

Session 12

Relational Foundations

God created humans to be relational, with the greatest relationship being between Him and His people.

Song of Songs 2:15–3:5



How would you describe to a child God's purposes in making people? What would you point to when explaining the difference between humans and animals?

Children are told that God made their hands for holding crayons, not hitting their siblings. Children may also be reminded that He made their teeth for chewing, not biting. Furthermore, they may be taught that He made their hearts for loving others, not hating them. When we give ourselves to Christ, we become God's children. In His wisdom, He tells us that He made our lives for sharing with others, not hoarding for ourselves. That's why healthy relationships matter.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Song of Songs (sometimes called the Song of Solomon) is God's wise counsel regarding love and relational intimacy. The book is a poetic chronicle of Solomon's romantic relationship with the woman in the poem. Solomon speaks as the man. The poem includes four other voices: the woman, the young women, the narrator, and the brothers. The five voices blend together to produce rich insights into God's wisdom regarding relationships, love, romance, and marriage.

The Song of Songs reminds the reader that sexual intimacy is not the creation of the evil one, but the sweet and intimate gift of God between a husband and wife. It is to be cherished and protected. Hebrews 13:4 states, "Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers." Marriage, and the sexual fidelity required of a successful marriage, must be developed and protected at all costs.

Solomon challenged God's people to embrace a sexual ethic that is grounded in fidelity and discretion. He was not bashful in describing the range of emotions experienced within marriage. The Song of Songs can make a person blush. However, Solomon made it clear to God's people as to what would happen when sexual intimacy is misused. Just as rightly expressed sexual passions can build a relationship, so too can the misuse and misguided use of sexual passions tear down and destroy a marital relationship.

SONG OF SONGS 2:15–3:5

2:15 Catch the **foxes** **A** for us—
the little foxes that ruin the **vineyards** **B**—
for our vineyards are in **bloom** **C**.

16 My love is mine and I am his;
he **feeds among the lilies** **D**.

17 Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
turn around, my love, and be like **a gazelle**
or a young stag **E** on the divided mountains.

3:1 In my **bed at night** **F**
I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but did not find him.

2 I will arise now and go about the city,
through the streets and the plazas.
I will seek the one I love.

I sought him, but did not find him.

3 The guards who go about the city found me.
I asked them, “Have you seen the one I love?”

4 I had just passed them
when I found the one I love.

I held on to him and would not let him go
until I brought him to my mother’s house—
to the chamber of the one who conceived me.

5 Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you
by the gazelles and the wild does of the field,
do not stir up or awaken love
until the appropriate time.

Passage Outline

Preventative Care
(Song of Sg. 2:15)

Build Trust
(Song of Sg. 2:16-17)

Restraint Required
(Song of Sg. 3:1-5)

Keywords

- A. Figuratively represents anything that might separate the lovers and harm their love
- B. A metaphor for the woman’s own body in 1:6; in the plural, it could refer to their physical attraction
- C. Implies figuratively both the initial stages of the romantic love relationship and the beauty of the two lovers when they’re most attracted to each other
- D. “Delighting in the flowers” (The Message); figuratively means the bride is ready for the groom to enjoy the pleasures she, the lily (2:1-2), offers him
- E. Word pictures for the groom (2:9), emphasizing his vigor, agility, beauty, and grace
- F. Suggests the woman is having a dream—or a nightmare—in which she can’t find her beloved

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Solomon's love poem tells the story about his romantic relationship with the Shulammitte woman (6:13), the love of his life who would become his wife. Like other love poems, it's written with a rich blend of literal and figurative language. Interpreting parts of the poem that have been written using figurative language can be challenging at times.

Despite a variety of interpretations of verse 15, the term *vineyards* refers to marriage. *In bloom* refers to the beauty before the harvest, referencing the beauty of two lovers anticipating marriage. The term *foxes* or *little foxes* hints at anything that could be harmful to the marriage. Just as a fox must be caught before it ruins a vineyard, so too must a marriage be protected from those things that can wreck and ruin a marriage relationship.

What kinds of things might be considered “little foxes” that can harm a marriage? What are some ways of “catching” those foxes?

KEY DOCTRINE: Man God created humans male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation (Gen 1:26-27).

Trust is needed to sustain marriage. Notice how dedicated this soon-to-be husband and wife were to each other. Marriage requires a mutual commitment to each other.

How are mutual trust and submission related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

The trust called for between a man and a woman creates oneness. Oneness refers to the mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational unity that is reserved for marriage alone.

What can married couples do to build trust?

The woman continues to speak in these verses. She expressed her longing to be with her future husband. In doing so, she included a reminder that one must be careful to avoid sexual temptation outside of the marriage relationship (v. 5).

How does a person rationalize or justify sexual infidelity? What do these efforts to justify infidelity reveal about the person and about our world in general?

Solomon understood that sexual passions can be strong, almost overwhelming. Thus he warned God's people to *not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time*.

