

Spring Fever: Getting Ready For the Big Day

Song of Songs 2:8-17

Introduction: 1) I read a story some years ago by Norman Wright called “The 8-Cow Wife.” He immediately captured my interest. Any article with such a title begs to be read so, here it is! See if God doesn’t teach us all something very valuable as we take it in very carefully and attentively.

“When I married my wife, we both were insecure and she did everything she could to try to please me. I didn’t realize how dominating and uncaring I was toward her. My actions in our early marriage caused her to withdraw even more. I wanted her to be self-assured, to hold her head high, and her shoulders back. I wanted her to be feminine and sensual.

The more I wanted her to change, the more withdrawn and insecure she felt. I was causing her to be the opposite of what I wanted her to be. I began to realize the demands I was putting on her, not so much by words but by body language.

The change came about in a very interesting way. During a trip to Atlanta I read an article in *Reader’s Digest*. I made a copy of it and have kept it in my heart and mind ever since.

It was the story of Johnny Lingo, a man who lived in the South Pacific. The islanders all spoke highly of this man, but when it came time for him to find a wife the people shook their heads in disbelief. In order to obtain a wife you paid for her by giving her father cows. Four to six cows was considered a high price. But the woman Johnny Lingo chose was plain, skinny and walked with her shoulders hunched and her head down. She was very hesitant and shy. What surprised everyone was Johnny’s offer – he gave eight cows for her! Everyone chuckled about it, since they believed his father-in-law put one over on him.

Several months after the wedding, a visitor from the U.S. came to the islands to trade and heard the story about Johnny Lingo and his eight-cow wife. Upon meeting Johnny and his wife the visitor was totally taken back, since

this wasn't a shy, plain and hesitant woman but one who was beautiful, poised and confident. The visitor asked about the transformation, and Johnny Lingo's response was very simple. "I wanted an eight-cow woman, and when I paid that for her and treated her in that fashion, she began to believe that she was an eight-cow woman. She discovered she was worth more than any other woman in the islands. And what matters most is what a woman thinks about herself."¹

- 2) In the Song of Songs we see a similar progression with the woman we call Shulamite. From a young girl struggling with her appearance (1:6-7) and insecurities (1:7) a radiant beauty has emerged. She has grown and matured in her self-confidence and her sense of self-worth because her Shepherd-King, her husband to be, has showered her with words (1:8, 15-16; 2:1) and gifts (1:10-11) of affection. She knows that she is loved and it has set her free to love in return.
- 3) Our song has moved from the King's palace (1:12-2:7) back to the country and Shulamite's home (2:8-17). It is springtime and love is in the air. Their wedding day (3:6-11) and wedding night (4:1-5:1) are fast approaching. Time is growing short. Every thought, every action, and every emotion is heightened and must be carefully weighed and considered. One cannot have too much information when it comes to committing to a mate and partner for life. I believe that the most important decision a person will ever make in life is whether or not they will trust Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. I believe the 2nd most important decision is who will you marry. So, we need to

¹ H. Norman Wright, "The 8-Cow Wife," *Marriage Magazine* (May/June2000).

ask lots of good questions, look at things very carefully and make a wise and informed decision. Sure, our hearts will be deeply involved in all of this. They should! But, so should our minds. What should we be looking for? What should we be communicating to the other person we hope to spend the rest of our life with?

I. Express your desire for love 2:8-14

- 1) In this section of the Song the bride-to-be does most of the talking. However, she spends much of her time telling us what her Shepherd-King is doing and saying. This man has captured her heart, and there is so much about him she wants to share.
- 2) Five times she will call him “my love” (2:8, 9, 10, 16, 17). He is her King but he is also her lover. He is “my” love. He is my “love.” There is power and great significance in both words.
- 3) The manner in which her King expresses his love is not singular. It takes a multifaceted path that resonates with her heart and sings to her soul.

1) Say it with your actions 2:8-9

- 1) Shulamite hears Solomon before she sees him “Listen!”, she says with an air of excitement. “My love is approaching.” Then suddenly she sees him and again her excitement cannot be contained. “Look! Here he

comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My love is like a gazelle or a young stag.” Today we might say, “He’s a beast! He’s a stud!”

2) His aggressiveness, agility, and attractiveness all are recognized by Shulamite. He is motivated (running, leaping) and he is interested. His actions scream loud and clear, “I want this woman!” His is a holy passion, a righteous desire, as the Song makes clear. He is enthusiastic for her. He is not ashamed to let anyone and everyone know what he feels in his heart for this lady. Her excitement, in return, for him, cannot be hidden either.

