

Passion, Purity, & Engagement

Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5¹

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

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Solomon 2:8-3:5**. We continue in a series of messages entitled “Passion, Purity, and Marital Fidelity”. Last week we talked about courtship. What’s that all about?

Courtship is a time when you are deciding whether or not the person is someone you would consider marrying. Courtship is has parental involvement, accountability, visibility, and it committed to purity. In courtship there is a commitment to not go to the romantic side. It doesn’t mean you don’t want to! It means you have a special friendship with lots of parental involvement. I was always with Jill’s parents or other godly adults.

But courtship leads to engagement. You’ve come to the place where you believe this person to be someone you can look up to spiritually. You haven’t had to compromise your purity or your convictions to keep this person.

Let me just say, that if you have had to compromise, put on the brakes! You don’t want to hitch your wagon to a wild horse! It’s not a wagon you will destroy, but your life. Make sure the person you are considering marrying is faithful, dependable, exemplary and predictable in their godliness and convictions.

Now we come to **Song of Solomon 2:8-3:5**, where courtship leads to marriage.

Song of Solomon 2:8, “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” She is anxious to see him! He’s anxious to see her!

I. Courtship is good **Preparation** for Marriage (vs. 8-13a).

Courtship is a wonderful time to lay some good foundations for marriage. You say, don’t you do that during the engagement? You might do some of that, but mostly during the engagement, you are planning the wedding! By the time you are engaged you should know and trust that this person is a faithful, consistent, dependable Christian person that you can spend the rest of your life with.

How long should courtship go? It should go as long as it takes to get to know what this person is really like. There are only two options in courtship—it ends in realizing that the person is not for you, or it ends in engagement.

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

In courtship there are several things that deepen and grow your relationship...

A. **Anticipation** is good preparation for marriage. **Song of Solomon 2:8**, "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills." The anticipation of seeing one another is breathtaking. We see King Solomon "leaping" and "bounding" over hills and mountains.

Courtship is exhilarating. So you need to be careful. There are many mountains and hills that you could trip on! Courtship ought to be a time when you are focused on trying to understand the person's convictions and faithfulness. ***Guard your heart! Do not give your heart away!*** You may not get married to this person. Even the consideration that the person you are courting might be the one is intoxicating. It makes one leap and bound like a gazelle! The pursuit of a wife is a good thing!

Proverbs 18:22, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD." If you find a wife, it's obvious you were looking, and desiring a wife. That's a good thing. Solomon was so convinced that he went to see this Shulammitte farm girl when ever he could.

B. **Dedication** is good preparation for marriage. Solomon was **committed**.

Explanation: The word courtship comes from the Elizabethan era in which the ladies of the court were wooed and won by knights and lords of the court through a process of frequent visitation.

He saw something in her that helped him overcome all obstacles and **persevere**. Often people in courtship overcome obstacles quite resiliently. **Song of Solomon 2:8**, "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills." Mountains and hills are probably literary images for obstacles to their love that the man overcomes.

It is amazing how resilient love is. When a young couple fall in love, they always think the best and give each other the benefit of the doubt. As **Proverbs 10:12** says, "love covers all offenses." When you love someone, you tend to overlook the blemishes. Truly, love is blind!

Now I'm not talking about stupidity. A godly person will want to court someone of godly character. You ought to be the type of person that no one would ever ask you to compromise your convictions. You'll be able to truly be committed and want the best for your possible mate if you know they are godly. You will easily cover their flaws. You'll "leap" and "bound" over them like a young stag or a gazelle!!

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that “love hopes all things”. Love thinks the best and fills in the question marks with thinking the best of the person.

We are all able to live within the bounds of love and respect. Why is it that often married couples lose this? Simply put—they are wounded.

Application: Consider the obstacles Christ “leaped” over to demonstrate His love for us—“In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!”

C. **Communication** is good preparation for marriage. There’s a desire to spend **time** together. He says, in **verse 10**, “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”

Solomon, asks the Shulammitte, the one he loves, to go for a walk in the countryside. It’s important to spend time together and get to know each other.

Explanation: The word courtship comes from the Elizabethan era in which the ladies of the court were wooed and won by knights and lords of the court through a process of frequent visitation.

The joy of love presents a God-given escape from the cruel world. There is that time when you are able to spend frequent time together. But be careful. Don’t focus on romance. There will be enough sparks flying in your heart that you need to be careful and self-controlled, or you will start a fire that you can’t put out! Focus on seeing if this person is committed to the Lord. Also remember when you are together, as we learned last week, there needs to be *visibility, accountability, and purity*.

Application: The same is true with your relationship with Christ. He calls us to frequently “come away” with Him. Is your heart often stirred by Him? As often as we can, we are to come away with Him and spend time with Him.

D. **Affection** is good preparation for marriage. Again, I’m not speaking of the physical side of love here. I’m talking about a healthy esteem and respect for the other person. You ought to think the world of one another for the right reasons. And here in verses 9-10 we see the foundations of love and respect being established for marriage.

Verses 9a, “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag”.

