

The Courtship

1.1 – 3.5

(Studies Five—Seven)

Study Five

What are you Looking for? (1.1-8)

I. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. What do you see as the value of having started our study “in the middle”? How can 3.6 - 5.1 prepare us to understand and to value 1.1 - 3.5 more?
2. Solomon wrote more than a thousand songs, but the Holy Spirit chose only this one to publish. Why?
3. What is the difference between friendship and dating and courtship?
4. What does our culture encourage us to look for in a mate?
5. As you read and reflect on the first eight verses, what things seem important for her to find in a mate? What view does she have of herself in these same verses?
6. How can you really know for sure that you are “in love”?
7. What role do the court ladies play in this passage? What role can and should others play as we move from friendships to marriage?

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. Divide the group into two parts, with the men on one side and the women on the other. Discuss this question, “What do I (or did I) look for in a future husband or wife? Having made a list, decide in each group on your top three items, and then discuss your findings in a combined session. (By the way, do not allow the answer “a Christian”. Ask instead, “What kind of Christian?”.)
2. In similar groups, discuss and then share your responses to this question, “What do I (or did I) have to offer to a future mate?”
3. The following statement could lead to a lively debate, on both sides of the Atlantic, “The North American dating system, as normally practiced, should be rejected by believers as ungodly and unhelpful.”
4. What are the most common ways in which young men and women in your country meet their future life partners?
5. If the group is all or mostly married, share stories of when and how you met, and how you first knew that he or she was “THE one”.

II. REFLECTION

I was not yet ten years old when I first fell in love... Her name was Gineke Keizer, and her dimples and sparkling eyes and pigtails caught my attention as we were fourth graders together in Groningen, Holland. One morning under one of the school's arches, I gave her a special chunk of liquorice. Her smile of thank you... well, I still remember it some fifty years later...

God was very wise, and very risky, when He created male-female differences in His original garden. And now in our passage, long after the fall, He does it again! The first word in this Song is not a safe "Once upon a time in ancient Israel...", but an explosive and passionate "Yissakeni!" ("Kiss me!").

We need to be reminded that at the centre of the universe is Someone of passion. He created and longs to oversee godly courtship, and godly marriage, and godly sex, told in this Song in roughly chronological order. Solomon had authored 1005 songs (I Kings 4.32), but the Holy Spirit selected only this one to publish. The Song of Songs is the Hebrew way of saying, (like King of Kings and Lord of Lords and Holy of Holies): "This Song is the Greatest. It's at the top of the hit parade." The Song was right because the girl was right.

And who was she? Abishag is a very attractive candidate. She was David's "security blanket" in his dying days, came from the north, and was renowned for her beauty (a casual reading of I Kings 1-2 is recommended!) The Pharaoh's daughter is another favourite candidate, but most commentators prefer to leave her unnamed.

The first and last chapters in the Song suggest a possible rendezvous. Solomon was landlord of vineyards in southern Lebanon and, donning blue jeans one day, decided to inspect his property. He may have been curious where the excellent wine was coming from that graced the tables at his state banquets... and there among the grapes, God arranged for the first spark of a very special relationship.

When chapter one opens, their friendship has already progressed to a commitment or courtship stage. But our seven observations can still apply to all those wishing to journey toward marriage.

1. She anticipates closeness to him in verse 2, and is not afraid to express her wishes and emotions! Do notice that she does not say, "I am going to wrestle him to the ground, and plant a kiss on him that he will never forget..." Her comment is a good mix of longing and restraint.

Apparently a spark is needed to separate our many friends from the special one who will become our lifetime friend in marriage. As my son said recently of a female companion, "Dad, the chemistry is just not there." By contrast our Lebanese lass says, "I cannot wait for his kisses. In fact, I just know that his lovemaking will be better than the best party."

2. She admires his character, and in verse 3 makes sure that her heart and head are working as allies. Her emotions and thoughts are both involved in the friendship, and comparing his name or reputation to fragrant perfume says that the objective opinion of others is important to her.

If you are in a space full of relatives and friends, and you are the only one that can "smell" how sweet and kind and considerate your boyfriend is...perhaps you need to wait and have a "nose check"?

3. What does she look for in a husband? Even as her emotions and thoughts are partners, so are the next two observations. In verses 4 and 7 she expresses the need to spend time alone with him. “Draw me...take me...” she says, and by deferring to his initiative (“let the king...”) and by using the rare form of address (“let the king...”) she appears to say this: “Please create space in the chaos of the royal schedule to spend time with me!”

In verse 7 she pursues this further, and conveys a wish to see him at work. She suggests a lunch break meeting, wishing to avoid the after dark parade of women with other things on their minds... Solomon may have “moonlighted” as a shepherd, but it seems to me more likely that she is using the very common king-shepherd associations, and is creating a play-acting scene, which was very common in contemporary love songs.

4. The alone time is balanced nicely by applause time in verses 4 and 8. The plural voices which occur everywhere in this passage suggest that the approval of others is very important in courtship. It should be a strong wish on our part that, when siblings and grandparents and team mates and employers and youth pastors speak about our special friend or fiancé(e) we can respond with “How right they are to adore you!”

(The translation of verse 8 is quite a problem... The “most beautiful of women” phrase recurs in 5.9 and 6.1, and the court ladies may just be a little sarcastic here. What do you think they are saying? Or are these perhaps Solomon’s words?)

5. The next couple observations are allies, too! When the country girl from Lebanon reflects on a lifetime with a “city boy”, and feels quite out of sync in the palace, she becomes apprehensive (but a little later, assertive in verse 6.)

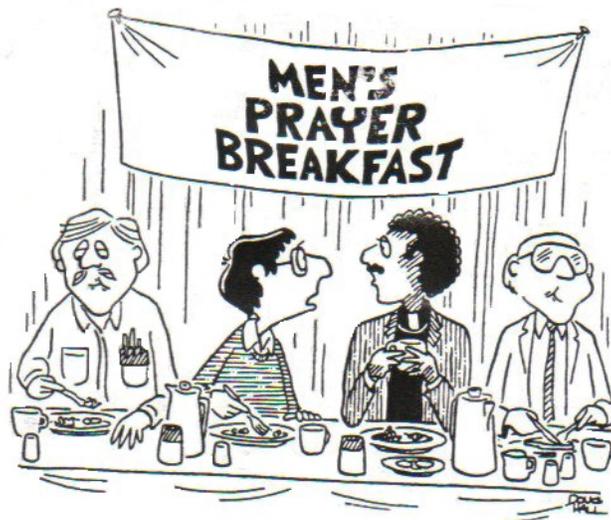
It appears that her father had died, and that her step-brothers in a clumsy and heavy-handed way had ordered her into the sun-drenched vineyards from dawn to dusk. She feels quite self-conscious, in a palace full of pale and highly-adorned queens and concubines, and is quite open about her feelings. Her candour and honesty are refreshing.

6. But she is assertive, too, and dares to address her new colleagues forthrightly. Since so many of these women, prisoners of political alliances, were getting very little one-on-one time with the king, they may well have spent much time on palace pastimes such as jealousy or gossip...

The young girl from Lebanon, the one whom Solomon loves, faces her shyness and their (possible) smugness squarely. She says, “Dark am I, but lovely...” and compares herself to the dark goats’ hair tents of her homeland, and the dark curtains of his. She has a healthy mix of self-awareness and self-confidence.

7. All six together can be summarized by the word accepting. She accepts herself and she accepts Solomon. This attitude is illustrated by an interesting “trinity” when she says, “Kiss me, draw me, tell me”. She welcomes his caresses and closeness, his companionship, and his conversation.