2) Say it with your eyes 2:9

1) Suddenly he is there! “Look”, she says, “he is standing behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.” His eyes now do some talking, and what Shulamite hears is precious indeed.

2) Solomon is no peeping Tom or dangerous stalker. In 5:12 she will tell him he has eyes like a dove. No, he has come to her home but he waits outside! He does not barge in rudely demanding something that does not yet belong to him. No, he approaches her with honor and respect. He comes close, very close, but not too close. His eyes tell her he loves her and that she is worth the wait. There will be a time to come in, but for

now loving her with his eyes will do.

- 3) Charlotte and I once had the privilege of going to the home of Billy Graham. It was the spring of 2007. It was a wonderful visit. While we were there, he talked of his love for his wife Ruth. I will never forget what he said, “We are both old now. We can’t see very well and we can’t hear very well. But every morning I go to her, we hold hands, and we make love to each other with our eyes!” Wow! I pray God allows my wife and me to grow old like that!

3) Say it with your words 2:10-13

- 1) *USA Today* reported on a study that found how we talk, even more than what we say, can predict whether a marriage will succeed or fail.

“How newlyweds talk to each other, more than what they actually say, can predict which couples will divorce with 87% accuracy, new government-sponsored research says.

The results of the 10-year study from the University of Washington, Seattle, add to the growing body of research sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health that seeks to identify what saves marriages.

Interviewed within six months of marriage, couples who will endure already see each other “through rose-colored glasses,” study co-author Sybil Carrere says. “Their behavior toward each other is positive.” Those who will divorce already see each other “through fogged lenses,” seeming cynical and unable to say good things about each other.” (Karen S. Peterson, “Sweet Nothings Help Marriages Stick,” 3-30-2000).

- 2) How we say things is as important as what we say. A kind attitude and a

tender tone will foster receptive ears on the other end. So, for the third time Shulamite refers to Solomon as “my love.” How else could she respond? With a gentleness and tenderness in his voice he speaks and she listens.

- 3) Both in verse 10 and 13 Solomon invites Shulamith to arise and come away with him. He is again utterly transparent in his intentions. He is also precious with his words. He calls her “my darling” and my “beautiful one” (NIV). She is a joy to his heart and to his eyes. He loves her and he finds her irresistibly gorgeous. He does not keep his thoughts to himself. He does not assume she knows how he feels; he tells her how he feels. He praises her publicly and precisely.
- 4) Solomon was an atypical man when it comes to romance. He understood that the way to a woman’s heart is often in the details, the little things. In verse 11-13 Solomon invites Shulamite not to have sex, but to take a walk in the countryside. She would have found this extremely romantic. Furthermore, the details with which he describes the passing of winter and the coming of spring is startling, especially for a man. It is quite likely that Solomon’s elaborate description has a laser focus. Springtime is universally a time for love. Falling in love is like experiencing springtime all over again and again. Everything is fresh, new and alive. Things

simply look different when you are in love. You see things and notice things that previously you missed or overlooked. For this young couple in love, winter and the rainy days were long gone. Flowers were blooming, birds were singing, spring was in the air. You could see it and smell it (v. 13). Love could be found anywhere and everywhere you looked or turned.

5) When two people are in love they want to spend time alone, just the two of them. Solomon extends his invitation again, calling Shulamite his “dove” (cf. 1:15). Doves are gentle and beautiful. They often nestle in the clefts of the rock out of sight and safely hidden. Solomon compares Shulamite to such a dove and urges her to come out to him. She has kept herself safe and secure until God brought the right man into her life. She has saved herself for marriage. Now the right man has arrived and he asks her to come to him. One senses the passion of his request when he says he desires to see her lovely face and hear her sweet voice. Keel’s comments strike home the thrust of Solomon’s words, “...the voice is just as infatuating (or “sweet”; cf. Prov. 20:17) as the face is ravishing... The usual translations (“pleasant,” “lovely,” etc.) are too pallid, failing to do justice to the intensity that enlivens this little song.”²

² Keel, 107.