What are the dangers of living an undisciplined life as far as sexual desires are concerned? What's the best way to teach the valuable lesson about sexual restraint so other believers put it into practice?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to be careful to protect marriages.
- Marriages grow through mutual submission.
- God created sex to be enjoyed exclusively with the marriage relationship.

Discuss actions the group could take to protect marriage. What actions may need to be taken as a result of the group discussion?

How would you rate the level of godly character and respect you demonstrate toward your spouse (if married) and toward people of the opposite sex? What actions do you need to take to increase your level of godly character and respect demonstrated?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Guarding your marriage is high priority.

Read Song of Songs 2:15, considering the imagery.

Verse 15 happens to be one of those passages that can be difficult to interpret properly. Solomon used the image of a fox ruining a vineyard. What does this verse mean in relationship to marriage and romance? The figurative language makes it full of possible implications for God's people. Bible teachers have offered a variety of possible interpretations. The wisest approach to interpreting this verse starts with an understanding that God's people who live according to His wisdom protect their relationships with each other. Guarding relationships becomes necessary when we realize that predators abound. They can destroy a relationship without anyone knowing the damage they have done until it's too late. The relationship between a husband and wife can be particularly susceptible to predators that can gnaw at a couple's devotion to each other. For that reason, a wise Christian couple makes guarding their marriage a high priority.

What "little foxes" have you seen harm a marriage? What are some ways of "catching" those foxes?

Day 2: God intends a married couple to share deep intimacy.

Read Song of Songs 2:16-17, recognizing the commitment shared.

The woman is the speaker in verses 16-17. In verse 17 she looks forward to how their intimacy would be expressed after they married. *Until the day breaks* anticipates that day. Her description reveals both anticipation and trust. The *gazelle* or *young stag* portrays the man who's passionate about the intimacy that he anticipates sharing with the woman. In turn, she reflects her desire for intimacy with the man by referring to him as her *love*. An anticipation of intimacy flourished in the couple's relationship. Trust, giving way to honor, cultivated a mutual desire for intimacy that remained reserved in their hearts for now.

Trust and respect renders the perfect setting for the depth of intimacy that God intends for a married couple. Trust is the bedrock of true love and marriage fidelity. Once trust is broken it is very difficult to recover.

How are mutual trust and submission related? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

Day 3: A godly marriage is based on oneness.

Read Song of Songs 2:16-17, recalling yesterday's study on the importance of intimacy.

Too often, even in marriage, husbands and wives live separate lives. The husband does his thing, and the wife does her thing. While it is perfectly okay to have separate interests, when a husband and wife become so divided and different in their interests they can grow apart in unhealthy ways. This can be true relationally, physically, and spiritually.

BIBLE SKILL: Use a concordance and/or a Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel's religious life. Consult a Bible dictionary for articles on the following: marriage, weddings, betrothal, and submission. Make notes on your findings. What were the expectations of the bride and the groom? How does the cultural framework in which Song of Songs was written give insight into sexual purity and marriage commitments?

What can married couples do to build trust?

Day 4: Avoid sexual temptation outside of marriage.

Read Song of Songs 3:1-5, contemplating the woman's search.

These verses tell the story of the woman searching for the one she loved, but she was unable to find him. Again, she referred to him as *the one I love*. (See also 2:17.) She was devoted to him exclusively, and she was eager to give herself to him. When she found him (3:4), she had to make an important decision. She didn't want to be foolish, but she didn't want to lose him again either. She decided she would never let him go away from her. Not having him in her life would not be an option. But pay close attention to the fact that she didn't take him back to her bedroom. Quite the opposite, she took him to the room in her mother's house in which she was born (v. 4). By bringing him there instead of her bedroom, she registered her determination to practice restraint. She was not going to give in to her eagerness to be sexually intimate with him. That kind of intimacy is reserved for marriage.

The pursuit of the bride for her soon-to-be-husband is noble, but her desires for him would only come after their marriage commitment. Avoiding sexual temptation means that natural sexual desires must be directed exclusively toward one's marriage partner, and those same desires must not be fulfilled until a marriage has taken place.

How have you seen a person rationalize or justify sexual infidelity? What do these efforts to justify infidelity reveal about the person and about our world in general?

Day 5: **Protect marriage against sexual temptation.**

Read Song of Songs 3:1-5, noting her charge to protect the marriage relationship.

How can a marriage be protected from the kinds of sexual temptations that can lead to the demise of a marriage? Solomon understood that sexual passions can be strong, almost overwhelming. Thus he warned God's people to not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time. Sexual desires must be brought and kept under control.

Like the virgin seeking her future husband prior to marriage, so too should the husband and wife continue to desire and pursue each other after they have been married. Doing so will help to protect the marriage against sexual temptation outside of the marital relationship.

What are the dangers of living an undisciplined life as far as sexual desires are concerned?



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Song of Songs 2 and 3, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

How might God's wisdom guide us in protecting marriages?

How can we heal when trust is broken?

What encouragement is there for those who have given into sexual temptation outside of marriage?



For additional context, read "Marriage in the Ancient Near East" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.