

My Beloved Is Mine, And I Am His – Song of Solomon 2:8 – 3:5
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We're studying the Song of Solomon right now, and some people may find this odd or awkward. Some might have the stereotype that sex is just not something you're supposed to talk about in church. I'm convinced that it's extremely important that we talk about this, because the world has plenty of suggestions for us—stronger than suggestions, actually, the world basically tries to pressure us, force us, manipulate us in order that we conform to its doctrines of premarital sex, extramarital sex, cohabitation, pornography, and divorce. And God has put a fire inside of me to want to talk about marriage and sex as God intends it, which is far better than the depraved doctrines of this world.

God has given us a whole book about marital intimacy, about love and romance and dating and marriage and sex. God is not silent about this stuff, and so the church shouldn't be silent about it either.

Before we get started in our text for this morning, let me tell you a couple of my hopes and prayers for this sermon series. As I've mentioned, later this year I'm going to start a sermon series on the book of Romans. And we're going to spend quite a bit of time in Romans, exulting in the deep truths of the Gospel. I want us to be a congregation with a firm foundation, with deep roots and sound theology. I want us to know who God is. I want us to understand the problem of sin. I want us to glory in our Redeemer and trust Him and love Him and hope in Him and obey Him. So I want there to be that rich, biblical knowledge of the Good News.

At the same time, and I don't think this is disconnected from what I've just been saying, I also want this to be a church where there are vibrant, passionate, romantic marriages. I don't want this to be a place where there's a bunch of men who know how to defend the 5 points of Calvinism, but don't know how to look their wife in the eye and say, "I love you," and don't know how to truly cherish her and communicate with her. I don't want us to be a church that has our theology all nailed down, but there's little fruit. And I think one of the fruits of our theology should be exciting, happy, vibrant marriages. If we are standing on the truth of the Gospel, if we are living with the hope that the Gospel gives us, then we should be husbands and wives who know how to confess sin, and repent, and forgive, and reconcile, and be patient and kind and merciful and gracious, like Christ has been so abundantly gracious to us! I want us to be a Gospel people. I hope you hear my heart on this. I want our marriages to be Gospel-

centered and therefore honoring to God. I want our marriages to be a witness to the world of God's goodness and God's clear design that marriage be a portrait of Christ's relationship to the church. This is awesome stuff, friends!

So please don't see this little sermon series on Song of Solomon as kind of diversion from what we're really about as a church. No, this is simply application. This is Gospel application. What we have in Song of Solomon is a glorious picture of what redeemed sexuality looks like. This is Gospel romance. This is God-glorifying, wonderful, enjoyable, intimacy in marriage.

Another thing I've been thinking about as I've been working on these messages is the need for this teaching to be passed down to the children among us, and to future generations. I want you to understand that I have the long view in mind. I'm certainly concerned for marriages that are struggling right now, and I desperately hope that these sermons will be an encouragement to those marriages. But I'm thinking much more broadly than that. Of course I'm thinking of all the married couples who are here, but I'm also thinking of all those who will be married at some point in the future. There are engaged couples here, dating couples. There are single adults who desire to be married. There are also teenagers and children in this church who will someday be married, and I'm thinking about them. Even the younger children who are not hearing these sermons right now, my hope is that we will teach our children about these things as they grow up and that they will embrace God's good plan for sex and marriage. I'm thinking of the babies in the nursery. I'm thinking of our grandchildren (if God would bless us with grandchildren someday—and our oldest is 8, so I'm not hoping for grandchildren anytime soon). But my point is that I'm thinking not only of those of us right here, right now. I'm thinking of future generations. I want this teaching to get into our homes. I want parents to be teaching their children. As a Gospel-centered, Bible-centered church, we need to talk about the things God talks about concerning sex and marriage. And I pray there will be much fruit in our lives and in our children's lives and in our grandchildren's lives.