Craig Glickman wisely writes, “One good indication of real love is the desire to communicate, a wish to discover all about this person whom you love so much. No detail seems too trivial to be related. No mood or feeling of one is unimportant to the other. And you care about the details and the feelings because you care so much about the person. That which would be insignificant or boring to even a good friend is eagerly received with genuine interest by the one who loves you... The mere voice of the one loved is enchantingly special just in itself. One could read from the telephone book and the other would raptly listen simply for the sound of the voice.”³

II. Expect some dangers to love

2:15

- 1) Verse 15 is one of those verses that could almost stand alone. However, the context informs us that it appears in a discussion about marriage, romance and relationships.
- 2) Solomon uses, again, the imagery of the vineyard, but now he introduces little villains that have the potential to wage havoc and destruction. He calls them “little foxes.” They are so dangerous that he commands us to “catch” them before they “ruin the vineyards.” “Catch” is an imperative of command. Catch them quickly and be aggressive about it is the idea.

³ Glickman, 47-48.

3) Foxes we are told, “were notorious in the ancient world for damaging vineyards... some ancient sources also suggest that foxes were particularly fond of grapes” (Snaith, 41). Solomon knows the beautiful vineyard of marriage is susceptible to destructive little foxes that can sneak in without our noticing them. He also knew that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Better to catch them on the front end of our relationship than to have to track them down later after they have messed things up. I believe the basic thrust of Solomon’s command is of a two-fold nature.

1) Trouble in marriage is usually in the small things

- 1) Foxes are not large creatures. They are small and sly, sneaky and quick. They usually come out at night when you can’t see them, and they are especially gifted at hiding. Often you only recognize their presence after the damage has already been done.
- 2) Two sinners saved by grace thru faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are still sinners. There are details and issues we must learn to navigate and resolve. Communication, role responsibilities, finances, sex, children, in-laws, aging parents, conflict resolution don’t always (seldom!) naturally come together in a marriage relationship. What, at first, seems small can blow up into something big over time if it is

not dealt with. Little foxes love to ruin a vineyard with bitterness, criticism, jealousy and neglect.

3) And, ignoring them, thinking they will just go away and resolve themselves will only encourage the foxes to mate and multiply!

Recognize from the very start the health and success of your marriage is bound up in the little things of life.

2) The relationship of marriage is a uniquely sensitive thing

1) The *HCSB* says we must be on guard against the little foxes because “our vineyards are in bloom.” The *NKJV* says “our vines have tender grapes.”

2) A marriage needs time to grow and bear fruit. It also needs protection because it is a tender and sensitive relationship, perhaps the most tender and sensitive of all. The fact is we all come into marriage with baggage. Open the trunk of your life and you will see both the baggage of your past and the baggage of your personality. The odds are overwhelming that you are unaware of all the things in these two bags.

3) Furthermore, it is almost certain that your mate has the same two bags but that the contents of their bags are all-together different than yours! Yes, it is often true that “opposites do attract,” but it can also

be true that “opposites attack” if we are not prepared in advance to deal with them. Solomon says that little foxes can ruin the vineyards of our marriage because “our vines have tender grapes.” (NKJV). They are vulnerable to attack. Therefore we must provide necessary and essential protection. In our words, actions, and attitude we must, with dogged determination, resolve to nurture and tend to our relationship with great care and concern. There are a number of questions which any wise couple will consider as they contemplate the prospects of marriage. They address various small things that could become big things if not faced head-on. Consider the following:

- 1) Have you discussed and come to agreement on what the Bible means when it says that the husband is to be a loving leader and the wife is to be gladly submissive (Eph. 5:22-33)?
- 2) Have you agreed to always tell your partner the truth, to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)?
- 3) Have you committed to never criticize your partner in public?
- 4) Are you in agreement on how decisions will be made when disagreement occurs?
- 5) Are you both committed to intimacy in your communication as a couple, giving the effort this will require?

- 6) Do you both want to be used of God to help your partner grow in Christlikeness (Rom 8:28-30)?
- 7) Do you like the outlook on life and the values of your partner?
- 8) Are you personally committed to making your marriage a success whatever the cost or sacrifice?
- 9) Have you determined to follow biblical premarital sexual standards with honest and open discussion so that your decision honors the Lord and your partner?
- 10) Does the wife-to-be realize that men move from the visual to the physical (usually quickly!) and therefore they need a healthy sexual relationship with their spouses to deter temptation?
- 11) Does the husband-to-be realize that women move from the emotional to the sexual (often rather slowly) and therefore need love demonstrated in verbal and practical ways often?
- 12) Do you have complete confidence that your partner will be faithful to you – i.e. could you trust her/him with a member of the opposite sex?
- 13) Can you identify a day or time period when you placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation?
- 14) Do you have the certainty that your partner has come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
- 15) Has your partner demonstrated a lifestyle of similar spiritual commitments as you have?
- 16) Have you decided where you will attend church together (!) and to what degree you will be involved?
- 17) Are you comfortable sharing openly your feelings, desires and goals with your partner?

