Relationship Goals - Part Two

# Intimacy

## (Song of Solomon 1:15-2:15)

Welcome to all of you. We are continuing our message series “Relationship Goals” as we find encouragement in the Scriptures. The backdrop for this series is the book entitled Song of Solomon and it is helping us to have better relationships. This is important because God created us for relationships, he said it is not good for us to be alone, and so whether you are single, married, divorced, or widowed you need at least one good solid relationship other than God in your life.

The challenge in our culture today is to recognize that there is a higher purpose for our relationships, so that we don’t want to miss the emotional, social, or spiritual benefits of deep committed relationships. In other words, no matter who you are, no matter what age you are, whether it is with family, friends, work, spiritual, romantic, situational or marital relationships, you will want to be able to identify and cultivate healthy relationships. And so, while there are different levels of commitment in the community, within the context of church, the family or the marriage relationship, we all need the benefits of having strong relationships.

As we begin, we must understand that there are different seasons in every relationship, and so my purpose in this series is to help prepare us to walk through each season in a way that honors God. This is what we see illustrated in the Song of Solomon, and so if you’d like to follow along, turn in your Bible to chapter one, and we’re going to begin reading at verse fifteen. Solomon and this young woman who is identified as the Shulammite are having this conversation, reflecting on this past season of their lives, and they are sharing with us some core values of a happy and healthy relationship.

In verse 15, Solomon says to this young Shulammite woman,

“How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves” (Song of Solomon 1:15).

This young woman returns the complement in verse 16 saying,

“How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant” (Song of Solomon 1:16).

Now, it almost sounds as if we just jumped in too deep, changing from a general audience rating to PG-13 or mature, but this word translated “verdant” simply refers to the bright green color of the soft grass on which they rested. And so, as they reminisced about this moment together, the innocent comment about “our bed” was merely a reference to the lush green grass of the meadow where they lay as she looked up into the sky. This young woman continues to describe their surroundings in verse 17, saying,

“The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs” (Song of Solomon 1:17).

I’m sure that some of you can picture this, you can see yourself laying in a clearing in the woods, surrounded by tall cedars, with fir branches extending overhead. And so, she is describing the atmosphere of this outdoor setting as they were reclining on the lush green grass talking. She remembers it to be like the roof and walls of a house, when suddenly like a commercial on TV, there is a chapter break reminding us that it was the publishers of the Bible and not God who inserted the chapters and verses.

And so, maybe this unfortunate chapter break should have been earlier or later, but nonetheless as she is picturing herself in this setting she says,

“I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys” (Song of Solomon 2:1).

Now, it’s interesting that this is translated “rose” because it is really unclear what kind of flower is meant here. In other words, there is only one other place in the Old Testament where this Hebrew word is used and that is in Isaiah chapter 35, verse one, where it is translated “crocus.” And so, it is most likely considering the context that she is speaking with humility as she likens herself to a lily or another common flower of the field.

Basically, she is saying that she is nothing extraordinary and this verse might be better translated, “I am like a wildflower in the meadow of Sharon”. But Solomon refuses to concede to her modesty and insists that she far surpasses those common flowers, saying in verse two,

“Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens” (Song of Solomon 2:2).

And so, he exalts her sense of self-worth, saying that she is far above all the others, she is “a lily among thorns”.

She responds in return with praise for her lover, in verses 3 through 6, revealing to us three aspects of a healthy relationship. Three things that are helpful in every relationship, a sense of security, self-worth, and confidence. And she expresses herself metaphorically, suggesting in verse 3 that Solomon was a surprise to discover. She says,

“Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste” (Song of Solomon 2:3).

In other words, as a woman who had worked in the sun, he gave her a sense of security, she felt protected by him, and “delighted to sit in his shade.” She said, “his fruit is sweet to my taste” which expresses intimacy and personal knowledge of someone. We understand that context in Psalm chapter 34, because the psalmist said,

“Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalms 34:8).

And so, they had cultivated the kind of relationship that allowed them to know each other intimately. There was communication, trust, commitment, vulnerability, empathy, respect, and companionship.

She appreciated the fact that Solomon let others see his love for her and that added to her confidence, and sense of self-worth. In verse 4 she said,

“He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love” (Song of Solomon 2:4).

And so, even though she was self-conscious of her appearance, dark from working in the vineyard, Solomon was not in the least bit ashamed of her. Instead, he delighted in her and boldly paraded her into the banquet hall in front of the girls from the palace. And so, his love for her was obvious, it was easily seen by anyone who observed them, and she trembled as she made this request in verse five.

“Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love” (Song of Solomon 2:5).

And so, she expressed her weakness, that she was faint with love, and she requested the sweet stimulation of raisins and apples, as well as the security of his strong embrace in verse six, saying that she desired his left arm under her head and his right arm to embrace her (Song of Solomon 2:6).