I'll use three headings this morning. The first is, how to date. Beginning in verse 8, this seems to be a reflection on their dating relationship prior to marriage. The second heading will be catch the foxes (from verse 15), which is a figurative way of warning against the little things that can creep into a relationship and bring about destruction. Finally, we'll consider the statement in verse 16, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

How to Date (2:8-14)

This applies to singles who desire to be married. I think there are some insightful things here that should give you a framework for how to think about godly dating and how to find the right spouse. This also applies to married couples, because married couples need to continue dating one another. So often there's exciting romance and intense emotions during the dating and engagement, but then it fizzles once the couple is married. The wife looks at her husband sprawled out on the couch like a bum watching sports all day, and she thinks, "what happened to that dashing young man who was so attentive to me and so thoughtful and kind, and who listened so well." And the husband looks at his wife, standing there in her sweatpants, nagging him about fixing the dripping faucet (she seems like a dripping faucet), and he thinks, "what happened to that sexy lady I was so attracted to, who thought I was such a stud." The romance is gone. So dating is not just for finding a spouse. Dating is for husbands and wives, too. You got to keep the spark alive. So let's observe some of the things about this couple. Whether you're single or married, this should be helpful to you.

In verse 8 she is excited that he's on his way to see her. "The voice of my beloved (exclamation point!) Behold, he comes . . ." She's excited! Do you remember, ladies, waiting for your boyfriend or fiancé to come and pick you up for a date? You've been getting ready—working on your hair, doing your make-up, picking out just the right outfit. And you can't wait for him to arrive.

Now, look at *how* he is coming to see her. He is leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. This guy is motivated. He's excited. Guys, can you identify with this? You're on your way to pick up your girlfriend or fiancé, and you just can't get there fast enough.

I remember my senior year at Wheaton College, and Stacy and I were dating long-distance. She was at Michigan State University, and it was about a four hour drive from Chicago. And a few different times I rented a car and drove to see her for the weekend. I rented the cheapest car that Enterprise had, which was a Geo Metro. And you wouldn't think that those are capable of speeding (they have one cylinder, I think). But I was so eager to get there, I was pushing that little car to its limits, and I actually got pulled over for speeding. The officer was gracious and just gave me a warning, but that's how eager I was to see my girl!

In verse 9 he can't wait to see her. He is gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. He wants her to come away and spend time with him. So he says in verse 10, "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away . . ." He talks about it

being springtime, and he wants her to come out on a walk with him through the beauties of nature. Everything is in bloom, including their love for one another.

Look at his words in verse 14. He calls her “my dove,” and he says, “let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” Here’s a guy who is passionate about the woman he loves. He is pursuing her. He is eager to be with her. He uses his words to express his affection for her.

Now, a lot of husbands might say at this point, in defense of themselves, “I’m just not that kind of guy. I’m not that passionate or expressive.” But then you see that same guy at Heinz field in 20 degree weather with a big “S” painted on his bare chest, holding a beer in his hand yelling at the top of his lungs. Don’t tell me you’re not passionate. And maybe you’re not that crazy Steeler fan, but every one of you guys is passionate about something. Whether it’s the Steelers or the Penguins, or maybe not the Pirates so much. Whether it’s golf, or wood-working, or motorcycles, or cycling or running or books or technology or food or movies or TV shows or video games (God forbid), or making money, or home improvement projects. You’re passionate about something. I was in a store recently and saw a guy with a T-shirt that said, “Will talk about cars with anybody.” And that’s how we all are. Just fill in the blank, whatever those things are that you’re passionate about. You’ll talk about it. There will be passion in your voice and a fire in your eyes.

So don’t cop out and say that you just don’t know how to share your feelings. You need to cultivate those feelings for your wife and then put things into words. You might say, “Oh, my wife knows that I love her, cause I bring home a paycheck, and I do the weed-eating, and I take out the trash.” No, she doesn’t know. You have to tell her. Tell her often, tell her in creative ways. Speak sweetly and passionately. Tell her how much she means to you. Tell her how glad you are to be married to her. And you might say, “What if I’m not glad to be married to her?” Then repent, and cry out to God for help to love her the way you should and seek counsel from others for your marriage.