- 18) Do you experience a sense of emotional pain when you are separated from your partner?
- 19) Have you demonstrated a willingness to be flexible and open to healthy compromise in your relationship?
- 20) Have you been able to forgive your partner for an offense, reconcile, and forget the matter (Eph. 4:32)?
- 21) Are both sets of parents in agreement with your intention to marry? If not, do they have a good reason?
- 22) Have you objectively looked at your partner's family to see the major influences in shaping her/his life?
- 23) Do you really respect your partner and are you proud to have people for whom you have high regard meet them?
- 24) Do you find generally that you like the same people?
- 25) Have you observed differences in your social backgrounds that might cause conflicts?

Discussing and answering these questions will go a long ways in handling successfully the little foxes that will attempt to wreck your relationship.

III. Enjoy the delights of love

2:16-17

- 1) As you consider your dating or marriage relationship, which portrays best your relationship at this time?

- 1) A summer drought – the temperature is high and your relationship is dry suffering from a lack of vital nourishment.

2) A fall harvest – you are reaping some rewards in your relationship but your love is fading and cold days and nights (!) seem on the horizon.

3) Winter deadness – things are frozen and lifeless.

4) Springtime – Life is everywhere. Things are blooming, fresh and exciting.

2) It is springtime for our Shepherd-King and his bride-to-be. Winter has past. The little foxes have been captured and put away. Their vineyard, the garden, is Edenic. As a result, they are prepared to enjoy the delights of love. They know they belong to each other. They know they want each other!

1) Know that you belong to each other 2:16

1) The language here is of delight and desire, confidence and assurance.

“My love is mine and I am his.” He belongs to me and I belong to him. There is a mutual understanding and confidence that they share. Theirs is an exclusive and intimate love. “What he wants is her and what she wants is him, exclusively and finally without remainder.”⁴

2) The Shepherd-King also “feeds among the lilies.” He enjoys the delights, love, and pleasures she has to offer. He is welcome and free

⁴ Griffiths, 73.

to browse or graze at his leisure. She gladly gives herself to this man as a gift because he has given himself to her.

- 3) A biblical relationship is always 2 givers. It is not a giver and a taker or 2 takers. The husband gives himself without reserve to his wife. She, in return, is set free to give herself without reservation or hesitation. This is the beauty and glory of a redeemed, Christ-centered relationship.

2) Know that you want each other 2:17

The couple longs for marital union and sexual consummation. Because they belong to each other they want each other with no barriers standing in the way. Thinking ahead to what they will enjoy, Shulamite invites Solomon to come into her with the agility, strength and beauty of a gazelle or young stag (cf. v. 9). Her invitation includes an episode of all night lovemaking. Would any red-blooded, sane male say no?! “The divided mountains” could be translated “the mountains of Bether” (*NIV*, “the rugged hills”). Literally it is “hills or mountains of separation.” This would seem to be a not so subtle reference to the woman’s breasts (cf. 4:6). With all of his desire and passion before her, she welcomes him. “Before the day breaks (lit. “breathes”) and the shadows flee”, (in other words “all night”) be my lover and enjoy the fruits of our love.

Shulamite has come a long way in her own personal self-evaluation. The unreserved love of this man who has entered her life has effected a great change. She is now the woman God created her to be. Together the two of them are far better and more beautiful than they could have even been alone (Gen. 2:18). Love will do that when we pursue it God's way and with all our heart.

Practical Applications from Song of Songs 2:18-17

50 Premarital Discussion Questions

In preparing for marriage we can never have too much information. Really knowing the person you are going to marry is essential if the marriage is going to start well, continue well and end well. The following are some important questions prospective couples should discuss together before the "I do's." Expect some disagreement! Don't paper over and ignore the tough questions. They probably need the most attention and discussion.

- 1) What does love mean to you? What does it look like? Does it reflect 1 Corinthians 13?
- 2) Do you believe the one you love is a mature person?
- 3) How do you try to please the one you love?
- 4) Who comes first after Christ in your relationship...you or the one you love? Someone else?
- 5) How often and in what way do you express feelings of warmth, tenderness and appreciation to the one you love?
- 6) What activities will you desire to continue to do separately once married?
- 7) How long do you want/expect your marriage to last? Why?

