

Let the Courtship Begin!

Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: Song of Solomon 1:7-2:7¹

Date: October 17, 2010, 10:30am

Series: Song of Solomon (Passion, Purity, & Fidelity)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Song of Solomon 1:7-2:7**. We continue in a series of messages entitled “Passion, Purity, and Marital Fidelity”. Today we are going to dive into a message entitled “Let the Courtship Begin!”

We’ve already talked about what to look for in a mate. Anyone can turn on the physical. You need to look for the heart of someone where God is working. You need to not get married until you are *ready* to be the person you ought to be. Are you ready to *work* hard? Are you ready to sacrifice? Are you *teachable* and ready to learn? If you are, and you are a single person, perhaps this message is for you.

Most of the messages and themes in our series through the Song of Solomon are directed at single people. How many single people do we have here today?

I know you are wondering, what is the pathway to marriage? What is courtship and what is the proper way to court a person and get to know them? What should a godly girl or a godly young man expect in courtship? Perhaps you are a parent here asking the same question. Then you’ve come to the right place.

Courtship is all about building trust. You want to find out if this is the person you can trust to care for you, to build a family together, to serve God together. How can you find out if the person is trustworthy? From this passage of Scripture, we are going to find that courtship rests on four pillars. It allows you to see if a person’s character is wobbly or untrustworthy. If the relationship begins to wobble and fall as you put up these four pillars, you know it’s not the right person for you to marry. How you begin courtship is very, very important. Let’s look at our first pillar.

- I. The first pillar you need to begin a courtship is **Discovery**. To begin courtship there needs to be safe places where young men and women can talk and get to know each other as friends. In Song of Solomon, remember we have a man and a woman looking back from their wedding day, telling us now about their courtship.

Looking back from her wedding day, she says, **verse 7**, “Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?”

- What about this strong language of love? Isn’t she coming on strong? She tells the story with strong words towards Solomon, but most commentators agree that this is part *soliloquy*, that is, this is the sentiment of her heart, not exactly what she said to Solomon. Ladies, it wouldn’t be appropriate to speak this way to someone you are just getting to know! But she was feeling this way. She had

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

observed King Solomon. We mentioned last week, she saw he was godly, a leader, someone any godly girl would desire.

- Why is Solomon called a shepherd here? I thought he was a king. Of course, Solomon was not a shepherd. This is like a pet name for Solomon after they are married. Solomon was anything but a shepherd. He was a king! This “shepherd” imagery is common to the Near Eastern ancient love poetry. This is appropriate for the queen on her wedding day to reflect, and call King Solomon, her “shepherd”. Solomon is very likely touring the countryside and inspecting his vineyards and catches the eye of the Shulammitte.

Transition: In **verse 7**, the first thing we see are three pillars in discovering who that special person is that God may have for you to marry: **visibility**, **accountability**, and **purity**. By committing to never being alone with someone of the opposite gender until you are married, you will always have these three pillars to provide a strong, safe foundation for discovering who you might marry (vs. 7). And by the way, you are NOT MARRIED until you are married!

- A. The first ingredient in discovering who you might court, is **visibility**. The Shulammitte farm girl asks where Solomon might be so they can meet in a **public** place. **Verse 7**, “Tell me... where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon”. She is asking where she can find him at a time when the sheep would be resting and not demanding the shepherds’ complete attention. She wants to meet this young king. She wants to make sure there are plenty of other shepherds present so that she does nothing that is inappropriate. She is concerned about modesty and purity.
- B. The first ingredient in discovering who you might court, is **accountability**. She is coming at noon in the middle of the day when many people would be around, in broad view of the public eye. In Israel, “the oppressive heat of the middle of the day drives people and animals to rest in shady places”.² “In the heat of the midday shepherds would lead their flocks under shady trees near a stream”.³ There was nothing questionable about this. There was a group of shepherds and others present, which means there was accountability.
 - As you consider the possibility of courtship, you need to meet anyone of the opposite gender in the broad daylight, so to speak. People with the same standards as you ought to be around. You must always meet with the right kind of people around, people who will hold you accountable.

Transition: We actually see a third ingredient to this discovery time before courtship...

- C. The third commitment to have before you are ready to court someone is **purity**. We see from this peasant girl, that even **she** knew nothing questionable could be going on. Without **accountability** and **visibility**, she could be accused of bring a harlot. **Verse 7b**, “why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your

² G. Lloyd Carr. *The Song of Solomon (TOTC)*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 87.