By the way, married couples, did you do your homework this week? Did you work on the assignment I gave you last Sunday? Did you spend some time talking about your relationship—reminiscing about your dating relationship leading up to marriage, and also honestly evaluating where your relationship is now? Stacy and I have had some good talks in recent weeks. Stacy has been excited about this sermon series because she knows that all the things I’m telling other husbands to do I’m going to try to do myself, so that I’m not a complete

hypocrite. So she's been excited about that aspect of it. Her only reservation is that she's been a little nervous about what I might say about her. So I told her that I would run everything by her before hand.

But we've had some good talks about our marriage, about our friendship, about our children, about ministry. And it's such a wonderful thing to see how a relationship can grow and mature through the years, through good times and difficult times, and how our love for each other has become deeper and sweeter through it all. And I think it's just going to keep getting better.

Now, a couple points specifically for singles. And then we'll move on to catching the foxes, which is also very applicable to both married couples and to singles who are thinking about a potential spouse. But first, notice two things in the verses we've already been looking at.

First, notice that in this dating relationship *he* is pursuing *her*. He's the one running to see her. He's the one asking her out on a date. And I think this fits right in with the biblical teaching on husbands being the leader in the marriage. That leadership should begin in the dating relationship. The guy should be the one asking the girl out. The guy should be the one pursuing her. The guy should be the one initiating talks about the relationship and where the relationship is going.

Single ladies, if you're involved with a guy who isn't showing much responsibility or taking much initiative in the relationship, that's a major red flag. If you feel like you're the one pursuing him, you're the one trying to get him to commit to marriage, you're trying to get him to step up and take responsibility, I'd say you should ditch him now while you still can. Putting a ring on his finger isn't going to make him into a leader.

Single men, you need to figure out what it means to be a leader. You need to prepare yourself for marriage, well before you even meet a woman who is a potential wife. Then, once you meet a godly woman and you feel that it's the right time and right person, and mentors of yours affirm that, then you have to be courageous to pursue her. And that's risky business, isn't it? You might get shut down. She might say, I would never go on a date with you in a million years, if you were the last man on the planet. But you can't let the fear of rejection keep you from pursuing a wife. There are godly single women who want to be married, but they're wondering why none of the Christian guys will ask them out.

Men, you need to initiate. You need to lead. You need to set the course for the relationship in terms of purity and intentionality. You need to be clear that this is not just recreational

dating, but it's for the purpose of discovering if God would be pleased for you to be married.

And then, if you do get married, you continue to lead in these ways. You continue to pursue her and say nice things to her and plan dates for the two of you to enjoy (even if it's as simple as a walk in park, like this couple is doing). You don't get married and then treat her like a trophy that you won. You spent money on her and planned all kinds of awesome dates and bought her presents and wrote out nice letters and said wonderful things and listened attentively to her, and then she said Yes and now she's yours. No, you have to keep dating.

Do whatever it takes. I know life can be crazy, especially when kids come along. But you have to make it happen. Hire a babysitter. Do a babysitting swap with another couple. Put the kids to bed early and then enjoy some quiet, alone time looking into each other's eyes and talking and listening and laughing. And men, it's primarily our responsibility to make this happen. Being the head of your home and the leader in your marriage doesn't mean you just tell everyone what to do and everyone serves you. That's not biblical headship. In biblical terms, being the head means you sacrifice yourself for the good of your wife and for the good of your family. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." That's Christ-like, loving leadership, and that's what we're called to.

The other thing for singles is to reiterate the call to purity that we looked at last week in 2:7, which shows up again in 3:5. "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." It's interesting to note in this date that we've been reading about, that the couple is not involved sexually at this point. This is a remembrance of a date they had before they were married, and the focus is not their physical relationship. The focus is simply their desire to be together and spend time talking about their love and also talking about potential problems in their relationship (as we'll look at in a moment).