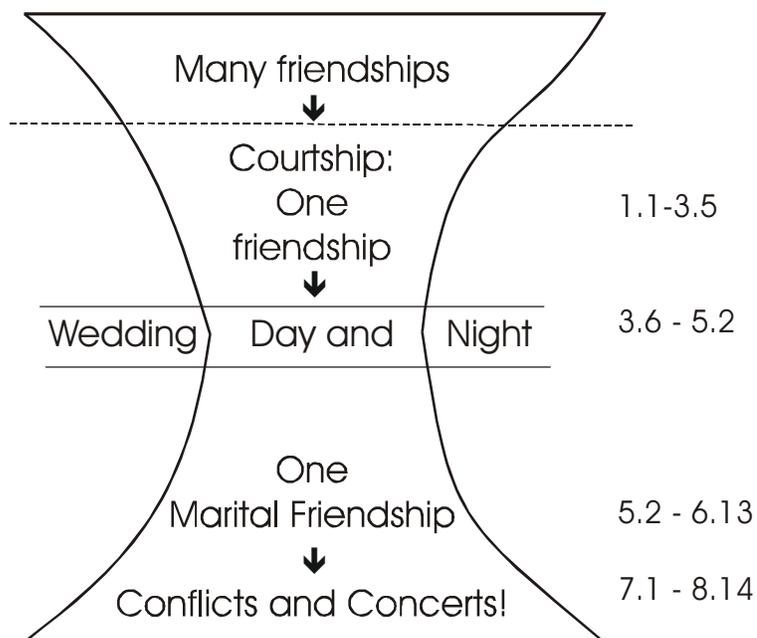
Billy Graham's wife, Ruth tells a story of once complaining to God about her husband, "Outside the house everyone admires and idolizes Billy, but inside the house he is not always so easy to live with. Please God, would you change him?" Ruth tells of hearing God's voice rather clearly, "Ruth, let's get our assignments straight. Your assignment is to love Billy as he is, and mine is to change him!"



"Am I utterly depraved if I came here hoping to get a date with a waitress?"

III. RESOURCES

1. Harris, Josh. *Boy Meets Girl*. Portland, OR: Multnomah, 2005.
2. Croft, Scott. "What does a Biblical Relationship Look Like?" In Piper, John and Taylor, Justin. *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.
3. A relational hourglass:



(Our journey with God is very similar to our journey toward and with our lifetime married partner...)

dards as an already married man. Single men must conduct themselves in a way that will not result in embarrassment or shame in the future.

3. *We Need to Guard Our Eyes and Hearts and Bodies for Marriage*

Third, single men need to guard their eyes and hearts and bodies for marriage. “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess. 4:7, NIV). A person will not fully know how critical this is until marriage, but trust us old married guys and know that what is done with the eyes, heart, and body *before* marriage matters. Too many times we have seen a Christian man and woman fall in love, get engaged, and then discover, during pre-marriage counseling, that their past relationships are no small factor. Too often, past physical relationships become impediments in the marriage bed.

We do not want a brother standing at the altar on his wedding day looking at his beautiful bride only to imagine behind her the boys and men who took advantage of her and robbed her of the trust and confidence that she now needs for her husband. We do not want a sister standing at the altar on her wedding day looking at her handsome groom only to imagine behind him a string of relationships with girls and women he failed to honor, and knowing that images in his head from pornography use and past flings may stick with him for a long time.

If I have just described you, you may have a painful road ahead of you, but our God is a great deliverer. The grace of God displayed in the shed blood of Christ on Calvary is more than sufficient not only to forgive you of past sins but to fit you for offering the comfort you have received to others, whether you eventually marry or not. If you have failed or are failing in this area, then remember your calling and resolve to stop now and prepare yourself for marriage. Guard your eyes and heart and body.

4. *We Need to Make Good Deposits in the Marriage Bank*

Fourth, we need to make good deposits in the Marriage Bank. What do I mean? The wedding day is the formal ceremony used to charter, if you will, a new bank, the Marriage Bank. Both deposits and withdrawals will be made at this bank. Men will make deposits with their actions of

holy living, faithfulness, gentleness, compassion, strength, prayerfulness, and washing their wives in the Word. And wives will draw on those deposits. They draw trust, confidence, and faith. What most men do not understand is, although the Marriage Bank is not officially open till the wedding day, deposits can be made early. The husband who goes into the workplace among attractive, unbelieving women may find that his wife will be tempted to doubt his fidelity because of how he treated her when she was not his wife. Or, he will find she trusts him because he was so careful to protect her when she was not his wife—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. To the single reader, then, let me encourage you to live now in light of the future you desire. Treat all women in a way that ensures, when doubt arises, that the one woman you do marry will be able to draw confidence and faith from the pre-marriage deposits you made through prayerfulness and holy living.

In short, single men must know now that what they do prior to marriage is not inconsequential to what happens in marriage. They will reap what they sow. So they must decide now to sow well. The short-term pleasures of physical intimacy outside of marriage must not be allowed to damage the prospects for long-term joy inside marriage.

What Does a Biblical Relationship Look Like?

SCOTT CROFT

Given this biblical theology of sex and marriage, what does a healthy, biblical dating or courting relationship look like in practice?

The attempt to answer that question has brought about a literary flood over the last several years, with different works bearing different levels of usefulness. A few examples include *Boundaries in Dating: Boy Meets Girl; I Kissed Dating Goodbye; I Hugged Dating Hello; I Gave Dating a Chance; Her Hard in Marriage; The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right; and Wandering Toward the Altar*.

These volumes can be divided into two groups. One group generally supports the method of “dating” and attempts to instruct readers how to date in a “Christian” way. The other group rejects the current dating method altogether as biblically flawed. It advocates an alternative system, which most describe as “courtship.” In my reading, the

book on this topic that seems the most sound theologically and practically is called *Boy Meets Girl*, by Joshua Harris⁴ (he is also the author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*).

What is the difference between courtship and dating, and is one more biblical than the other? I will provide a working definition of each, describe how the two methods are broadly different, and then recommend why one method is fundamentally more biblical than the other.⁵

Defining Courtship and Dating

Let's begin by defining courtship. Courtship ordinarily begins when a single man approaches a single woman by going through the woman's father, and then conducts his relationship with the woman under the authority of her father, family, or church, whichever is most appropriate. Courtship always has marriage as its direct goal.

What then is dating? Dating, a more modern approach, begins when either the man or the woman initiates a more-than-friends relationship with the other, and then they conduct that relationship outside of any oversight or authority. Dating may or may not have marriage as its goal.

The Differences Between Courtship and Dating

What are the differences in these two systems? For our purposes, there are three broad differences between what has been called biblical courtship and modern dating.

1. *The Difference in Motive*

The first difference lies with the man's *motive* in pursuing the relationship. Biblical courtship has one motive—to find a spouse. A man will court a particular woman because he believes it is possible that he could marry her, and the courtship is the process of discerning whether that belief is correct. To the extent that the Bible addresses premarital relationships at all, it uses the language of men marrying and women being given in marriage (see Matt. 24:38; Luke 20:34-35). Numbers 30:3-16

⁴Joshua Harris, *Boy Meets Girl* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2000).

⁵If after reading the chapter, you have unanswered questions, you can find the notes for my six-week Sunday school class on courtship and dating at www.capitolhillbaptist.org.

talks about a transfer of authority from the father to the husband when a woman leaves her father's house and is united to her husband. The Song of Solomon showcases the meeting, courtship, and marriage of a couple—always with marriage in view. I am not advocating arranged marriages; rather, I am pointing toward the biblical purpose for why young men and women associate with one another. These passages do not argue that marriage should be the direct goal of such relationships so much as they assume it.

Modern dating, on the other hand, need not have marriage as a goal at all. Dating can be recreational. Not only is “dating for fun” acceptable, it is assumed that “practice” and learning by “trial and error” are necessary, even advisable, before finding the person that is just right for you. The fact that individuals will be emotionally and probably physically intimate with many people before settling down with the “right person” is just part of the deal. Yet where is the biblical support for such an approach to marriage? There is none. How many examples of “recreational dating” do we see among God's people in the Bible? Zero. The category of premarital intimacy does not exist, other than in the context of grievous sexual sin.

