

Passion, Purity, and Marital Fidelity
A Devotional Study of the Song of Solomon

Passion, Purity,
&
Marital Fidelity

By Matthew Black

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Passion, Purity, and Marital Fidelity
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introduction

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

SONG 1:1

Many references to Solomon throughout the book confirm the claim of 1:1 that Solomon wrote this book (cf. 1:4-5, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 6:12; 7:5; 8:11-12; 1 Kings 4:33). He reigned between 971 and 931 B.C.

How could Solomon, who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), be the same faithful lover this book presents? He could be if he became polygamous after the events in this book took place. That seems a more likely explanation than that he was polygamous when these events occurred but just omitted reference to his other loves.

He likely wrote the book before he became polygamous. We do not know how old Solomon was when he married the second time. The history recorded in Kings and Chronicles is not in strict chronological order. The Shulammite farm girl who lived among the tribe of Dan was obviously not Pharaoh's daughter in view of references in the book (1 Kings 3:1; cf. Song 4:8).

R.C. Sproul makes the following suggestion: "It could be the Shulammite is Naamah the Ammonite, Solomon's first wife; the mother of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:21) who was born one year before Solomon became king, which probably occurred around age

twenty. Thus she would be his first love. It's possible that Solomon met her through one of his father's mighty men, Zelek the Ammonite who might have lived in the rural Ammonite town of Shulah.

Why Study the Song of Songs?

There are many reasons that the child of God should study the Song of Songs.

First, this book celebrates marital, sexual intimacy enjoyed as God's good gift. It elevates erotic love with dynamics of care and tenderness, associated with the depths of transparency, intensity, and delight between husband and wife. When read, one quickly recognizes the God-designed, benevolent, and powerful instrument of sexual intimacy within marriage. This explains Hebrews 13:4, which declares the marriage bed is to be held sacred and honored by all.

Second, it extends and promotes intimacy within marriage by affirming recreational and ministerial sexual intimacy and not only procreational sexuality. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 Paul emphasizes the husband and wife are to give themselves to each other with this ministry mindset. They do not come together to take from the other but to give - the sexual relationship is not hierarchal but reciprocal. The husband/wife relationship and the gift of sexuality is not for personal gratification but for the joy of giving gratification knowing that it is "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In other words, giving actually heightens one's experience, and taking diminishes one's experience.

Third, the Song of Songs is countercultural. It powerfully presents sexuality to be enjoyed within a relationship that is defined by God. It is covenantal, monogamous, and heterosexual. Any other definition of marriage will destroy a society.

Fourth, it attacks today's resurgence of neo-paganism, which declares the spiritual as good and the physical as evil. When God made man - male and female - and the marriage covenant, He declared that both the spiritual and physical are "good." The fall brought death to both. Therefore, redemption renews both. We are not only born again spiritually, we are renewed so that our bodies become "temples of the Holy Spirit" anticipating the new body, the new heavens and new earth. This includes God's good gift of sexual intimacy within marriage as renewed and by grace properly enjoyed. Any other use of sexuality is idolatry and is destructive.

Finally, while one must refrain from allegorizing the text in its entirety in order to promote spiritual meaning, it is valid to see how Christ is being presented. Ephesians 5, while defining the marriage relationship between man and woman, also declares that the marriage covenant is a proper way to understand the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

In 1859 the great Presbyterian preacher James Henley Thornwell had the opportunity to announce the wedding of his daughter, Nancy. In the weeks leading up to this event, the hundreds traveling would end up at a funeral, not a wedding as she took ill from cholera typhoid and began a rapid demise. Thornwell, overcome, came to his daughter's bedside in her waning moments and said, "Oh my dear daughter, such tragedy!" She replied, "Father, do not weep. I know my Savior." He said, "But this was to be your wedding, your whole life now before you." She, the youth, yet with greater maturity said, "Father, but I now go to a greater Groom that I am prepared to meet." Nancy Witherspoon Thornwell was laid to rest in a wedding gown, and the tombstone reads: "As a bride prepared for her Groom."

ONE | SONG 1:1-4
what should attract you to a
potential mate?

Your name is oil poured out; therefore virgins love you.

SONG 1:3

God made marriage, He made our bodies, and He has direction for us all. And we will be supremely blessed if we heed what God says on this. There is an attack on the family directed to both singles and married people. The best way to secure yourself or your family from harm is to take shelter under the Word of God.

When you are looking for a mate, remember that this is a person you are going to spend your entire life with. The vows are still “Till death do us part” not “Till my desire changes do us part”. We are committed until death as Christian people because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church.

We want to look for a mate that we can serve God with. Someone that we can raise godly children with. Now we have

the Bible, but guess what? The world is not on our side. The world thinks that purity is no big deal and passion should always be fulfilled immediately. The world does not want you to be pure until you are married. The world says, “You need to test drive your potential marriage”. “You need to live together”. The world is not on the side of marital fidelity. They are not on the side of growing old together. The world has established a pattern.

THE DANGERS OF MODERN DATING

We have an awful process in our country that is really nothing more than preparation for divorce. Most of what is called “dating” should really be called “destruction” because it ends in disaster and the forfeiting of your purity. Young people in this activity are encouraged to hang out together and perhaps “go steady” or be boyfriend and girlfriend. They are often left alone, they give away their purity, and they are scarred morally as a result. There is a cycle that prepares a young person to not want commitment. To be afraid of commitment and marriage. They want to give up easily. The world establishes this pattern very early on in our children.

Joey Likes Sally

Have you ever seen the scribbling testimonies of love on a tree or a wall that said something like “Joey HEARTS Sally”? I remember as a young person, this was something around the 5th or 6th grade that occurred on a weekly basis. A boy would become infatuated with a girl, and the word would get out that “Joey loves Sally”. Word would get to Sally, and Joey would write a note to Sally, “Will you be my girlfriend? Circle YES or NO”. Then they would be a couple. This is what goes on in the fifth grade. That juvenile relationship

might last a day or a week or maybe a month, but eventually Sally and Joey “break up” and move on to other juvenile “romances”. Now this all sounds cute, but it gets much more serious in high school, and it prepares our young people for disaster when they get married. Because by the time they get married, they’ve had plenty of preparation for divorce.

Arranged Marriages

I know what we can do, we can just have the parents arrange the marriage. You would be surprised that arranged marriages are far more successful than those built on dating. Often people from other cultures who have arranged marriages are baffled by the stupidity of our “dating” system in America. They can’t believe the practice of a young person choosing who they are going to marry based merely on superficial feelings and the very limited insight I have into a potential mate.

I read about one such visitor to the USA who asked, “Why do these young people think they can make a wise choice about marriage when they’ve never been married? Why do they think they are able to choose their own mates when they don’t even know who they are themselves, much less who they will become? Why don’t they trust their parents, who understand something about marriage and know that beauty is deceitful and charm is in vain?”¹

Now I’m not against dating and courtship if the parents are carefully involved.

For this study, instead of going from our own limited perspective, we are going to go way back in time and inter-

¹ Tom Nelson. *The Book of Romance* (Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1998), 2.

view a married man and his wife as they give us inspired biblical advice as to what to look for in a potential mate.

Turn with me if you would to the Song of Solomon. This is a love song that was sung by the ancient Hebrews. We are told that we are to sing “songs, and hymns and spiritual songs”. This would be a “spiritual song”.

In this song there are certain characters that give advice about passion, purity, and fidelity.

THE CHARACTERS AND MESSAGE OF SOLOMON’S SONG

First we have Solomon. He is the famous king of Israel. As the author of this song, he is one of the main speakers. He gives us the first verse. Verse 1, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.”

This is a song of Solomon that begins with his wife testifying of her unique journey of how she as a peasant girl marries a king. This is the only love song inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore this is really the authoritative standard on passion, purity and marital faithfulness. So why should Solomon, who in later years was not known for marital fidelity, write this book? I believe he wrote this book before he strayed. The fact that God brought him back by the end of his life demonstrates God’s grace, and should give all of us hope!

But there is another character we meet in this love song. Her actual name is never mentioned.

Solomon’s song is about the love he shares with a peasant girl who becomes his princess. The first biblical record we have of Solomon marrying is to a pagan, Pharaoh’s daughter as part of a political alliance (2 Chronicles 8:11).

Yet, it seems that the Song of Solomon was written well before that—a song written to Solomon’s first wife and first love, a young and beautiful Shulammite girl from the tribe of Dan. She has become known throughout the ages as “the peasant princess”. In verse 6, you’ll notice that the Shulammite girl’s brothers made her a shepherdess—“they made me keeper of the vineyards” (verse 6). This was not a flattering thing for a girl. Nothing much was on her side. She was poor, and without striking natural beauty. Yet Solomon loved her and wrote this letter as the standard for marital love in the Bible.

The message of Song of Solomon is that it is God’s will for God’s people to have a full and happy marriage. But marital love is very spiritual. It is far more than skin deep. In fact, Song of Solomon is not only a love song about godly marriage—it ultimately points to a far greater love—the love Jesus Christ has for His church. We must always remember that marriage is a temporary institution which will be ended by death and whose purpose it to tell us of God’s everlasting love for His people.

What we are going to see in the first seven verses is two married people reflecting on what it was that attracted them to each other. Now this is a love song, but it is filled with wisdom about how to deal with passion in a godly way and to be pure until marriage and faithful within marriage.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON SHOULD I BE ATTRACTED TO FOR MARRIAGE?

You have to understand that this is a married woman remembering the days leading up to her wedding day. She’s going to talk about what attracted her to Solomon.

Physical Attraction

The first level of attraction mentioned is Physical attraction (vs. 2). The first thing we notice is that these are definitely the words of a married woman. The Jews would have forbidden any and all sensual contact outside of the context of marriage, recognizing that such contact would inevitably lead to intimacy.

Verse 2, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.” Certainly, there was the kiss of a greeting that at times was allowed, such as when Jacob kissed Rachel. This is not the kiss of a greeting. Here is a married woman testifying to what we all know.

Love is powerful. There is a powerful jolt of electricity that God designed with physical touch. There is a physical urge in all of us that is reserved only for marriage. This kind of love is worth the wait. Electricity is very helpful, but it must be harnessed, or it will destroy!

I remember the first time I held Jill’s hand. We were on the Ferris Wheel at the Carnival in Oak Forest, Illinois! Wow, that’s electric! We do have a level of passion and attraction in our hearts that is not wrong, but it must be very guarded. Solomon’s Shulammitte bride reflects of her battle with attraction before she was married in Song 2:7, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem... that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

The sad thing is that the world paints this kind of love as the ultimate goal of love for those who are not married. That is so sad. Solomon’s pure Jewish bride says that marital love is “better than wine.” Love that is expressed in God’s time and in God’s way is truly heavenly and holy. It is something to be esteemed. It is so sacred and holy, precious and priceless. It is not something that we should say is “dirty”. It is holy if it is kept and reserved for marriage.

What Solomon and his pure Shulammitte bride symbolize is the same as what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:4, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous”.

Marital love is pure, but if you remove the marriage covenant from the equation, all sexual activity (including that which occurs only in the imagination) is nothing but fornication, a serious sin that is especially defiling and shameful—so much so that merely talking about it inappropriately is a disgrace according to Ephesians 5:12.² This is why the words about marital intimacy are shrouded and hidden and mysterious. God uses words that are purposely metaphorical to guard the sacredness of marriage.

This physical desire must be harnessed by holiness, not as dirty, but as sacred, God-given, and precious and reserved for marriage. We must never found a marriage on romance alone. That is a recipe for disaster. Marital love is intoxicating. Love that is reserved for marriage will make a person light-headed. It is exhilarating. This is why it is extremely dangerous if this is all you have.

Sadly, many people rush to marriage only on the fumes of romance. It’s like putting lighter fluid on a fire. There is a great explosion of fire at first, but then the fire quickly dies out and gets very cold. There is nothing of substance to make that fire burn. In our day, couples too often rush into marriage on passion alone. Soon after marriage, after the romantic vapors evaporate, what is left are two very flawed and selfish people. So we have to build on something greater than mere physical attraction.

² See John MacArthur. *The Rape of the Song of Solomon*. Blog archive. Challies.com.

Social Attraction

The second and most important level of attraction mentioned is social attraction (vs. 3). I've heard girls say, "He's such a hunk!" My first question is "a hunk of what?" What's this guy made of? What you ought to be looking for, single girls, is a man that is made of godly character. Dads and moms, you need to teach your children what to look for in a mate.

Listen to the Shulammite peasant girl: Verse 3, "your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out; therefore virgins love you".

Orderliness ought to attract us (vs. 3a). The Shulammite says, I like your "anointing oils". She's saying, "I like his cologne". The first thing she notices is that this guy's well put together. He's well groomed. Verse 3a, "your anointing oils are fragrant". Solomon took care of himself.

In Solomon's day, men rarely bathed. They used scented oils and ointments—kind of like cologne. These oils kept their skin from drying out in the dry Middle East climate. So yes, he was well groomed and clean, and often the superficial outward things like this first grab our attention.

I can remember in college we would get intercollegiate letters, and no matter who it was from, every letter smelled like perfume!

You can tell when love begins to awaken in young people. The kid who used to hate baths is taking showers twice a day! They are constantly brushing their teeth and swishing with mouthwash.

So orderliness is important, but what really impressed the Shulammite girl was something much more important than his outward togetherness.

Spiritual Attraction

We ought to seek a mate that has give themselves to God. What should we look for that would clue us into to their spiritual vitality?

Character

Character ought to attract us (vs. 3b). Verse 3b, “your name is oil poured out”. A person’s name in Israel was equal to the person’s character. Solomon’s cleanliness goes far beyond how he kept the outside. His godly character is pleasing and above reproach. There’s nothing in Solomon’s character at this time that “smells bad”.

“...oil poured out”: This oil is referring to the most purified oil there is. It is the first pressing of the oil—this was the oil that

“was used in the lampstand that burned day and night in the Temple. The first pressing of any olive harvest went for Temple use only...it was designated solely for the worship of the Lord. Purified oil, therefore, was the best, but even beyond the best, it was the best given to God.”³

Chastity

Chastity ought to attract us (vs. 3). Verse 3c, “therefore virgins love you”. Young women of marryable age loved Solomon. They respected him. The chaste women of Solomon’s court felt safe with Solomon. Why? Solomon had the reputation with others of having a pure, godly, and chaste lifestyle. He apparently treated women with dignity and respect. He kept himself pure. This was well known. He was chaste and careful with the opposite gender. The unmarried

³ Nelson. *Romance*, 4-5.

what should attract you to a potential mate?

girls felt safe around him. He had a reputation of godliness and purity.

Are you chaste? If you are a flirt around the opposite gender, you ought to be ashamed. You are not protecting and respecting God's daughters. When considering a lifelong mate, ask yourself:

- Do I have the reputation as a chaste, godly person?
- Am I attracted first and foremost to the physical, or is this person's beauty more than "skin deep"? Is their godliness the primary reason for my attraction?
- Would I be proud to bring this person home to meet Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, Aunts and Uncles?

Chivalry

Chivalry ought to attract a young woman (vs. 4a). What is "chivalry"? We find it in verse 4, "Draw me after you; let us run". Chivalry is when the man takes the lead. A young man sets the tone for his future marriage by being a man. He "draws" the woman after him. He takes the lead. He opens the car door. He esteems her with his words. He treats her gently. He draws her in the right way.

Ladies, if a man wants to put you into a compromising situation, then he is not a leader, but a coward. He will lead you to all the safe places. He will insist that you never be alone. If you suddenly come on to him, he will warn you! He will be a man. It is that kind of man that every young woman wants to "run" with. "Let us run" says the Shulammitte.

By the way, women ought not to put themselves forward. A godly woman will WAIT for a godly man to draw her after him. A godly man will take the lead, and never lead to

compromising places. That leads us to the last thing that the Shulammitte names that attracts her.

Self-Control

Self-Control ought to attract us (vs. 4b). Solomon was of such character that he took the lead in his courtship of his pure Jewish bride. There is a need for self-control. Notice in verse 4, that the desire for marriage is strong. “The king has brought me into his chambers.” The bride is looking back from her wedding day with NO REGRETS!!!

The sacred day did arrive for the Shulammitte. But they kept pure until that day. He protected her. He was a man of reputation. He never put her in any compromising situations. Here is a married woman reflecting on her courtship and what attracted her to Solomon – The king waited until the wedding day to bring her into his chambers.

To single men and ladies, what is reserved for marriage is so precious must guard it. Some men will say, “Well I love her!” Single men, if you want to express your love, then you protect her and don’t treat her like a prostitute. Don’t awaken that romantic strong love until you are married. You ought never put yourself in a situation where you are alone with your potential mate.

Notice she speaks of marital love as a place that is hidden and secret: the “chambers”. Intimacy is reserved for marriage! Marital love is sacred and should be mysterious. It should be something shared only between a man and the wife that he has covenanted to be with whether they are poor or rich, whether they are sick or in good health. They are together until death parts them!

This is why we ought to be offended when marital intimacy is prostituted on TV commercials and on internet

what should attract you to a potential mate?

ads! We ought to be incensed and infuriated! If we men are truly men at all, we will guard our homes from this garbage. We will guard our own eyes from that which trashes the most sacred love between two people.

Where is a man of this character? Every lady who is interested in marriage ought to want a man like this. Every mother ought to diligently teach her son to be a man like this.

Listen to the godly daughters of Jerusalem in verse 4b, “<OTHERS> We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.”

A man like this is one in a thousand. Men, married or single, you be a true man that protects that which is sacred. You be a man that honors what God honors. Don't contribute to the decadence of our culture. Keep sacred that which God calls sacred. Men, if you do that you will be highly honored by women in general. They will point to you and “exult and rejoice in you”. They will rightly respect you.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps there are those here today that are thinking about marriage. The first question you ought to ask yourself about your potential mate is: Is this person born again? Do they truly have a walk with Jesus Christ? Has this person grown in the faith? Do they have a reputation about being forward and courageous about the things of God? Is God more important in this person's life than any human relationship? The heart of a spiritually dynamic believer in Christ ought to attract you to a potential mate.

TWO | SONG 1:5-7 when are you ready to marry?

*Why should I be like one who veils herself [as a prostitute]
beside the flocks of your companions?*

SONG 1:7

When are you ready to marry? You are ready to marry when you are the kind of person that you ought to be. You need to come into marriage with Godly character, ready to work hard. Marriage is not there to make us happy. Joy and happiness come when you are submitted to God whether you are married or single.

So many people rush into marriage thinking it will make them happy and solve all their problems. That's a recipe for disaster. To be married takes an awful lot of work and sacrifice on the parts of both people.

WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT

You are ready to be married when you are concerned about what is most important.

Inner beauty matters

You are ready to marry when you are not concerned with the superficial and shallow. This Shulammitte is no princess.

We find out that she's grown up on a farm. She's not so concerned about superficial beauty.

