

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Song of Songs 2:8-3:5

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A good expensive wine takes time to mature. Cheap wines don't need that much time. It's the same with a good loving relationship. It takes time to mature. Sometimes movies give the impression that falling in love and getting married happens overnight. Girl meets her dream man. They instantly click in their adventure together. And so, they ride in the sunset and live happily ever after. But real life is not like that. Think of a teenage girl. She comes home with a strange look on her face. Her mother asks, 'What's with you?' 'Oh, nothing'. So mum probes a bit more. Her daughter bursts out with excitement 'I've met him, mum. The man of my life! I'm in love!' But a few weeks later the mother asks about the 'man in her life'. The daughter replies 'Who? On him. Alright I guess. I don't really care.' What happened? Well, they got to know each other a bit better. And realized what the other was really like after the initial physical attraction. They really were not suited to each other. The time of going out together is a very important time for a couple. It's a time to lay a foundation for a possible life together.

That is what we have here in this section of the Song of Songs. In the first part we met the farm girl who was so attracted to king Solomon. She was attracted not only by his good looks but also to his character and faith. As she said (Song of Songs 1:3) *"...your name is like perfume poured out."* She was wondering how she could get Solomon to notice her. She was so different to all the beautiful women in the palace. Yet he had noticed her, precisely because she was different. She was so natural and open. At the end of the first part of the song we see the two have met. Now the song goes on in its poetic way to describe how their relationship developed.

The first thing we notice is the growing intensity of their wanting to be together. You can see it with the way the woman says (Song of Songs 2:8) *"Listen! My lover! Look, here he comes..."* She is constantly attuned, eager for her man to arrive. You will notice this with a teenage daughter who has met someone. As soon as the phone rings she is the first to grab it. 'I'll get it! It might be him'. Before she wouldn't think of moving a muscle. Not for the phone. Not for the door. She would just veg playing with her iPhone. But now, when there is a knock on the door she is up and the first there. 'It might be him!'

Or as our poet expresses it, *"Listen! My lover! Here he comes ..."* We notice the man is feeling the same way. The woman says (Song of Songs 2:8) *"Here he comes leaping cross the mountains, bounding over the hills."* He is also very eager to see her. And it does not matter how far or how difficult the road. He has boundless energy. (Song of Songs 2:9) *"My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag..."* He just leaps over the mountains. If you ask a teenage boy to get some milk from the shop, it's too much of a bother. But if he has met a girl and wants to see her he will hitchhike 50 kilometers or drive 200 kilometers just to see her for an hour or two and drive home again. Of course, all that eagerness to see his girl can be a bit embarrassing. (Song of Songs 2:9) *"There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice."* Why is he out there? Well, young men can be like that. They can get embarrassed, tongue tied in the presence of the girl they are attracted to.

What the man in our song really wants is to be alone with his girl. They want to be by themselves, so they can talk and be open with each other. They want to express their affection without being embarrassed by family or friends. (Song of Songs 2:10) *"My lover spoke to me and said 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.'" When they are alone together they spend hours talking. They share their stories, who they are, what they like, their ideas and dreams. At that time the world seems to be the most wonderful place to be in. It might be winter, wet and miserable, but it is springtime in their hearts. (Song of Songs 2:11-13) *"See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth, the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in the land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise my darling, my beautiful one, come with me."* Whenever a couple are in love there is a freshness to life. It's like being back in paradise. Spring is in the air and everything is going for them.*

Now the man and woman really want to know more about each other. (Song of Songs 2:14) *"My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."* In Israel there were doves who would hide themselves in amongst the crevices of the canyons. They were hard to see, and it was difficult to observe their lifestyle. Think of a birdwatcher taking their field glasses to get a closer look. What the man is saying in this poetic description is that he wants to know the woman better. He wants her to reveal herself. Reveal her character, her joys and struggles, her thoughts on life. That is the main purpose of courting. It is a process of gradually revealing who you are to each other. It takes time and it comes awkwardly at first. But as a couple's relationship and trust grows they will tell each other more. It is very important that all those going out take this aspect of courtship seriously. Marriage is a total giving of self to our spouse. A

complete sharing of ourselves. It involves all our thinking and faith. And that requires time for preparing. We need to make sure we are suited to each other. In lifestyle, character and above all in faith. In premarital counselling I call this: 'getting to know each other 'warts and all'. It is a tragedy that too many people rush into a physical relationship. God's gift of sexual intercourse is there to deeply bond a couple. When a couple rush into it they are bonding with someone they don't really know yet. Too many end up living with someone they don't really know. They discover too late they don't get on.

