensure their ability to meet the needs of their children (cf. Luke 14:28).

Other considerations like stewardship of the earth, its natural resources, and not creating undue economic burden on society factor in here as well.

Trust in God
Even though a couple makes a plan and takes the necessary precautions, the possibility of conception still remains (even when deemed medically impossible; cf. Gen. 17:17; 18:12). This possibility reinforces the necessity of a fundamental trust in God to guide in the life of the Christian. Moreover, if the very fact that the sexual act is entered by two individuals is an insufficient reminder not to be selfish, the possibility of a human being conceived in the act ought to be another.

God is ultimately the Author of life, and only He can rightfully end it. While we must prayerfully plan our families, these plans are to be laid at the feet of the One who knows what is best for our good.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Song of Solomon 8:4–6  
Genesis 2:21–25  
Psalm 16:11  
1 Timothy 6:17

What other verses come to mind in connection with God’s pleasurable gifts?

Review your memorized verse from Philippians 2:1–11.
HOLY SEX ON THE HOLY SABBATH

For many Christians, the thought of God being present while they are engaging in the sexual act, even within the bounds of marriage, can be daunting. For many who have grown up with religious instruction, sex has been so strongly prohibited, and shrouded in mystery, that they cannot conceive of a setting where it is to be freely enjoyed, especially in God’s presence. Yet if fullness of joy can only be experienced in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11) then ultimate sexual fulfillment comes only in God’s presence.

To speak of sexual fulfillment in God’s presence clearly points to the fact that the conditions God has outlined as prerequisite to engaging in the sexual act must be met. We will discuss more of this in future lessons. In this section we shall consider just one component in this respect.

While we may enjoy communion with God every day, God has, in a special sense, imbued the Sabbath day with His presence. So sexual intercourse on any day may be blessed by God so long as it conforms to divine direction. But there is a special blessing to be anticipated with holy sex on God’s holy day.

Consider that the first full day that Adam and Eve spent together in Eden was the Sabbath day. This after God had brought them together as man and wife. The notion of them engaging in the sexual act at some point during the Sabbath is not far-fetched. But it is most commonly challenged on the grounds of Isaiah 58:13. So let us briefly consider this text.

Turning your “foot from the Sabbath” refers to not treating the Sabbath as though you have ownership over it. While the Sabbath was made for man, it is still God’s holy day. This means that He is the arbiter of what is and is not appropriate behavior on the Sabbath.

The injunction interpreted as prohibiting sex on the Sabbath is that against “doing your pleasure.” Our first observation is that pleasure is not categorically verboten on the Sabbath because the very next phrase in the same verse says to “call the Sabbath a delight.” If pleasure in any form were forbidden, then singing or eating on the Sabbath would not be permissible.

What is actually forbidden here is selfish pleasure seeking. By contrast, selfless acts that result in pleasant feelings for the actor, or for others, would be acceptable. For instance, while removing the ox from the ditch may require significant effort and labor, it would be Sabbath appropriate to relieve the suffering of the animal (Luke 14:3–5).

For the Christian, sexual intercourse is not a selfish act. Its purpose is not merely to gratify one’s sexual appetite. Rather, each partner considers the other’s fulfillment as of greater importance. As Paul states it in Philippians 2:4, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

So, on the Sabbath, of all days, when selfless service epitomizes the delight of communion with God, who could forbid the ultimate act of intimacy when sanctioned by God?
**THE LAW OF LIFE**

“Now sin has marred God’s perfect work, yet that handwriting remains. Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence. There is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself. No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun sheds its light to gladden a thousand worlds. The ocean, itself the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud.

“The angels of glory find their joy in giving,—giving love and tireless watchcare to souls that are fallen and unholy. Heavenly beings woo the hearts of men; they bring to this dark world light from the courts above; by gentle and patient ministry they move upon the human spirit, to bring the lost into a fellowship with Christ which is even closer than they themselves can know.

“But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. ‘I do nothing of Myself,’ said Christ; ‘the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.’ ‘I seek not Mine own glory,’ but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 20, 21.)

“‘There is a Witness constantly in your bedchamber, who hears every word you utter. Every gesture, every action, is noted by this Witness.” (Ellen G. White, Letters and Manuscripts, Vol. 12, Letter 51a, 1897.)

“All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman’s heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband’s character and give it completeness—fulfill God’s purpose for them.” (Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, 99.)

“Those who regard the marriage relation as one of God’s sacred ordinances, guarded by His holy precept, will be controlled by the dictates of reason. They will consider carefully the result of every privilege the marriage relation grants.” (Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, Vol. 1, 155.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How does your concept of God include a Being who is light-hearted?

How does the worldly concept of sex and sexuality fundamentally differ from the biblical ideal?

Can the Bible’s ideal for sexual intimacy be reached? Why and how?

What standards are to determine the appropriateness of sexual intimacy?

What factors should be considered when addressing the question of abortion?

What is the difference between pleasure in a holy sense and in unholy sense?

How does this week change or vivify your view of Christ?