



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

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.

***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?***

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

SONG OF SONGS 1:1–5:1

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 should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” 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.

Read Song of Songs 2:15–3:5, noting the imperatives given. How do the imperatives given in this passage relate to each other?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PREVENTATIVE CARE (SONG OF SG. 2:15)

¹⁵ Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

VERSE 15

As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is true when it comes to guarding and maintaining marital love and commitment. Keeping a marriage safe from ruin requires preventative and diligent care, as if one were tending a garden.

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.

A wise Christian couple makes guarding their marriage a high priority.

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: ***Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*** 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.



KEY THEMES IN THE SONG OF SONGS

- God affirms intimacy, but He expects His people to be wise in the expression of romantic love between a man and a woman.
- The relationship between a married man and woman provides the only healthy setting for Christians to express romantic love completely.

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?

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.

The preventive care of a marriage can take many forms: praying together; romantically and continually pursuing one another; communicating clearly, honestly, and consistently about all things; being kind, compassionate, and forgiving; sharing in ministry involvement together; and making Christ a priority in the home.

Small things can become big things that cause a marriage to implode. Many marriages crumble not because of acts of infidelity (although that happens) but most often through neglect. Just as a garden must be tended so, too, must a successful marriage.

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).

BUILD TRUST (SONG OF SG. 2:16-17)

¹⁶ **My beloved is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies.**

¹⁷ **Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.**

VERSES 16-17

Trust is needed to sustain marriage. Notice how dedicated this soon-to-be husband and wife were to each other: ***My beloved is mine and I am his.*** Marriage requires a mutual commitment to each other.

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 ***beloved.*** 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.



The trust called for between a man and a woman creates oneness. God created marriage so that a man and a woman might be united as one (Gen. 2:23-25). Oneness refers to the mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational unity that is reserved for marriage alone.

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.

What can married couples do to build trust?

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?

RESTRAINT REQUIRED (SONG OF SG. 3:1-5)

¹ All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. ² I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him. ³ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. “Have you seen the one my heart loves?” ⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother’s house, to the room of the one who conceived me. ⁵ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

VERSES 1-5

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). These verses use highly symbolic language to address the restraint and control needed in order to maintain one’s sexual purity.

Pay close attention to the fact that she didn’t take him back to her bedroom.

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 my heart loves***. (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 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?

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 arouse or awaken love until it so desires***. 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?

What's the best way to teach the valuable lesson about sexual restraint so other believers put it into practice?