She says in verses 5-6, "I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. 6 Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!"

Poor Jewish Girl

She was not socially attractive. She's from a broken and poor family. We first notice she addresses the "daughters of Jerusalem", the single, eligible ladies in Solomon's royal court. She was not from the royal city. The Shulammite is from the tribe of Dan in Lower Galilee—she's from the wrong side of the tracks! There is always that desire to compare. But she does not gain her value from her family or hometown.

Her father is not named, but her brothers have put her to work. Many commentators believe the father has either left the family or has died. What hope does this girl have of marrying?

The godly Shulammite girl is from a poor Jewish family in the tribe of Dan and does not have the pampered beauty of the urban women of the upper class. She was a working-class peasant girl. She was not a princess. Her skin was dark not only because of natural beauty but also because of the sun-tan that comes from working so many grueling hours in the fields.

She says, "I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon".

She was dark and radiantly beautiful, but she was also “weathered”. She was sun-tanned. Though she was beautiful, she had a very low on the social totem pole.

The Shulammitte girl in our passage as looked down upon not because of her skin but because of her low social standing. Her face was dark and sun-tanned and she had blisters on her hands. Everybody knows farm girls don’t marry kings!

Some Jewish people have darker skin. They are not European but Semitic. Most of the royalty in the world at this time in history were brown skinned people. In fact, many Africans in this girl’s day that were royal and dignified and respected. We think of the famous Queen of Sheba.

The social standing of the Shulammitte may have been a turn off, but she is a brown-skinned and beautiful woman, and more than that, we find out she is she is spiritually attractive! Inner beauty mattered to this Shulammitte.

The Tents of Kedar

Like the tents of Kedar, she was a woman who protected that which was on the inside. She guarded her character and her purity. She was like the tents of Kedar, which were weaved of black and grey goat hair. The tents of the Bedouin shepherds of Kedar are blackened by exposure to the elements and are strong enough to endure the desert climate.¹ So the Shulammitte shepherd girl is not dainty and fragile like the ladies at Solomon’s royal court. Yet she sees herself as “lovely”.

¹Garrett, D. A. (2001, c1993). *Vol. 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (386). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The tents of Kedar were more concerned with protection than with presentation. She's good looking but not at all pampered or in with all the fads of the day. She's out of touch with what's "in" because she's been working in the field. They were beautiful sprawling tents that were a shelter of protection for the Bedouin shepherds and their family. The tents of Kedar were places of protection and shelter—they took the wear and tear to protect what was in the inside.

The Shulammitte was willing to take the wear and tear on the outside to protect that which was most important on the inside. These tents soaked up the heat and provided cover for the family and the belongings. It was a place of comfort and rest.

The Curtains of Solomon

Like Solomon's curtains, she was a woman who was mysterious and modest. Verse 5, "I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon."

The curtains of Solomon were dark, but you never knew what was happening on the inside. There was mystery and modesty. You are ready to be married when you know not to blab all your problems to the world. When you can be quiet and take your problems to the Lord.

You are ready to be married when you can be like the curtains of Solomon and have some shamefacedness and modesty and mystery about you ladies.

There is something attractive about a girl who is content with herself. Who isn't chasing after the guys. Who is secure and spiritual. Ladies and men, this is good preparation for marriage.

Some of you ladies are tempted to chase after superficial fads so that you can get noticed. That's a dangerous road to follow. Even if it worked, what kind of guy would you get? You'd get a guy that's going to be superficial spiritually, and he'll break your heart in the end! If all you are is make up, cool clothes, and a good hair style, then you are not ready for marriage. If you have to flirt with a guy to get him to notice you, you are not ready for marriage.

What are you on the inside? Are you a godly girl? When's the last time you prayed for an hour? When's the last time ladies you read the Bible from cover to cover? When was the last time you had answered prayer. You are not ready to marry if your standard for living comes from your peers. You have to be able to stand on your own on the Lord's side.

We don't know what the woman of Proverbs 31 looked like, but we read in verse 30, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."

WHEN YOU ARE CAREFUL TO SERVE GOD

You are ready to be married when you are careful to serve God where you are (vs. 6).

Responsibility Matters

Verse 6, "Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!"

So many people put on rose colored glasses and think that Mr. Right or Miss Perfect is going to "make them happy". If you are looking for someone to make you happy, you are not ready to marry!

On the surface, we would all say, she does not compare to the women of the royal court. She's only a farm girl! She's a peasant, not a princess! But this girl was content to be single. She wasn't looking to marry Solomon. She was looking to be faithful to God!

The Shulammitte's brothers might have been angry and mean to her, but God used that situation in her life to make her a hard working and learn to submit to God even in a hard situation.

The Shulammitte was not looking to be married. She was faithful to God. Serving God did not help her cause on the surface. On the surface she was less marryable.

She was submissive to authority, even in times of great stress. She did what she was told to the neglect of her own eligibility for marriage.

She did not have an ideal family situation. When she speaks of her "mother's sons", she's talking about her step brothers. We don't know why they were angry with her. Nothing is indicated that she did anything wrong. This is just her lot in life. She has no idea that one day she is going to be a princess. She just kept her eyes on God and trusted God. That's what you need to do. She's looking back and saying, I wasn't fretting about being single. I'm content to serve God right where I am.

You may not have an ideal family situation. That doesn't matter. God is in charge of finding you a mate. God sent Solomon one day to look out at his fields and he noticed a humble lady that was different from the women of his royal court. As he got to know her, he put aside all the superficial stuff, and saw a girl who wanted to serve God! A man is attracted to a girl who is not afraid to work.

Do you have a servant's heart? Until your highest goal in life is to please God and serve Him with all your heart, you are not ready to be married.

The Shulammitte girl didn't have the money or the time to be worldly wise with fashion. In verse 6, she says of her brothers, "they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!". She was willing to put off marriage for the livelihood of her family. They needed to eat. She gave of herself. If you think worldly fashion is the road to a good marriage, you are NOT ready to get married! You need to adorn yourself with a humble servant's heart. That's what makes for a lasting marriage.

Men if all you are attracted to is the outside, you are in for a very rocky marriage. Ladies, are you willing to trust God to send the right man along if that is God's will for you? Do you see that God wants to make you the woman that you ought to be so that if you get married, you'll have the marriage God wants you to have?

WHEN YOU ARE CAUTIOUS ABOUT THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

You are ready to be married when you are cautious about the sanctity of marriage (vs. 7). You are ready to be married when you know you don't have to give away your purity in order to get a potential mate.

Purity Matters

Verse 7, "Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?"

She's willing to wait. She wants to be with him, but she wants to go about it in a legitimate way.

We are to "make no provision for the flesh".

In Solomon's day, a veiled woman who would appear in midday was a prostitute. The Shulammitte says, "I will not practice the immorality of a prostitute to get a man". Single ladies, "I will not sacrifice my chastity and my purity for a man". The Shulammitte girl had convictions.

If at any time you feel like you must set aside your Biblical godly convictions to win the attention of someone, then you need to **PUT ON THE BRAKES**.

The right person for you if you are a Christian, is someone who is going to push you toward God, not away from Him! You should aspire to marry someone who is going to challenge you spiritually, and is willing to tell you goodbye if you go the wrong way!

Let me say finally, that what you wear ladies matters. 1 Timothy 2:9-10, "women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works."

The Shulammitte said, "why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?" And I ask all the ladies here today, are you concerned that your apparel communicate the modesty and respectability of godliness, and not the questionable morals of the world? It is quite difficult to buy clothes as a Christian woman these days because so much of what the world pushes is meant to accentuate your form.

Single Christian ladies, you should want to wear clothing that accentuates your face, not your body. You want the man

you marry to love you for a beauty that is more than skin deep.

WHEN YOU ARE CONTENT TO BE SINGLE

Song of Solomon 2:7, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases” (cf. Song of Songs 3:5).

The daughters of Jerusalem are the elite class of women in the royal court. The Shulammite girl never was jealous of her peers who had money and popularity in the royal court. She was content being single. She wasn't looking for Solomon. You might ask, if she doesn't have the money or the friends of the ladies of the royal court, then how can she compete? She wasn't competing. She was content to be single. She had desire. But she was careful not to awaken that desire.

I think of Jim and Elizabeth Elliott. Both loved each other. Both desired marriage. Both gave up marriage for missionary work. They met near a cemetery. As they told each other of their love, and that they would sacrifice that love for the cause of Christ, the shadow of a cross from one of the grave stones came between them.

You are not married until you are married. You may have whims of love as a single person, but you cannot awaken it until you say “I do”. We'll get much more into this in the next two weeks, but for now let me say this is the art of contentment in singleness.

You cannot put your mind on the physical desires marriage until the right time.

CONCLUSION

What kind of foundation do you want for your marriage? How many of you have ever gone camping? Have you ever started a fire with twigs and lighter fluid that burned brightly and then quickly burned out? You know that in order to have a fire that lasts, you have to have some good strong mature lumber. In the same way, unless you are spiritually mature, you are headed for disaster. Unless the person you are interested in is spiritually mature, you are looking at starting a long term relationship with lighter fluid. If you are looking at a potential mate, you need to have someone with strong, godly character, that loves and walks with the Lord.

The person you desire in a mate says so much about you. May God give grace to all our singles to make the right choices, and to all our parents to teach and guide their children in making these choices.

THREE | SONG 1:7-2:7 the courtship begins!

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

SONG 2:7

I know you are wondering, what is the pathway to marriage? What is courtship and what is the proper way to court a person and get to know them? What should a godly girl or a godly young man expect in courtship? Perhaps you are a parent here asking the same question. Then you've come to the right place.

Courtship is all about building trust. You want to find out if this is the person you can trust to care for you, to build a family together, to serve God together. How can you find out if the person is trustworthy? From this passage of Scripture, we are going to find that courtship rests on four pillars. It allows you to see if a person's character is wobbly or untrustworthy. If the relationship begins to wobble and fall as you put up these four pillars, you know it's not the right person for you to marry. How you begin courtship is very, very important. Let's look at our first pillar.

The first pillar you need to begin a courtship is Discovery. To begin courtship there needs to be safe places where

young men and women can talk and get to know each other as friends. In Song of Solomon, remember we have a man and a woman looking back from their wedding day, telling us now about their courtship.

Looking back from her wedding day, she says, verse 7, “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?”

What about this strong language of love? Isn’t she coming on strong? She tells the story with strong words towards Solomon, but most commentators agree that this is part soliloquy, that is, this is the sentiment of her heart, not exactly what she said to Solomon. Ladies, it wouldn’t be appropriate to speak this way to someone you are just getting to know! But she was feeling this way. She had observed King Solomon. We mentioned last week, she saw he was godly, a leader, someone any godly girl would desire.

Why is Solomon called a shepherd here? I thought he was a king. Of course, Solomon was not a shepherd. This is like a pet name for Solomon after they are married. Solomon was anything but a shepherd. He was a king! This “shepherd” imagery is common to the Near Eastern ancient love poetry. This is appropriate for the queen on her wedding day to reflect, and call King Solomon, her “shepherd”. Solomon is very likely touring the countryside and inspecting his vineyards and catches the eye of the Shulammitte.

PILLAR 1: DISCOVERY

In verse 7, the first thing we see are three pillars in discovering who that special person is that God may have for you to marry: visibility, accountability, and purity. By com-

mitting to never being alone with someone of the opposite gender until you are married, you will always have these three pillars to provide a strong, safe foundation for discovering who you might marry (vs. 7). And by the way, you are NOT MARRIED until you are married!

Visibility

The first ingredient in discovering who you might court, is visibility. The Shulammitte farm girl asks where Solomon might be so they can meet in a public place. Verse 7, “Tell me... where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon”. She is asking where she can find him at a time when the sheep would be resting and not demanding the shepherds’ complete attention. She wants to meet this young king. She wants to make sure there are plenty of other shepherds present so that she does nothing that is inappropriate. She is concerned about modesty and purity.

Accountability

The second ingredient in discovering who you might court, is accountability. She is coming at noon in the middle of the day when many people would be around, in broad view of the public eye. In Israel, “the oppressive heat of the middle of the day drives people and animals to rest in shady places”.¹ “In the heat of the midday shepherds would lead their flocks under shady trees near a stream”.² There was nothing questionable about this. There was a group of shepherds and others present, which means there was accountability.

¹ G. Lloyd Carr. *The Song of Solomon (TOTC)*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 87.

²Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (So 1:5-7). Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.

As you consider the possibility of courtship, you need to meet anyone of the opposite gender in the broad daylight, so to speak. People with the same standards as you ought to be around. You must always meet with the right kind of people around, people who will hold you accountable.

Purity

The third commitment to have before you are ready to court someone is purity. We see from this peasant girl, that even she knew nothing questionable could be going on. Without accountability and visibility, she could be accused of bring a harlot. Verse 7b, “why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?” She doesn’t want to be like the prostitutes that would veil themselves and catch a shepherd all alone.

PILLAR 2: FRIENDSHIP

The second pillar you need to begin a courtship is Friendship (vs. 8-9).

Protecting the Woman’s Honor

The man to take the lead by protecting the woman’s honor (vs. 8). He thinks the world of her. He wants to honor her. He calls her, “O most beautiful among women”, the one distinguished for beauty among all women. These are his inner thoughts being revealed in this love poem, so we know what is going on in their heart, not necessarily what would have been said. This would have been entirely inappropriate to speak this way upon first meeting.

He is a gentleman, and he wants to protect her modesty and insists that she come properly in public. He is teasing

her a bit and says, verse 8, “If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your young goats beside the shepherds’ tents.” In other words, everyone would know where Solomon would be. All the shepherds would be with Solomon if he was visiting their fields.

But she asked because it would be improper for her to have any hint of immodesty.

Prizing the Woman as a Person

The man is to take the lead by prizing her as a person (vs. 9). As you begin a courtship, you need to develop a strong friendship in a non-romantic way.

It is so interesting to read this, because this is one of the greatest, richest, most powerful kings ever to live, and he is absolutely stunned by the poor Shulammitte farm girl. He calls her a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots, which is the highest of compliments! He says in Song of Solomon 1:9, “I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots.” In ancient times, chariots would never be pulled by mares. “Stallions, not mares, were used to pull chariots in antiquity. A mare, therefore, among the chariots might [very] well start a chaotic experience.”³ To Solomon, she was as beautiful and sought after as if she were the only woman in a world full of men. He was attracted to her for all the right reasons. She was not like a prostitute. The mare often would be white and represented grace, beauty and nobility. She was godly. She was pure. She was graceful.

Some of the married men need to listen. Remember when you were courting your wife, and you were willing to

³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:1013). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

listen to Opera with your wife. You'd go to the store, and actually it didn't matter, you were happy to go anywhere with her. You prized her. You prized what she prized because she prized it. And that woman felt loved. You talked to her. She felt like she was one in a million. She needs to feel that way.

We are called to love our wives and treasure them in the most exalted way possible, as Christ loved the church. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her". That which a man begins in courtship, he is to continue in marriage. Some of you men know how to communicate love to your wife. You did it when you were courting. It's not that we don't know how.

In courtship, it is important to get to know the other person. Men in marriage are told: "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). So start getting to know this exceptional girl. Find out about her walk with the Lord. Make her feel treasured and prized as a special friend. As you begin a courtship, you need to develop a strong friendship in a non-romantic way.

PILLAR 3: COMMITMENT

The third pillar you need to begin a courtship is Commitment (vs. 10-16). The courtship is founded upon careful commitment. There are a flood of emotions that accompany the possibility of courtship. These emotions are expressed, but they are sandwiched by great caution.

Commitment principle #1

You must go into courtship with Marriage in mind. Why is this? Because marriage means commitment. Dating is dangerous because it does not have marriage in mind. In dating, a person wants “all of the pleasure of love with none of the work, none of the vows, none of the sacrifice”.⁴

This generation wants “intimacy without obligations”.⁵ Courtship works, because it brings in accountability and purity with two people who love the Lord but DO NOT TRUST THEMSELVES. They learn to trust each other, because they are “two people who care more about each other’s good than their own momentary pleasure”.⁶

Solomon had marriage in mind. We see this in verse 10. Solomon pictures this peasant girl as his Bride and his Queen. He’s not looking for superficial pleasure from her. He’s looking for commitment. Song of Solomon 1:10, “Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.” “It was a centuries-old fashion in the East for a woman to wear a cord of gold around her forehead...which hung down over her checks...Neck chains or necklaces were made of gold or other metal, or consisted of strings of pearls, corals, or precious stones.”⁷

It seems that he was imagining her wearing this jewelry, because in the next verse, the daughters volunteer to make these for her. She is poor. She is likely adorned with no jewelry. Her chief attraction is her grace and purity. She is an unlikely candidate for a king.

⁴ Joshua Harris. *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible*. "Rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick"--Cover.; Includes index. (Rev. ed.) (344). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

And so the daughters of Jerusalem, the elite women in Solomon's court, volunteer to make the peasant girl her royal jewelry. Verse 11, "<OTHERS> We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver."

What a beautiful picture of Christ and the church. We were poor, and Christ has made us rich. We were weathered by sin, and Christ has given us shelter from our scorching iniquities!

Commitment principle #2

You must carefully understand a person's Character before you can commit to them. This goes without saying, but everything leading up to this point showed that both Solomon and the Shulammitte were mature, godly people who were ready to marry because they had a strong commitment to God and to purity and accountability. She compared his name to the oil that was "poured out" in the Tabernacle worship of the LORD (1:3).

Commitment principle #3

The joy of intimacy is the reward of Commitment. In other words, marital intimacy is the reward of those who wait until they are committed through a marriage vow before God.

Remember Uzzah in who touched the Ark of the Covenant when he shouldn't have? What did God do to him? God killed him. Why? Because he was not the one committed to carrying the Ark. The Ark was so sacred, you had to be a priest to touch it. And it had to be a specific family of priests. Why? It shows the sacredness of the Ark. It is only to be touched by those who commit their entire lives and livelihood to protecting and caring for the Ark.

In the same way, only a man who has committed his life to protecting and caring for a woman before God and witnesses, may touch that woman. The joy of intimacy is the reward of commitment.

Joshua Harris, in his book “I Kissed Dating Goodbye” said this about intimacy without commitment:

“Intimacy without commitment contradicts what the Bible teaches about love. Instead of being selfless, it’s selfish. Instead of looking out for the ongoing good of the other person, it’s focused on the needs of the moment.”⁸

Instead of cherishing the person as a brother or sister in Christ, the person becomes an object to fulfill your desires.

Look at how Solomon and the Shulammitte girl he is courting dealt with passion. It is beautiful. They have very real passions, but they keep them under control.

You must be careful to guard the rush of emotions that accompany the possibility of courtship. It is natural to think highly of someone you are interested in. Both the peasant and the king think of each other when they are away. The affection seems to be out of this world!

When referring to the following verses, Spurgeon said, the Song of Solomon was “one of the most heavenly portions of God’s Word”.