- 8) What are your strengths and weaknesses as you see yourself?
- 9) What do you see as your major responsibilities (role) in marriage?
- 10) What was the degree of happiness or unhappiness of your parents? What did you learn from them?
- 11) What feelings do you have toward each of your parents? Your brothers and sisters?
- 12) Did you come from a home where there were quarrels and fights? How were differences and problems solved by your parents?
- 13) Did you favor either parent? Do you feel like you are the favorite child of either parent?
- 14) How did you cope with your parents when they argued?
- 15) How do you anticipate dealing with your parents once married? How do you anticipate dealing with your in-laws?
- 16) How much time do you feel you want to spend with your parents or in-laws in the first year of marriage? After that?
- 17) How near do you plan to live to your parents or in-laws?
- 18) If a problem should come up with your parents or in-laws, whom do you think should handle it?
- 19) Is your marriage going to be like the marriage of your parents, your in-laws or neither? Why?
- 20) Is the one you love too close with either parent? Can he or she leave and cleave?
- 21) What form of entertainment do you like? Does the one you love enjoy the same kinds of entertainment or are they different?
- 22) Do you like the friends of the one you love?

- 23) Do you have many friends, and how close are you to them?
- 24) After you marry, how will you choose friends? Spend time with friends?
- 25) Do your feelings about God or spiritual matters play a particular, even important, part in your relationship with the one you love?
- 26) Do you attend church regularly? Does the one you love? Will you attend regularly and together once married?
- 27) Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? If not, would you like to?
- 28) Will any future children you may have be brought up in church and taught to love God?
- 29) What are your goals in life?
- 30) Do you like sympathy and attention when you are ill? How much do you require?
- 31) As a general rule, do you enjoy the companionship of the opposite sex as much as that of your own sex? How, if any, will that change after marriage?
- 32) How much praise do you feel you need?
- 33) Do you think it will be a good idea to allow your future spouse an appropriate amount of the family income to spend as he (she) so chooses, without giving an account to you?
- 34) Do you like to tease the one you love in front of others? Why?
- 35) Who is more intelligent, and how do you feel about this? Who is wiser?
- 36) Do you ever feel depressed? Is this ever noticeable in the one you love?
- 37) Do you perceive yourself, as a “talker” or a “listener”?
- 38) What interest, sports, or hobbies do you two share?

- 39) Do you like children? How many children do you want...how many does your future spouse want?
- 40) Would you express your feelings on family planning and discipline?
- 41) How will finances be handled in the marriage? What are your thoughts about debt?
- 42) Do you plan to use a budget? Have you ever tried to draw up a projected budget?
- 43) What sexual experience have you had? Is this known to the one you love?
- 44) Could you express your ideas on the need for affection and sex in your forthcoming marriage?
- 45) Do you think your sexual needs are more or less than those of the one you love? Have you discussed this area much? At all?
- 46) Do you think your sexual/affectional needs are more or less than those of the one you love?
- 47) Who informed or instructed you on the so-called facts of life? Are you sufficiently knowledgeable in this area?
- 48) Do you usually remember birthdays and special occasions? How do you recognize and honor them?
- 49) How would you feel about getting professional help from a marriage counselor should you not be able to work out problems in your marriage?
- 50) Do you know many happily married couples?

How does this text point to Christ? The Invitations of the King

- 1) In this poem the Shepherd-King comes after his bride-to-be and invites her to come to him. He takes the initiative. He is the true seeker! In fact, his

invitations are not one, they are many. And, he comes to her by his voice, by his word.

In the incarnation the voice of God was heard as His Word became flesh (John 1:14). Coming full of grace and truth, our Shepherd-King, our Good Shepherd, informs us that like Shulamite, 1) we hear his voice, 2) He knows us, and 3) we follow [come after] him (John 10:27). Like Shulamite we are called to “arise and come away” (2:10, 13) to a new life with our Shepherd-King, the Lord Jesus.

In Hebrews 3:7-19 the author cites Psalm 95:7-11, telling the people of God to “Hear his voice” and enter into the rest the Lord has prepared for His people. Repeatedly He emphasized that “Today” is the day to respond in faith, not hardening their hearts. Indeed their response to Him should be the natural thing to do because as Psalm 95:7 says, “For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

Jesus our Shepherd-King invites us to come to Him now, today, for rest in a garden of love, joy and fruitfulness made possible by way of another garden, the garden of Gethsemane. Coming to him in faith, we can proclaim for all to hear, “My beloved is mine and I am his (SS 2:16). His voice, His word, is the only voice I want to hear. His voice, His word, is all I need to hear.

Today, as I hear His voice, I will not harden my heart. Rather, I will let His

voice put me at ease and bring joy to my soul, for my beloved Lord Jesus is mine and I am His!