Now we come to a transition point, the ending of one section, and the introduction of the next. And so, I want to pause before we continue, because I want you to notice what just happened. This couple was spending time with one another, they felt close to each other, and they were developing intimacy because they were talking all the time.

Some of you remember when you were dating how you talked all the time, you remember phones that were attached to a cord on the wall and so you moved through the house trying to get some privacy, but you were restricted by the length of the cord. And you remember it was like you never wanted the conversation to end, but then you got married, life started happening, and you stopped talking.

Suddenly you discover that you’re not as intimate as you once were, there is a distance, and the reason is that communication is essential for every healthy relationship. There’s got to be communication, but the challenge for most of us guys is that we just want the facts, we just want what we need to know. On the other hand, most women want all of the details, and so when we don’t open up talking about everything, they feel a lack of intimacy.

And I admit, I’m guilty of this, this is tough for me, because I’m an introvert, and so I’m not a very talkative person. In fact, I’m pretty happy just quietly studying and writing in the office, taking care of the administrative duties of the church. Now, don’t get me wrong, I love to get out and meet with people, but that’s not instinctive, that’s not natural for me, that is supernatural.

And so, what I’m learning to do, what I’m trying to do, is when I come home at the end of the day, I try to include Dana in more than just the facts. And I sit down, and I listen to her as she gives me the details of her day, and simply by listening we are growing closer. There is intimacy, she feels connected, we’re in this together, because we’re communicating again.

In our text, Solomon and the Shulammite woman are having this dialogue, she’s doing most of the talking, but they’re remembering how they got to know each other, and then she speaks to the audience saying,

“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” (Song of Solomon 2:7).

And it’s a reminder for those of you who desire a close intimate relationship like the one she and Solomon enjoyed, wait patiently for God to bring it into your life. In other words, she is saying that genuine love, like the gazelle or the doe out in the field are shy, gentle, and easily startled. And so, you’ve got to be patient, you’ve got to wait for it, and so you’ve got to embrace the season that you’re in right now.

Now, for those of you that are not yet married, when you meet that someone special, it can be exciting. And for some of you, you may have a season of infatuation where you think everything is perfect. You know, the food, the lighting, their hair, and I think this is what is being described in verse eight. The Shulammite woman says,

“Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills” (Song of Solomon 2:8).

And so, if you can just imagine this, she’s in love, everything is perfect, and here he comes, he’s excited because they’re going out tonight. You know, he’s got some flowers, maybe he found the perfect card, and so he’s leaping and bounding over the hills. And she says in verse 9,

“My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice” (Song of Solomon 2:9).

Now, this is where it gets kind of creepy, because he’s looking in the windows, and peering through the gate, but she likes it. And for those of you guys that are not married, you need to know that when you get married, you may come home one day and get one response, but when you do same thing the next day, you may get an entirely different response. In other words, on Monday she’ll think it’s adorable, but on Tuesday she might scream at you and call you a pervert. And so, just saying, there’s no rhyme or reason as to why, but today he’s peaking in the window and she likes it.

In verse 10 she tells us, “My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me” (Song of Solomon 2:10).

In other words, he’s like, “Let’s go out to dinner,” and it was perfect, everything is perfect, because they’re in love. And you may have a season like this, you may feel like it couldn’t get any better than this, but you need to know that it can get so much better than that, because what you’re feeling is not real, it’s just emotions. It’s not the depth of commitment, you’re not even engaged yet, and there is no real sacrificial love. And so, you’ve got to work through this season of everything being perfect, until one day you come to the realization that this person is not perfect.

This is when you discover what it’s like to lay down your life, to serve someone in marriage. And you may go through some really good times, but there will be other times when you’re just praying for strength to get you through. In this season, you’ll learn to forgive one another, to work through the conflict and pain, and as you seek God year after year, eventually you will have something so much better than infatuation. It’s what the apostle Paul calls laying down your life for him or her,

“…just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

When you get to this season, this level of commitment and intimacy, this is a relationship that will stand the test of time.

Now, there may be some of you right now, you wish you were in a different season, you don’t know what it looks like, but can I encourage you to let God complete the work that he began. Whatever you’re going through right now, it’s just a season, and God is doing something, he’s preparing you for the next season. And this is what we see in verse 11 and 12, Solomon said,

“See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land” (Song of Solomon 2:11-12).

