

The Continuing Courtship

Song of Solomon 2

Song of Solomon 2:1-6 - *"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.*

² *Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*

³ *Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.*

I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

⁴ *He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.*

⁵ *Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick.*

⁶ *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me."*

Background Notes

Within the historical interpretation of the Song of Solomon, there are two views. The traditional view sees two characters in the book: Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. In the triangular view there are three lovers. What is this triangular view? For the sake of time, I'm reading from an essay I wrote some time ago entitled "Catch the Foxes." You can find it on our website (growingchristians.org).

"Some growing Christians have never even read Song of Solomon, let alone been able to understand the book. And Christians who have read and studied the book have discovered that Bible scholars and commentators are not agreed on exactly how the Song should be interpreted. Some say that there were just two lovers in the story, while others say that three lovers were involved.

The three-lover, or triangular view was first put forward in the late 1700's, and is thus relatively recent in Church history. In this view, the true love affair is not between King Solomon and the Shulamite maiden, but rather between the young woman and her shepherd boyfriend. The Shulamite maiden may have lived in the area of Shunem in the north of Israel, and she and the shepherd were simple country folk who fell in love and were planning marriage.

Then along came the villain of the melodrama, King Solomon! When he caught a glimpse of the beautiful maiden, he lusted after her and abducted her for his already large royal harem. But, in spite of all his wooing and wealth, Solomon couldn't persuade the Shulamite maiden to give in to him. She remained true to her shepherd fiancé and continues to talk and dream only of him.

In the meantime, her shepherd lover came to Jerusalem to try to get his fiancée released from Solomon's clutches. Finally, Solomon granted the Shulamite woman her freedom. She and her shepherd then traveled home to the country together, happily looking forward to their marriage."

In this triangular or three-lover view of the Song, even though Solomon was the author of the book, he essentially "told on himself" at the end, and acknowledged that he was wrong to try to lure the Shulamite maiden away from her true love and marriage.

There are a number of pros and cons for each view, but in our Talks we've chosen to go with the traditional view of two main characters: King Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. We've chosen this view for these three reasons:

- a. **The traditional two-character view** was held by Jewish people and Christians down through the years - until the rise of "higher criticism" of the Bible in the 18th century AD.
- b. **The triangular view** was first advanced in 1771AD by destructive critics of the Bible.
- c. **In the triangular view**, Solomon is the "bad guy," whereas in the rest of Scripture Solomon is often a type (or picture) of Jesus Christ in His glory.

Doctrinal Points

1. "Love talk" is an important part of a love relationship.

"Love talk" involves a lot of figurative language. Solomon likened the Shulamite maiden to a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valley (v1-2). The maiden likened Solomon to an apple tree, providing shade and sweet fruit (v3). Solomon was not ashamed to publicly show his love for his bride-to-be (v4-5), demonstrating that it's not wrong to be very much in love, or to think about physical love with the one that God has provided for you.

Verse 7: *"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases."*

It seems that Solomon is wisely counseling that they do whatever it takes to let their love relationship develop slowly and naturally. This is good advice for all love relationships!

There is more "love talk" in verses 8-14, where it seems the Shulamite maiden was thinking to herself about Solomon.

Verses 8-9 - *"The voice of my beloved!*

Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice."

Again we have a lot of figurative language here, but it's quite easy to interpret.

Verses 10-14 - *"My beloved spoke, and said to me: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.*

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!

"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."

In these verses we see that love and a beautiful spring day go together - even from God's perspective!

Love talk is an important part of a love relationship.

2. “Catching foxes” is an important part of a love relationship.

Verses 15-17 - *“Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether.”*

Within this love talk, we have an exhortation to “catch the foxes.” What’s that all about? Were the Shulamite’s brothers (mentioned in chapter 8) telling their sister to come home to the family vineyards to keep the foxes from ruining the vines? No, probably not. Again, I’m reading from my devotional essay, “Catch the Foxes.”

“As little foxes can ruin vineyards by gnawing at the tender shoots, so the little problems (that inevitably show up in a growing love relationship) can ruin that relationship. These “little foxes” must be caught and stopped before they grow and do serious damage.

“Little foxes” always seem to come around just when we’re getting it all together in our love relationships - when the vineyards are in blossom. For example, think of our love relationship with the Lord. Just when the relationship seems to be developing well, the “little fox” of neglect can show up: neglect of daily reading of God’s Word, or neglect of a regular prayer time.

And what about our relationship with that particular person of the opposite sex that the Lord has picked out for us? How often the “little foxes” of criticism or cutting words cause needless breakdowns in relationships that could otherwise be beautiful. And there are the “little foxes” of petty jealousies and small misunderstandings that can tear down our love relationships. How sad!

Without some definite “catching” action on our part, the little foxes will continue to eat away - until they become big foxes, and cause serious damage - even ruin the vineyard!

How sad!

Without some definite “catching” action on our part, the little foxes will continue to eat away until they are big foxes, and perhaps even destroy the vineyard!”

Sly little foxes can be difficult to catch, but the job is not impossible. The problem areas that are bound to come in every growing love relationship are not always easy to recognize and eliminate, but with diligent effort and divine assistance the task is not insurmountable.

“Catching foxes” is an important part of a love relationship.

Practical Applications

1. Let God speak through your marriage.

Once again I’m reading from my essay “Catch the Foxes”:

“Because the Song portrays the deep and wonderful love between man and woman, it obviously becomes a beautiful illustration of the love relationship between Christ and His people. God has ordained that the love relationship between a man and his bride should reflect the love relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church (see Ephesians 5:31-32). What a tremendous testimony for the Lord your marriage will be if you determine from the start that it is going to reflect

that wonderful mystery of our Lord's love for us. This will involve a lot of hard work because a lot of "foxes" will have to be caught. Don't let the "little foxes" spoil the message God wants to convey through your marriage."

Let God speak through your marriage.

2. Remember, God can use your negative past experiences.

Solomon departed from the divine ideal for marriage by having many wives and concubines. In fact, all those marriages to foreign women eventually led to Solomon's downfall. 1 Kings 11 says, *"King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh... and he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart... Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem... And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods."*

Solomon's love life was **very far** from what God intended for man and woman - yet God used Solomon, of all people, to write a book that gives us the divine perspective of love, romance and sexual relationships between a man and woman!

Most likely Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon before his wives led him astray into idolatry, but from God's perspective the multiple wives and concubines in his early years were very negative and sinful experiences. However - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - that negative background enabled Solomon to write with authority about what a love relationship between a man and a woman **should** be, and **can** be, and **what God intended it to be**. God did not condone Solomon's wrongdoing in any way - but God can even weave even our negative life experiences together to accomplish His good purposes.

Are there negative experiences in your past? A problem with alcohol or substance abuse? Negative experiences in your priorities, or use of money, or business ethics, or failure in your family? God does not condone those negative experiences in any way, but when our sins have been confessed and forgiven, God can actually use that negative background.

Overcoming negative experiences will not only to make you stronger, but your experiences may to help you counsel others. Remember, God can use your negative past experiences.