Listen to the words of the Shulammitte farm girl. Verse 12-14, “ <SHE> While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. 13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. 14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi”.

The language here seems a bit shocking, but it really is not. We must be careful not to make that which is pure and innocent to be worldly and sensual. To the pure all things are

⁸ Harris. *Dating Goodbye*, 32.

pure. She is speaking of that which is closest to her heart. These are the thoughts of her heart.

It was common for a woman to wear a pouch of perfumed spices and flowers around her neck. Whenever she smelled it, she thought of Solomon.

The “nard” is simply a very expensive perfume from near the Himalayan mountains in India, and the “myrrh” is an expensive spice that would have been mixed with the holy oil in the Tabernacle and then Temple worship (Exodus 30:23-33).⁹

By referring to Solomon as the “nard” or sweet smelling and very expensive perfume, she is saying Solomon is precious to her. She esteems him. In verse 16, she goes on to say “Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”

By saying he is like the holy “myrrh” close to her heart she is saying her heart for holiness is knit with his heart. She reverences him.

Respect and esteem are proper for a girl of marryable age as they look to a godly man. But this of course speaks to more than just this love story between Solomon and the poor peasant farm girl. This speaks of the beauty that Christ puts in our hearts as we come to know Him.

He welcomes us to him. And though we are poor and worthless and weathered by sin, our King of kings welcomes us. As He says to poor sinners like you and me, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28), we begin to see him as “beautiful” and “truly delightful”.

Again, this girl was godly and kept her distance from Solomon. The Shulammitte farm girl saw the king from a distance on his couch in the forest. The couch is referring to the king’s dining table where he would recline for a meal. His

⁹ Carr. *The Song of Solomon*, 92.

royal tent (“the curtains of Solomon”—1:5) had likely been brought there as he travels the countryside inspecting his vineyards. We can imagine him having dinner out in the open. She is admiring him from a distance.

We have to remember that this all pictures Christ and his church. Christ does not come to soil us, but to convict us of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come. He calls us to see the beauty of His holiness. He doesn't take His Bride to be and roll her around in the mud. He loves and respects her and protects her purity! Single men, it is your responsibility to picture this and to protect that girl's purity.

Solomon also greatly esteems her. Verse 15, “<HE> Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.” When you know the color of the girl's eyes you are interested in, you know you are “twitterpated”!

And the Shulamite girl responds again in verse 16, “<SHE> Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”

I'm told that my great Uncle Matthew from Scotland once was in partnership with a man named “Walt Disney”. Uncle Matthew broke the partnership with Mr. Disney because he thought that the little cartoon mouse would never take off. Wow, was he wrong. Disney put out a film called Bambi in 1941 that had an owl explaining to everyone what it was to be in love. You'll have to listen to it yourself!

Owl: “Nearly everybody gets twitterpated in the spring-time. For example: You're walking along, minding your own business. You're looking neither to the left, nor to the right, when all of a sudden you run smack into a pretty face. Woo-woo! You begin to get weak in the knees. Your head's in a whirl. And then you feel light as a feather, and before you know it, you're walking on air. And then you know what?

You're knocked for a loop, and you completely lose your head!"

It's comical, but it is strikingly true. These emotions are raging and trying to get to the surface in all of us. What are we to do with them? Remember what I said Commitment principle #3 was? The joy of intimacy is the reward of commitment.

Here's the thing. You've got all these God-given feelings, but you must control them. You must be careful as the Shulammite says in the next chapter, 2:7, "I adjure you...that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

PILLAR 4: DETERMINATION TO PLEASE GOD

The one thing you want to be careful of during courtship is that you carry through on your convictions before God. Solomon did that. He was a man of honor and purity.

You must be determined in your accountability. The courtship begins in 1:16! You can see that it is the first instance of the couple together. We see this in Song of Solomon 1:16b-17, "...Our couch is green; 17 the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine."

They are together, but they are never alone. If you want to destroy your potential marriage before it starts, then have no accountability, and keep yourself in a state of temptation. If you are alone, no matter how godly you are, you will be tempted!

You must be determined in your purity. The emotions are running high.

She feels treasured (vs. 1-2). Song of Solomon 2:1-7, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. <HE> As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.

She feels protected. He furnished her with the best food. Verse 3, “<SHE> As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow...”

She feels provided for. Verse 3, “With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste,”

She feels joyful and a part of his heart, verse 4, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”

All of these things tend to make a massive assault on purity. We have another soliloquy. These are her thoughts, “Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. 6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!” Look at her strong desires, but then we have the right response to those desires. Verse 7, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

CONCLUSION

I would encourage anyone beginning courtship to sign a purity covenant with their parents present. Never allow yourself to be alone. Be careful what you talk about on the phone. Let things be focused on Scripture. Memorize Scripture together. Put that passion and motivation to good use. Jill and I memorized the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount together during this time. Don't let the conversations get romantic. The time will come for that. Do not awaken your love. Be very careful when you say the words “I love you”. You'd better wait until you're engaged to do that. And I recommend short engagements. The reasons are obvious. You don't want to awaken love until the wedding night.

You've got to focus your mind away from romance so you can get to know the person. You are laying a foundation for marriage.

Be very careful not to have physical contact. Keep your clothes on and your hands off! Be determined to please God and do nothing to compromise your convictions.

Courtship is all about building trust. If you are a car dealer, you don't let the person take the car on a trip to Florida until they have BOUGHT the car. If you're in real estate, you don't let them move into the house until they've BOUGHT the house. Until they are committed and have promised to care for that item, they are not allowed to act like owners.

If you are single, and one day consider beginning courtship, or your children begin courting someone, remember, you want to find out during this time if this person is trustworthy to serve God and fulfill their God-given role. This is a person you need to be able to trust. Are they a dependable, trustworthy, predictable, faithful committed Christian person? You can start by seeing if this person has the character and commitment to submit themselves to accountability, visibility, and purity. May God give us the grace to do so!

FOUR | SONG 2:8-3:5

passion, purity, & engagement

My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away”.

SONG 2:10

The last chapter we talked about courtship. What’s that all about? Courtship is a time when you are deciding whether or not the person is someone you would consider marrying. Courtship has parental involvement, accountability, visibility, and it committed to purity. In courtship there is a commitment to not go to the romantic side. It doesn’t mean you don’t want to! It means you have a special friendship with lots of parental involvement. I was always with Jill’s parents or other godly adults.

Courtship ideally leads to engagement. You’ve come to the place where you believe this person to be someone you can look up to spiritually. You haven’t had to compromise your purity or your convictions to keep this person.

Let me just say, that if you have had to compromise, put on the brakes! You don’t want to hitch your wagon to a wild horse! It’s not a wagon you will destroy, but your life. Make sure the person you are considering marrying is faithful, dependable, exemplary and predictable in their godliness and convictions.

Now we come to Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5, where courtship leads to marriage.

Song of Solomon 2:8, “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” She is anxious to see him! He’s anxious to see her!

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE: COURTSHIP

Courtship is a wonderful time to lay some good foundations for marriage. You say, don’t you do that during the engagement? You might do some of that, but mostly during the engagement, you are planning the wedding! By the time you are engaged you should know and trust that this person is a faithful, consistent, dependable Christian person that you can spend the rest of your life with.

How long should courtship go? It should go as long as it takes to get to know what this person is really like. There are only two options in courtship—it ends in realizing that the person is not for you, or it ends in engagement.

In courtship there are several things that deepen and grow your relationship...

Anticipation

Song of Solomon 2:8, “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” The anticipation of seeing one another is breathtaking. We see King Solomon “leaping” and “bounding” over hills and mountains.

Courtship is exhilarating. So you need to be careful. There are many mountains and hills that you could trip on! Courtship ought to be a time when you are focused on trying to understand the person’s convictions and faithfulness. Guard your heart! Do not give your heart away! You may not

get married to this person. Even the consideration that the person you are courting might be the one is intoxicating. It makes one leap and bound like a gazelle! The pursuit of a wife is a good thing!

Proverbs 18:22, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.” If you find a wife, it’s obvious you were looking, and desiring a wife. That’s a good thing. Solomon was so convinced that he went to see this Shulammitte farm girl when ever he could.

Dedication

Dedication is good preparation for marriage. Solomon was committed.

The word courtship comes from the Elizabethan era in which the ladies of the court were wooed and won by knights and lords of the court through a process of frequent visitation.

He saw something in her that helped him overcome all obstacles and persevere. Often people in courtship overcome obstacles quite resiliently. Song of Solomon 2:8, “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” Mountains and hills are probably literary images for obstacles to their love that the man overcomes.

It is amazing how resilient love is. When a young couple fall in love, they always think the best and give each other the benefit of the doubt. As Proverbs 10:12 says, “love covers all offenses.” When you love someone, you tend to overlook the blemishes. Truly, love is blind!

Now I’m not talking about stupidity. A godly person will want to court someone of godly character. You ought to be the type of person that no one would ever ask you to compromise your convictions. You’ll be able to truly be commit-

ted and want the best for your possible mate if you know they are godly. You will easily cover their flaws. You'll "leap" and "bound" over them like a young stag or a gazelle!!

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that "love hopes all things". Love thinks the best and fills in the question marks with thinking the best of the person.

We are all able to live within the bounds of love and respect. Why is it that often married couples lose this? Simply put—they are wounded.

Consider the obstacles Christ "leaped" over to demonstrate His love for us—"In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!"

Communication

Communication is good preparation for marriage. There's a desire to spend time together. He says, in verse 10, "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,"

Solomon, asks the Shulammitte, the one he loves, to go for a walk in the countryside. It's important to spend time together and get to know each other.

The word courtship comes from the Elizabethan era in which the ladies of the court were wooed and won by knights and lords of the court through a process of frequent visitation.

The joy of love presents a God-given escape from the cruel world. There is that time when you are able to spend frequent time together. But be careful. Don't focus on romance. There will be enough sparks flying in your heart that you need to be careful and self-controlled, or you will start a fire that you can't put out! Focus on seeing if this person is committed to the Lord. Also remember when you are together, as we learned last week, there needs to be visibility, accountability, and purity.

The same is true with your relationship with Christ. He calls us to frequently “come away” with Him. Is your heart often stirred by Him? As often as we can, we are to come away with Him and spend time with Him.

Affection

Affection is good preparation for marriage. Again, I’m not speaking of the physical side of love here. I’m talking about a healthy esteem and respect for the other person. You ought to think the world of one another for the right reasons. And here in verses 9-10 we see the foundations of love and respect being established for marriage.

Verses 9a, “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag”.

Solomon sets the example with strength and gentleness. Are you like a strong young stag of a man that will keep his convictions? Are you gentle but firm with your special someone, so that they know you want their best. Are you graceful like a gazelle? The Shulammitte trusts Solomon as a man of honor. Solomon was a man among men, but he was a true “gentle-man”.

The man’s affection draws him to his beloved Shulammitte farm girl.

Verses 9b-10, “Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. 10 My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away,”

Solomon approached the wall around the Shulammitte’s home and then peered through the lattice. He was anxious to see her.

Renewal and Hope

It's Springtime... Springtime is often celebrated as a time for young people in love. This is a gift from God. It is exciting and refreshing. There is much potential.

Verses 11-13, "for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance."

There is great hope during a good courtship process. You can see how you might work together. You have the same convictions. You love the Lord. You deeply feel respect and love for your special someone, and they make you feel loved and respected.

All that is a good foundation for marriage. One mistake that some make is they don't know how to read the warning signs.

I know of a courting couple that allowed themselves to be in tempting situations, and started fooling around, so they got married. That's not good preparation for marriage.

I've heard of couples getting married because it's a quick way to get out of their parents' house. Bad idea! That's the warning sign of a tumultuous marriage. It's a bad idea to start a marriage by breaking the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother".

There are those who can't get along very well as a couple. They are worn out from all their highs and lows. They think marriage will bring some stability. They conclude, "We don't seem to be doing very well in courtship. At least in marriage we'll be able to be intimate. Let's get married." That's like saying "I can't bench press fifty pounds, I think I'll add five hundred more pounds!" And you get crushed by it. I've seen marriages that start like that end in divorce.

Learn to read the warning signs. It'll be like Spring has come. Godly people are giving you the green light on the person's character. You have seen that this person walks with the Lord. You esteem them and feel so special to be loved by such a godly person.

THE PROPOSAL FOR MARRIAGE

We find an invitation to leave her home. Verse 13b, "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away." This is the closest thing to a proposal we have in the Song of Solomon.

Engagement is a promise to marry. Betrothal in Bible times was serious. It required a spoken and eventually written covenant that laid out the intentions for marriage. It was taken very seriously, and it was made between the two families. It was signified by giving a ring or some other token of the Groom's intension to marry the bride.

There was actually a ceremony for betrothal. "The Jewish betrothal [ceremony] in Christ's time was conducted thus: The families of the bride and groom met, with some others present to serve as witnesses. The young man would give the young woman either a gold ring, or some article of value, or simply a document in which he promised to marry her. Then he would say to her: "See by this ring [or this token] thou art set apart for me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel."

Engagement requires the father's permission, if living and able. As I said, both families were involved in the Jewish betrothal. So, the parents should be involved in the engagement. It is not mentioned here, but it must be said. In courtship and in engagement, it is the man's responsibility to seek the father's permission.

1 Corinthians 7:36 NKJV, “But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin [daughter], if she is past the flower of youth [of marriable age], and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.”

We see that the father gives the bride away. It is he who gives his daughter’s hand in marriage. The father must protect his daughter and make sure she is marrying a godly man.

Engagement means that the woman must start thinking about leaving her parents protection and come under the protection of the groom. Verse 14, Solomon calls out to his betrothed, “O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the cran- nies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.”

Doves hide in the crevasses of the rocks. This speaks to her desire for safety and the protection of her mother’s home. Quoting Genesis 2:24, Jesus said, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife” (Mark 10:7). The woman has to trust the protection of this man.

Ladies, one way you can know if this man is a man of honor and will protect you, is if he is careful to protect your purity. Is he careful to guide the conversation in a godly di- rection? Are his walk and talk consistent? If not, stay in the crevasses of the rocks in your parents’ home! Its better that you break an engagement than you later find yourself with a broken marriage!

The betrothal is not mentioned here, but it is assumed. The courtship has been observed by godly people. The father is consulted. In this case, since the Shulammmite’s father does not seem to be on the scene, the mother would be con- sulted. Perhaps the mother would seek advice from other

godly men in the family. At any rate, by this time it should be plain to godly, mature people whether or not a wedding should take place. So permission is either granted or denied.

So we've seen the preparation for marriage, and the proposal for marriage. Now we move to the engagement. Let's talk about...

THE PRESSURES OF THE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement brings with it many pressures. It's one thing to dream about marriage. There are no imperfections in most of our dreams. But actually considering marriage is scary for most people. You really begin to see the flaws for the first time. But it's a good thing if you handle the pressures in the right way.

Verse 15, "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

Foxes are pests that wreak havoc in vineyards (e.g., they will eat the grapes). Although the vineyard has been associated with the appearance of the woman (1:6), here it is described as our vineyards and thus refers to their relationship. The foxes represent some hindrances that are threatening to spoil their relationship.

"The foxes represent as many obstacles or temptations as have plagued lovers throughout the centuries.

Perhaps it is the fox of uncontrolled desire which drives a wedge of guilt between a couple. Perhaps it is the fox of mistrust and jealousy which breaks the bond of love. Or it may be the fox of selfishness and pride which refuses to let one acknowledge his fault to another. Or it may be an unforgiving spirit which will not accept the sincere apology of the other. These foxes have been ruining vineyards for years and the end of their work is not in sight".

Engagement will bring with it foxes. Are you able to guard your relationship from foxes? Are you able to keep yourself under control? Even in ideal courtships and marriages most couples encounter some potentially destructive problems. Their willingness to solve them together is an evidence of their maturity.

If you can't get along and solve problems with each other for a few hours a day, three or four times a week, you certainly aren't going to be able to get along with a person seven days a week for the next fifty years!!

THE PASSION OF ENGAGEMENT

Verse 16, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. 17 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains." The next chapter is the wedding; the betrothal period is coming to a close. Her passions are rising. Solomon like a graceful gazelle is very gentle in how he approaches her. Yet he is strong in his convictions as "a young stag on cleft mountains". He's careful to protect her from her own passions and emotions. She strongly desires marriage. She says, "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee"—she wants to be his wife! Her passions are strong.

THE PURITY OF ENGAGEMENT

(Song of Solomon 3:1-5).

The woman dreams of her future husband. Song of Solomon 2:1-5, "On my bed by night [very strong in the Heb. lit. "night after night"] I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. 2 I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek

him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. 3 The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" 4 Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me."

The wedding is approaching. Night after night she thinks about marriage to this man. She truly cannot live without him.

Her passions are strong. She is a godly woman. These are pure and holy passions, but she know they must be reserved and guarded for the soon coming marriage, and so she says again in verse 5, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

She dreams of married life, but she is careful with her desires. She guards her passions.

A fire in the hearth is beautiful because it is controlled and in the right place. It gives warmth and light. But if you take the logs and burn them in the middle of the living room, you'll lose everything. So it is with passion. You must guard it!

CONCLUSION

Let me close with a few encouragements and warnings.

Don't jump into an engagement too quickly. If you are not very, very sure that this person truly is what they say they are, wait. Don't jump in too quickly. Listen to godly people around you. Make sure you are desire marriage for the right reasons. Physical attraction is not strong foundation. There must be consistency, godliness, and biblical conviction. Does the person you are interested in speak and live

openly about their walk with Christ? If it is not the center of their life now, you cannot expect anything to get better when you are married. You can certainly expect things to likely get worse.

Look for the warning signs. Can your relationship survive misunderstandings, arguments and the pressures of life? If not, you ought to put the engagement on hold.

Plans should move quickly if you are engaged. The time to discover if this is the person to marry is during courtship. I believe in a long courtship but a brief engagement. If you are engaged, try to make it a short engagement if possible with lots of accountability. Once the decision is made to marry, it is very difficult to restrain passion. DO NOT be alone together. The passions are too high. More than a year of engagement is not wise unless there is great distance between you. I was engaged to Jill for a year and two months, but she was 1000 miles away in college. We were both very busy during our engagement. A short engagement is advisable. Keep busy planning the wedding and get on with the marriage!

Here's a word of advice to you men. Get to know the girls' parents well during the courtship time and especially the engagement time. Schedule some time with her parents while she is away. You are not only marrying her, but you are marrying her family!!

The Bible tells us that we are betrothed to Christ and we need to be a "chaste bride". This is true in engagement, but it is also true in our Christian life. We are not yet in heaven. We have not yet partaken in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Keep yourself unspotted from this world. Let your heart be on the Beloved One Jesus Christ! Walk closely with Him, because He is coming very soon to bring His Bride to the wedding feast!!