The motive for dating or courting is marriage. The practical advice I give the singles at our church is, if you cannot happily see yourself as a married man (or woman) in less than one year, then you are not ready to date.

2. *The Difference in Mind-set*

The second major difference between biblical courtship and modern dating is the *mind-set* couples have when interacting with one another. What do I mean by that? Modern dating is essentially a selfish endeavor. I do not mean maliciously selfish, as in “I'm going to try to hurt you for my benefit.” I mean an oblivious self-centeredness that treats the whole process as ultimately about *me*. After all, what is the main question everyone asks about dating, falling in love, and getting married? “How do I know if I've found the one?” What is the unspoken ending to that question? “For me.” Will this person make me happy? Will this relationship meet my needs? How does she look? What is the chemistry like? Have I done as well as I can do? I cannot tell you how many men I have

counseled who are courting a wonderful woman and are terrified to commit, worrying that as soon as they do, "something better will come walking around the corner." Selfishness is not what drives a biblical marriage, and therefore should not be what drives a biblical courtship.

Biblical courtship recognizes the general call to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3, NIV). It also recognizes the specific call that Ephesians 5:25 gives men in marriage, where our main role is sacrificial service. We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church, giving himself up for her. That means loving sacrificially every day. Biblical courtship means that a man does not look for a laundry list of characteristics that comprise his fantasy woman so that his every desire can be fulfilled, but he looks for a godly woman as Scripture defines her—a woman he can love and, yes, be attracted to, but a woman whom he can serve and love as a godly husband. In other words, modern dating asks, "How can I find the one for me?" while biblical courtship asks, "How can I be the one for her?"

3. *The Difference in Methods*

Third, and most practically, modern dating and biblical courtship are different in their *methods*. And this is where the rubber really meets the road. In modern dating, intimacy precedes commitment. In biblical courtship, commitment precedes intimacy.

According to the current school of thought, the best way to figure out whether you want to marry a particular person is to act as if you are married and see if you like it. Spend large amounts of time alone together. Become each other's primary emotional confidantes. Share your deepest secrets and desires. Get to know that person better than anyone else in your life. Grow your physical intimacy and intensity on the same track as your emotional intimacy. What you do and say together is private and is no one else's business, and since the relationship is private, you need not submit to anyone else's authority or be accountable. And if this pseudo-marriage works for both of you, then get married. But if one or both of you do not like how it is going, go ahead and break up even if it means going through something like an emotional and probably physical divorce.

Such is the process of finding "the one," and this can happen with several different people before one finally marries. In the self-centered world of secular dating, we want as much information as possible to ensure that the right decision is being made. And if we can enjoy a little physical or emotional comfort along the way, great.

Clearly, this is not the biblical picture. The process just described is hurtful to the woman that the man purports to care about, not to mention to himself. And it clearly violates the command of 1 Thessalonians 4:6 not to wrong or defraud our sisters in Christ by implying a marriage-level commitment where one does not exist. It will have a damaging effect on the man's marriage and hers, whether they marry each other or not.

In a biblical relationship, commitment precedes intimacy. Within this model, the man should follow the admonition in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 to treat all young women to whom he is not married as sisters, with absolute purity. The man should show leadership and willingness to bear the risk of rejection by defining the nature and the pace of the relationship. He should do this before spending significant time alone with her in order to avoid hurting or confusing her. He should also seek to ensure that a significant amount of time is spent with other couples or friends rather than alone. The topics, manner, and frequency of conversation should be characterized by the desire to become acquainted with each other more deeply, but not in a way that defrauds each other. There should be no physical intimacy outside the context of marriage, and the couple should seek accountability for the spiritual health and progress of the relationship, as well as for their physical and emotional intimacy. Within this model, both parties should seek to find out, before God, whether they should be married, and whether they can serve and honor God better together than apart. The man should take care not to treat any woman like his wife who is not his wife. Of course he must get to know his courting partner well enough to make a decision on marriage. However, prior to the decision to marry, he should always engage with her emotionally in a way he would be happy for other men to engage with her. In all these ways, a biblical relationship looks different than a worldly relationship. If this is done well, Christian women will be honored, even as they are pursued. Christian wives will be honored. And God will be glorified.

Conclusion

MARK DEVER

Some of these ideas will seem obvious to some readers, and revolutionary to others. We have heard objections to parts of this teaching, but none that have caused us to doubt the wisdom of it. And we increasingly hear wonderful testimonies.

I talked recently with an unmarried friend in his mid-thirties who had just finished listening for a third or fourth time to a 9Marks Ministries interview with Joshua Harris, Al Mohler, Scott Croft, and myself on dating.⁶ He said that he was beginning to think he had wrongly approached finding a wife. (He also said his age was leading him to the same conclusion!)

Not too long after that, I was in a seminary bookstore, and a young couple came up to me and announced they had become engaged soon after hearing this same interview. They simply wanted to thank me. The young man in particular said that such marriage-focused teaching on male-female relationships had shown him his responsibility and had given him courage.

And now we pray that you, our unmarried readers, will not despair, but that you will be blessed as you pray, study God's Word, discern God's will, seek godly counsel, and either pursue finding a godly wife or embrace a life of celibacy. We also pray that our married readers and church members generally will better know how to counsel and encourage our single brothers and sisters in Christ as they approach God's wonderful gift in marriage.

How true the words of Solomon: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD" (Prov. 18:22).

⁶ Available at www.9marks.org.

CHAPTER 7

Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know

C. J. MAHANEY¹

A smile crossed the king's face as he dipped his quill into the inkwell one last time. With firm, smooth strokes the final lines flowed freely onto the parchment.

Pushing back from his writing desk, he sighed with satisfaction. The project had gone very well. This was some fine work. Rising from the chair and lifting his hands to heaven, Solomon the son of David offered thanks to the Lord. Here, complete at last, was his greatest song, one of the most important pieces of writing he had ever done. With satisfaction he lowered his eyes to the finished work spread out before him. Today, we call it the Song of Solomon.

It's about sex.

In his lifetime, Solomon would produce 3,000 proverbs and more than 1,000 songs and hymns. The son of a legendary king, and a great king himself, he would be esteemed in Scripture as the wisest man who had yet lived. And his "Song of Songs" is nothing less than an explicit and unblushing celebration of sex within marriage.

To Solomon, this may have been simply a deeply personal reflection on love. But really it was much more than that. Because one day, as we know, it would be counted among the perfect and infallible words of Scripture, inerrantly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and intended by

¹The material in this chapter can be found in expanded form in my book, *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004).

IV. RESPONSE

A. If you are single:

1. Write down your expectations of a lifetime partner, and discuss them with parents, and roommates, or other close friends.
2. Where and how will you carry out your “search”?
3. Write down your response if God chooses not to meet your expectations.

B. If you are married:

1. What attitudes or actions in your courtship would you like to recover for your marriage?
2. In what ways can your marriage be a “continuing or ongoing courtship”? Let the “I do” of the wedding day echo across the years as “I still do” (and not as “I have done” or “I am done”...!)

Study Six

What are you Aiming for? (1.9 - 2.7)

I. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. What do these four little scenes tell you about their developing friendship? What are they aiming for?
2. What role should praise and affirmation play in a healthy relationship? What is the difference between praise and flattery?
3. How much attention should you pay to appearance: clothing, hair, make-up, jewellery, and so on?
4. Which of the four scenes do you enjoy the most, and why?
5. Many men who are excellent communicators before the wedding seem to lose this skill after the wedding. Do you married folks find this to be true, and how would you explain it?
6. Share some ways that you were affected in the last week, both positively and negatively, by non-verbal communication.
7. In the last little scene (2.4 - 7) there is a growing tension. What is it, and how is it resolved?