³Smith, J. E. (1996). *The wisdom literature and Psalms* (So 1:5-7). Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.

companions?” She doesn’t want to be like the prostitutes that would veil themselves and catch a shepherd all alone.

II. The second pillar you need to begin a courtship is **Friendship** (vs. 8-9).

A. The man to take the lead by protecting the woman’s **honor** (vs. 8).

1. He thinks the world of her. He wants to honor her. He calls her, “O most beautiful among women”, the one distinguished for beauty among all women. These are his inner thoughts being revealed in this love poem, so we know what is going on in their heart, not necessarily what would have been said. This would have been entirely inappropriate to speak this way upon first meeting.
2. He is a gentleman, and he wants to protect her modesty and insists that she come properly in public. He is teasing her a bit and says, **verse 8**, “If you do not know, O most beautiful among women, follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your young goats beside the shepherds’ tents.” In other words, everyone would know where Solomon would be. All the shepherds would be with Solomon if he was visiting their fields.

But she asked because it would be improper for her to have any hint of immodesty.

B. The man is to take the lead by **prizing** her as a person (vs. 9). As you begin a courtship, you need to develop a strong friendship in a non-romantic way.

It is so interesting to read this, because this is one of the greatest, richest, most powerful kings ever to live, and he is absolutely stunned by the poor Shulammite farm girl. He calls her a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots, which is the highest of compliments! He says in **Song of Solomon 1:9**, “I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots.” In ancient times, chariots would never be pulled by mares. “Stallions, not mares, were used to pull chariots in antiquity. A mare, therefore, *among* the chariots might [very] well start a chaotic experience.”⁴ To Solomon, she was as beautiful and sought after as if she were the only woman in a world full of men. He was attracted to her for all the right reasons. She was not like a prostitute. The mare often would be white and represented grace, beauty and nobility. She was godly. She was pure. She was graceful.

Application: Some of the married men need to listen. Remember when you were courting your wife, and you were willing to listen to Opera with your wife. You’d go to the store, and actually it didn’t matter, you were happy to go anywhere with her. You prized her. You prized what she prized because she prized it. And that woman felt loved. You talked to her. She felt like she was one in a million. She needs to feel that way.

Application: We are called to love our wives and treasure them in the most exalted way possible, as Christ loved the church. Paul says in **Ephesians 5:25**, “Husbands,

⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:1013). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her". That which a man begins in courtship, he is to continue in marriage. Some of you men know how to communicate love to your wife. You did it when you were courting. It's not that we don't know how.

Application: In courtship, it is important to get to know the other person. Men in marriage are to "dwell with them [their wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (**1 Peter 3:7**). So start getting to know her. Find out about her walk with the Lord. Make her feel treasured and prized. As you begin a courtship, you need to develop a strong friendship in a non-romantic way.

III. The third pillar you need to begin a courtship is **Commitment** (vs. 10-16). The courtship is founded upon careful commitment. There are a flood of emotions that accompany the possibility of courtship. These emotions are expressed, but they are sandwiched by great caution.

A. Commitment principle #1:

YOU MUST GO INTO COURTSHIP WITH MARRIAGE IN MIND.

Why is this? Because marriage means commitment. Dating is dangerous because it does not have marriage in mind. In dating, a person wants "all of the pleasure of love with none of the work, none of the vows, none of the sacrifice".⁵

This generation wants "intimacy without obligations".⁶ Courtship works, because it brings in accountability and purity with two people who love the Lord but DO NOT TRUST THEMSELVES. They learn to trust each other, because they are "two people who care more about each other's good than their own momentary pleasure".⁷

Solomon had marriage in mind. We see this in **verse 10**. Solomon pictures this peasant girl as his Bride and his Queen. He's not looking for superficial pleasure from her. He's looking for commitment. **Song of Solomon 1:10**, "Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels." "It was a centuries-old fashion in the East for a woman to wear a cord of gold around her forehead...which hung down over her checks...Neck chains or necklaces were made of gold or other metal, or consisted of strings of pearls, corals, or precious stones."⁸

It seems that he was imagining her wearing this jewelry, because in the next verse, the daughters volunteer to make these for her. She is poor. She is likely adorned with no jewelry. Her chief attraction is her grace and purity. She is an unlikely candidate for a king.

⁵ Joshua Harris. *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 34.

⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible*. "Rewritten and updated by Harold J. Chadwick"--Cover.; Includes index. (Rev. ed.) (344). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

And so the daughters of Jerusalem, the elite women in Solomon's court, volunteer to make the peasant girl her royal jewelry. **Verse 11**, "<OTHERS> We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver."

Application: What a beautiful picture of Christ and the church. We were poor, and Christ has made us rich. We were weathered by sin, and Christ has given us shelter from our scorching iniquities!

B. Commitment principle #2:

YOU MUST CAREFULLY UNDERSTAND A PERSON'S CHARACTER BEFORE YOU CAN COMMIT TO THEM.

This goes without saying, but everything leading up to this point showed that both Solomon and the Shulammitte were mature, godly people who were ready to marry because they had a strong commitment to God and to purity and accountability. She compared his name to the oil that was "poured out" in the Tabernacle worship of the LORD (1:3).

C. Commitment principle #3:

THE JOY OF INTIMACY IS THE REWARD OF COMMITMENT.

In other words, marital intimacy is the reward of those who wait until they are committed through a marriage vow before God.

Example of Uzzah: Remember Uzzah in who touched the Ark of the Covenant when he shouldn't have? What did God do to him? God killed him. Why? Because he was not the one committed to carrying the Ark. The Ark was so sacred, you had to be a priest to touch it. And it had to be a specific family of priests. Why? It shows the sacredness of the Ark. It is only to be touched by those who commit their entire lives and livelihood to protecting and caring for the Ark.

In the same way, only a man who has committed his life to protecting and caring for a woman before God and witnesses, may touch that woman. **The joy of intimacy is the reward of commitment.**

Joshua Harris, in his book "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" said this about intimacy without commitment:

"Intimacy without commitment contradicts what the Bible teaches about love. Instead of being selfless, it's selfish. Instead of looking out for the ongoing good of the other person, it's focused on the needs of the moment."⁹

Instead of cherishing the person as a brother or sister in Christ, the person becomes an object to fulfill your desires.

Look at how Solomon and the Shulammitte girl he is courting dealt with passion. It is beautiful. They have very real passions, but they keep them under control.

⁹ Harris. *Dating Goodbye*, 32.

1. You must be careful to guard the rush of emotions that accompany the possibility of courtship. It is natural to think highly of someone you are interested in. Both the peasant and the king think of each other when they are away. The affection seems to be out of this world!

When referring to the following verses, Spurgeon said, the Song of Solomon was “one of the most heavenly portions of God's Word”.

2. Listen to the words of the Shulammitte farm girl. **Verse 12-14**, “<SHE> While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. 13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. 14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi”.

The language here seems a bit shocking, but it really is not. We must be careful not to make that which is pure and innocent to be worldly and sensual. To the pure all things are pure. She is speaking of that which is closest to her heart. These are the thoughts of her heart.

It was common for a woman to wear a pouch of perfumed spices and flowers around her neck. Whenever she smelled it, she thought of Solomon.

- The “nard” is simply a very expensive perfume from near the Himalayan mountains in India, and the “myrrh” is an expensive spice that would have been mixed with the holy oil in the Tabernacle and then Temple worship (Exodus 30:23-33).¹⁰

By referring to Solomon as the “nard” or sweet smelling and very expensive perfume, she is saying Solomon is precious to her. She *esteems* him. In **verse 16**, she goes on to say “Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”

- By saying he is like the holy “myrrh” close to her heart she is saying her heart for holiness is knit with his heart. She *reverences* him.

Application: Respect and esteem are proper for a girl of marryable age as they look to a godly man. But this of course speaks to more than just this love story between Solomon and the poor peasant farm girl. This speaks of the beauty that Christ puts in our hearts as we come to know Him.

He welcomes us to him. And though we are poor and worthless and weathered by sin, our King of kings welcomes us. As He says to poor sinners like you and me, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (**Matthew 11:28**), we begin to see him as “beautiful” and “truly delightful”.

3. Again, this girl was godly and kept her distance from Solomon. The Shulammitte farm girl saw the king from a distance on his couch in the forest. The couch is referring to the king’s dining table where he would recline for a meal. His royal

¹⁰ Carr. *The Song of Solomon*, 92.

tent (“the curtains of Solomon”—1:5) had likely been brought there as he travels the countryside inspecting his vineyards. We can imagine him having dinner out in the open. She is admiring him from a distance.