FIVE | SONG 3:5-11

a wedding designed by God

Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

SONG 3:11

The wedding ceremony is symbolic of the marriage of Christ and His church. A Christian wedding is the anticipation of the wedding that is to come between Christ and His Bride when we will fully be united eternally with Christ. What a day that will be! In every way the wedding day should display the Church's relationship with Christ.

It is the day when two people become one in every way: spiritually, emotionally, physically, and socially. The wedding ceremony is so important because it lays the secure foundation for your family, and for many generations to come.

I often remember my wedding vows.

"I Matthew take you Jill to be my lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, honor, protect, and cherish, abandoning all others and dedicating myself wholly to you 'till death do us part."

Jesus will never leave or forsake His Bride. We men must never leave or forsake the bride God gave us.

The wedding ceremony is special because it is a vow before God and witnesses. It symbolizes the union between Christ and His church.

That vow is a vow of fidelity, devotion to God, protection and provision for the wife, and the permission and blessing of the parents.

A VOW OF FIDELITY TO ONE ANOTHER

The wedding ceremony symbolizes the couple's fidelity to each other (vs. 5). The Shulamite farm girl has more anticipation of love than most young marryable women. She is a poor peasant girl about to be a queen. And yet, she demonstrates self-control. Some people say, "I just can't help myself." That is not true! You can and you must. Listen to this young lady's words.

Abandoning All Others

Verse 5, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

On my wedding day I remember the wedding vows: Jill was mine "to have and behold from this day forward". In my marriage vows I said, "abandoning all others and dedicating myself wholly to you 'till death do us part." That's why this young lady was controlling herself. She was reserving what was most precious for her king and soon to be husband.

Once I was married, I abandoned any friendships of the opposite gender I might have had. That is an obligation for all married people.

Once I was married, my wife was all mine, and we could awaken love fully and completely. Until that day, purity must be carefully guarded. Love is not to be awakened until after the marriage vows. It is for this day the couple has preserved themselves.

God said in Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” It is not until you leave and cleave through a marriage covenant before God and witnesses that you may become one flesh.

Staying pure is hard work, but it is worth it a thousand times over. It is the day that you have reserved yourself for each other. You have kept yourself from the world’s lusts. You have remembered Hebrews 13:4, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

You have remembered Proverbs 5:15, “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.” And now, this is the day that God has given you your own cistern that will fulfill you and by His grace bring you many generations of godly children.

A VOW OF DEVOTION TO GOD

Listen to the description of Solomon. He is described as one who is devoted to God and led by Him into this marriage.

Verse 6, “What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant [traders who would come from all around the world]?”

For Better or for Worse

I remember my wedding vows: “for better or for worse”. If I am married, I do not have the authority to split in two what God has put together. Every lawful marriage is put together by God. “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:9).

It is clear from this description that Solomon was led to this marriage by God. In great contrast to Solomon’s hundreds of political marriages, this woman is the wife of Solomon’s youth. He was led to this marriage by God. We see this by the description.

Solomon is the shepherd-king. Verse 6, “What is that coming up from the wilderness...?” As a king he has become a shepherd to win the love of this lowly shepherdess. The image of the green wilderness pastures where the shepherds would pasture their sheep is given. They would literally “come up” to Jerusalem, which was truly the beautiful royal city set on a hill.

God is the true shepherd king. Solomon is described as coming up like “columns of smoke” from the wilderness. Verse 6, “What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke.

This is a striking reference to the leading of the Spirit of God who manifested Himself through a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night in the wilderness.

A marriage is not just between you and your spouse. It is between you, your spouse and God. It is a holy, unbreakable vow before the divine Author of marriage. Therefore it is important to follow the leading of God into your marriage!

“A recent survey concluded that 80 percent of relationships in which couples were living together without marriage vows end in separation. Sixty percent of those who are married by a justice of the peace are divorced later. Forty percent

of those who are married in churches eventually divorce. And those who read their Bibles together [regularly] divorce only at the rate of 1 out of 1,050”.¹

It is so important that a marriage be founded upon devotion to God!

Think of the joy when the church’s wedding day comes, and we see the King of kings and Lord of Lords coming for His Bride!

A VOW OF PERMANENCE

The wedding ceremony symbolizes the sacredness of marriage (vs. 6b).

Solomon is described as “...perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant” (Verse 6b). This marriage was extravagant. This extravagance points to the permanence of marriage. You don’t spend all this money and have this kind of lavish display for some overnight fling. This marriage is “til death do us part”. The costly fragrances point to the sacredness and significance of the marriage. The Scriptures teach that marriage is permanent.

The merchants here refer to the traders that would have brought the very best of the perfumes from across the world. Solomon spares no expense to make this wedding one never to be forgotten for his bride.

The marriage is special and sacred. It is to be celebrated. It is extravagant.

“The Scriptures teach that marriage is one of the most important events in a person’s life. Therefore it is fitting that the union of a couple be commemorated in a special way.”²

¹ Tommy Nelson. *The Book of Romance* (Thomas H. Nelson: Nashville, 1998), 71.

² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:1017). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Consider the extravagance of Christ's love to us! Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

A VOW OF PROTECTION

Verses 7-8, "Behold, it is the litter [the couch on which servants carry the king] of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, 8 all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night".

He arrives on his chariot-chair with sixty groomsmen beside. Solomon's royal litter, the couch upon which he was carried by his servants. This is a royal, full-dress military wedding. These are the navy seals or green berets of Solomon's army.

"The king was taking no chances with the safety of his bride. If bandits would appear at night and terrorize the bride, the soldiers were ready for them. The lesson is valid today for a would-be husband. He should give proper thought and planning to protect his bride. One form this takes is providing economic security for her."³

Ephesians 5:25-29, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one

³Ibid.

ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church”.

The word cherish means “to warm with body heat”. It has the idea of not leaving the body vulnerable. A man is to protect his wife. What does Paul mean about nourishing and cherishing his own body? Well, when your body is vulnerable you cherish it. When you hit your thumb with the hammer you carefully protect it and shelter it. You make sure no one and nothing can do it any more injury.

God is jealous for his people. He is our shelter and our shield and our high tower. Christ cherishes His Church. Do you realize what Christ has done for us?

He bore the wrath of God for us! He took the shame of our sin upon us! He intercedes for us. He guides us. He says, “I will never leave you or forsake you”. We abide under the shelter of His wings. We can say “I am His and He is mine!”

A VOW OF PROVISION

Verses 9-10, “King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. 10 He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.”

The song even describes the chair which is the finest quality for this occasion, even inlaid with love. The women of the court have lovingly contributed to this day. Everyone shared the joy.

Purple cloth was made using a pigment from the murex shellfish; it was even rarer than silver and gold.

A man must be ready and willing to provide for his wife. It is his responsibility, not hers. Lack of money is one of the greatest causes of tension in life, and it certainly is true in marriage.

In the New Testament, husbands are called to lay down their life for their bride and to nourish, or provide for them (Ephesians 5:29).

He is our Shepherd. Psalm 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” You can see how Christ is the believer’s provider.

Psalm 84:11, “No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.” Christ will nourish His Bride. He will provide for her in every way. He cares for her.

1 Timothy 5:8, “if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

VOWS ARE GIVEN AFTER PARENTAL PERMISSION IS GRANTED

The wedding ceremony symbolizes the permission & blessing of the parents (vs. 11). Verse 11, “Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.”

Solomon’s mother crowned him with the wedding crown that a groom wore in those days, usually a laurel crown of leaves. It was a sign of her approval that he was marrying a woman she valued and would love as a daughter. It is also a sign to the general public that he would be leaving his parents’ home and making a home of his own.

For centuries upon centuries, crowning was a part of marriage ceremonies. Today, the bride is crowned with her veil. The bride even in ancient times would be crowned with a garland of flowers by her father.

All of this symbolizes the parent’s permission and blessing. Today, usually the wedding ceremony begins with the

minister asking, “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” The father normally gives permission by saying, “Her mother and I do”.

1 Corinthians 7 demonstrates the importance of the father’s permission. It’s clear in the NKJV.

A bride must have her father’s permission. 1 Corinthians 7:36, “But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.”

If a young lady has come to physical maturity and has the desire to marry, and she has such a desire that it requires her to be married, the father should take serious consideration of that and permit marriage.

Verses 37-38, “Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.” Why was this such a big deal? Why would Paul have to remind the fathers that they were not “sinning” when giving their daughter in marriage? The context is that some father’s in this church had dedicated their daughters to the Lord’s service as single people. At the time some of the girls came to physical maturity and wanted to be married. Paul said, you are not sinning if you dedicated your daughters and they want marriage. Let them marry. The father should consider the daughter’s desire for marriage, and if the young man is godly, the father should consider the daughter’s desires.

The giving of the bride is the father’s prerogative. Verse 38, “he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better”. If the daughter has no necessity of getting married, the father still has the preroga-

tive to encourage her in marriage or to encourage her to remain single. It's fine if the father encourages his daughter or son in marriage, but it is even better if parents encourage singleness if they can bare it. Matthew 19:12, "...there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" (ESV).

A wedding that is approved by the parents is one that God blesses!!

A VOW OF PREPARATION

Finally, the wedding ceremony symbolizes the great preparation and joy that God gives a couple who diligently give their marriage to Him (vs. 11b).

Verse 11b, "...on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart." Do it right and you will have gladness of heart. Do it wrong and you will have questions.

CONCLUSION

If you have any question about entering into marriage, wait! Don't go forward until you have all the green lights. Make engagement a time of further preparation. A wedding designed by God is one truly to rejoice in!

SIX | SONG 4:1-5:1

God's plan for intimacy

Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil.

SONG 4:1

Hebrews 13:4 summarizes the message in Song of Solomon chapter 4 when the writer says this: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be [kept] undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

God has a plan for intimacy. Very simple it is this: it is only beautiful in marriage. Intimacy outside of marriage is ugly and monstrous. Within marriage it is the most exalted form of human love. Outside of marriage it is taking something beautiful and dragging it through the mud. It is taking a beautiful face and scarring it up! It is taking the sacred and spitting on it. Marital intimacy is beautiful in God's sight.

God designed marital intimacy

God designed intimacy to be between one man and one woman in a monogamous relationship for the entirety of life. God made marital intimacy to be pure and undefiled and holy. It is designed by God. It is the most exalted human love that there is.

Marital intimacy is a picture

But please understand this, both married and single people. It pales in comparison to the love that we have in Christ. The love of Christ is exalted far above all human love. Marital love and intimacy is a faint picture of the powerful love that we have in and through Jesus Christ.

My point today is that if you are married, you need to keep the marriage bed pure and undefiled. That's done through listening to each other, forgiving each other, and keeping a very close relationship with one another. That's on the human level.

This chapter is not simply about marital love. I have much to say about your walk with God today. And whether you are married or single, I want you to understand the exalted love that God has for you if you are in Christ.

God has used marital love to be a beautiful picture of His love for the church. He has made the marriage bed pure, undefiled, and holy.

So many do not have a clue how sacred marital love is, and they have become sexually immoral. Our society is saturated with sexual immorality. Intimacy is reserved for marriage alone.

Let me try to explain how powerful physical love is and how it should be carefully guarded and protected. I want to do this by sharing a little parable I once heard by a pastor by the name of Tom Nelson.

Parable of the Crocodile

Once upon a time there was a man that went to live among the people a great River. And he sat by to eat with these people. Then he noticed out of the corner of his eye

was a 1700 pound crocodile. As the crocodile approached the table, the man yelled out: “There’s a crocodile coming at us!” As he did that a woman shushed him and said, “We don’t talk about crocodiles—it’s impolite.”

If you walked around town, you could see many people who were torn up by these crocodiles. Some wounds were fresh. Others were scarred over and over again. But there were no signs to warn the people of crocodiles. And no one wanted to talk about it. It was something they all just lived with.

That’s how many churches deal with intimacy. Most young people learn about God’s gift of marital intimacy on the playground and on the streets, and so he does. You people see it in magazines and hear about it through stand up comedy.

But he never really understands God’s gift of intimacy is only beautiful in marriage. If it is hatched before marriage, it is monstrous and destructive. He never hears God’s perspective on it. Then when the kid’s about 14 or 15 a crocodile comes out of the river and puts a permanent scar on that young person. They have the most powerful overcoming urge that comes upon them, and it is something that can cause untold pain and heartache and tears with long lasting wounds and unhealed marks. And the young person gets married, but he’s never talked about it. He’s learned to sweep it under the rug in the home and in the church. He’s not to talk about it.

But all of the sudden he gets married and the problem is glaring in neon lights every day. And if this is not talked about, you can have singles and married people who go through years of silent pain and anxiety and maybe even anger and bitterness and frustration. It can become the bar of leverage that separates and sears couples or makes a single

person who's messed up think they could never enter into marriage.

We are talking about God's plan for intimacy today. It is reserved for marriage. But some of you—single and married people need to know that God can cleanse every wound of sin. He can purify all of us today. We need to come to the healing fountain of Jesus' blood. No matter what has happened to you in your life, understand, where sin abounds and heart ache and pain because of sin abounds, grace much more abounds!

God gives us an entire chapter of His Word to tell us how beautiful marital love is, and why marital intimacy is reserved for marriage.

God's gift of intimacy can be a great blessing to married people, but He will judge and is judging people every day for defiling it. Internet pornography and the steamy lust of many television commercials is destroying marriages and keeping people from eternal life.

Marital intimacy is not something to play with. It is something to guard and reserve for the right time! It is designed by God, and it is special.

MARITAL LOVE IS PURE AND ENCOURAGED BY GOD!

Only in marriage, a man is encouraged by God to look upon the beauty of his bride. Although there may be many beautiful women in the world; in marriage the husband has vowed to take an interest in her womanly beauty in particular. It is important that the husband regularly praises his wife's beauty. We see this here at the Honeymoon for Solomon and his Shulammitte bride.

Married men should admire their wives.

Solomon looks upon his bride behind her veil (vs. 3b), and says to her in verse 1a, “<HE> Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!” The Honeymoon begins! They have just been married, and he is delighted with her. He tells her of her beauty!

As you read this passage, you are going to find how strange Solomon’s comparisons are for his bride. The imagery which Solomon uses in praising his Shulammitte bride are drawn from a setting she would have been familiar with: the green pastures of a shepherdess. And so though Solomon is a king, and he knows of gold and silver and palaces, he does not use that language. He uses her language—that of doves, goats, sheep, pomegranates, fawns, gazelles, mountains, hills. Solomon’s bride, was raised in the country, and she would have so appreciated these images.¹

Men, you need to speak in words your wife will appreciate. You need to work on your communication with her. She needs to know she is loved! This praise and admiration of his wife would bring a sense of peace and security.

Married men, is your wife secure in your marriage? Do you speak to her with words of gentleness and love?

Solomon admires his new bride’s eyes. Verse 1b, “Your eyes are doves behind your veil.” The dove represents a bird that usually likes to hide away in rocky places where it remain safe. But in a beautiful picture here, the young bride is peeking out from behind the veil, which covers part of her face. Solomon can see her eyes as she senses that she is now safe with her beloved on their wedding day! The bride feels safe and peaceful in the presence of her husband. And so it is

¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:1018). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

with the church. We know that there is safety in Christ! There is no condemnation!

Solomon admires his new bride's hair. Verse 1c, "Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead." This hardly sounds like a complement! Seen from a distance the dark hair of Palestinian goats was beautiful in the sunset as a flock was descending from the mountains. The dark hair of Solomon's bride had the same beautiful quality.

Solomon admires his new bride's teeth. Verse 2, "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young." It was rare to have all your teeth in the ancient world! And not only did this girl have all her teeth, they were very well aligned, like "bear twins".

It seems that this bride had a sweet smile on her face and she felt happy being married to the king! O the joy that the church has in Christ.

Solomon admires his new bride's lips. Verse 3a, "Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely."

Solomon admires his new bride's cheeks. Verse 3b, "Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil." All of this is while she is still behind her veil. Perhaps the vows have been made but the honey moon has hardly begun. Yet he is admiring her as if for the first time.

Let me say a word about purity and how preserving yourself is worth the wait! Solomon it seems has a clear conscience. He has preserved himself for marriage, and now that he has vowed his love to this girl he is free to look upon her and admire her.

This is not a cheap glance of lust, but a deep gaze of love, because Solomon is not in this for some quick thrill, but he has now pledged his life to this girl! And now he admires her behind her veil.

Solomon admires his new bride's neck. Verse 4, "Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors." Again, this doesn't sound like a complement, but it surely is. Upon David's tower there in Jerusalem would have hung thousands of shields of those warriors who had fought for him. They were a sign of allegiance and love.

Solomon was admiring the jewelry on his bride's neck, and expressing his undying loyalty to her to protect and love her all the days of his life.

Married men, you need to know that marriage is **HARD WORK**. You need to constantly make sure that your wife feels safe in your marriage.

Solomon admires his new bride's form. Verse 5, "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies." This is shockingly intimate to us, but the Scripture is making at least two points here:

First, marital love is pure and holy and good within the bounds of marriage. It was before the fall that man and woman were "naked and unashamed". So it is in marital love. There is no shame in marital love.

Outside of marriage, if a man gazes upon a woman, it is sin. He is taking that which is precious and putting graffiti on it. He is defacing it. But within marriage, God says, yes! I made this for you. It is reserved for this! It is godly and holy for the groom to the beauty of his wife.

Husbands should regularly admire and compliment their wives. This is part of the mystery of marriage. There is a time and a place that God allows a man to gaze upon a woman and desire her. That time is any time after the wedding ceremony—after the covenant vows of marriage have been given.

Second, this woman now belongs to this man, and this man now belongs to this woman. More will be said later. Suffice it to say that this is not lust—this man has pledged his life to this woman. This is holy and godly love with God's approval.

Let me say that this love is so sacred we dare not say any more than the Bible says. We dare not cheapen it!!

Marital love is so strong and powerful. It is so sacred and holy. And it is this way because there is a deeper meaning to all this. Married people are a living picture of Christ and the church.

Married people are a picture of Christ and the Church

The admiration of the married man for his wife is a picture of Christ's love and admiration for His bride. The love between a married couple is the highest human love there is. But Christ's love for His church is infinitely more exalted than the greatest human love.

We read in Song of Solomon 8:6, "...love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD."

This love is so strong, it is the very flame of the LORD! A Christian is spotless and lovely in the eyes of Christ. Christ tells us, "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you" (vs. 7). The One who has saved you has made you this way. He has declared you to be like this. He shed his blood for you.

If you are here as a believer and you are struggling against sin, and your heart's desire is to please Jesus Christ, but you look in the mirror and you see all the ways you come short and all your failings and all your blemishes, you need

to know this: “where sin abounds grace much more abounds” (Romans 5:20).