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. On a scale of 1 – 10, rate yourself as a listener and also as a speaker. Ask a close friend or a marriage partner to rate you in the same two areas, and then compare numbers! (In other words, if you give yourself a nine as a listener, but your wife evaluates you as a five, there is clearly some homework ahead...!)
2. If you are part of a conference or retreat, or an ongoing class, devote one mealtime to this assignment (as separate table groups), “How can we improve (marital) communication, both verbal and nonverbal, in specific and practical ways?” Perhaps the youngest person at each table could take notes.
3. If you are engaged or married, develop the discipline of affirming your partner at least once a day (saying, “Hey, nice dress” ten days in a row does not really count...)
4. A most valuable conversational exercise to practice with your partner is this: “What are we aiming for in the area of financial harmony? What attitudes and habits did we grow up with in relation to earning, saving, and spending money?”

II. REFLECTION

It was one of the sadder scenes that I have seen in a long while. Not quite on the same level as typhoons and hurricanes and floods and earthquakes, but still very sad.

A husband and wife were sitting by the window of a cozy restaurant, exploring a tasty lunch with one hand. With the other hand, they were each on a cell phone speaking to a third party.

Several years ago, hundreds of divorced couples were given several possible reasons for their break-up, and asked to tick the ones that applied to them. A full 85% indicated lack of communication or poor communication as a major reason (the second reason most commonly cited polled 44 %.)

Our couple in the Song, or at least the female half of the couple, spelled out quite clearly in 1.1-8: “this is who I am, and this is what I am looking for in a lifetime partner.” Now in the next courtship act from 1.9 – 2.7, they spell out what they are aiming for in a relationship. Simply put, they want to build a foundation for an open, give-and-take, affirming conversation. They may well have said to one another, “After fifty years of marriage, we still want to look forward to having a good, long chat...”

By the way, such candor and openness is an amazing tool in the battle against AIDS. The HIV positive virus flourishes in an atmosphere of silence, of cover up and denial, and of spreading tribal myths and biases.

On the other hand, the virus shrinks in the light of full information and disclosure, of honesty and confession, and of communal care for both those who die and those who remain. It is no surprise that Uganda, most candid country in Africa (President Yoweri Museveni addressed the Makerere University graduates on this issue many years ago) has seen its HIV positive rate drop from 15.8% to 6.2% in the last ten years.

They converse in four little scenes: while standing in the palace (1.9-11), sitting at the dining table (1.12-14), walking in the countryside (1.15 – 2.3), and reclining at a public banquet (2.4-7). Even the variety is instructive! If your experience is always just the two of you, off to the same cinema, back to the same room, enjoying the same snack, talking about the same others in the same way... the boredom could very easily lead you to stop talking with your vocal cords and to start talking with your hands. Especially you guys, you can do better than this!! We challenge you to set the tone in leading a verbal adventure!

1. Solomon, who speaks here for the first time, appears to stumble out of the gate by comparing her to a horse (do not try this at home...) For a millennium a stallion had led Egypt’s chariots and armies into battle, but now Solomon says a mare, a filly, will be the focus of attention.

The focus is on her appearance, and her beauty stands out in a palace full of beauties. The king wants to underline and embellish her splendour, and focuses on her cheeks and neck, the parts most likely to be affected by the sun. He also enlists the help of a possibly reluctant harem: “We will provide...”

Cathy and I have tried to raise a son and three daughters and we’ve had our share of “conversations” about short skirts and “holy” jeans, and male earrings and female tattoos. We pass along a simple principle: in any cultural or social situation, do not call attention to yourself by over-dressing or under-dressing or dressing strangely.

And a word for parents: do not confuse a skirmish with a war. Choose your fighting issues with care. Our son had an earring for a couple years, Christi has a tasteful butterfly tattoo above her belly button, and Cyara shaved her head completely in Austria a couple years ago. All have survived while we have tried as parents to help them focus on inside character stuff and on the choices facing them in areas of entertainment and friends and future...

2. Leaving the party in the outside courtyard, the two now move inside to sit together over a casual lunch (1.12 – 14). She is attentive to him, responding with delight to his praise. She reflects on his character and seems to think about him “out loud” (by contrast there is actual speech in the scenes which precede and follow).

As was customary in the tenth century B.C., she wore a sachet or pouch of myrrh around her neck. In the increasing warmth of both the day and her feelings, the spices would melt and release fragrance and also serve as a rather effective deodorant.... She seems to say, “You fill my space with a pleasing aroma and not only that, if I am a unique lead mare to you, you’re like an Engedi oasis in an endless desert to me. You are like a fragrant cluster of small blue (henna) flowers.

3. The conversation continues on a leisurely stroll outside, perhaps after lunch. They playfully picture the grand outdoor scenery as their home (1.15 – 2.3). And since he seems content as a busy king to spend all this time with her, she slips into a shy mood once more and her confidence wavers.

“I am but a small insignificant rose of Sharon, one small lily among a thousand...” But Solomon’s response has me whispering out loud to all potential male suitors, “Hey guys, do take some notes here!” The king replies, “You are like a lily among thorns...” giving her a profound sense of assurance. She is distinctive and unique and special to him, and he has all the time in the world for her.

In the last verse of this scene, she is so relaxed! Sitting in the shade of an apple tree, while nibbling an apple, she is deeply grateful for both his protection and provision. But a challenge awaits...

4. The fourth scene (2.4-7) puts them back in the palace, perhaps as the king entertains at a banquet that evening. And he makes another brilliant move as a suitor. He gives her not only private assurance, but also public acclaim. His banner, that clear visual signal in battle that indicates the king’s whereabouts, is now spread above her as a way of saying to all the gathered VIP’s: “This sunburned girl, daughter of nobody you know, is my choice as a future wife.”

I am impressed, since I am someone whose private assurance of my wife does not always spill over into public approval and affection. And how many of us men ignore our wives at socials, or belittle them in conversation? Go on, when was the last time you laughed sincerely and heartily at your wife’s attempt at telling a funny story?

5. Our girl from Lebanon is very impressed! And she experiences arousal! Raisins and apples were part of her cultural “love diet”, and her language in verse 6 (musing to herself as she looks ahead to the wedding night) is remarkably candid.

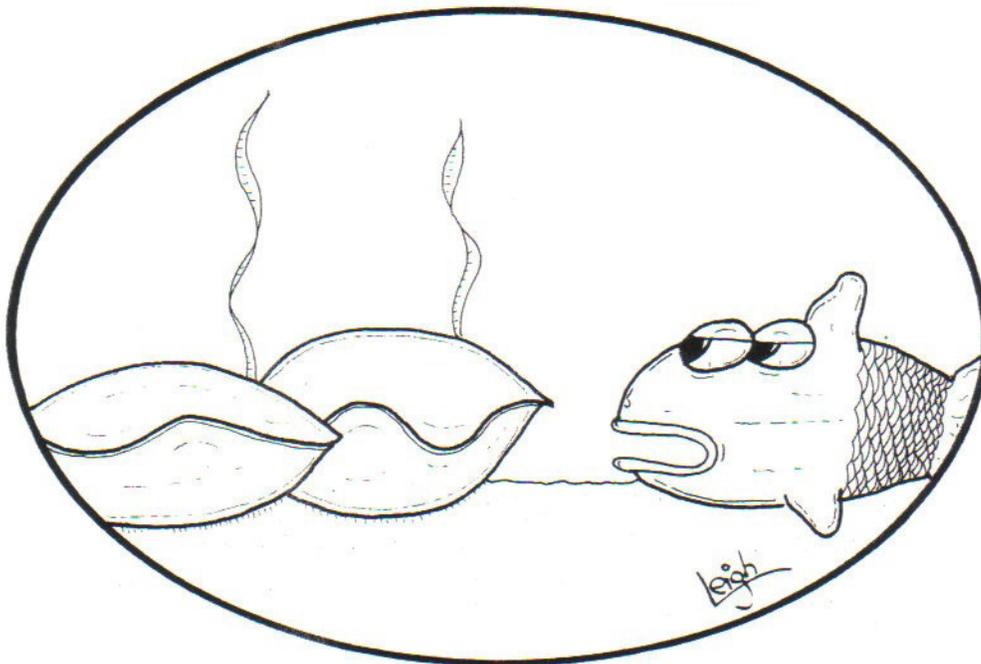
She is not a statue or a plaster saint, but is free to admit that God created her with specific anatomy and hormones and desires. The key issue of course is what we do, both then and now, with these strong feelings...