Also involved in this 'getting to know you' time is learning how to cope together with tension and problems. That's the issues when the man says (Song of Songs 2:15) *"Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom."* The vineyards are a reference to the couple themselves. Previously the woman had said (Song of Songs 1:6) *"My own vineyard I have neglected"*. There she was referring to herself. She had neglected her own appearance. Now we read their 'vineyards are in bloom'. Things are going well for them in their relationship. But they need to be aware of the 'little foxes that ruin the vineyards.' In other words, they must be careful of the little things that can mar their relationship. Quirky habits, issues from the past, different approaches to spending money, family of origin differences. These things come in at this point in a relationship. When you get to know another person well you will see their good. But also, their not so good. You will see a person like yourself who has a sinful nature. Who has a certain amount of brokenness. Someone who needs the 'body and blood' of Jesus for forgiveness. The person you love has weaknesses and faults. Together with yours these will create tension. All relationships need time for adjustment. You have to watch out for these little foxes in the vineyard' that they do not 'ruin' the relationship. A couple must learn to deal early on with these things.

Now it seems the man and woman were able to handle their problems. And so, their love developed to a higher level (Song of Songs 2:16). *"My lover is mine and I am his ..."* What we read there is a commitment to each other, a possession of one another. 'My love is mine and I am his'. They do not want a relationship with no strings attached. They want to be totally committed to each other for all of life. And deep down that is what everyone really wants and needs, Christian or not. How can you really open up and be with someone who might leave you and break your heart? To protect yourself from heartbreak you hold back, you don't really give yourself fully. Just in case they leave you. Trouble is that reluctance to be fully committed to the other, often generates the very thing its afraid of. True love desires to make the other your own. It's like we confess towards Jesus (Heidelberg Catechism LD1) *"I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ."* As the

Apostle Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 7:4) *"The wife's body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife."* It is the 'leave and cleave' principle. So here we see the love of the two have grown to such an extent they desire to belong to each other. They want to be one together. And they long to do that physically as well. (Song of Songs 2:16-17) *"My beloved is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills."*

But they are not married yet. They do not fully possess each other. And that can produce an element of anxiety. We see the woman is struggling with some doubt that she might lose her man. She says (Song of Songs 3:1) *"All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves. I looked for him but did not find him."* The woman is having a dream in which she can't find her man. You can tell how she really feels about him because she keeps repeating, three times, *"I looked for the one my heart loves"*. In her dream she walks down all the streets of the town, constantly asking (Song of Songs 3:3) *"Have you seen the one whom my heart loves?"* Her dream is revealing her subconscious. She so longs to be one with him that her biggest fear is she might lose him. Her imagination goes into overdrive, worrying what could happen to him. Or that perhaps another woman would attract his attention. The thought of living without her man is unbearable. In a sense this anxiety is a measure of the depth of her love. So, what does the woman do about her anxiety? She goes out and finds him and holds him even tighter (Song of Songs 3:4) *"... when I found the one my heart loves, I held him and would not let him go till I brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me."* To the ancient Jewish person, to bring your man home, was not just to meet the family. It was saying you were engaged to be married. By this act they declare their promise to be married. They are saying they belong to each other.

So now it is only a matter of time before they get married. But still the woman recites the refrain of the song (Song of Songs 3:5): *"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you, by the gazelles and by the does of the field do not arouse or waken love until it so desires."* Here again, as when their passions were aroused the first time they met, she makes her companions swear. They must not tempt her to go further in the relationship than what is appropriate. God's set place for the full expression of love and intimacy is in marriage. That is the way she wants to keep it.

What this part of the song provides is also an imagery of the developing love between Jesus and the church. Through our preaching and Bible studies, the Spirit is leading us

to come to know Jesus. The Spirit doesn't just want us to pass on some knowledge about Jesus, or good doctrine. He wants us to know Jesus personally. The more we read the Bible the more we get to know the wonder of who he is and what he is like. When we do our profession of faith (or Jesus declaration) we are saying 'I am really committed to him'. Again (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1) "I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ." Through the Lord's Supper we are assured of the wedding feast, of the Lamb and his Bride. That will happen when Jesus returns. In the meantime, we are, in a sense courting. We should be like the woman in the song, or the teenager in love, constantly at the door to see if he is coming. Our true devotion to Jesus can be seen by how much we long to spend time with him in devotion. How we long to see him face to face. Sometimes as the church we may get anxious and think he is taking too long to return. We should be thankful for this time of preparing, to get to know him better as we are today through the Word and Sacrament. What we are doing is getting ready for the wedding day. We are getting ready to live with him forever on the new earth. On that glorious day all the world will know that he is king. And it will know that we belong to him. We are his chosen, his royal bride.