When Christ looks at you he sees no blemish because He Himself has put away your blemishes with His own scars—His own wounds, with the wrath of God that He took on that cross in your place. You are all together lovely in His sight! You are “justified by faith apart from works of the law”.² You are “cleansed with the washing of water by the word”.³ You are “accepted in the Beloved One”.⁴

God treasures you in Christ. He has reserved a universe that He has not yet even created. He wants to freely and “graciously give us all things.”⁵ We are called “the apple of his eye”.⁶

If you are in Christ, if you have “married” Him, then you are loved with an infinite eternal love. Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you”. God is faithful to us because of His love for us, not because of our love for Him.

Yet we often struggle with the idea that God loves us. We feel that we haven’t done as much as others, so God must love us less. God must love Tyndale and the martyrs and the missionaries and Paul more than me! Listen, the love of God is not a ladder to climb. There is not a love scale that God measures us by. That’s all our American mentality. God loves for us is not dependant upon us!

His love for you is based on His work for you, not your work for Him.

You are precious to Him because of Christ’s work. You cannot do anything to make him love you less. You cannot

² Romans 3:28

³ Ephesians 5:26

⁴ Ephesians 1:6

⁵ Romans 8:32

⁶ Psalm 17:8

do anything to make him love you more. You didn't form the righteousness that makes you lovely. Jesus paid it all. Your sin is gone, and Jesus' lovely righteousness make you lovely.

He loves you because you are in Christ. You don't deserve this love. If you plant 1000 churches you still will not deserve this love. You are loved because you are God's child. He's made you into His own likeness in Christ. He loves you because you are now His son or His daughter.

There is no flaw in you. You are sinless and perfect before His almighty holy throne in Christ. Rejoice in His love for you. You are altogether lovely in His sight!

MARITAL LOVE PROTECTS US FROM THE DANGEROUS DEFILEMENT OF THE WORLD

In marriage, a man is encouraged to often Retreat with his Bride. Listen to Solomon's invitation to his new bride in verses 6-8a, " Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. 7 You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. 8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon."

Solomon wants to retreat with his bride. He wants to retreat with the one he loves. It's a refuge from the dangers and difficulties of life.

Marriage is a Refuge

God has designed marriage to be a place of refuge. As husbands, it is our responsibility to make our home a place of love and security and safety for our wife. She is vulnerable and we need to make a place that is safe and protected. A man should make his home a place of protection and safety.

He should find his home and his wife a retreat from the world.

Christ says to His church—come away from all your busyness and your crowded life and your overburdened thoughts and come away with me! Find rest in Me!

We often think we just need to work harder to be holy. And we crowd our schedule. We need to be alone with Christ. We need the quiet rest available in Christ.

We often go about trying to be successful in ministry or in life or at work. That's utterly fleshly and wrong-headed. It's turned upside down. Listen to me on this: if you will make it your goal to commune with God and make that be the main work of your day, everything else will fall in place.

Remember the words of David. He did not seek to accomplish great things—instead he sought God's face—look at David's words in Psalm 131:1-2, "my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me".

We must not go about setting great things before us. We must set our great God before our eyes.

In marriage, we come down from dangerous places to the place of God's protection. Strong desires outside of marriage easily turn into lust, and lust will kill your spiritual life! So we hear the groom, King Solomon saying to his Jewish bride...

Verse 8, "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards."

Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be [kept] undefiled, for God will

judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” Marriage protects us from the defilement of lust and fornication. God has given all of us a legitimate way allow our passions to burn.

1 Corinthians 7:9—Paul says if a believer “cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.” The burning of these passions outside of marriage is illegitimate, sinful and dangerous.

Look at how King Solomon describes the dangers. He says in verse 8, “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.”

The Lebanon mountains are a very high and dangerous mountain range which includes the peaks of Amana, Senir and Hermon mountains. There are dangers there such as lions and leopards that will tear you apart! There are hideouts where the wild animals live!

A good marriage will keep you from the misery of this world. Proverbs 5:15 tells us, “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.”

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:5, “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Fill your cup at home. Don't fill it through lustful thoughts. Don't fill it through other friendships. Don't fill it by working longer hours and ignoring problems. Come down from the dangerous mountains and fill your cup at home!

This is not the voice of a drill sergeant or a task master. This is the voice of one who deeply loves you saying, “Stay away from those mountains. Come to the place of safety.” It is a father calling a child away from the edge of a cliff. It is a

lover calling his love away from lust that can destroy and rape and pillage and do harm that cannot be undone.

There are young people who feel they can be alone together. They may be very godly. But even the godliest people cannot overcome love. "Love is strong as death." You will not overpower death when it comes. Neither can you overpower this kind of love. It is powerful!

That is why you must never be alone with someone of the opposite gender unless you are married to them. The lions and the leopards of lust will eat you alive. You cannot overcome it!

Let me warn you that Paul did not say try youthful lusts or test them or play with them. He said, "flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

1 Thessalonians 4:1-6, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother [or sister] in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you."

Christ says, "Depart from the peak of Amana" (SS 4:8). Some of you need to cut your internet and your cable. It's killing your spiritual life. If you are regenerate, you know you cannot mock the Holy Spirit. He's convicting you, telling you what to do, and you need to do it. If you have no conviction,

but only excuses, you need to “examine yourself to see whether you be in the faith”.

Marriage is a Place of Satisfying Joy

Marriage is a place of satisfying joy in a dangerous and difficult world. Christians marriage can be and ought to be a very wonderful place of joy and refuge for the married people in our congregation. It's not easy. You must have a sufficient amount of love and respect.

The lead must begin with the man. There love must be a self-sacrificing effort on the part of the man (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Peter 3:7). It is the man in Scripture that must take the lead.

It is the man who communicates in this love poem. Verse 9, “You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.” How joyful it is for young newlyweds to be captivated with each other. The word “captivate” here could be literally translated, “to make the heart beat faster” (as in the NASB). Listen just a glance from me, and I can make Jill's heart beat faster.

We need to make sure our marriage is a place of joy and sweetness. We should learn to enjoy spending time together.

Marriage Points to True Joy in Christ

And of course, this is a picture of our communion with God. Just as my heart is captivated by Jill's glance, so God's heart is captivated with our glance to heaven in prayer.

God's Heart Beats Faster

Consider the motivation for communing with God. And just a glance to heaven, and we make God's heart beat faster. God is pleased when you pray—when we commune with Him.

He tells us in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Look again at verse 9b at what Solomon is captivated by, "you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace."

Where did the bride get a necklace? She gets it from her lover. It is just like when Rebekah met Isaac. She was not embarrassed. Because Isaac had already given her something to wear. He had given her "jewelry of silver and of gold, and [costly] garments".

Consider God's joy in communing with you! Verse 10, "How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!" Solomon delights in his bride. Her beauty overwhelms him. Her love is intoxicating. Her fragrance is more valuable to him than the most expensive spices. This woman is supremely valued.

Get this saints, God is overcome with joy at how beautiful you are to Him. This is not a man centered statement, because it is the work of His beloved Son that makes you beautiful. God has great joy in communing with you and delights in your love to Him. It is better than wine or than perfume. This is not just "nice". This is exalted!

God Doesn't Just Tolerate You

Listen God does not just tolerate you. He welcomes you. He loves you. When I see my children, especially when they are so little and vulnerable my heart just leaps for joy. I walk into the door of my home, and my kids run to me and shout Daddy! They know I delight in them. I deeply delight and rejoice in them.

In that way, God rejoices in you. His banner over you is love. You are more precious to Him than all the gold or silver. You are the apple of His eye. You are precious.

Marriage is a Sweet Oasis

Marriage is a place where words are said that can be said to no one else. Words are said that refresh the soul, like an oasis. Verse 11, "Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon."

You don't just say these words to anyone. You don't kiss just anyone. At least I hope you don't. There are certain words we don't say to anyone of the opposite gender until we marry them!

Solomon describes this woman's lips and voice like honey and milk. There is a fullness and a happiness and a joy in the sweet words of lovers.

Isn't it amazing how young lovers, if they are away from each other can spend hours and hours on the phone with one another!

Do Your Prayers Drip with Nectar?

But let's consider this in our communion to Christ. When you pray, do your lips drip nectar, or are your prayers as dry and dead as ever?

How much effort have you made to spent time with God? Do you hear His voice? Does He hear your voice? Have you gotten down on your knees and asked God to speak to you? Are you willing to bombard the gates of heaven until he that sweetness returns to your heart and you have returned to your first love?

MARITAL LOVE IS TO BE PRESERVED UNTIL AFTER THE VOWS ARE GIVEN

The husband should be able to boast in his bride's virginity. Solomon is very aware that his bride has kept herself pure.

Verse 12, "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. 13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices— 15 a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon."

See what deep respect King Solomon has for his new bride. He is in awe of her purity. Again, we dare not go beyond what Scripture says. Marital love is a delightful garden. Before supermarkets, people could only dream of these kinds of gardens that seemed to have every kind of delightful food and spice imaginable. The picture is joy and fullness. You say, what does all that mean?

It speaks of that which is sacred and reserved by God to be delightful to those who wait.

It also speaks of that which is fruitful. If you follow God's design for purity and marriage, you will be fruitful in life! You will be blessed by God!

In times of greatest fruitfulness I have exerted often less, much less effort. In seeking God in being united with our head, in being united with the vine, fruit just comes natural. You don't see apple trees out there doing calisthenics.

Guidelines for Guarding Your Virginity

Be chaste, reserve yourself for Christ. Let's apply this to our walk with Christ. Saints, we are to keep ourselves pure and reserved for Christ. You say, "I don't have time to pray". It's because you are spending time with another lover. It may be your job. It may be the internet. It may be sports. It may be a hobby. Whatever is stealing your time from Christ may very well be adultery. Christ wants your best time.

Bear fruit. Christ wants you to cultivate a garden that will bear fruit. We see a lot of fruit in this garden of love. And there is great fruit in a happy marriage. There's enough fruit to sustain you in the hard times. There is enough fruit to sustain generations in godliness. Christ says that He is the vine, we are the branches (John 15). Any branch that abides in Him will bear fruit!

Solomon boasted in his new wife's obedience to God in guarding her purity. Great joy and years of delight come from obeying God. God can and does forgive. He does cleanse. But sin always leaves scars. Some of those scars will not be removed until Jesus comes again.

Keep intimacy in marriage alone. Your body is reserved for your spouse, and for no one else. A virgin woman is to preserve herself for her husband alone. The virgin man as well is to preserve himself for his wife alone. This is the plan of God. All this time, she has said, "Do not awaken love until it pleases" (2:7; 3:5). Now she boldly says in verse 16, "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon

my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.”

Guidelines Regarding Modest Clothing

Listen to me unmarried ladies. Are you a garden locked, preserving yourself for that person to whom God would give you?

I'm certainly talking about your purity. Don't prostitute yourself before your wedding day. If you have done that, seek God with deep remorse, and He will cleanse you and purify and restore you.

I'm talking to all ladies now. So many young ladies think they haven't committed immorality because they haven't had intercourse. Or if you are married, you believe you are faithful to your husband, and you have.

But consider this. You are guilty if you dress in such a way that you frame your body and cause a man to lust. You need to wear loose clothing. It is so sad that today, there are plunging necklines and clothes so tight they leave not room for the imagination. If you have to spray paint your clothes on, God hates what you are wearing. Ladies, don't dress to strut your stuff. That's what prostitutes do. The Bible tells ladies how to dress, and it says that they should be "shame-faced" and "modest". There should be plenty of fabric to your clothing.

Ladies, listen to me. I have no business seeing you because you are not mine and I am not yours. No one has any business seeing you except the one to whom you will belong one day. The most beautiful, the most precious of all women is the one who considers herself to be what? A garden sealed up, a spring sealed up, covered.

Don't parade yourself whether you be male or female. Display what is beautiful in God's sight. Be a fountain sealed

up. And only display yourself to your spouse in the privacy of the marriage bed where you can be “naked and unashamed”. If you show the form of nakedness and do not cover yourself properly, you should be ashamed.

Let me say this. Guard your heart and guard your body for marriage. Flee youthful lusts. Be a fountain sealed. Let the time that you say “Awake” be your wedding night.

GOD IS VERY PLEASED WHEN WE FOLLOW HIS DESIGN FOR INTIMACY

Now here is something very important. This is a king. She has made a garden for a king. And this isn't just any king. I mean this king has thousands of people making gardens for him. Do you realize that? He has employed thousands upon thousands of people to prepare the gardens in his palace. What on earth does he need with a little puny garden from a little girl? Do you think King Solomon cares about this garden she's made for him?

He may have 30,000 gardeners working on a garden. He's the king. But the one that he loves the most is the garden that his wife has cultivated.

Verse 1 of chapter 5, “ <HE> I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk.”

There was some myrrh and spice that she had planted. There was honey and grapes and wine and milk. It wasn't impressive, but because of love, and because he knew it was her best and it was done out of pure love, this would have been the greatest give he could have received from his new bride!

King Solomon is not just putting up with this garden. He is relishing it. Why? Because it came from the one he loves.

Think about the stick man your child drew for you. I have this picture of my daughter Katie and I and it hangs in my office. She drew it when she was six or seven. It's not the MonaLisa, but it is more precious to me than any of the great masters' paintings. Why? Because my daughter drew a picture of her and her dad together. There's a smile on both our faces.

In the same way, I want to challenge you to lift up your voice to God and it may seem pitiful to you, but know that He loves your prayers. He loves your effort. Because He loves you.

Let me give you an application to married people. You give yourself to your spouse. Serve each other. Love each other. Marriage is all about giving, not getting. Find out the needs of your spouse. There are many. There are emotional, physical, social, and spiritual needs. Meet each others needs the best you can.

You might say, I have nothing more left to give. Men, you love your wife. You lay your life down. You never give up! You sacrifice your life for your wife. And if you have nothing left to give, then realize God has an infinite supply of grace. Go to Him and ask for all the grace you need, and He will give it to you.

There are ladies, and you say, I can't give any more. Yes there are great limits on what we can give. But you're going to the wrong source. Go to God. He has an infinite supply of grace.

Verse 1b, "OTHERS-possibly God Almighty> Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!"

There is a place where there is total freedom in marital love. It is the marriage bed. Keep it undefiled and you will be blessed. Enjoy it, it's a gift from God. Defile it, and God will

remove His blessing. You'll experience the misery and tyranny of the flesh if you give into it.

What should I do if I have messed up?

God didn't come to the earth to save the righteous. There's no one who hasn't messed up in one way or another.

There is victory. I'll give you the secret. It is through prayer. It is through radical amputation. It is through careful accountability and transparency. If you don't want to give up all for Christ and for victory then don't complain about your misery. There is victory in Jesus!!

CONCLUSION

If you are single reserve those passions for marriage. If you are married, delight in your spouse. Whether you are single or married, rejoice in your walk with Christ.

If you are married, remember your marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. And we say with the apostle in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be [kept] undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

May God guard us, both married and single people, to follow His perfect design for passion and intimacy. It is reserved for marriage alone!

SEVEN | SONG 5:2-6:13

the sanctifying power of conflict in marriage

*I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and
gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but
found him not*

SONG 5:6

The union of two sinners in marriage can be a revealing experience. Often a godly young man and woman both think they are progressing spiritually and growing in Christ. He's found his Proverbs 31 woman. She's found her pious prince charming. They both think so highly of each other. On the honey moon while the couple is experiencing the novelty of marriage, things are going well. Then the two sinners begin life together with all the pressures and hurts and even cruelties that life brings.

Reality sets in. Insecurities and selfishness begin to rise to the surface here and there. The sparkle begins to fade. The shine and superficial varnish and newness of immature love wear away, and conflict begins. The ugly reality that you are married to a selfish sinner hits you. The person you married is far from perfect. And because you love that person and marriage requires you to be vulnerable to that person, you

find that the joy your spouse can give as well as the pain they can cause you is more any other relationship in your life.

Is there a purpose for marital conflict? Marriage is one of God's tools for making us like Jesus. Husbands are told in Ephesians 5:25: "love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word..." He finishes in verse 28 by saying, "In the same way husbands should love their wives..."

Marital conflict is a way that God shows us that we are not as far along in our sanctification as we thought we were. Marriage is made to sanctify you. What do you do when you are hurt? How do you react when you feel cut by the one you love? Are you really Christlike? What should I do when I have a serious disagreement with my spouse?

I want to share with you a message that I hope will help you make the most of your marriage when you feel hurt. I want to show you how not to waste marital conflict. Now this is also for single people too, because you too will be hurt in life. This is a message in how you can respond to conflict instead of being controlled by negative emotions. First we need to understand the root and cause of conflict by sinners.

THE ROOT OF CONFLICT: SELFISHNESS

James 4:1, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" We are all by nature selfish. Our entire society is geared toward selfishness. Have it your way. Comfort is the goal. You are fundamentally selfish. The only question is to what degree. Only through the power of Christ in us can we lay down our lives and be selfless and serve as He served.

Through the grace of Christ we can move from selfishness to servanthood.

We are selfish sinners by nature and nurture, by nature and by choice. Our entire society encourages selfishness. We've all graduated from ME University with a Master's Degree in Selfishness. The highest goal that our culture promotes is to make enough money so that everybody else serves you. The utopia and goal of living is to make it to Paradise, which would be a place where the world revolves around me and my comfort.

Selfish people are terrible friends, terrible spouses, inconsistent Christians, terrible parents, and they leave a terrible legacy.

This leads us to the Song of Solomon 5. The honeymoon is over. Reality is setting in. Pressures weigh on both Solomon and his new princess. You know what's happening. The fantasy world of that we created in our mind about ourselves and our spouse now has some serious cracks in it. We have high expectations for our spouse to serve us, to love us, to make us happy. They fail. They might even sin against you. Mostly there are a lot of misunderstandings. What do you do?

Let's check out what Solomon does. In verse 2, Solomon arrives home. He does not have a nine to five job. He has a lifestyle job. He's king. In this time period it was common for husbands and wives to have separate bedrooms. Solomon gets home to his palace and he wants to spend time with his wife. It's late at night. Her door is locked. She is half asleep, tired, and in the twilight of her mind can kind of hear her beloved husband knocking.

Verse 2a, "<SHE> I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking..." She had given up on Solomon coming home at a reasonable hour, and so she was

sacked out and sleeping! Of course being a loving husband, he would want his new bride to get plenty of beauty sleep. It would be inconsiderate to bother her at this hour of the night.

But apparently Solomon missed his wife and needed to be near her. It's very late at night, when there is dew on the ground—certainly after midnight. He's worked long hours ruling the kingdom. He wants to enjoy the company of his wife. She is his sanctuary. And he gives his four best lines. Verse 2b, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

Like most men, Solomon was working in the hard, cruel and cold world and he wanted to come home to some tenderness and appreciation at the end of his difficult day.

In verse 3, the peasant princess starts making some very lame excuses: "I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?"