6. Instead of weakly giving in, she makes the courageous choice of abstinence. The same girl who wanted a noon day and not a night time meeting in 1.8, now appears to say in 2.7 “I will say no to the good pleasures of sex now, in order to wait for the greater pleasures of sex in marriage!”

Our son-in-law Scott proposed to our daughter Cami on a favourite beach on 11-9-2002. He quoted from the Song of Solomon, and they then shared their first kiss. And agreed that their second would be on the wedding day...

Africa’s fairly common A-B-C mantra against AIDS needs some adjustments in a couple areas. We have heard of abstaining from sex before marriage, being faithful sexually in marriage, and condomizing if the first two don’t seem to work. I suggest that the negative “abstain” should be joined or perhaps replaced by the positive and joyful “anticipate”! And the “condom” should be replaced by “Christ and His strength”, available to help us. Only animals and very selfish people insist on instant gratification. And the Spirit’s fruit basket in Galatians 5.22,23 surely includes the fruit of self-control!

She knows it will not be easy, so she enlists the help of the court ladies. It is an amazing and timely lesson to liberate wrong sex from the area of personal struggle and make it into a community project. A group of ten to fifteen men from McGill University in Montreal met midweek for years. When I was invited for supper and study and sharing one evening, I was amazed at the level of openness about their sexual struggles. But this meeting was clearly a sanctuary of shared struggles and prayer and hope.



“The problem with your marriage is obviously a lack of communication.”

7. Sex before marriage is obviously something to talk about! The main note of all the conversations in these ten verses is its affirming nature. The glass of water is always half full. Since the tongue is a half-ounce that can create an atmosphere of heaven or hell for our partner, and all other listeners, let's develop some heavenly habits!

III. RESOURCES

A. Diagnostic Tool and Introduction to Communication

Although Solomon is the king of an empire, the two lovers have found time and space to communicate in creative ways, using their five senses. They stand together watching a palace scene, sit facing each other over a meal, walk together in the countryside, and appear together on a very public occasion.

1. Write a definition of communication, in your own words.
2. Reflect on how your parents (or family) communicated in the following areas
 - How were decisions made in your home? (e.g. Was it a long or short process? If the decision affected you, were you consulted? Who made the final decision? How well were decisions implemented [carried through] in your home?)
 - Was affection shown between mother and father (or with children) – either verbally or nonverbally (gestures or looks)?
 - How emotional did family members get in expressing their feelings or wants?
3. What are some common hurdles to good communication?

What is communication?

*Communication is a process (either verbal or nonverbal)
of the sharing of information with another person
in such a way that he/she understands what you are saying.*

*“When we speak we give out information;
but it is only when we listen that the communication loop is completed.
Sharing information on its own is not communication;
it is merely giving out.
Communication is getting through.”¹*

*“Listen or your tongue will keep you deaf.”
(First Nations of North America proverb)*

1. Milton Kamwenda quoting Sidney Harris in “Take Time to Listen” in the *Zimbabwe Herald*

*He who did not listen to a warning rode in a boat made of clay.”
(Swahili proverb)*

“Cows are born with ears; later they grow horns.”

Tira Tribe – Sudan, warning us not to outgrow the habit of listening and become arrogant...

Creating Time and Space for Communication

In order to communicate well, like the lovers in the Song, we need to create time and space for communication to happen.

For small group discussion:

1. What sort of things could couples do to create a space and time for communication to happen?

Write answers on the board, then fill in items below (suggested by students in Ethiopia)

- making coffee together (a one-hour ceremony in Ethiopia)
- taking time as a couple to get away for a night to talk about their life as a couple - spiritually, financially, socially, sexually, other lifestyle concerns)
- scheduling time together (and keeping it) at home, having breakfast, sharing family meals, sitting in the same room in the evening or on Sat and Sun
- doing things together at home – dishes, bathing the children, reading to them, singing and praying with them, family devotions at meal or bedtime
- doing things together outside the home – church, shopping, marriage weekend sponsored by church, or occasional coffee or meal away from the house, if possible
- using travelling time to talk together (walking or in the car) as a couple (without children) to visit relatives or others – this can give space away from the demands of home

2. What are some tools to help improve our communication?

Write answers on the board, then fill in with items below suggested by students in Ethiopia:

- Show **genuine interest** – welcome your spouse when s/he comes into the room; don't be preoccupied with your own issues, don't let your eyes or mind wander; make eye contact, say “uh-huh”
- **“10-10”** (Marriage Encounter) take turns – each one gets 10 min of uninterrupted talking
- Communicate your **understanding** – “that must have been very hard for you” “that's great, terrible”
- **Sum up** the other one's statements
- **Validate their emotions** – let your partner know their emotions make sense to you

- **Take your spouse's side** – be supportive of her/him. Don't side with the opposition. They need emotional support from you...Express a “**we against others**” attitude
- Don't give **unsolicited advice** – suggesting solutions (women may be more sensitive than men often about this – they don't want solutions at first, they want sympathy)
- Do not fall into **mental debates** (by having a judgemental attitude or using rebuttal techniques)
- Express **affection** – hand, hug, pat shoulder
- Be **honest** about your own feelings
- Share your feelings in such a way that it does not **blame or hurt** your partner. “Objectify” rather than “subjectify” Say, when this happens I feel....”
- Do not use “always” or “never” or “You make me feel...”

Application:

1. How can I improve my commitment to creating a time and space for our relationship?



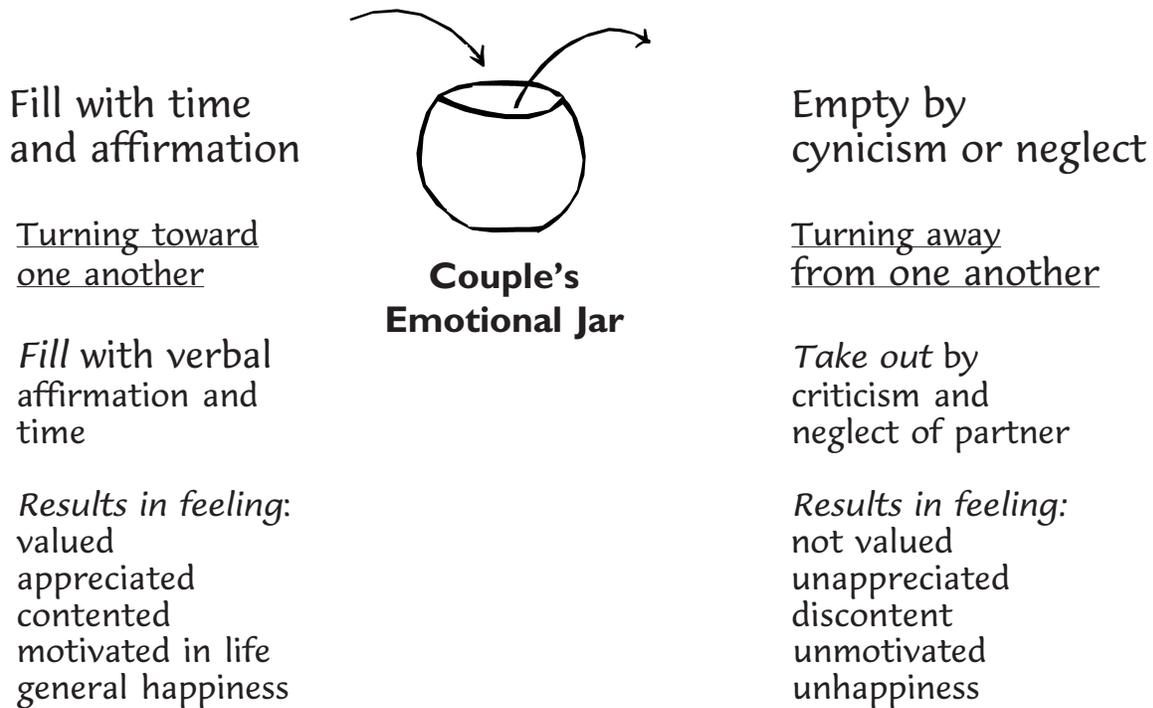
2. John Gottman, Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work (p.83)

2. Out of the list above, which one or two could I begin to practice? As a marital partner, which one would you like your partner to practice (or practice more)?

