



FOR BETTER OR WORSE:

Marriage in the Middle

Song of Solomon 2

In scripture, God often uses GARDENS to describe relationships. He often spoke of his people Israel as a VINEYARD that he tended and cared for as the Divine Gardener. This analogy is a very powerful description of his INTIMATE LOVE for his PEOPLE. Therefore, I want to begin this message by letting you see an INTIMATE PICTURE of a healthy, loving relationship. The Song of Songs is a story about the love relationship between Solomon and his bride, the Shunamite woman. It uses very poetic, picturesque language to describe their relationship and the way that they see one another. It will almost make you BLUSH to hear how they talk to and about one another, but it is HOLY. This is how lovers tend to talk to one another! **Song of Solomon 4:10-14 NIV**

10 How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice! 11 Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. 12 **You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.** 13 Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, 14 nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.

Now, I want to CONTRAST this picture with another one that is VASTLY different. It is found in **Proverbs 24:30-34 NIV**

30 I went past the field of a sluggard, past the vineyard of someone who has no sense; 31 thorns had come up everywhere, **the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.** 32 I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: 33 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- 34 and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.

This passage is a horribly clear picture of what happens when one is LAZY and APATHETIC about their relationships. It is such a CONTRAST to the beauty and intimacy and care you see in the Song of Solomon! What I notice is the fact that PRUNING and PROTECTION were absolutely ABSENT in this garden. [\[Notice the broken-down wall and the wild weeds!\]](#) Someone failed to CARE for this once-beautiful sanctuary. This happens all too often in marriage when we FORGET that marriage is HARD WORK. Instead of this, we want to be people that faithfully TEND the

garden of our relationship to make sure that it is healthy and productive. The Song of Songs can help us to learn how to do this. **Song of Solomon 2:10-14 NASB**

10 "My beloved responded and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along. 11 **'For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers have already appeared in the land; the time has arrived for pruning the vines,** and the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. 13 The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along!'" 14 **"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway,** let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely."

Solomon is inviting his bride to walk through the garden of their relationship to enjoy it and to EXAMINE it for anything that needs to be changed. **He acknowledges that there are different SEASONS in their relationship!**

-Winter rains . . . spring flowers

NOTE: Spring time is when all seems well, but it is the best time to PRUNE the vines of your marriage.

*Don't wait until a CRISIS! Work on it when things are good!

You will also experience an unexpected series of SITUATIONS in your marriage. Steep cliffs and rocky paths: These rough places are where you seek to KNOW one another better! **"Let me see your form. Let me hear your voice."**

There is a KEY VERSE in this Divine Song that holds a crucial PRINCIPLE for keeping love alive through all of the stages and seasons of life: **Song of Solomon 2:15 NKJV**

Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.

There are LITTLE FOXES that creep into your marriage that you must KILL! We tend to focus on the BIG DRAGONS that we see destroy marriages all around us: ADULTERY, ABANDONMENT, ABUSE. But . . . **the little foxes can OPEN THE DOORS to these big dragons!**

WHAT ARE THE LITTLE FOXES?

Little foxes are the seemingly insignificant decisions, distractions, and inactions that often slip into our relationships and sabotage them.

-Catching these foxes requires MUTUAL EFFORT! “Catch US . . .”

*You BOTH must be VIGILANT about keeping foxes out! Stand GUARD!!

Catching and killing the little foxes requires MUTUAL COMMUNICATION.

*Your spouse cannot SEE what is going on in your mind and heart.

-Ask your spouse what is eating his or her “LOVE BUDS.”

Let’s look at FOUR LITTLE FOXES that can RUIN our MARRIAGE GARDEN.

Little Fox #1 - UNCONNECTED CALENDARS

Couples have to MAKE TIME for one another! This will not just happen. Too often, couples let their calendars get so out of control that there is no time left for each other. We may not even realize this is happening. I am amazed at all of the work that is required these days for families to coordinate their calendars! It requires a DEGREE in administration! We tend to think that our calendars RULE US, but that is a LIE. We are in charge of our own calendars, and we are often too LAZY or DISTRACTED to do anything about it! Laziness or inattention to our ever-busy calendars leads to a massive, gradual DISCONNECT! This leads to a failure to spend time ALONE with one another.

*Watch out: Kids/Job/Hobbies can all become EXCUSES! Make them allies instead.

***CHALLENGE:**

Set BOUNDARIES on your schedule at work and at play!

Schedule TOGETHER-TIME and put it on the calendar.

Busy SCHEDULES are the WEEDS and THORNS that overtake our TIME together. [The WEEDS of Proverbs 24 remind me of the weeds that Jesus talked about that **CHOK** OUT the good seed. Those weeds and thorns represent the worries of this world and the deceitfulness of riches]. Too many of us spend more time chasing MONEY and PLEASURE than we do chasing our SPOUSE! [CLEAVE = NEVER STOP CHASING!] Chasing too hard after WEALTH and CARING too much about STUFF will DESTROY your garden! **This is true in the SPIRITUAL world and in the MARITAL world!**

Little Fox #2 – UNHEALTHY SPEECH. Proverbs 15:1-2 NLT

1 A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare. 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing, but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness.

Most couples use PET NAMES for one another. Solomon called the Shunamite, “My Bride” and, “My Dove.” She called him, “my Beloved.” I love calling Lisa my bride! I do it without thinking, but I

am amazed how often it catches people off-guard. I am also saddened by how I hear men call their wives, “The little woman,” or “the wife.” It seems so impersonal. Now, it may not be for you if that is what you do, but check with your wife to see if it makes HER happy! Now, most guys like being called, “My MAN” by their wife!