This is so important in dating. You need the time to get to know one another without being involved physically in any way. Sure, there will be physical attraction. But don't stir up or awaken those passions until it's the right time. It is so important that dating occur without any kind of sexual intimacy, because that physical intimacy will obscure all objectivity in your mind as you try to think and pray about whether you should marry this person. Are you tracking with me? Some people say, Oh, well, we have to have sex to see if we're compatible. We have to live together to see if we're compatible. You may enjoy sex. You may even enjoy living together for awhile. But those are not the things that a

marriage is built on fundamentally. And once you've gone there, it complicates the relationship so much that you can't step back and think clearly or objectively about whether this is the person you want to spend the rest of your life with.

God knows best! Trust His plan. Spend time dating, without any physical intimacy. Talk and talk and talk and talk about all kinds of things. Pray and seek counsel from godly men and women. And then you get married, and then you sleep together and live together and begin your life together. That is the path of lasting pleasure, and it's what honors God.

Catch the Foxes (2:15)

There's something on their date that threatens their enjoyment of the experience together. They are focused on their relationship, focused on one another, talking with one another, simply being together. Everything is in bloom. It's springtime. All of this is figurative of their blossoming romance. But there are these foxes that pose a threat to all of this. There are little foxes that could spoil the vineyards—the vineyards being figurative of their relationship. And so these foxes need to be caught. They need to be dealt with. Even though they're little, they can do a lot of damage. And so they need to be addressed, talked about, and resolved.

Again, this applies to singles in terms of things to think about in a dating relationship and what to look for in a spouse. You need to think about potential foxes that could do a lot of harm. Also, for married couples, you'll need to continue catching the foxes throughout your marriage. They won't always be obvious. They might not rush upon you like a lion, but may be subtle and almost unnoticeable until you realize they've eaten away the roots of your relationship.

Here are a few particular areas to talk about, for dating and engaged couples as well as married couples. First of all, talk about theology. Talk about your understanding of the Gospel. Share your testimonies with one another. Talk about what God is doing in your life. Study the Bible together. Discuss doctrine. How do you understand the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility? I remember one of my professors in college said that on his first date with the woman who is now his wife, he asked her if she was a Calvinist. She must have said yes, and they lived happily ever after. Talk theology. Are you on the same page? How can you grow together in your understanding of the Bible? If there are some fundamental things that you strongly disagree on, that's going to be a fox in your relationship.

A very practical theological issue to talk about is marriage roles. As I've alluded to already in this message, and as I've

preached on at length in other sermons, the Bible teaches that there are distinct roles for the husband and the wife. The husband and wife are completely equal in God's eyes, and in God's goodness and creativity He made us differently, with different assignments. He calls the man to be the leader, the protector, the provider. He needs to make sacrifices for his wife. He needs to go out and work hard to provide for his family. And God calls the woman to respect her husband, submit to him, support him, and be mainly engaged in the work of raising children and caring for the home. Unfortunately, our culture does not have a whole lot of respect for childrearing and homemaking, but that labor of love is tremendously influential and utterly important.

If these roles are reversed, if these roles are not clearly defined, if a husband and wife are not striving to fulfill these God-ordained roles, it will be a fox that wreaks havoc in the relationship.

Another set of questions that you need to talk about have to do with family. As a dating or engaged couple, you should talk about how many kids you envision yourselves having. That's probably not a question for the first date, but as the relationship gets more serious, this is something that needs to be discussed. Do you want one kid, or 18 kids? Do you want them to be 5 years apart or 18 months apart? Do you want to adopt? Do you want to have foster kids?

What do you envision family life to be like? What was your home like growing up? Is dinner going to be at 6pm sharp every night with the whole family sitting there, or are people going to be wandering around eating whatever and whenever they want? Is the TV always going to be on, or will it never be on? Will we read books together? Will we go to bed late, or early? Will we wake up late, or early? What kind of home do you hope to live in?