B. Emotional Jars or Bank Accounts requiring Good Communication

Couples often spend a lot of time facing each other before marriage (leave/cleave) and then afterwards they become preoccupied with other things (“turn away from each other”) and forget to nurture the weaving stage-one flesh /or “turning toward each other”.

John Gottman says: Each couple has an emotional jar or bank account that they either fill (verbal affirmation & time commitment) or empty (criticism and neglect).²



C. NonVerbal Communication

Diagnostic Question:

Discuss with your spouse, or in the small group:

In the last 24 hours to 7 days, remember a time when your spouse (or a family member or housemate) frowned, yawned, or walked away. Did you know what it meant?

What we really feel seeps out in our nonverbal communication. We can also miss what others are really feeling if we are moving through life too fast, pressured with other things, or distracted. Women are often better at catching nonverbal signs, but they tend to misinterpret it.

When we ignore the other's nonverbal communication and what it is telling us about what is on the inside, we create toxic waste in our relationships. Inner thoughts, feelings, and desires that do not get out become corrosive to us personally and pollute our communication and ability to resolve conflict.

Group Activity to practice nonverbal communication:

1. Have leader put the following words expressing feelings on small pieces of paper and put them in a hat or bag:

*contentment shyness indifference fear frustration loneliness sorrow anger
hope happiness joy warmth love admiration*

2. Divide the group in half. Have one group write their names on slips of paper and put them in a hat or bag. Then have them each choose a word out of the bag (contentment, etc), but keep it to him/herself.
3. Have the other group's members each choose a name out of the hat. The chosen person will stand opposite the person who chose his/her name.
4. The leader will explain that the person holding the feeling word must demonstrate the word for their partner using not only their face but also their bodies.
5. When everyone has correctly guessed the emotion, put the words back in the hat and allow the opposite partner to choose one and act it out accordingly.
6. When everyone has had the opportunity to play both roles, have ask: What was the easiest emotion to communicate? Which the hardest and why?
7. Ask, why is communication sometimes so difficult?
(The same emotion can be expressed in different ways. Anger can be expressed by jumping up and down or staying silent. Crying can express happiness, sadness, excitement, grief, pain or confusion.)

Lecturette on NonVerbal Communication

Verbal Communication: Words

Nonverbal Communication (65 - 90% of communication): ³

Ask the group to give examples of nonverbal communication, and write them on the board.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Facial expression ◆ Degree of eye contact ◆ Body position – posture ◆ Muscle tone – body tension ◆ Breathing tempo ◆ Voice tone ◆ Continuities in speech – rate, duration, nonfluencies, pauses ◆ Gestures – hand and body movements ◆ Physique ◆ Spatial distance ◆ Touch ◆ Manner of dress 	<p>Even when someone tries to hide their feelings, they will usually show somewhere on the body or the face.</p> <p>“The joy of the heart colours the face” Proverbs 15.30 paraphrased</p> <p>“Every time you talk, All of you talks.”⁴</p>
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About Nonverbals

- ◆ Nonverbals are clues to true feelings and information
- ◆ They can powerfully communicate emotions such as like or dislike, acceptance or rejection, interest or boredom
- ◆ Relationships are nourished and sustained nonverbally (a smile or a touch may outweigh words)
- ◆ Nonverbals are often more accurate than verbals
- ◆ But nonverbal communication is not always congruent with verbal communication.
- ◆ Nonverbals can be tested to clarify meanings (“You look ... How are you feeling or, what are you really feeling?”)
- ◆ We need to develop our ability to make our nonverbals and our verbals congruent; that is, we need to demonstrate with our bodies what we feel inside.



I feel terrible

3. Satir, p. 4
4. Satir, p. 81

Application Question:

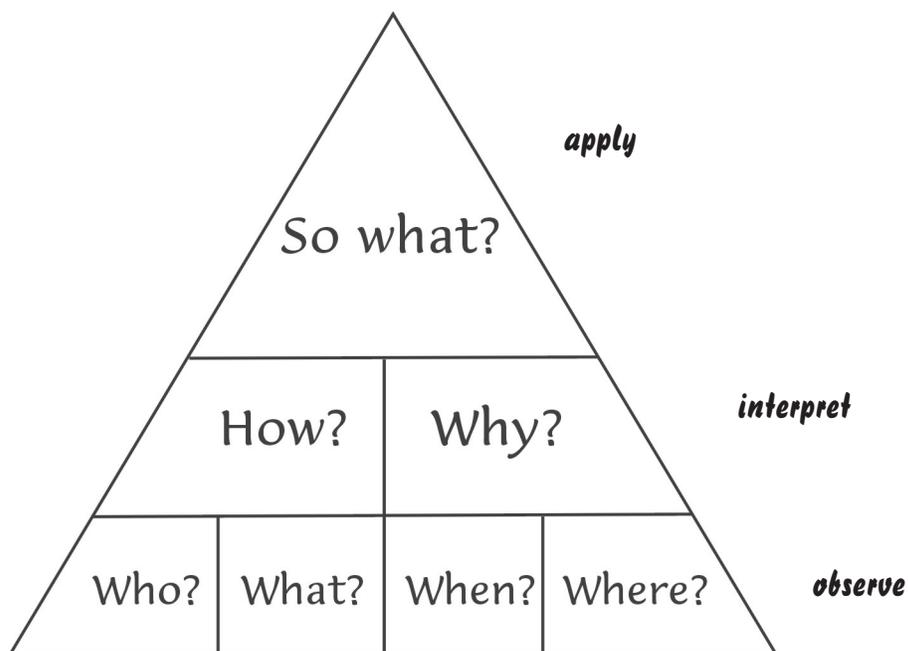
For singles: How did I know that my parent(s) were angry, happy, disappointed, and that they loved me? How well are others able to read from my nonverbals what I am feeling? How can I make my nonverbals more effective?

For marrieds: How do I know that you are angry, happy, disappointed, and that you love me? How well can you tell what I am feeling? How can I make my nonverbals more effective?

If you want to express warmth, your words, your facial expressions, tone of voice, posture and so on must all express warmth.

If your nonverbals contradict what you are saying or feeling, the other person may think that you are untrustworthy and it will create anxiety in your relationship.

Receiving contradictory verbal and nonverbal messages for a long period from someone you love can result in mental illness.⁵

The “Q” Pyramid

Use the Q pyramid as you study Scripture, including “manuscript” style as we have done on the Song of Solomon.

5. Johnson and Johnson, *Reaching Out* (1997). Needham Heights, MA.

D. Open and Direct Communication Exercise

In groups of two or three women or men: using the Q pyramid as a guide, what do you learn about (couple) communication from 1.9-2.7? How does your culture compare and contrast with the Biblical culture we see in these verses? (take 10-15 minutes)

In the large group, share what your group discovered about couple communication and cultural comparisons.

As a couple (or group of three to five individuals), 1) Think of an event coming up in your family and plan how you will celebrate it. Take ten minutes and be prepared to share this process with your group.⁶ 2) Together share how that planning process made you feel? Successful? Unsettled? Frustrated? What other emotions or physical feelings arose? Would you say your communication with one another was open or closed?