Have your SPEECH HABITS gone bad over time? Not just what you call your spouse, but how you TALK TO THEM and ABOUT THEM. Do you use HONORABLE speech?

***Honor is the choice to give VALUE and WEIGHT to a person.**

-Is a CHOICE, not a FEELING!

Dishonor Is most clearly revealed in our FAILURE to give our spouse PRIVATE RESPECT and PUBLIC PRAISE. **Wisdom understands the power of our WORDS.**

-How we talk ABOUT one another. (In front of our kids/our friends/etc.)

-How we talk TO one another.

Gentle words – Power to heal/restore

Harsh words – Power to crush the spirit

Encouraging words – Power to inspire/challenge

Too many words – Power to NUMB!

Honest words – Power to disarm/remove barriers

Dishonest words – Power to wound/kill - “As one who throws knives

*No one FORCES you to use the words that YOU CHOOSE TO USE!

*When you ABUSE your spouse verbally, you are abusing YOUR SELF!

***Make TIME for healthy, deep conversation!**

-This must become a REGULAR event (Daily is best!)

-Get away from the KIDS (Our 4-wheeler dates!)

-Honor one another’s TIME ZONES

-Eliminate DISTRACTIONS

*Television

*Cell phone (Texts, Facebook/Instagram, etc.)

Little Fox #3 - UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS. Hebrews 12:15 NIV

15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Unresolved conflict NEVER goes away. It just buries itself and GROWS. You and I must remember this! We cannot simply insist that our spouse “get over” some hurt that came to them at our hand. **Jesus said that offenses are bound to happen.** But resolving them must be a DETERMINED CHOICE that both of you must make.

So, who is responsible for going to the other spouse when there is an offense? **I love how the New Testament deals with this!** ON the one hand, Jesus said that if you go to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go and make it right with him. [\[Matthew 6\]](#) On the other hand, Jesus also said that if you have been offended by someone, you are to go to that person and seek to make it right. [\[Matthew 18\]](#) **Bottom line, this means that the one that is AWARE that there is an offense must be MATURE enough to go to the other person and seek to make it right.** It is actually not uncommon for someone not to even KNOW that there has been an offense. So how can he or she resolve it if he does not know it is an issue? Got it! Don't let the offense STEW in YOUR heart if it is an issue. Some ONE has to step ABOVE EMOTIONS and move in LOVE toward the OTHER.

And HOW you go about resolving conflict is just as important as THAT you go about resolving conflict! Don't turn the APPROACH into an OFFENSE!

***First, you must STAY COMMITTED to resolving all offenses with HONOR and GENTLENESS.**

-Remember this principle: **You fix problems, NOT people!**

-Learn HOW to express/identify offenses and hurts.

*Let the ISSUE remain the issue (Don't make it worse by attacking)

*****This is what you did, and this is how it affected me.*****

This method is NOT ACCUSATIVE, nor is it an ATTACK. It is straight truth! EVERY argument and disagreement MUST be brought to an honorable and loving CONCLUSION. **Furthermore, If only ONE of you feels that an issue is resolved, it is NOT resolved! Got it?**

***FORGIVENESS is the key to ongoing health.**

-Go back and listen to RELEASE Series on MyCHC app

-Get book: [I Should Forgive, but . . . by Frank Lynch](#)

We must also remember that forgiveness does not always make someone FEEL BETTER right away! [\[Story of Sammi saying, “It doesn't help.”\]](#) Must give someone TIME to warm back up. Don't try to

FORCE them to act like they are all better. If you cut someone, they still hurt even after you doctor it.

***You must BOTH be WATCHFUL for any ROOT of BITTERNESS that may be hiding in either of your hearts! “Look out for each other . . . Watch out!” (15)**

HURT often turns into BITTERNESS. **Resolving conflict requires keeping a LOOKOUT for BURIED BITTERNESS.** This bitterness can come from issues that you thought were long past and over! I even know of some couples never realized that the CONFLICT in their marriage was actually ROOTED in an unresolved issue that was never truly dealt with in their lives. [Couple that went through an awful divorce without the husband ever knowing of the wife’s sexual abuse.]

If your relationship is SPIRALING out of control, seek God’s help in identifying any buried PAST pain that is blossoming into bitterness.

-This kind of bitterness turns simple communication into conflict:

*Arguing over nothing (TV shows, restaurants, etc.)

*Constant feelings of insecurity come out as ANGER and RAGE.

*”Look out for one another.” This is a sacrificial act of love. Take the hurt!

*Commit to FINDING this root together NO MATTER WHAT!

***Seek HELP if you cannot come to a resolve alone together.**

Little Fox #4 - UNGUARDED RELATIONSHIPS. Song of Songs 4:12 NIV

12 You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.

Rivals in attention and affection

Unhealthy friendships that UNDERMINE your marriage

***Failure to create PERSONAL SPEED BUMPS, GUARDRAILS, and ROADBLOCKS**

***Speed Bumps:** STORING UP the TRUTHS that can help to SLOW YOU DOWN.

[Scripture memory/Books on marriage and family/Deleting music & movies that have GODLESS themes from our CD and DVD collections!]

***Guardrails:** Predetermined STANDARDS that give adequate MARGIN.

[Glass doors/Passwords/Standards about activities with the opposite sex]

***Roadblocks:** Specific, COMMITMENTS that you share with accountability.

[Accountability relationships/Patterned schedules/Financial Arrangements]

***3 Ways to guard your marriage:**

Healthy friendships that honor BOUNDARIES.

Healthy, consistent SEXUAL INTIMACY

Guard your own HEART!

Do you WANT security and joy in your marriage this year? Kill the foxes!

Let's pray.