What a bunch of lame excuses. She's not descent. She doesn't want to dirty her feet. Listen, she's in a palace, not in a dirt floored shack! She wants him to know she is in control. She's not going to give way to his every whim. After all she's now a princess! She may feel a bit wronged and neglected since Solomon did not come home at a descent hour. These feelings are all very common in marriage. Both feel neglected.

And so the conflict begins! What is the root of the conflict? Your selfish, evil, unloving heart. We all think the world should revolve around my needs. But a person who truly has godly love will deny their own needs to look after the needs of the spouse.

Conflict always begins when one person is selfish and puts their needs above the other. Be careful here. The deci-

sions we make have consequences. We are not only responsible for our actions, but we are responsible for our attitudes and our words and even our tone of voice and how we speak to our spouse. So much will get misunderstood!

THE RESPONSE TO CONFLICT: REJECTION AND REMORSE

Rejection

Verse 4-6a, “My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. 5 I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. 6 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone.”

A man and a woman speak radically different languages. Verse 5a is very telling. The wife observes, “I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.” The husband wanted to express his love to his wife with closeness. Myrrh is a beautiful fragrance used in the Temple. His intention was to express love, affection, and security for his wife.

The wife spoke a different language. She thought he should express his love by respecting her need for sleep! But it seems here that the wife changes her mind, and decides to let her beloved husband in. ““My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me” (vs. 4). But it is too late. Verse 6, “I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone.”

The man wanted to express his love, and all he got were excuses. “I’m already in bed! I’m sleeping. I don’t want to get my feet dirty”. The husband feels disrespected. He feels dishonored. He feels shot down.

The wife feels unloved because she thinks, “If he really loves me, he’ll want me to sleep.” What is the problem here? Husbands and wives speak different languages.

Until you realize this, and you learn to communicate and actually help your spouse to understand you, then you are going to be in for a lot of pain, offense, hurt, misunderstanding, and confusion.

According to 1 Peter 3:7, it is the husband’s responsibility to learn the wife’s language first. “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Solomon thought his new wife didn’t care. Mrs. Solomon thought Solomon didn’t care that she get her sleep. Both are hurt. So the king turns and leaves. Mrs. Solomon says, “my beloved had turned and gone” (vs. 6).

Often newly married couples have not learned a planned response but a spontaneous negative reaction to the hurt. It is often true in a marriage that a man will at first not want to fight with his wife. He will give up. Why? Because he knows he cannot win. If he ends up winning, he loses. If he ends up losing, he loses. So a man tends to want to escape. He will just not say anything and clam up. He will give the silent treatment. He’s been shot down; he’s hurt and he wants to run!

It seems that Solomon is frustrated here. He leaves, but he leaves a calling card on the door! Song of Solomon 5:5, the wife says: “I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.”

And now the conflict carries on. It seems this next section is a dream. She doses off and has a kind of nightmarish sequence. Conflict is such that it brings unrest in the marriage and in LIFE itself. When things are going great in marriage, everything is great. When marriage is going bad, everything is really, really bad.

Remorse

Solomon's bride feels the separation of conflict. Verse 6b, "My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer."

Her soul failed. This is a very strong Hebrew phrase. Her heart burned with remorse or dropped with regret and pain is the idea. A paraphrase was, "I nearly died when I found out he had gone".

So we see that the new Queen of Israel has a great wave of regret overcome her. I believe this regret has godly repentance at the foundation. We can always trust God to shepherd our spouse. He can show us when we sin and the pathway to repentance. Look at the good Queen's regret and remorse for her selfishness.

Conflict late at night is BAD!! Be careful not to get into difficult or intense discussion very late at night. That's the time when many marital conflicts begin. Our burdens are heavier, our strength is less, and we can often feel discouraged or weak at the end of a day.

A child of God cannot live comfortably in sin . We don't know how much time passed, but eventually if a person is walking with the Lord, they will begin to feel regret and remorse for selfish behavior. A child of God cannot live comfortably in sin. Like righteous Lot of old, sin vexes our soul from day to day.

Verse 6b, “My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.”

Look at some consequences for handling conflict in a selfish way (vs. 7).

Solomon’s leaving makes the new bride feel unbelievably insecure. We will find the man meant nothing by it, but a woman’s security is messed with, and she is beside herself. The next verse may refer to a dream that Solomon’s princess had. There is debate, but some awful things happen. She is beside herself. Either in reality or in her dream she goes looking for him.

When a man leaves, though he may just need to “take a walk” and “calm down”, but woman is prone to feel abandoned. We may just need some time alone, but we may be communicating abandonment.

The dream of Solomon’s bride reveals the toll that this conflict is having on her.

Verse 7, “The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls”.

So she has a nightmare where she gets no help finding her beloved. She’s half dressed so she looks like a woman of the night. She’s got the veil, that makes her look like a prostitute. At this hour all respectable women are in their own beds sleeping. The elders of the city punish her and beat her. They seem to mistake her for a prostitute and give her some kind of punishment.

Men can often get over conflict fairly easily and quickly, but we have to remember that our wife is a “weaker vessel”, literally a “fragile vase”, and though conflict can be forgiven by the wife immediately, she may struggle with insecurity

until trust is rebuilt by the husband. This can last for months or years if the husband isn't careful.

So we see the root of conflict is selfishness. I want my way. We look at marriage is what we can get out of it. How can I change my spouse to my likings? That attitude will always bring with it contention and conflict! Pride and selfishness bring great pain in marriage. Conflicts may have come to some of you this morning, and you are being ripped apart.

THE REMEDY FOR CONFLICT (SONG 5:8-6:13).

We are not called to live according to our feelings, but to live according to the Word of God. The key in conflict is to RESPOND according to your commitment to Christ, don't REACT according to your flesh.

Respond with Respect (vs. 8-17).

The newlywed wife in our story wakes up from her dream, and what do you think she does? Does she hold a grudge? No, she genuinely shows respect to her husband.

It seems she wakes up from this dream and talks to her female friends and counselors. Verse 8, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love."

The friends respond, verse 9, "<FRIENDS> What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?" In other words, what's so great about your beloved? Come on, gossip! Tell us the bad nitty gritty.

She could have disrespected him, but her heart was HUMBLE. She starts thinking about him in a godly way.

When you are hurt, you must discipline your mind to think on that which is true and good in your spouse (vs. 10-17).

She resists the temptation to gossip with her friends, and instead esteems her husband's character.

She esteems his character (vs. 10-13). She respects him above ten thousand. Verse 10, “ <SHE> My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.”

He's dependable. Verse 11a, “His head is the finest gold;

He's full of life. Verse 11b, “his locks are wavy, black as a raven.”

He's trustworthy. Verse 12, “His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool.

He's tender. Verse 13, “His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh.

She esteems his strength and ability to work (vs. 14-16). Verses 14-16, “His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. 15 His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. 16 His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable”.

She cherishes his friendship (vs. 17). Verse 17, “This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” “My friend” is a very common word for a companion without sexual connotation. Friendship is far deeper than the superficial excitement of physical love. That's a bonus in marriage, but she reveals that she is a godly woman who has a deep friendship with her husband.

Even if your husband does not know Christ, you are to respond in respect to your husband. Peter calls wives to be

respectful even to those who are being disobedient to God's Word. The key in conflict is to RESPOND, don't REACT.

1 Peter 3:1-2, "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct".

Wives can go about winning battles by attacking, criticizing, or lecturing husbands who are not doing right according to the Scripture. Peter basically says, don't be manipulative. Respect him. Through your quiet and chaste life you may win him.

Your flesh is going to fear that if you let go of the control and manipulation, you will not change your husband. And that is right. It is not your place to change your husband. You need to ask God to change you, and you pray for God to help you to be a godly wife and through your prayers, there is much more possibility that your husband will change through God working in his heart.

The newlywed wife in our story wakes up from her dream, and what do you think she does? Does she hold a grudge? No, she genuinely shows respect to her husband.

Seek immediate Reconciliation (Song 6:1-3).

Song of Solomon 6:1-3, "<OTHERS> Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? 2 <SHE> My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. 3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies."

When we are wronged, we need to seek immediate reconciliation. Matthew 18:15-18, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If

he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The joy of responding to conflict in God’s way is Reconciliation (Song 6:4-10).

Verses 4-8, “<HE> You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. 5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me—Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. 6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. 7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. 8 There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number”.

Kings and their many queens and concubines would visit Solomon, but Solomon at this time in his life did not need harems and hundreds of queens. He loved only his beloved peasant queen. She was unique! And everyone agreed!

Verse 9, “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her”.

The man praises his wife, as he did on their wedding day. Other kings had many concubines and queens, and the king said they would feel jealous that all he had was her. She is unique above all women. Verse 10, “Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun,

awesome as an army with banners?” He makes her feel so special!

The best thing about conflict is making up!

Restoration (vs. 11-13).

Following God’s way in restoration brings long term fruit in marriage. Verse 11, “<SHE> I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom.” Like the vines in her special garden, her marriage was bearing fruit from following God’s way of handling conflict.

Sometimes you might feel like you are not getting far if you give and give and give in marriage. But you will bear fruit if you follow God’s way. Just like Mrs. Solomon’s garden, you will always “reap what you so” and you always “reap more than you sow”. If you sow to the wind, you will reap the whirlwind.

Following God’s way in restoration brings long term joy in marriage. Verse 12, “Before I was aware, my desire [SOLOMON] set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.” She’s caught up in joy—she’s been treated like a princess, and she feels like a princess!

“She wanders down to the nut garden, where she believes her beloved will be, and makes the delightful discovery that it is springtime again in their relationship. Then all of a sudden she is placed in the king’s royal chariot, doubtless the first of his fleet, and she finds herself racing along at his side before all the people. It is a public display of total reconciliation. They are together again, and a new spring has begun.”¹

¹Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (So 6:11). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

Verse 13a, “<OTHERS> Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, return, that we may look upon you.” The women of the palace call after her as she flies by in the chariot, wanting to see again the look on her face that speaks volumes about the joy of a restored relationship.² But she so busy with her King she cannot stop.

Verse 13b, “<HE> Why should you look upon the Shulammitte, as upon a dance before two armies?” This is a comment from the king. Looking upon his wife is just like the excitement of watching a lively, exuberant victory dance where the war has been one between two armies. The two sides have signed the peace treaty, and now they should celebrate! They have been reconciled!

CONCLUSION

Whether you are married or single, if you have unresolved conflict in your life, you are not right with God. You need to be tenderhearted and seek to be the first to reconcile. You cannot worship God if you have not dealt with sin and misunderstandings in your life. Set your gift down, that is before the next worship service, get things right. Settle the conflict in a godly way.

There is great joy and long term stability if you will seek selfless giving instead of selfishness. Following God’s path to restoration in conflict is one of God’s primary tools to make us like Christ!

²Ibid.

EIGHT | SONG 7:1-13

fountains that help us grow old together

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

SONG 7:10

The world sees marriage kind of like “As the World Turns”. You fall in love. You have a passionate honeymoon. And then you bear with or exist with one another. You put up with one another until Mr. or Ms. Perfect comes along, and then you “find happiness” with someone else. What a sad and selfish state marriage is in today. When you ask someone how long they have been married, it is rare to hear 40, 50 or 60 years. But God designed marriage to endure to the end. If you are married, he wants you to grow old together in true, deep happiness centered around Him. Till death do you part. “What God has joined together, let not man separate”.

God’s design for marriage is very happy, thrilling pathway. Dissatisfaction in marriage is not God’s plan. God designed marriage be deeply satisfying and to last a lifetime.

If we follow God’s way, we will find that marriages need to mature and deepen. The harvest of a godly marriage is unimaginably amazing.

God designed marriage to get deeper and happier as each day goes by. Your marriage is exactly what you put into it. If

you are dissatisfied with your marriage, you need to look in the mirror. We reap what we sow. Can I ask you, what are you putting into your marriage?

Married people, if you want to grow old together with your spouse, listen up. Single people, you might be married one day soon. You might not believe me, but you need to hear this message too!

The love and security that King Solomon gives his wife is an example that all married men ought to attain to.

If you want to have a strong growing marriage, you must treat it like a plant. A plant must have plenty of water. Your marriage must have six special fountains to grow deep for Christ.

These actions are not found within yourself, but in Christ. Look to him for strength. He is the ultimate Fountain of Living Waters.

I want to give you six fountains that will grow your marriage. All of them reflect Christ. They spell “F-R-I-E-N-D”. Is your spouse your friend?

THE FOUNTAIN OF FAVOR

The fountain of Favor will grow your marriage (vs. 1a). Do you communicate that God has favored you in giving your spouse to you?

Solomon looks at his bride, and the text seems to indicate it is several years after the honeymoon. He says to her something he might not have noticed when he was courting her. He says, “How beautiful are your feet in sandals” (Verse 1a). The commentators picture King Solomon upon his knees before his wife, humbly unlatching her sandals.

Several times a day I tell my wife I love her. It’s a way for me to get bow down in my spirit and say, “God has favored

me with you”. I tell my wife constantly, “I’m not worthy to have you”. “I don’t deserve you”. “Thanks for putting up with me—I know I’m hard to live with”. She needs to hear this.

She needs to know that you appreciate every part of her—even her feet! You are favored by the least things about her. Most women are not going to boast about their feet. But Solomon notices this farm girl’s feet.

I can remember the first time Jill cooked for me at her home with her parents and brother, we had a special dish with cheese on top, and the cheese was slightly burnt. I told the whole family, “I love burnt cheese!” And I did and I do. It was a sincere compliment about something that could have made Jill feel bad, but instead it endeared me to her.

It is important for a husband to verbally compliment and admire his wife. Feet are not normally a comely part of the body. But Solomon notices everything. Even though she’s a farm girl, he says the way she holds herself in her sandals bespeaks a princess. He perceives everything about her. He loves her. She knows it.

On the honeymoon in chapter three he noticed her face, her eyes, her cheeks, and her lips. Now he notices everything about her. Even the little things. Solomon’s intimate knowledge of his wife has deepened. He cares about every part of her. He loves her from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet, and he tells her.

Married men, your wife wants you to notice her. Ladies long for that special attention. They long for appreciation. If you are not appreciating your wife, then its not wonder she’s lost that twinkle in her eye. If you’ve stopped pursuing her and telling her how sweet and beautiful she is, then you are not planting what you ought to plant in marriage. If you plant seeds of selfless admiration in your marriage, you will reap a harvest of holy happiness in your marriage.

Do you appreciate something in your spouse? When's the last time you told her? I want to grow old together with my wife appreciating every little thing about her!

THE FOUNTAIN OF REASSURANCE

Solomon calls his wife, years after the honeymoon, “O noble daughter!...” (verse 1a). She was not a daughter of nobility, and yet Solomon calls her that. He makes her feel special.

If you read in chapters 1 and 2, early on he speaks of her as:

- 1:8, “most beautiful among women”
- 1:15, “my love”
- 2:2, “a lily among brambles”
- 2:10, “my beautiful one”
- 2:14, “my dove”
- By chapters 5 and 6, his favorite name for her is: “my perfect one” (5:2, 6:9)

And now in chapter 7 Solomon calls this farm girl, “noble daughter”—he’s calling her the daughter of a prince. Was she a daughter of a prince? No, but he made her feel like one! This woman gets great esteem from the way King Solomon sees her. Remember in chapter 1, she was greatly concerned about her looks. Now she’s secure in them. She’s not royal. She’s not the right stock. But Solomon makes her feel like she is: 7:1, “O noble daughter”

Is there “good name calling” going on in your house. Maybe you call her “sweetheart” or “honey”. Maybe you have a special name that only your spouse knows. Be careful to call each other sweet names. That will deepen your commitment in marriage.

I want to grow old together with my wife recognizing how precious she is to me!

THE FOUNTAIN OF IMPORTANCE

The fountain of Importance will grow your marriage (vs. 1b). Solomon makes his wife feel important and beautiful.

Solomon says in verse 1b, “Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.” He later says in verse 2b, “Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.” Today, if you say that to your wife, that’s enough to get the cold shoulder for a while!

What is beautiful has changed. Many of the women posing for magazines today are dying of anorexia. They are malnourished. The look of starvation and malnutrition is sadly in vogue today.

Married men, your wife needs to know you love her just the way she is. She is God’s gift to you. All women are different, but God crafted her just for you.

Solomon tells his wife that she is a work of art. She looks like she’s been made by a master craftsman. Now realize that she’s not as young. By the description, she may have had a baby or two.

Married men, do not ever insult your wife’s appearance. Don’t be immature. Men, you try having three kids, maintain the house, care for your needs—and you’re never allowed to get sick. You ought to be attracted to your wife’s appearance, and let her know how secure you are in her love.

By the way, women are very sensitive about their appearance. Her goal in life is not to compete with the Hollywood divas. Her goal is to raise children for Christ and to be a helper for you. God made your wife just for you. Appreciate God’s masterpiece!

The queen's form has certainly changed since her honeymoon. But Solomon is sincerely satisfied with his wife's form. He's sincerely excited by his wife, and he's not looking elsewhere. A married woman is not going to look like she stepped out of a swimsuit magazine. Why? Because—God has a totally different measure for beauty. I hope you get your value of beauty from the Bible and not from the trash in *Sports Illustrated*. Having lots of babies and raising them in godliness is attractive to God. Caring for the home and for her husband is attractive to God.

Why are so many who profess Christ getting their values from Sodom and Gomorrah?

Married men, are you sincerely satisfied with your wife's beauty? Do you tell her often how beautiful your wife is? She needs to hear it. Romance is a 24/7 engagement.

THE FOUNTAIN OF ENJOYMENT

The fountain of Enjoyment will grow your marriage (vs. 2). Solomon truly enjoys and is satisfied with his wife.

Verse 2, "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies." Married men, if you tell your wife her navel is like a round bowl and her belly is like a gigantic heap of wheat, I think she might get really offended!

Solomon speaks of wine and wheat. Wine was the Spring harvest (early June) and grapes were the Autumn harvest (late September).²⁵ He says, I am encouraged.

Now the harvest is a gift from God. So it is with a wife. Proverbs 19:14, "House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD."

²⁵ ISBE, "harvest".

THE FOUNTAIN OF NEARNESS

The fountain of Nearness will grow your marriage (vs. 3-9). He now describes his wife in verses 3-9 as a place of paradise!

He wants to be near her! Verses 3-9, “Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. 4 Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus. 5 Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. 6 How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! 7 Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. 8 I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, 9 and your mouth like the best wine.”

She responds: “<SHE> It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth. 10 I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.”

This is married love. It is holy and beautiful in marriage. It is forbidden and ultimately unsatisfying if trampled on outside marriage.

Verse 3, “Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.” This is exactly what he said to her their wedding night. He’s as happy with her as he was on their wedding day. He is still excited and happy with her.

Verse 4a, “Your neck is like an ivory tower.” There is no such thing as an ivory tower. It does not exist. It would be beyond what could be paid for. He is saying “You are priceless to me”. I could lose my home, my job, everything. But I could not imagine ever living without my wife!