Lecturette on Open and Closed Communication

Open Communication: makes you feel good about yourself and helps you appreciate your partner

- It is direct:
 - ◆ You say what's on your mind, what's in your heart, and what you want.
 - ◆ You are clear and specific.
- It is congruent:
 - ◆ You look each other in the eye.
 - ◆ Your words (verbals) match your nonverbals.
 - ◆ "You mean what you say and you say what you mean."
- It is respectful:
 - ◆ You view and value your spouse as highly as you do yourself.
- It is constructive:
 - ◆ You see reality (you are honest) but you are affirming at the same time ("dark am I, but lovely" SOS 1.5)

Closed Communication: makes you feel bad about yourself and you put down or demean your partner.

- It is indirect:
 - ◆ You may speak about your partner to others rather than directly.
 - ◆ You may "beat around the bush", not saying what you really mean. You are vague, and unspecific, expecting your partner to know what you really mean.
 - ◆ You avoid eye contact, and often have your body turned away from your partner.
- It is incongruent:
 - ◆ The verbals (words) do not match the nonverbal. You may say "I am fine" but your body language says you are not; you get upset about something else (e.g. kick the cat) or get a headache, backache or stomach-ache.

6. From Virginia Satir, *The New Peoplemaking* (1988). Mountain View, California: Science and Behaviour Books, p. 133

It is disrespectful:

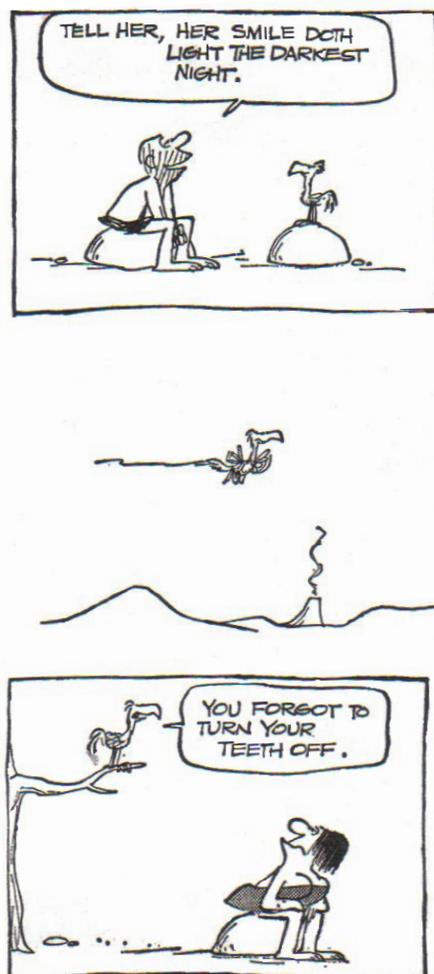
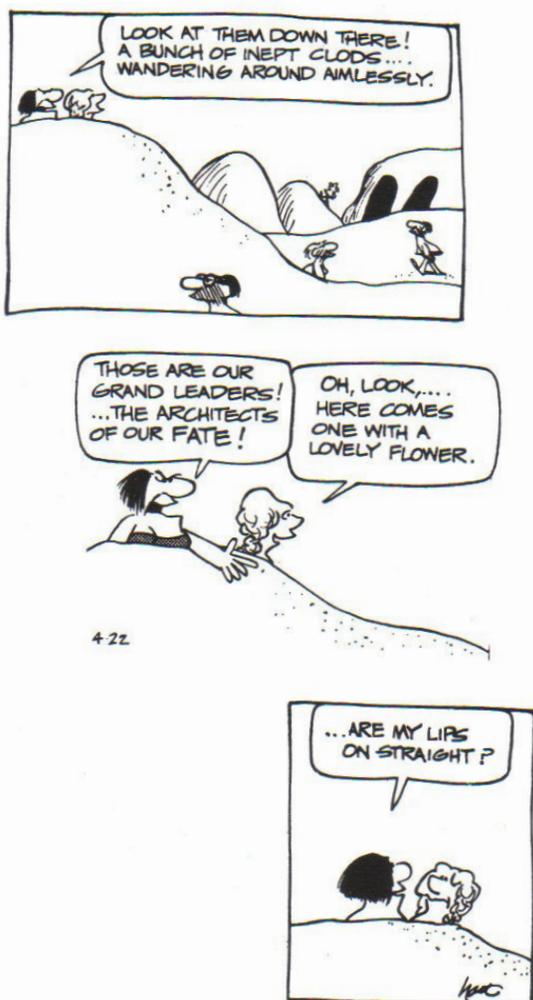
- ♦ You may blame your partner rather than speaking your own concerns.
- ♦ (You ask “Why?” questions that imply blame and produce defensiveness.)
- ♦ You may “smooth over” or say nothing rather than speak your heart.
- ♦ You may intellectualize rather than speak your heart.
- ♦ You may talk about everything else but what’s really on your mind.

It is destructive:

- ♦ You tear down your partner with your words or critical remarks.
- ♦ You speak your criticism inappropriately, out of proportion or in front of the children or other adults.

As a couple:

- 1) discuss your own communication style and share what you see are your strengths and weakness. Ask your partner for feedback.
- 2) Share one change you will make to allow your marital communication to grow more open and direct, becoming more like that of the Song of Solomon.



E. Five Levels of Communication

Level five: *Cliché Conversation*

Safe topics. How are you? How's your family? It's nice weather.

Level four : *Reporting the Facts about Others*

Tell what someone else has said, but do not reveal what I feel, no personal commentary.

Level three : *My Ideas and Judgements*

I risk telling some of my opinions, ideas and decisions. Still cautious and will retreat if what I am saying is not accepted.

Level two : *My Feelings or Emotions*

I share how I feel about facts, ideas, and judgements. Some feelings underneath are revealed.

Level one : *Complete Emotional and Personal Truthful Communication*

Based on absolute openness and honesty. May be difficult to achieve because it involves a risk – of being rejected because of our honesty. Sometimes this level can be achieved. At other times, the communication is not as complete as it should be. (“They were naked and not ashamed.”)

Questions to ask:

1. What is our communication like?
2. On which level are we?
3. How can we move toward Level One in our relationship?⁷

What frees a person to open up his/her life to another, to reach out to share and to love another person? Before I can love another person,

1. I must experience love from someone else (parents, I John 4:11,18,19 – the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Heavenly Father)
2. I must love myself.

F. Recommended Books

Dale, Robert D. and Dale, Carrie Kondy (1978). *Making good marriages better*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press.

Gottman, John and Silver, Nan (1999). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Powell, John (1969). *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* Argus Communications

7. Powell, John, pp. 91,92

Satir, Virginia (1988). *The new peoplemaking*. Mountain View, California; Science and Behavior Books.

Wright, H. Norman (1985). *Communication: key to your marriage*. Ventura, California: Regal Books.

IV. RESPONSE

- A. 1. As a couple or as a class, list the most common arguments against waiting for sex until marriage, and then respond to each one sensibly and, where possible, scripturally.
2. Also list some good arguments for waiting for sex until marriage, and write a one page talk for the youth group at your church.
- B. How would you respond, once again in one page, to this letter from your ten-year-old cousin? "Yesterday I attended the second funeral of a classmate this term. It was all so very sad! The pastor spoke about TB, but at the back of church someone whispered to me, 'He died of AIDS, you know'. Now I'm kind of confused, and a little scared. What is AIDS? Could I get it? How can I be sure that I don't die from this, too? Please help me!"
- C. 1. If you are single, but have a "serious friend", practice your conversational skills by talking about the expectations and the limits of the physical side of your friendship. You may wish to write your agreement on paper, and dare to share it with a close friend or older couple whom you can invite to gently check up on you from time to time!
2. If you are married, go for a long walk or to a favourite eating spot, and talk together about the connection between marital conversation and marital sex.