1. Solomon sets the example with **strength** and **gentleness**. Are you like a strong young stag of a man that will keep his convictions? Are you gentle but firm with your special someone, so that they know you want their best. Are you graceful like a gazelle? The Shulammitte trusts Solomon as a man of honor. Solomon was a man among men, but he was a true “gentle-man”.

2. The man's affection **draws** him to his beloved Shulammitte farm girl.

Verses 9b-10, "Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. 10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away."

Solomon approached the **wall** around the Shulammitte's home and then peered **through the lattice**. He was anxious to see her.

- E. Having Renewal and **Hope** are good preparation for marriage. It's Springtime... Springtime is often celebrated as a time for young people in love. This is a gift from God. It is exciting and refreshing. There is much potential.

Verses 11-13, "for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance."

There is great hope during a good courtship process. You can see how you might work together. You have the same convictions. You love the Lord. You deeply feel respect and love for your special someone, and they make you feel loved and respected.

All that is a good foundation for marriage.

Application: One mistake that some make is they don't know how to read the warning signs.

- I know of a courting couple that allowed themselves to be in tempting situations, and started fooling around, so they got married. That's not good preparation for marriage.
- I've heard of couples getting married because it's a quick way to get out of their parents' house. Bad idea! That's the warning sign of a tumultuous marriage. It's a bad idea to start a marriage by breaking the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother".
- There are those who can't get along very well as a couple. They are worn out from all their highs and lows. They think marriage will bring some stability. They conclude, "We don't seem to be doing very well in courtship. At least in marriage we'll be able to be intimate. Let's get married." That's like saying "I can't bench press fifty pounds, I think I'll add five hundred more pounds!" And you get crushed by it. I've seen marriages that start like that end in divorce.
- Learn to read the warning signs. It'll be like Spring has come. Godly people are giving you the green light on the person's character. You have

seen that this person walks with the Lord. You esteem them and feel so special to be loved by such a godly person.

Transition: We've seen the preparation for marriage, let's look at...

II. The **Proposal** for Marriage (vs. 13b-14).

We find an invitation to leave her home...

Verse 13b, "**Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.**" This is the closest thing to a proposal we have in the Song of Solomon.

A. Engagement is a **promise** to marry. Betrothal in Bible times was serious. It required a spoken and eventually written covenant that laid out the intentions for marriage. It was taken very seriously, and it was made between the two families. It was signified by giving a ring or some other token of the Groom's intention to marry the bride.

There was actually a *ceremony* for betrothal. "The Jewish betrothal [ceremony] in CHRIST's time was conducted thus: The families of the bride and groom met, with some others present to serve as witnesses. The young man would give the young woman either a gold ring, or some article of value, or simply a document in which he promised to marry her. Then he would say to her: "See by this ring [or this token] thou art set apart for me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel."²

B. Engagement requires the father's **permission**, if living and able. As I said, both families were involved in the Jewish betrothal. So, the parents should be involved in the engagement. It is not mentioned here, but it must be said. In courtship and in engagement, it is the man's responsibility to seek the father's permission.

1 Corinthians 7:36 NKJV, "**But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin [daughter], if she is past the flower of youth [of marriable age], and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.**"

We see that the father gives the bride away. It is he who gives his daughter's hand in marriage. The father must protect his daughter and make sure she is marrying a godly man.

C. Engagement means that the woman must start thinking about leaving her parents **protection** and come under the protection of the groom. **Verse 14**, Solomon calls out to his betrothed, "**O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.**"

² Fred Wright. *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1983), 336.

Doves hide in the crevasses of the rocks. This speaks to her desire for safety and the protection of her mother's home. Quoting **Genesis 2:24**, Jesus said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife" (**Mark 10:7**). The woman has to trust the protection of this man.

Application: Ladies, one way you can know if this man is a man of honor and will protect you, is if he is careful to protect your purity. Is he careful to guide the conversation in a godly direction? Are his walk and talk consistent? If not, stay in the crevasses of the rocks in your parents' home! Its better that you break an engagement than you later find yourself with a broken marriage!

Explanation: The betrothal is not mentioned here, but it is assumed. The courtship has been observed by godly people. The father is consulted. In this case, since the Shulammmite's father does not seem to be on the scene, the mother would be consulted. Perhaps the mother would seek advice from other godly men in the family. At any rate, by this time it should be plain to godly, mature people whether or not a wedding should take place. So permission is either granted or denied.

Transition: So we've seen the **preparation** for marriage, and the **proposal** for marriage. Now we move to the engagement. Let's talk about...

III. The **Pressures** of the Engagement (vs. 15).

Engagement brings with it many pressures. It's one thing to dream about marriage. There are no imperfections in most of our dreams. But actually considering marriage is scary for most people. You really begin to see the flaws for the first time. But it's a good thing if you handle the pressures in the right way.

Verse 15, "Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

Foxes are pests that wreak havoc in vineyards (e.g., they will eat the grapes). Although the vineyard has been associated with the appearance of the woman (1:6), here it is described as **our vineyards** and thus refers to their relationship. The foxes represent some hindrances that are threatening to spoil their relationship.