There may be some of you who would love to say that winter is past, the rains are over, but God is still healing you of some hurts in the past, maybe you had a marriage that went wrong, maybe someone betrayed you, and you’re just now learning to forgive. Maybe you’re almost to the place where you’re ready to start trusting again, but right now your spiritual roots are still growing deeper, and you’re not quite strong enough to carry the weight of a new relationship. And so, this season is not a bad thing, because you can’t have spring without winter, and for some of you, I just want to encourage you to embrace the season that you are in because Solomon tells us,

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

And so, maybe in this season you’re single, maybe you’re dating someone, maybe you’ve been married for a couple years, maybe you’ve been married 5, 10, 15, 30, or 40 years, but whatever season you’re in, I want to encourage you to pursue intimacy.

This is important in every relationship, but the problem is that most people think that intimacy refers to romance. But that’s not what intimacy is, intimacy is not flowers and candlelight dinners. Intimacy is familiarity. Intimacy is transparency. It is closeness, understanding, confidence, and genuine care. And so, as you pursue intimacy in your relationships it’s letting your guard down, keeping no secrets, opening up your heart, and sharing who you are. It’s been real with someone and sharing your dreams and your fears.

We all need a relationship like that, it’s intimacy that holds the relationship together, whether it’s platonic or whether deeper and personal attraction leads to marriage. This is the direction that we see Solomon going in verse 14, he is attracted to her and he wants to know her intimately, and so he calls out to her,

“My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely” (Song of Solomon 2:14).

Notice what he is doing, he’s enticing her, trying to tempt her, trying to lure her out of hiding. He says, “Come on out, show me your face, let me hear your voice. I just want to talk with you, I want to look you in the eye, and I want to hear your dreams.”

He is pursuing her, trying to get to know her, letting her know that he is attracted to her and that he cares. And so, he’s inviting her to trust him, to develop a greater intimacy, as they talk about their fears, their weaknesses, their vulnerabilities and temptations. Solomon is trying to take it up another level, to discover a depth of intimacy that would cultivate a lasting relationship.

But today, for you and me, I want us to take a step backwards, not talking about relationship goals with the opposite sex. But talking about all of our relationships, relationships with our brothers and sisters in church, relationships in our families, relationships with our neighbors, no matter what season you are in, pursuing a greater intimacy in your relationships. In other words, don’t make the mistake of thinking that you’re close to somebody just because you share the same faith, the same house, or even share the same bed. You see, there is a big difference between being close by and close to. Just because you are close by someone does not mean that you are close to someone.

The good news is that you can always improve your relationships, when you pursue intimacy, you can truly become close to someone. And I know that can be uncomfortable because you’re making yourself more vulnerable, and so I want you to see the importance of protecting that relationship. Watch what the Shulammite woman says as she comes out to meet her lover in verse 15, she’s actually not addressing him, but she addresses her companions. She says,

“Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom” (Song of Solomon 2:15).

In other words, she’s aware of the need to protect their vineyards, their bodies, and the fruitfulness of their youth. And so, she’s talking about the fruit of their relationship, rather than about literal foxes and vineyards, because she recognizes that their vineyards are in bloom and need to be both protected and encouraged.

And so, she’s encouraging her community, asking her peers to step up to protect this relationship, to take the spiritual lead, to raise the standards and to increase the level of accountability in their relationship. She says, “catch the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, because our vineyards are in bloom.” And so, she was well aware of the enemies, the little foxes, the temptations and adverse circumstances that would attempt to come and destroy the blossoms. She said, “Catch for us the foxes” before they have the opportunity to destroy the love in bloom, reaching the blossom, and keeping them from reaching the ripeness of full maturity.

She’s learned her lesson, because life hasn’t been easy, she’s experienced loss before. You remember last week in verse 6, she said,

“My own vineyard I have neglected” (Song of Solomon 1:6).

In other words, the context here is her body and she’s talking about protecting her vineyard that is in bloom. And so, she’s calling on her peers, calling on her community of believers to help protect her vineyard, to help strengthen this relationship, so that the blossoms are not destroyed before she ever gets a grape.

This is a warning for those of you who are not yet married, if you continue to date someone that consistently dishonors God with their body, you need to know that you could be exposing your vineyard to ruin by entertaining a relationship with someone that does not fear God. They may say that they believe in God, but they don’t have a holy fear of God, and so you need to be aware of that. What we see the Shulammite woman doing here is that she sets up her standards right up front, and that is important because if you want a marriage that is based on righteousness, you need to date according to the same righteousness.

Last week she said there are certain things I don’t do, and she said it right up front. Chapter 1, verse 7, she told Solomon,

“Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?” (Song of Solomon 1:7).

In other words, she didn’t wait until she was in the backseat of his camel. She told her girlfriends, “Catch for us the little foxes that ruin the vineyards.”

And so, we’re talking about relationship goals, talking about protecting our relationships, when we’re single, when we’re dating, when we’re married, when we’re widowed, and in every season, we want to cultivate and protect intimacy in our closest relationships, because we all need them.

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