And then questions about the extended family, too. How often will we see my parents, your parents, your second cousin once removed? Is it really important that we live close to our relatives? What if we move far away? Will we travel to see them? Will they travel to see us? Will we talk on the phone with them twice a day (I hope not), or twice a month or twice a year?

Talk about time. How much time do you think we'll spend together as a married couple? How consuming will work be? Will we go on vacation sometimes? What will that be like? Are we going to be apart for extended periods of time? This relates to what happens in Song of Solomon at the beginning of chapter 3. There the song jumps to a dream that the woman has, a kind of nightmare. She fears that she has lost her husband. She doesn't know where he is. So she goes searching for him and then clings to him and won't let him go. Couples who are dating or engaged

may think that once they're married, they will be together 24-7. This dream of hers is kind of a reality check, that he has a job, he has things he has to do, he's not going to be by her side all the time. Talk about what that's going to be like.

And for married couples, talk about time. Wife, do you feel like your husband is gone too much? Husband, do you feel like your wife wants too much of your time? Talk honestly and try to find a balance that works for your lives and allows the needed time for work but also makes the relationship a priority.

Talk about money. This can be a firecracker. This past Tuesday evening Stacy and I spent some time working on our budget together. And we were both pleasantly surprised that it went very well. Maybe it's because I'm preaching on Song of Solomon right now. We've had our moments in the past when we've not been very nice to each other while working on the budget. Maybe you can identify with that. Have you ever gotten testy with your spouse when talking about money? This is an area that shows our selfishness and pride, and a couple needs to learn how to discuss and come to an agreement about how to spend money, and save money and give money away. And it's all in the details. How much do we spend on a car? How much do we spend on a house? How much do we spend on eating out? How much do we spend on clothes? How much do we save? How much do we give away? Stacy and I use an electronic envelope system that's offered by Crown Financial Ministries. I know some of you recently went through Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace curriculum. There are great resources out there to help you, and I'd encourage you to use them. Talk about your budget. Plan out a budget. And check in regularly to see how well you're keeping to the budget. If there are major disagreements on how you spend your money, that will be a fox that will spoil the vineyard.

The last topic for discussion that I'll mention is romance (although I'm sure there are countless other things that would be beneficial to talk about). Discuss your romantic relationship and how you anticipate that to look like in marriage. By the way, Stacy and I are totally agreed that working on the budget is not romantic. It is not a date night to sit down and crunch numbers and discuss how we're spending our money. That's like the opposite of a date. When we're looking at the budget, we don't necessarily feel like lovers. We feel more like business partners. At other points we feel mainly like partners in ministry. At other points we feel mainly like parents. So we try to make sure our dates are frequent enough to remember that we're lovers, mainly.

As a couple prepares for marriage, they should talk some about how they can safeguard their romance. In the busyness of life, how are you going to make time for each other? For married

couples, what are the foxes that are eroding your romance? It might be something big, like a pornography addiction or an affair. You need to get serious help in those situations and fight to restore your marriage. Or it may be little things, and even good things, like having the kids in too many activities or doing so many ministries and church activities that you don't have time for each other. It may be working too much.

Simple exhaustion may be a fox in your relationship. You're running around doing a hundred good things, but you don't have the time or the energy for one another. So you have to really look at your priorities and figure out how to make your relationship the priority it needs to be.

Another fox that might be eating away at your romance is a messy house or a messy bedroom. If you go into your bedroom and there are piles of laundry and stacks of papers and a TV and the kids have left their legos on the bed, that's just not a very romantic place to be. Take some time to think about your home, and specifically your bedroom, so that it can be a haven, a retreat, a place for you to enjoy being together. We recently moved to a different house, and in our bedroom there's wallpaper that looks like something you'd see in a nursing home cafeteria or a funeral home. It's not very romantic. So we plan on tearing it down and painting the room with some nice color that Stacy will pick out.