"The foxes represent as many obstacles or temptations as have plagued lovers throughout the centuries.

- Perhaps it is the fox of uncontrolled desire which drives a wedge of guilt between a couple.
- Perhaps it is the fox of mistrust and jealousy which breaks the bond of love.
- Or it may be the fox of selfishness and pride which refuses to let one acknowledge his fault to another.

- Or it may be an unforgiving spirit which will not accept the sincere apology of the other. These foxes have been ruining vineyards for years and the end of their work is not in sight”.³

Engagement will bring with it foxes. Are you able to guard your relationship from foxes? Are you able to keep yourself under control? Even in ideal courtships and marriages most couples encounter some potentially destructive problems. Their willingness to solve them together is an evidence of their maturity.

- If you can't get along and solve problems with each other for a few hours a day, three or four times a week, you certainly aren't going to be able to get along with a person seven days a week for the next fifty years!!

IV. The **Passion** of Engagement (vs. 16-17).

Verse 16, “My beloved is mine, and I am his; he grazes among the lilies. 17 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle or a young stag on cleft mountains.” The next chapter is the wedding, the betrothal period is coming to a close. Her passions are rising. Solomon like a graceful gazelle is very gentle in how he approaches her. Yet he is strong in his convictions as “a young stag on cleft mountains”. He's careful to protect her from her own passions and emotions. She strongly desires marriage. She says, “Until the day breathes and the shadows flee”—she wants to be his wife! Her passions are strong.

Transition: That brings us to our final point.

V. The **Purity** of Engagement (Song of Solomon 3:1-5).

The woman dreams of her future husband. **Song of Solomon 2:1-5**, “1 ¶ On my bed by night [very strong in the Heb. lit. “night after night”] I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. 2 I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. 3 The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. “Have you seen him whom my soul loves?” 4 Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.”

The wedding is approaching. Night after night she thinks about marriage to this man. She truly cannot live without him.

³S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers*, pp. 49-50

Her passions are strong. She is a godly woman. These are pure and holy passions, but she knows they must be reserved and guarded for the soon coming marriage, and so she says again in **verse 5**, "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."

She dreams of married life, but she is careful with her desires. She guards her passions.

Illustration: A fire in the hearth is beautiful because it is controlled and in the right place. It gives warmth and light. But if you take the logs and burn them in the middle of the living room, you'll lose everything. So it is with passion. You must guard it!

Conclusion: Next week we will talk about the wedding God wants those who are engaged to have. But in the meantime, let me close with a few encouragements and warnings.

1. Don't jump into an engagement too quickly. If you are not very, very sure that this person truly is what they say they are, wait. Don't jump in too quickly. Listen to godly people around you. Make sure you are desiring marriage for the right reasons. Physical attraction is not a strong foundation. There must be consistency, godliness, and biblical conviction. Does the person you are interested in speak and live openly about their walk with Christ? If it is not the center of their life now, you cannot expect anything to get better when you are married. You can certainly expect things to likely get worse.

Look for the warning signs. Can your relationship survive misunderstandings, arguments and the pressures of life? If not, you ought to put the engagement on hold.

2. Plans should move quickly if you are engaged. The time to discover if this is the person to marry is during courtship. I believe in a long courtship, but a brief engagement. If you are engaged, try to make it a short engagement if possible with lots of accountability. Once the decision is made to marry, it is very difficult to restrain passion. **DO NOT** be alone together. The passions are too high. More than a year of engagement is not wise unless there is great distance between you. I was engaged to Jill for a year and two months, but she was 1000 miles away in college. We were both very busy during our engagement. A short engagement is advisable. Keep busy planning the wedding and get on with the marriage!
3. Here's a word of advice to you men. Get to know the girls' parents well during the courtship time and especially the engagement time. Schedule some

time with her parents while she is away. You are not only marrying her, but you are marrying her family!!

Let me close by saying that the Bible tells us that we are betrothed to Christ and we need to be a "chaste bride". This is true in engagement, but it is also true in our Christian life. We are not yet in heaven. We have not yet partaken in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Keep yourself unspotted from this world. Let your heart be on the Beloved One Jesus Christ! Walk closely with Him, because He is coming very soon to bring His Bride to the wedding feast!!

Purity Covenant

On this 31st day of October, 2010

Evan Wayne Black

after earnest prayer and consideration, presented himself today before God and in the presence of his parents and his church in a covenant to remain pure for marriage. He pledges the following:

I will wait for God's timing in all things. My times are in His hands, therefore I will trust Him. In His time He will bring forth my wife. Until then I will remain pure, keeping myself and the first fruits of my love for that person alone that God chooses. With God as my witness and strength, I, Evan Wayne Black, commit to remain morally pure from this day until my wedding day.

*Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.
For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him!*

ISAIAH 30:18 (ESV)



Evan Wayne Black

Matthew S. Black, Father (witness)

Matthew S. Black, Pastor (witness)

Jill M. Black, Mother (witness)