Study Seven

What are you Waiting for? (2.8 - 3.5)

I. READY?

The Questions (for personal study, or group use)

1. What summary sentence or phrase would you suggest for each of the three scenes of this courtship act: 2. 8-14, 2.15-17, and 3.1-5?
2. Saying no to sex in 2.7 allows the couple to say yes to what possibilities in 2.8 ff? How can early and excessive sexual involvement in a relationship seriously damage it?
3. Discuss this statement, "Genuine love is not achieved by sex, but is best expressed in sex." What counsel for healthy courtship is contained in that marvellous fourteenth verse?
4. How true is this comment, in your experience and observation, "*Boys and men will often use "love" to get at sex, whereas girls and women tend to use sex to get at "love"*."
5. How can you detect and deal with the "foxes" that can nibble away and destroy the roots of a relationship? Can you identify at least five?
6. What emotions does the young girl experience in 3.1-5, and why? Why does great and growing love often appear to open the door to great pain?
7. Why is the urgent request in the fifth verse repeated here, just prior to the wedding?

The Quest (for more understanding)

1. In the book, *Boy Meets Girl*, Josh Harris quotes from a letter addressed to him after his *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*: "I want to avoid the pitfalls of our culture's approach to romance, but how do I get close enough to a guy to decide whether I want to marry him? What comes between friendship and marriage?" (p.7). How would you answer this young woman, apart from suggesting she go out and buy the book...?
2. If you are single, interview three couples that you admire, and ask them to reflect on their courtship. What choices and experiences would they repeat, and which ones have caused them regret?
3. Again for singles: are your family and circle of friends influencing you toward, or away from, a godly understanding and practice of friendship, courtship, and marriage? (Do you need to invest perhaps in a new circle of friends?)

II. REFLECTION

John Gottman and his wife, plus a trained team, study marriages full-time in Seattle. What makes certain marriages work? Why do others break down? They have asked numerous couples to “re-create” their last fight for twenty minutes, while the team watches and listens behind a one-way window. Gottman says calmly that after twenty minutes of watching the nonverbals and listening to the verbals, they can predict with 90% accuracy which marriages will make it, and which will end in separation or divorce!

After 2.7, the king and his Lebanese friend appear ready for wedding bells. We might say, “What are you waiting for?” But they do decide to wait and to make sure that three resources are available that will carry them “until death do us part”. They will need skills in welcoming doves, watching out for foxes, and winning out over butterflies. Or, in other words, to create space for conversation, catch little problems before they become big ones, and count the cost of lifelong commitment! And the text clearly warns that each of these three will be short-circuited by pre-marital sex...

1. *Welcoming the doves.*

This passage (2.8-14) has to be one of the loveliest in Scripture, and I simply do not tire of reading it and reflecting on it. I used it at my daughter Cami’s wedding, and will probably use it again when her three siblings decide to follow suit...

The king could easily have summoned her to the palace, and sent an impressive escort, but decides to go to her homeland for a “date”. She notes his boyish excitement (“Listen!...Look!”), and suppresses a laugh as she sees her leaping and bounding lover suddenly hiding behind the shrubs, peeking into the windows. ..

He invites her for a walk into the countryside, her countryside, by using seven springtime pictures and seven verbal invitations. They repeatedly use their special names for one another: he is her “lover”, used about twenty-seven times in the Song, and she is his “darling”, used about ten times. And in verse 14 they set quite a high standard for courting well.

He once again invites her (notice that he does not impose or insist) out of the mountainside hiding places, so that he can see her face and hear her voice. This relationship is pursued in the daylight using voices, rather than after dark using hands... Now there’s a principle that has some staying power!

Gary Smalley, who has written some good stuff about marriage, discovered research suggesting that men speak an average of 10,000 words a day, and women about 20,000 (it’s interesting that in the Song, her words outnumber his almost two to one...) This could explain why a typical husband, spending words at the office all day with colleagues and secretaries, has no words left for his wife at supper time when she is ready to start spending her words (her “conversations” with the three-year-old and the baby during the day do not really count...).

Recent research has also shown that after 8-12 weeks or so in the womb, male babies have very active arms and legs (Carey actually “kicked” me at three months...), whereas the girl babies have very active jaws! What a challenge to discuss this difference in a constructive way...

Welcoming the doves means to stop, look, and listen. It means to develop and grow our communication skills. It means to “lose” jokes like “Oh yeah, I have the last word in every argument: the word is “Yes, dear.”

Cathy and I went for a date almost every week during our ten years in Africa, and agreed that for those three hours or so to completely ignore the most pleasant and most urgent topic of conversation: our kids. We felt that our marriage should outlast our children. We have also been quite hard-nosed about spending a weekend away as a couple every spring and every fall, getting to know the terrain where God has placed us.

So lovers and future lovers, stop your routine once in awhile. Look at him across a crowded room, catch his eye, and wink. Ask her opinion, "Honey, what do you think about...?" and then listen. All these will serve as small investments in a large future.

2. *Watching out for foxes.*

Small things can also distract and destroy! When our family lived in the wild interior of British Columbia, Canada for three years, a fox and her six or seven kittens leased a little place a hundred feet or so below our log home. We thought they were cute. Neighbours warned us that our adjective might change if we tried to grow some vegetables...

As a country girl who knows vineyards, and the damage that foxes can do to the root system of young plants, she expresses concern. And she wants it to be a shared concern: not your problem or my problem, but ours.

We were part of a Kitwe Chapel couples conference in early July 2006, held in Livingstone, Zambia. The theme was "Catch the Foxes..." and the couples there identified twenty-six foxes! They then selected the most aggressive and sneaky ones (such as handling Sunday morning well and handling relatives well) and set about brainstorming about how to go "fox hunting." It was a wonderful and instructive holiday weekend.

And there is a hint in the next two verses (2.16-17) on the identity of some of the foxes. There is a consistent undercurrent of tension between the blending of two homes, Lebanon and Jerusalem, and of two occupations, the vineyards and the flocks.

She possibly refers to his shepherding call as she says, "He browses among the lilies" and this royal work of caring for his people, his flock, can sometimes last until well after dark. She says,

"You now need to turn, and go leaping and bounding south to your Jerusalem agenda..." using exactly the same words as in her welcome extended in 2.9. The last phrase can also mean hills of "separation" and hints at her struggle in sharing him with the empire. The energy invested in vocation compared to attention invested in marriage can be quite a troublesome fox, especially if the couple chooses two or more vocations. It is mandatory to chat openly about such issues, deciding whether needs or wants are dictating the number of jobs, and how this could affect partnering and parenting.

3. *Winning over the Butterflies.*

The king is absent, and we are not sure if it is due to a royal commitment or a royal argument... but she feels the pain, and has recurring (the Hebrew "nights" is plural) dreams or nightmares about it. She moves rather suddenly from his city streets to her village home, which is of course possible in a dream.

Opening her life to deeper love has also opened it to deeper pain, and she struggles with pre-marital butterflies. Can she accept him and his lifestyle? Can she leave the

country for the city? Can she embrace both the intimacy she feels as well as the influence she fears?

Four times in four verses she says, "...the one my heart loves...". She finds the watchmen in the foreign city supportive, and she decides that she will hold him and not let him go.

That is a firm commitment, but in its shadow another fox is lurking. She could easily fall into the tempting trap of using sex to hold onto him, not fully sensing that sex used as a leash can often turn into a boomerang. So she once again decides, and asks for support in her decision, "This man, this king is right, but the time for full surrender is not. I will wait" (her "Awake, O north wind" in 4.16 is even more wonderful after her strong encouragement "not to awake or arouse" in 2.7 and 3.5). As we might say three millennia later: What fun is it, after all, to open one's Christmas presents on December 20?

And her realistic wanting, followed by her resolute waiting, leads to a recipe that's a winner. The wedding is just around the corner...