

Building blocks for a god-glorifying marriage

The Song of Solomon can be divided into three major sections: dating (1:2-3:5), wedding (3:6-5:1), married life (5:2-8:14). Let's consider the process of dating or courtship.

Develop the relationship carefully

The Shulamite met the king in his palace, but searched for him in the country. He is a property owner (8:12) and a shepherd (1:7), and she wants to see him at his place of work, perhaps to learn about

him in the nuances of different environments.

Find space to process the relationship

Both the King and the Shulamite have time alone. This is important to process the relationship independently and over a period of time. Relationships should not form in a single and controlled environment; they need exposure to variation, new and different difficulties to tease out reactions and responses. There are lessons learned in being apart as well as being together.

Processes a proper self-awareness

The self-conscious and self-deprecating characteristics of the girl are not necessarily bad. They can, in fact, be healthy. It is an unhealthy relationship that begins with a sense of entitlement, an overabundance of self-confidence in one's own beauty and abilities. A young

person who feels that they have the looks or talent to grab the attention of anyone they want will play fast and loose and may lack commitment.

The Shulamite is aware of her shortcomings and weaknesses, but these have not crippled her. She accepts herself for who she is and is not attempting to be something or someone she is not. Although conscious of her appearance, she is still there among the other women, strong enough to be in the presence of greater talent. She will later develop confidence of her own and a boldness within the security of the marriage relationship.

But the Shulamite is not against beautifying herself either; she wears jewellery (1:10; 4:4; see also Psalm 45:9), and accepts help from her friends also (1:11). It is a false godliness that remains

plain, dowdy, shabby, and dull. Creation is witness to the fact that God loves variety and beauty. His temple was decked out with gold. God's people should keep themselves well-groomed and not be afraid to enhance their natural beauty without excess and immodesty (1 Timothy 2:9).

Iron out difficulties

Despite her difficulties, the girl is wise and honest enough to recognize and admit that there are "little foxes" that threaten the relationship (2:15). It is wise to work through these before marriage. It may be easier to postpone or procrastinate, hoping that problems will iron themselves out or go away, or perhaps plan to deal with them after the wedding. There will be enough difficulties within marriage without carrying problems over from the courtship.

Respect sexual intimacy

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God, designed to avoid fornication (1 Corinthians 7:9), for procreation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3), and for mutual friendship and oneness in body and soul (1 Corinthians 6:16; Matthew 19:4-6). The Song of Solomon highlights the mutual enjoyment of the marriage relationship as the foundation for a happy home.

She loves him intensely, but she does not want to consummate the marriage prematurely, and she sends him away, perhaps in case she is tempted (2:16-17). He describes her as a "locked garden" (4:12), and she defends her purity against the misgivings of her brothers, assuring them that she is a wall and not accessible (8:10). Three times, also, she cautions the court women not

to "stir up..." love until the appropriate time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4).