Verse 4b, “Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim.” The pools of Heshbon were an oasis. It is like saying, “Your eyes are like the oceans that surround Hawaii”.

Verse 4c, “Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus.” There was a tower in Lebanon that protected Israel from Syria. This man felt secure with his wife. She did not criticize him intentionally. I can say that my wife has never intentionally criticized me in public.

Verse 5, “Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.” Carmel means “garden”. It’s the ridge above Jerusalem, and it is beautiful and fruitful.

Jill is my crown. I can say that I would not be where I am today without her. Men, if your wife is not your crown, you are missing out!

The king “is held captive in the tresses” (vs. 5). He was the sovereign of Israel, but he was a slave to his wife’s beauty.

Now the final oasis is the marriage bed. But you cannot have verses 6-9 without the first five verses.

You must first touch your wife’s heart and mind and soul before you touch her body!

Verse 6, “How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! 7 Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. 8 I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, 9 and your mouth like the best wine.”

The love life of a married couple is a barometer of their marriage and spiritual life.

THE FOUNTAIN OF DATING

The fountain of Dating will grow your marriage (vs. 11-13). Verses 11-13, “Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; 12 let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. 13 The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.”

I want to grow old with my wife. No matter what, I commit to live with her until death. I know what will grow my marriage. I cannot be a true friend to my wife unless I am a friend of the Lord Jesus.

In Christ we have...

- Favor, acceptance—Justification. We are accepted in the beloved.
- Reassurance—We are called nobility, God’s children, heirs.
- Importance—Christ died for us!
- Enjoyment—(wine wheat), we have the joy of the harvest!
- Nearness—Christ is a paradise to us.
- Delight of Companionship—We can say, “I am His and He is mine”.

CONCLUSION

In 1990, after 22 years as president of Columbia International University, Robertson McQuilkin announced that he would resign to devote full time to Muriel, his wife of 40 years, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. In March 1990, Dr. McQuilkin announced his resignation in a letter with these words:

“My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear—even terror—that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel “in sickness and in health...till death do us part.” So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not have to care for her. I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.”²⁶

²⁶ For more, see “Muriel’s Blessing” from Christianity Today.
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/februaryweb-only/2-9-12.0.html>.
Accessed 11-28-2010.

NINE | Song 8:1-14

the picture of Christ & the church

*Love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.*

SONG 8:6

Christians are to relate to marriage—whether married, unmarried, soon to be married, or formerly married. The Song of Solomon is not just speaking to married people. It is written to all Christians as the profitable, sufficient Word of God as to how we are to relate to marriage on this earth.

God's Word calls us to come together as one Bride that is to be married to Christ, not to divide the church into various special groups. One day all of us are intended to be married. We are betrothed to Jesus Christ. We listen for the trumpet that will call both the living and the dead in Christ to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

We come to the Song of Solomon chapter 8, and we find a woman who is happily married. She feels safe and delighted with her husband. How does she display this security and happiness? She wants to show public affection toward her husband, and this sprouts right out of her security in her husband.

So what how is love for Christ displayed specifically in marriage? How should you approach marriage if you want a marriage that will last a lifetime?

PRAISE! (VS. 1-4)

She is his cheerleader! She wants everyone to know that she loves him. She praises her lover and husband.

Look at this woman's public devotion

She wanted to show public affection for her husband. She wanted everyone to know she belonged to him.

Verses 1, "Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me."

The great joy of this woman's life is to be with her husband. She knows how to tease and how to be playful. Good friends in marriage are always great lovers.

She says she wanted to show public affection as a sister instead of a wife, so that "none would despise me". This girl wants to show open affection for her husband, but this is not acceptable in her culture. Those in Ancient Israel did not allow public displays of intimate affection unless you were a near relative. It is that way even today in Israel. Brothers, family members, cousins can display affection, but not husband and wife. It is considered immodest. It was for this reason that the queen wished that Solomon was her brother. She wanted to openly display her love for Solomon. She wanted to lift him up and show him off in public!

Look at how safe and happy she is in this marriage to Solomon. She wants to show kindness to him with spiced wine. She desires his affection. It's palpable! It's strong. Even years later, looking back upon her time before marriage, the desires seem so strong.

Look at this woman's private devotion

Verses 2-3, "I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother— she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate. 3 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!"

She wants to spend time with him. Notice children and career are not mentioned. Couples need to turn the mobile phones off, say no to the office, turn off the TV, put the kids to bed and spend time together.

It is this way in our life with Christ. Do you know how many universes God controls? And yet we think we need to control our own lives. We need to slow down, tune in, and listen up to God. Spend time with Him. He said, "Without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Christ's presence is satisfying and encouraging. All time spent with Him will be rewarded.

Martin Luther who almost single-handedly turned the world upside down, said:

"If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the Devil gets the victory through the day... I have so much business, I can not get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."

In the same way married couples, you need to spend time together. You are a living parable of Christ's love for His church. Talk with each other.

Look at this woman's careful discipline

Physical love is so precious it is reserved for marriage. Keep intimacy in marriage! If you have a great love life in marriage, that is a virtue, but outside of marriage it is a

shame and a reproach and a STAIN. We must not soil that which is precious and pure.

Solomon's wife recalls that there is always a time and a place for physical affection. It is after the vows are made before God and others. It is specially reserved for marriage. Verse 4, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases." Solomon's wife remembers the days before she was married, and recalls how she reserved this for marriage. She has a healthy view of marital intimacy. She reserved herself for her husband so that she could give all that she was to him and him alone.

The natural joy of sexual awakening is ruined by premature experimentation. Satisfying sexual passions outside of God's covenant of marriage is like a person who enjoys stolen money.

In Proverbs 9, there is a woman called Folly. It is said in verse 13 that "she is seductive and knows nothing. 14 She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, 15 calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" And to him who lacks sense she says, 17 "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." 18 But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol."

A wise woman realizes that she can lead a man straight to hell by tempting him, and so she looks forward to marriage, but keeps herself pure.

There is a danger that we speak of marital love as the most beautiful, free relationship that a human being can have. But something this sacred must be reserved for marriage.

Regardless, this is a woman who is at home with her husband. She loves spending time with him. She feels safe.

She knows him. She wants to display her affection publically for him. She is his cheerleader!

You want to build a lasting marriage? The first thing Solomon's queen demonstrated is a playfulness that was really the fruit of her security. She was happily married. There were no other men on her mind. She gave herself wholly and completely to one man.

PRODUCING FRUIT (PARENTING) (VS. 5)

This is a strange verse if you don't understand the context. After many years, and many days of wilderness trials, Solomon still has his queen leaning on him, intoxicated with love. They pass by an apple tree near Solomon's childhood home.

The secret to great parenting is investing in your married life

You can't have a great family if you don't have a great marriage! You are rarely going to have godly kids if you don't have godly parents who love each other.

Verse 5a, "Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?"

"Who is that girl?" She's special. She's noticeable. The "wilderness" is a reminder of Israel's 40 years of trials to the Jewish mind. The couple had emerged from their trials successfully as well.

This couple (and every couple) had to overcome the curse of disharmony that began at the fall of man into sin (Genesis 3:16). They've come up out of the wilderness after going through so many minefields, but they are arm and arm. She is leaning on him.

She comes out of years of marriage, and she is nourished, secure, safe, happy, and leaning on Solomon's arm. Men, our wives out to be closer to Christ because of us!

Another secret to great parenting is investing in your family life

Verse 5b, "<SHE> Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor."

This may refer to their first meeting. Apparently their love was sparked under this tree. Solomon was sleeping there, and she awakened him. Solomon's mother Bathsheba seems to have spent some time under the tree when she was in labor. This may seem strange, but this is a reference to fruitfulness in marriage. The implication of the apple tree is symbolic of the "family tree" that bears the fruit of marital love, namely children. The desire is to carry on the family by having children.

Listen, a marriage is more than companionship. It's more than romance and intimacy and fun together. It is all that. But it's about building a family tree.

Deuteronomy 6 is my roadmap for family life. Some people ask me "How do you do devotions with the children?" My wife and I do have formal devotions with the children. We share that responsibility. But whenever I am home, we are having devotions. All day at all times is devotions. The children are to be taught in every situation.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7, "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

YOUR PRESENCE & THE PRESENCE OF GOD (VS. 6-7)

The Shulammitte talks about how she wants to be a seal on Solomon's heart and arm. Listen to Solomon's wife. Verse 6a, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm" A seal is a permanent marking. It doesn't go away. Seals in ancient times were used to show ownership and permanence.

Your love ought to be the permanent kind. You are going to stick around till you die. Love is not a feeling, but a choice to sacrifice yourself for another, whether they are worthy or not. Verse 6 describes the Velcro of a long lasting marriage relationship.

Are you plugged in, totally committed to marriage? It means you forsake ALL others and love only her. It means you always answer her phone calls. The biggest insult you can give a wife is to make her talk to your voice mail. The only way that ought to happen is if you lose your phone. It ought to be so rare that if your wife has to talk to voice mail, the next thing she feels compelled to do is file a missing person's report.

Be plugged in. You ought to be like a seal on your wife's heart. Like a permanent marking on her arm. You are one flesh. Know your wife. Talk to her. Listen to her. She needs you to be engaged.

For men, it is easy to ignore their wife. Show her attention. Have a rule when you get home. I'm told that you need to give her a ten second kiss when you walk in the door! Don't ignore your wife. She probably feels ignored at times. Listen to her. Love her. She'll want to lean on you. If you want a long lasting marriage, be friends. Be plugged in to her life!

Love is powerful.

Verse 6b, “for love is strong as death”. No is “half dead”. You are either dead or you are not! Death is so strong that once you die you can never come back. That’s the kind of commitment godly love gives. Men are to love their lives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it through the DEATH of the Cross. Love is as strong as death.

Love is also possessive.

Verse 6c, “ jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire”

The grave never gives up it’s people. It has an eternal hold on everyone who goes there. That’s how strong godly love is! It never let’s go!

1 Corinthians 13 says, “love does not envy”—It’s not jealous in a selfish way. But this jealousy is the kind that mirrors God. Exodus 20:5, “I the LORD your God am a jealous God”.

This kind of love is possible only through the LORD. It is called in verse 6d, “the very flame of the LORD.” This is the only place in the entire Song of Solomon that the Lord’s covenant name “Yahweh” is used. You can only love like this if you are walking with Christ. It finds it’s very origin in God!

Love is persevering.

Verse 7a, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.” Many tests will come to your love, but love from God will overcome it all. Your love cannot be based on fleeting emotion, but on covenant commitment to God!

Love is priceless.

Verse 7b, “If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.” This kind of love is so

priceless. We often play with the worthless toilet water when God has a beautiful ocean for us.

PURITY (VS. 8-10).

Keep the fires of marriage within marriage. God says they are pure and holy in the marriage union! The Shulammitte queen now tells the story of her life long integrity from the time she was a little girl. She says she was a wall, not a door. She was not an easy women that men could walk through like a door. She was a secure wall.

She recalls her brothers wanting to protect her before she was a woman. They were looking out for her—they were guarding her for her wedding day.

The brothers were taking the responsibility of the father. The father is not on the scene. Listen to them.

Verse 8, “<OTHERS> We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? 9 If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

Do you see the imagery? Basically if she seemed to want to be promiscuous, they were going to protect her from herself. If she seemed to be pure they would trust her.

Verse 10, “<SHE> I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers; then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace.”

She looked at her body as a place of peace and security. She was not a violated castle. She was not compromised.

PATIENCE (VS. 11-14).

God is faithful in controlling all circumstances relat-

ed to marriage.

Verses 11-12, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.” Solomon owned the vineyard. He “let out the vineyard to keepers” (vs. 11). And who were these keepers? They were the Shulammite’s brothers.

They were to bring Solomon the profit of what they sold. “Each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.” (vs. 11).

But Solomon got something more than the price of the vineyard. He got these brother’s little sister!

We can trust God for marriage. The Shulammite’s eyes were not on marriage, but on being faithful!

Verse 12, “My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.” Solomon can have the profit, and the her brothers get some of the profit too, but Solomon got her!

A good marriage is worthy of celebrating!

Verse 13, “<HE> O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice; let me hear it.”

This is a verse that speaks of celebration! Solomon is saying to his friends, “celebrate with me!”

A good marriage is something to run to as an oasis!

Verse 14, “<SHE> Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.”

CONCLUSION

How do you build a lasting marriage? All this is vain if you only see the surface of marriage. This is not meant to be

a “self-help” message. Moralism helps no one. This message is a clarion call to know your God.

This is a picture of Christ and the church. Christ is our oasis. Married people, you need to communicate that in your marriage. Single people, you need to give single hearted devotion to Christ.

Let His flame burn in you, and your marriages will burn brightly. Draw near to Him single and married people as we await our marriage to our Sinless Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

TEN | Genesis 24

how to choose a godly mate

Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen.

GENESIS 24:27

Let's consider the history of dating, courtship, and marriage. In Genesis 24 we have the courtship and marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, one of the great love stories of the Bible.

HISTORY OF COURTSHIP AND DATING

At the turn in the century, in the early 1900s, if you wanted to get married, here's how it would work. Your mom and dad would have a front room on their house called a parlor. In the parlor would be some nice sitting arrangements and a piano.

Courtship was originally done under the watchful eyes of parents. The parents would make a list of potential suitors. They would be young men of a good reputation in the parents eyes. A man, who was seen as a prospective husband or suitor, was permitted by a girl's parents to spend time with her. But the man and woman could not spend time **alone** with each other. Parents took care that there was no physical intimacy between the couple. The man could talk with a

woman, listen to her songs and piano playing, and even communicate with her through letters. This was done to ensure that the couple got to know each other before marriage.

The couple was never alone, but was with the parents. They would sit in the parlor, and the dad would sit there, and the mom would sit there, and the girl would sit in the back, and they would drill the young man with lots of questions.

- Do you love the Lord?
- What are your intentions?
- How's your 401k?
- What do you think about Shakespeare?

And they would drill this man with questions, and they would feed him, you know, snacks and tea, nothing too big, don't want the guy to hang out too much, and then, "Thank you, you may leave, and if we consider you a suitable candidate, we will notify you, and you could come over again. And they might have him over many, many times, and if at the end they feel that he's fitting, then they would allow them to get to know one another in their presence.

And this was a long, formal process in the girl's house, ***under the leadership and direction of her mom and dad.*** And the woman's family controlled the entire courtship process.

1900s – Ladies' Home Journal

–fashion/morals contradict the home and the Bible

But then something happened in the early 1900's. ***Women's magazines started coming out.*** Ladies Home Journal by 1900 had over a million subscribers. So now rather than young women taking their cue of what is a normal woman from the church or their Bible or their family, or their mom and dad, they're reading women's magazines.

And the magazines have a lot about what is fashionable and feminine but there is not a lot of Bible verses in them. Have you ever looked at these magazines? There's not a lot of Bible. They tell you how to break all the commandments. But for the most part they tell how to live life according the world's standards with no reference to God.

And so the NEW normal does not come from the Bible or from the family, but from some fashion designer that gets his fashion ideas from prostitutes and pimps. And our ladies and our daughters started reading these magazines. And they think their mom and dad are not normal, but what the magazine says is.

1920s – Moving Outside the Home

–Entertainment, and Restaurants

In the 1920s what occurs is that the USA moves from being an agricultural society to an urbanized society. So everybody begins moving to the city, working in the city. So now creative culture moves in with them, and suddenly there's lots of entertainment possibilities. There are restaurants, movie theaters, dance halls and concert halls.

Essentially, the young ladies are starting to be taken out of their mom and dad's home to go on dates with boys out in the city. ***No longer are they under the protection of father and mother, but they are now to entrust a hormone filled boy to guard the purity of their daughter.***

1930s – Automobiles go Mass Market

Then in the 1930s this really picks up because then the automobile hits mass market. Young men buy cars, go over, beep-beep, pick up the young lady, put her in the car, get her

away from her parents – particularly her dad – as quickly as possible, take her out on a date. Now she's taken farther and farther from home with less and less parental involvement. The main thing is that she's now far from the protection of father and mother. She is now alone under the dark sky, and she is in trouble. Now the teenage pregnancy rates start moving up for the first time. This goes on through the 40s and 50s as well.

1960s – Feminist Movement

– *Equal Rights, women treated like men*

What happens then in the 1960s, is you have a cultural experiment that is doomed to failure. All self control goes out the window. Everything that was sacred: a woman's purity, a little baby, femininity—it all is on its way out the window. The feminist movement really hits its stride and demands equal rights for women. The problem is men don't treat other men very well. So chivalry goes out the window, and respect for women begins to go out the window.

There was a time when they were going to take the men and ladies signs off the restrooms and make them all unisex. Society was trying to undo the very order of Creation.

Chivalry - There was a day a woman walks in the room men would stand out of respect, open the door. We would help them with their coat. We would treat women as treasured and special.

Then out of the feminist movement comes the sexual revolution. Out of that revolution, the pornography industry becomes culturally acceptable, and filth magazines start to be sold not just under the counter but eventually above the counter, and now men are being told that fornication and all uncleanness was normal.

1970s – The Pill and Abortion

So then the 70s come along. All of the sudden everything is out of control, and the birth control pill is developed, so that there would be no consequences to wrong actions.

In spite of the pill, ladies were still getting pregnant, and so in 1973 we institute legalized abortion. And now because there is so little commitment marriages are falling apart. So in 1974 we create no-fault divorce laws.

The Present – Total Cultural Meltdown

So this is how we came to experience an entire cultural meltdown over the course of less than 100 years. At no point did the culture ever come to its senses and say, “This isn’t working. We should repent and go back and reevaluate whether or not this is indeed wise.”

Now you have been born into all of this, and you might think it’s normal. You might think, “Well, I read the magazines and watch TV and this is what everyone says is normal.”

STATISTICS

Cohabitation

- In 1970, 36 % of Americans were unmarried.
- In 1980—39% unmarried.
- In 1990—41%.
- In 2000—44%.
- Less and less people are getting married, why? Because they can live together, sleep together and they get some of the benefits of marriage without any of the obligations.

- Today as well there are over **86 million single adults**.
- In the 1950s, 80 % of all Americans were married – 1950.
- Today, 50 % are married, okay? People aren't getting married, and those who do get married aren't staying married.

MORE SINGLE PARENT HOMES, MOSTLY SINGLE MOTHERS

Men are now into pleasure without any obligations. The magazines and the sitcoms have taught them that.

- So now 1/3rd of all children today are born to an unmarried women.
- 40% of children tonight go to bed without a father.
- 40% of all children today will live with a parent and that parent's live in boyfriend or girlfriend, and it's all really confusing.

So my point is simply this: the world we live in is just not working. It's broken. It's messed up. It's not good, and it ought not to be normal for you if you are a Christian.