In lots of different ways, you have to be very intentional about your romantic relationship as a couple. You have to make time to communicate deeply. You have to make the effort to do that, even you guys who might not like to talk much, or you might not like to listen much. There has to be that emotional bond with your spouse that grows deeper and sweeter with each passing year. If you're not connecting on that level, then your marriage will be susceptible to an affair. If there's an emotional void, an intimacy void, then the husband or the wife or both will search to fill that void outside the marriage in some way. Don't let that happen. You affair-proof your marriage by setting up clear boundaries around your relationship, like not spending time alone with a member of the opposite sex, not cultivating a close relationship with a member of the opposite sex. That's the defensive strategy for affair-proofing your marriage, and it's very important. But an even more important strategy is the active work of fostering a deeper and deeper emotional intimacy with your spouse. As you do that, by God's grace, you'll be able to catch all of the little foxes that come along seeking to hinder your relationship.

Talk about these kinds of things. Another assignment for you this week. What are the foxes that are spoiling your vineyards? What are the things in your lives, big or small, evil or good, that are threatening your romance and intimacy?

My beloved is mine, and I am his

The last thing we'll look at this morning is the statement in verse 16, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." This is repeated in 6:3 and in 7:10. It's a beautiful statement of the oneness and the reciprocity of the marriage relationship. The husband and wife belong to one another for life. They become one flesh, as it says in Genesis 2:24. Also, listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, ESV)

The husband and wife belong to one another. Their bodies belong to one another. But it's not simply that. They are joined as one, and therefore their lives are knit together in such a profound way that everything is now shared. It's not appropriate any longer to speak of his money and her money, for everything that's his is hers, and vice versa. The couple's hopes and dreams in life should also be united. They're not going in different directions, pursuing different things. They are together, with a common vision and purpose and goal.

Being married is a very sanctifying experience, and one of the things that marriage forces us to look at is our own selfishness. When you become one with another person, it shows you how selfish you are. Because now, all of a sudden, every decision I make is not just about me, but about us.

Let me close with this exhortation, and I'll apply it to all of us. First of all, for husbands and wives, let this be an opportunity for you to confess and repent of your selfishness. What a terrible fox that can cause so much harm in your relationship. Of all the foxes that you might identify in your marriage, how many of them come down to selfishness? You want things your way. That's our sin. But there's something far better for us in God's design. He wants us to give up self, give up our own personal rights, and rejoice in the oneness of marriage. "My beloved is mine, and I am his." That's an awesome statement, but to really mean it and to really experience the benefits of it, you have to fight to kill selfishness in your life.

I also want to exhort single people to look for ways to combat selfishness in your life. You may be very selfish and not realize it, simply because you're not in a marriage relationship that forces you on a daily basis to consider the needs and desires of another person. Be intentional to find ways to make your money

not just about you, and to make your time not just about you. Be generous with your money and your time. Be thoughtful and kind to others. Go out of your way to help others. Make sacrifices to serve others. These kinds of things will go a long way in preparing you for marriage, if God should lead you to be married. But whether you get married or not, you will grow in holiness and you'll be more like Jesus.

The application for all of us is that we are united to Christ, and therefore we are not our own. The oneness of marriage points to the oneness of Christ and His bride, the church. So if you are a Christian, you are united to Christ. You are one with Christ. And therefore your life is not your own. You belong to Christ. Everything you have, everything you are, is rightfully His. And so you ought to live for Him. You give up selfishness. You sacrifice everything in your pursuit of a closer relationship with Him. But don't view this as a chore, as a burden. It is the best thing in the world to belong to Christ. It is the happiest thing in the world to give up all your selfish cravings in order to enjoy His presence and serve Him.

I hope we've been encouraged in our marriages. I hope we've been instructed in what God's Word has to say about marriage. And I hope we'll see the Good News that marriage portrays—that Jesus gave Himself for His bride and will be united to her forever.