Application: Again, we have to remember that this all pictures Christ and his church. Christ does not come to soil us, but to convict us of sin, righteousness, and the judgment to come. He calls us to see the beauty of His holiness. He doesn’t take His Bride to be and roll her around in the mud. He loves and respects her and protects her purity! Single men, it is your responsibility to picture this and to protect that girl’s purity.

Solomon admires her as well.

4. Solomon also greatly esteems her. **Verse 15**, “<HE> Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.” When you know the color of the girl’s eyes you are interested in, you know you are “twitterpated”!
5. And the Shulammitte girl responds again in **verse 16**, “<SHE> Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”

TWITTERPATED! Illustration: I’m told that my great Uncle Matthew from Scotland once was in partnership with a man named “Walt Disney”. Uncle Matthew broke the partnership with Mr. Disney because he thought that the little cartoon mouse would never take off. Wow, was he wrong. Disney put out a film called Bambi in 1941 that had an owl explaining to everyone what it was to be in love. **You’ll have to listen to it yourself!**

Owl: Nearly everybody gets twitterpated in the springtime. For example: You’re walking along, minding your own business. You’re looking neither to the left, nor to the right, when all of a sudden you run smack into a pretty face. Woo-woo! You begin to get weak in the knees. Your head’s in a whirl. And then you feel light as a feather, and before you know it, you’re walking on air. And then you know what? You’re knocked for a loop, and you completely lose your head!

But don’t worry, owl said most people get twitterpated in the Spring. That’s six months away, so we are safe.

But seriously, these emotions are raging and trying to get to the surface in all of us. What are we to do with them? Remember what I said Commitment principle #3 was?

THE JOY OF INTIMACY IS THE REWARD OF COMMITMENT.

Application: Here’s the thing. You’ve got all these God-given feelings, but you must control them. You must be careful as the Shulammitte says in the next chapter, **2:7**, “I adjure you...that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

IV. That brings us to the fourth pillar you need to begin a courtship, which is what I call **Determination to please God**. The one thing you want to be careful of during courtship is that you carry through on your convictions before God. Solomon did that. He was a man of honor and purity.

A. You must be determined in your **accountability**.

The courtship begins in 1:16! You can see that it is the first instance of the couple together. We see this in **Song of Solomon 1:16b-17**, “...Our couch is green; 17 the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine.”

They are together, but they are never alone. If you want to destroy your potential marriage before it starts, then have no accountability, and keep yourself in a state of temptation. *If you are alone, no matter how godly you are, you will be tempted!*

B. You must be determined in your **purity**. The emotions are running high.

1. She feels **treasured** (vs. 1-2).

Song of Solomon 2:1-7, “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

2 <HE> As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.

2. She feels **protected**. He furnished her with the best food. **Verse 3**, “<SHE> As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow...”

3. She feels **provided for**. **Verse 3**, “With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste,”

4. She feels joyful and a part of his heart, verse 4, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”

5. All of these things tend to make a massive assault on purity. We have another silology. These are her thoughts, “Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love. 6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!” Look at her strong desires, but then we have the right response to those desires. **Verse 7**, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

Conclusion: I would encourage anyone beginning courtship to sign a purity covenant with their parents present. Never allow yourself to be alone. Be careful what you talk about on the phone. Let things be focused on Scripture. Memorize Scripture together. Put that passion and motivation to good use. Jill and I memorized the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount together during this time. Don't let the conversations get romantic. The time will come for that. Do not awaken your love. Be very careful when you say the words “I love you”. You'd better wait until your engaged to do that. And I recommend short engagements. The reasons are obvious. You don't want to awaken love until the wedding night. You've got to focus your mind away from romance so you can get to know the person. You are laying a foundation for marriage.

How do you begin a courtship? There are four levels.

- Discovery
- Friendship
- Commitment

- Determination to remain accountable and to remain pure.

Be very careful not to have physical contact. Keep your clothes on and your hands off! Be determined to please God and do nothing to compromise your convictions.

Courtship is all about building trust. If you are a car dealer, you don't let the person take the car on a trip to Florida until they have BOUGHT the car. If you're in real estate, you don't let them move into the house until they've BOUGHT the house. Until they are committed and have promised to care for that item, they are not allowed to act like owners.

If you are single, and one day consider beginning courtship, or your children begin courting someone, remember, you want to find out during this time if this person is trustworthy to serve God and fulfill their God-given role. This is a person you need to be able to trust. Are they a dependable, trustworthy, predictable, faithful committed Christian person? You can start by seeing if this person has the character and commitment to submit themselves to accountability, visibility, and purity. May God give us the grace to do so!