REBEKAH'S STORY IS TRUE AND HELPFUL

The Bible is – it's many things, but two things I like to say, it's true, and it's helpful. It's both. A lot of people say, "Well, I don't care about the Bible" – well, that's fine, but if you don't follow it you are going to have a broken life.

This whole world you're born into, it's not abiding in the truth. It's not truthful about what the consequences are, but it's also not helpful. If you believe the lies of this culture, it's going to cause great damage to your life, the life of others. It

is a royal mess. It's not set up for 50 years of marital fidelity and happiness and joy.

So what we need to do is what Paul calls the renewing of our minds.

Genesis 24 (ESV) — “Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh,”

That sounds different, doesn't it? That's strange. Why would he put his hand under his thigh. Apparently, in that culture when you were real serious, and you wanted to make an oath one guy would look another guy in the eye and grab his thigh. That's what they're doing here, a little different. I like shaking hands better.

“Put your hand under my thigh, 3 that I may make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell,”

Here's what is happening. Abraham has a son named Isaac who is now 40 years old. He needs a wife, but Abraham says, “Don't go get a wife from the unbelieving, Godless Canaanites. We need a nice believing Hebrew woman. So he's going to send his servant Eliezar on a 450-mile journey

—
“4 but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac.” 5 The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” 6 Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there.”

So Abraham says, you cannot leave Isaac in Babylon, in Ur of the Chaldees. God made some promises and covenants to me.

Verse 7, “The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8 But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.” 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter. 10 Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. 11 And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.”

All the ladies go out at night because it’s the cool of the day to get water for their households from the community well. He’s traveled 450 miles. He’s going to where the nice, lovely, young ladies are. Now he has no idea who it is that he’s looking for, so he prays. This is important. We need to pray! Hear Eliezar’s prayer.

“12 And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14 Let the young woman to whom I shall say, ‘Please let down your jar that I may drink,’ and who shall say, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels’—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this

I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.”

So do you think God’s going to answer this prayer? You better believe it!

“15 Before he [Eliezar] had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. 16 The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. 17 Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water to drink from your jar.” 18 She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. 19 When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” 20 So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.”

How many camels? (Look at verse 10). He took ten camels, and how many girllons does it take to fill up a camel? About the same as gas in an S.U.V., about 25 girllons – for those of you who do the math, 250 girllons. This is a nice lady. How many of you ladies would go to a well for a complete stranger, get calloused hands pulling up a rope, maybe a bucket a girllon, take the girllon, run over to the trough, dump it out, 250 girllons to feed ten camels. Most women won’t even get their husband a cup of coffee. She’s in good shape. She’s a working girl, calluses on her hands. This is a wonderful, hardworking woman.

“21 The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not. 22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten

gold shekels, 23 and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?” 24 She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” 25 She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.”

So Rebekah is sweet and hospitable. So Eliezar gives thanks to the Lord. We should thank God for godly ladies!

“26 The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD 27 and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.” 28 Then the young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things. 29 Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban.”

Ok, enter Laban. – Laban is a fake. He’s an opportunist. He’s always looking to make a buck. He’s a crooked guy. He’s very prominent in the rest of Genesis.

His name literally means white. He’s kind of a whited sepulcher. He’s beautiful on the outside but ugly on the inside.

He sees the jewelry on Rebekah, and he’s thinking: opportunity! So what does Laban do? He runs out toward Isaac! Isaac is Mr. Moneybags, Mr. Bling!

“Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. 30 As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. 31 He said, “Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.” 32 So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and

fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. 33 Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, "I will not eat until I have said what I have to say." He said, "Speak on."

So Eliezar recounts the whole thing in verses 34 through 48. I'll let you read that later. So then Eliezar says to Laban in verse 49:

"49 Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

He's basically saying, "Here's what God's done. What are you going to do, Laban?" Apparently her father's gone, so Laban is the head of the household, the older brother, and he is wanting to get permission from Laban to see if Rebekah would be willing to go back and meet Isaac, and perhaps, marry him.

"50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good."

In other words, if that's what God wants, we can't argue. What are we supposed to say?

"51 Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52 When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. 53 And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments." So this is the price for the bride.

54 And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me away to my master." 55 Her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman remain

with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.” 56 But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.” 57 They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.”

So they ask Rebekah, do you want to go, meet Isaac, marry him? What do you think?

“58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.” 59 So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, “Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!” 61 Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.”

Now you know why they got the ten camels. This lady’s got travelling suitcases. Shoes, purses, accessories, hats, lotions, and potions, whatever else – she’s got all her stuff. Rebekah is the lady with ten carryons at the airport. This is ten camels. That’s ten Hebrew U-Hauls.

“62 Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. 63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening.”

So Isaac was having his devotions, praying, thinking on God.

“And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. 64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel”. Isaac is walking and so she is showing respect by getting off her camel.

“65 and [she] said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself.”

So she took her veil and covered herself.” Most Hebrew women didn’t have a veil, but brides did. She’s come this long way and left her parents to cleave to her husband.

66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

This is not the way it would happen in Chicago, right?

Isaac is 40 years old, needs a wife, needs a believing, Godly wife, but there aren’t any one like that around him. So Abraham, his father sends his servant out to find a good, Godly girl. They pray. They worship. God sovereignly provides. Parental involvement at age 40? That’s crazy!

No, we’re crazy and they’re normal. What we want to do now is we want to take our bankrupt culture, say, “That’s not a good way to do it.” And we’ll look at 15 principles that tell us how to go from courtship, to falling in love, to marriage, in a way that pleases God.

Dating

So let’s talk about dating. Why is dating WRONG? Here’s dating. It’s privately overseen by the couple. No mom, dad, pastor, nobody involved. The goal is totally undefined and often times it moves rapidly into a loss of purity and a broken heart.

You must not go the dating route. It’s just mind numbingly dumb. It doesn’t go anywhere. You spend lots of money, lots of time, lots of energy, lots of emotion. How many of

you have been in a dating relationship, and it didn't go anywhere? And then all you have to show for it is a broken heart.

Courtship

Courtship, here's what it is. It's publically overseen by family and friends and church, your mom, your dad, people in your Bible study, pastors, good, Godly people. Everybody's involved, right?

They're involved, and they're looking at it, right? There's are referees. You have accountability. You have visibility. You have responsibility. You have a goal: Marriage.

You start as friends. It develops into courtship which is the testing phase. At that point you're working toward marriage, and if you do want to get married, and everybody's okay with it, then you go ahead and get engaged.

So here's what we're gonna get, 15 principles for marriage taken out of Genesis 24.

1. God created marriage, and it is therefore good! (Gen. 2:18; Heb. 13:4).

In Genesis, marriage is good. The man is good. The woman is good. Creation is good. The only thing that's not good, ***it's not good for the man to be alone***. Hebrews said that, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled" (**Hebrews 13:4**). Marriage is good. It's good to be married. God is pro-marriage. Get married.

The vast majority of Christians should and will marry. So the first thing you need to say is some of you came from broken homes, messed up homes. Perhaps your father wasn't around. Perhaps, like me, your mom had her boyfriends living there all the time, and you say, "You know what, I just

don't want anything to do with that. I think it's bad." No, marriage is good if it's done biblically, if it honors God. If it's done in the way that God intends it can be a very good thing. I'm a happily married man of 14 years. Marriage done God's way is AWESOME!

2. A Christian should NEVER be romantically connected to a non-Christian.

Verse 3, Abraham says to Eliezar, swear that "you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites". So, a Christian should never ever, ever, never, ever, ever, never, ever, ever, ever, never, ever, ever, ever, never, never, ever be romantically connected to a non-Christian, ever.

Abraham says, "My son needs a wife. He needs a wife who loves the Lord because he loves the Lord."

- **1 Corinthians 7:39** tells us that we are "free to be married to whom [we] wish...[but] only in the Lord."

What that doesn't mean is this: "Well, my heathen boyfriend said he believes in God." James says demons believe in God. You need to go beyond that.

- **2 Corinthians 6:14**, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

So if you love the Lord, marry somebody who loves the Lord.

3. Men who want to pursue courtship should go where godly women are.

Eliezar had to go 450 miles out of his way to find a godly wife. You're not going to find a wife among the heathen. Probably you'll not find her at your work place. You're definitely not going to find her at a night club. **Rebekah's not at the night club. She's home reading Leviticus.** She doesn't work at the night club.

She's probably not by your cubicle at work. You've got to go where Christian women are. Abraham sends his servant on a 450-mile journey to go find a godly girl.

The girl you're looking for is probably not at the movie theatre. She's home watching *The Sound of Music*. Men, you need to be looking at church or at a Christian get together for a wife. You're not going to find her in the world.

4. Marriage is for responsible men, not for boys.

Notice Isaac's age. He is 40. He's a man. He's got a job. He's got a house. He's got a place. He's got it together. He's not a boy.

Back in Genesis, man will leave his mother and father, and he will be his own man. He's able to support himself and get married.

Marriage is for men, not for boys. If a boy gets married, he's going to act like a boy and get into debt and cheat on his wife and cause problems. Getting married does not make anyone an adult. You can't live off your parents. You've got to support yourself.

One commentator says that a lot of boys who chase women are like dogs chasing a fire engine. Should they catch one they would have no idea what to do with it!

5. The man takes the initiative and pursues a wife.

The man pursues the wife by going to the father. The father must give approval. When it was time to get serious

with Jill, do you know what her words were to me? Ask my father.

Now Rebekah did not have approval, but Laban acted as her father.

If your daughter gets asked on a date, the proper answer is: ask my dad. Here's his phone number. And then dad can ask all the questions: Is it visible? Are you accountable and responsible to a chaperone?

So the guy has to pursue the lady. If he is not willing to chase you, he's not willing to work hard to keep you. In this story Rebekah's at home, and Isaac sends his servant. He makes all the initiative to go get this woman.

Ladies, you might ask, What about Sadie Hawkins? That's the date where the girls ask the guy. You need to wait on God.

6. The man must court the lady through the father (1 Cor. 7:36).

And every father should have a gun! If a young man wants to get to know my daughter, he's got to get to know me and her mother first.

There's a disputed verse in 1 Cor. 7:36, the translation is difficult, but I believe it generally identifies the father as the one who gives the daughter away in marriage. I'm going to read it from the NKJV.

1 Corinthians 7:36, NKJV "But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin [daughter], if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry."

So the principle is the father gives away his daughter to be married. We always ask at the wedding, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man". And the father gives the answer: her mother and I do.

So courtship must take place through the father. The boy must be willing to get to know mom and dad and get to know my daughter on my daughter's turf. Not is some Volkswagon Rabbit.

My daughter's not going to go out with some ridiculous young man hitting the horn in some Volkswagon Rabbit with fur on the dashboard, stealing my little girl's heart.

In other words, the young man must court dad and mom before he courts the daughter!

My Experience with Jill's Parents

I don't have a parlor, but I can remember spending tons of time getting to know Jill at her house. I loved coming over for dinner. We'd play basketball with her dad. I was a college graduate. I had to win her parents before I could win her.

7. If there is no father, the mother or a godly couple takes the place of protection for the young lady.

Rebekah didn't have a father in her life, so her older brother Laban fulfilled that part.

Now, what if the young lady is in the same situation today. If she doesn't have a nice, godly father, what happens? Well, then maybe her mother takes her place. If mother's not there, then an uncle or a grandpa or a pastor or a godly leader or a good godly couple are brought in. Why? To help oversee things, to give wise counsel. Some of you say, "Well, I know exactly what I want to marry." You don't know what you need. You need somebody who's been married for a while that will give you frank advice. I didn't have a godly mom or dad. So for me it was a brother in the church, the music director named Dave Shaleen. It was also my own pastor.

8. A man should pursue a woman who will make a godly wife and mother (Pro. 31:30).

Don't just say, "She's beautiful!" That's all I need! Beautiful is just fine. Rebekah's pretty, great, but beauty does not necessarily prepare a woman for motherhood.

Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised."

If she's going feed a camel, she'll feed a kid, right? You see she's a woman who is hardworking, industrious, nice lady, right?

A young man needs to ask, "Do I want my daughters to be just like her? Do I want my sons to marry a woman just like her?" If not, run for your life. Don't marry her.

A lot of guys will say, "She looks amazing." Well, you know what, in 50 years she's not going to look exactly the same, and if she drives you crazy, it could be 50 years of misery, right? Charm is deceitful, beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord, that's the one who should get cuts to the front of the line.

9. A man should not pursue more than one woman at a time.

I love the fact that the servant Eliezar shows up at the well and doesn't say, "Hey, ladies, I got this new reality show. Who wants to marry a millionaire? He prays. He asks God to guide him. He uses common sense and care. He sees the girl, and he worships God. God is up front and center in the whole equation. He prays with her family. But it's clear that she's the only one.

You might think a girl is special. Don't put your hands on her. That could be someone else's spouse some day. If it's

not the one, then move on and protect your purity. Be holy and careful and clean. Don't give your heart away!

Men, have the guts enough to let the girl know your intentions. If you aren't ready to marry, then don't be looking for a woman. If you are ready, be upfront, and treat her like a sister. Don't have her and two others you are going to date. That's not respectful or wise.

10. There should be no intimate contact between the couple until marriage, and then there should be lots of it.

No sexual contact. What does that mean? You know what it means. Ephesians says even be a hint of sexual immorality. It should not be once named among you as a saint.

Where's the line? Well, I tell you what, zero; how about that? You don't want to get near the edge. You want to stay 150 feet or a mile from the edge. If you have no intimate contact before you are married, you have no regrets after you are married.

Be careful about hugging. No making out. No necking. No nothing.— why?

Well, first of all, God says that the body is holy, belongs to him, and it's sacred, and you're not to dishonor it in that way.

1 Thess. 4:4-7, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in

holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”

2 Timothy 2:22, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

Remember the words of Joseph when he was tempted to lie with Potiphar’s wife, **Genesis 39:9**, “[My master] is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

In addition, you don’t know who you’re going to be married to until you’re actually married, **you could be dishonoring someone else’s spouse sending them into marriage with baggage**. Do you really want to dishonor that person?

11. A woman should not pursue a husband, but pursue the Lord.

A woman should live her life without a guarantee that she will be married. Don’t pursuing the man. The man you have to pursue is the WRONG MAN. Rebekah was content to be a hard worker with her older brother Laban.

For Rebekah, she’s drawing water out of a well. Next thing you know she’s on a camel going 450 miles away. She wasn’t looking, but suddenly she’s getting married.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, it’s better to serve the Lord as a single.

A woman should not pursue a husband. Don’t run around looking for a husband. Don’t worry about getting a husband, ladies. Here’s what you worry about. Holiness, love the Lord, read your Bible, confess your sin, walk with Jesus, humility, hard work, and hospitality. Those are the characteristics of Rebekah. She’s not looking for a husband.

She loves the Lord. She's very humble. She works very hard. She practices hospitality. If you want to attract the right spouse, be the right person, and they will find you. That's what I'm telling the ladies. If you're a good, Godly woman who's living her life with Christ, men will be attracted to you. The right husband will find you.

12. A woman's character should be observed from a distance before the man initiates.

Rebekah is observed from afar by Eliezar. She's got a servant's heart.

Young men, see how she serves in church. See what her prayer life is like. See what she does on the job. See how she lives her life. Watch her.

You know, I was talking to a guy not too long ago, and I said, "What attracted you to your wife?" He said, "We were in a group of people in a room, and there was someone who was a little bit of a social misfit over in the corner. Everybody else ignored them. My wife walked over and struck up a conversation, was kind to them, brought them into the social circle and introduced them to her friends, and I thought, 'What a tender, sweet, attentive woman.'"

13. God is sovereign, but we must also be faithful in obeying Him!

Can't God work if I want to do evangelize dating? He has, but I wouldn't depend on it. You'll probably end up with your heart broken. If you know to do right and don't do it, it's sin.

We don't make rules based on God's mercy. **I also know alcoholics who drive home every night and don't kill anyone, but we shouldn't do that.**

God is sovereign over the details of our lives through faithful people. You see the providence of God in this. God gives Isaac, gives this servant, the servant prays. He goes to town. God provides Rebekah at the well at just the right time. Laban does his job. Rebekah agrees, goes back to meet Isaac. God works out all the details of an individual person's life. This is our good, sovereign God, and the reason it works so well is everybody's obedient to the Lord, Abraham, Isaac, the servant, Rebekah. Laban does his job. Everybody's obedient to the Lord. **The sovereign Lord wants to work out the details in your life, but you need to obey him, otherwise you mess up his plan and get in the way.**

Obey God. Don't live together. Don't give away your purity. Don't be with somebody who's an unbeliever. Don't play multiple people in a relationship. Don't do all these things, why? Because God blesses obedience. You reap what you sow. Because the sovereign God is faithful, will provide, but you will definitely assist him if you are an obedient and faithful person. We see God's sovereignty, and we see human responsibility worked out well in the story.

14. The man must choose the woman he loves, and then love the woman he chooses.

Isaac loves Rebekah, but then most importantly, he must love the woman he chooses. A lot of people, "I want to marry the person I love." Okay, great. Then love them. Then love them.

In most countries there are arranged marriages. They are much more successful than our American marriages.

In America, we marry the one we love, but we don't love the one we marry.

Isaac loves Rebekah. He keeps loving her, and what that means is this.

Ephesians 5 says, ‘Husbands, love your wives.’” Well, if it’s a command God must mean that you can do that. So it can’t be just a feeling. It needs to be a commitment.

Do marry the one you love, but love the one that you marry.

15. Pray for your future mate because God answers prayer.

And the last point is this. God answers prayer, doesn’t he? The servant prays, “Please, a good, Godly woman” – Rebekah. Pray.

- **It’s not just about personality type.**
- It’s not just about being in the right place at the right time.
- It’s not about saying the right words, and impressing her.

It’s about prayer and the sovereign providential God works out the affairs of our lives so that we can meet someone that we can love, that the details can be worked out. Pray. You say, “But how do I pray?” Pray for your spouse. You say, “But I don’t know who they are.” God knows. Pray.

What if You’ve Blown it?

Because some of you are thinking, “It’s already too late. I mean, fornication, wrong stuff in magazines and the internet, cohabitation, multiple partners, playing people, lying, not having a plan. It’s too late, I have blown it. I have made huge mistakes, these huge sins. I’m a total fool. What now?” Well, grace.

See, that's the beauty of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ died for all our sins, specifically junk we're talking about. Not just a huge category of sin in general but the junk we're talking about. He died for that.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

So you don't need to walk out of here totally depressed. You should walk out of here repentant of sin, if and where it is appropriate, and repentance is saying, "This is the way the world does it. This is the way I was doing it. I turned my back on that. I'm going to open my Bible, and I'm going to trust the sovereign God, and I'm going to pray to him and worship him. I'm going to function like a good servant. I'm going to be a good, Godly man like Isaac and be a good, Godly woman like Rebekah, why? Because God's empowering grace will enable me to do so. Jesus died to take away my sin. He promises to conform me to His image!

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