

Have you ever gotten in a relationship that you weren't really ready for? What was it like? Why weren't you ready? What did you learn?

I'm sure in many ways you enjoyed it. In other ways, you regretted it- there was a lot of pain.

We want to spend some time thinking honestly about sex and romance today, and focus in on the idea of being ready, or prepared for it. Now, I realize some of you are already in a relationship. This talk is definitely still for you, because a lot of the stuff you need to think about getting into a relationship is the same stuff you have to work on to stay and grow in it. You can't just fall in love and expect to have a great relationship, you have to grow in love- right? I'll probably address more of the singles directly in this talk, but I think you'll be able to easily convert this information into an applicable format for yourself.

I also want to acknowledge that not all of us necessarily want to be in some type of romantic relationship- that is totally fine, please don't take this talk to mean you have to. In fact, some of the best people around have made this choice for themselves. But perhaps you can help a friend out as they go on their journey, so do listen in as well. So let's take a look at our Bible text for today, and get going.

We're in the Bible book called Song of Songs, a book written some 3000 years ago about sex, romance, and God. It's a collection of love poems that tells a story between a man and woman who pursue this and end up getting married. This married part is an important part: the Bible's view of sex is that it was a gift for marriage. I realize not all of us believe that; I'm glad you're here if you don't. But that will be something we assume throughout our talk today. Let's take a look at our text.

Read Text: Song of Songs 2:1-15

Our main point is pretty explicitly stated in v.7. The woman says there "I adjure you- or I want you take make a promise"- Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases." In other words, **beware of pursuing romantic, sexual love until it's time.** The rest of the poem afterward elaborates on it; the couple is talking about how it's springtime, so to speak, the time for them to pursue their love together.

Now, the question comes up, I think- when is it time? When might someone, or a couple, be ready? The woman describes their relationship prior to this statement, and I think the answer to the question lies there. The woman gives us three things to think about as to when we might be ready for romance.

We are ready when we can have a singular love for one person.

Text: Note how the poem starts. The woman describes herself as a rose and a lily. This is actually self-effacing description; the "rose" here was seen as a common flower, not one of our roses today. And the lily was a common one as well back then, especially in the field setting. So she's saying, really, I am really just a normal woman.

But the man... well, he says no, you're not. You are a lily among brambles (or thorns). You stand out, there is no one like you. You are special to me.

The woman then says the same thing about the man- you are one of a kind, unique to me; you are an apple tree in the forest- a rare sighting for sure.

Both the woman and the man have this singular focus on each other.

Our context:

You know, some of us aren't ready to get this sort of singular focus. Some of us think we are, but really, we aren't. This is for various reasons, both good and bad. Maybe it's because we just feel too busy in our life stage, or we're not ready to sort of settle down and focus on one person- and that's fine. Yet at the same time, there may be some reasons beneath the surface, and this is something to be aware of. It could be our parents' divorce, issues involving abuse or sexual addiction, the sort of friends we hang around who are always talking about the latest eye candy around, an unrealistic expectation of what love and romance really is about and so we're constantly looking at the grass on the other side.

And even after we've taken the step to be in that committed relationship, to maintain a singular focus- we still have a lot of work to do.

You know, this issue was something in my relationship with Yen both before and after marriage. I had some doubts dating, some doubts in engagement, and some doubts in our first year. I found myself lacking in singular focus, thinking- what if there is someone else better suited for me? It got so overwhelming that I went to go see a counselor. And as we began to unpack things, I realized just how much I was affected by the world we live in. I already was a sex addict and a total Hollywood romantic at the time, so I had a lot of things to work through from that. But during this time I realized how

affected I was by this world of where the ability to have choices and options. I had to really work at getting a singular focus- I had to go through a change.

Where are you today with this? Don't stir up love if you haven't worked these issues out.

We are ready when we can protect and provide for another.

Text: Look at how this woman, as she continues, describes her man. V.3-4.

Sitting in his shadow, and this talk of the man having his banner over her- these are all metaphors for strength and protection.

And the talk of his fruit, and how he brings her to the banqueting room- these speak of provision in a holistic sense- emotional, physical, relational.

This is not to say that women, you don't have to play a role in protecting and providing for the marriage. You have a role to play in that as well- note v.15- the man tells the women to protect the relationship in terms of getting rid of things that have the potential to ruin the relationship. And women, you do have a role to provide for the marriage, too- a few books before Song of Songs, in the book of Proverbs, there's a description of a woman of character. One of the things that is mentioned there is that she knows how to provide monetarily for the marriage, along with the man. Both men and women- we are called to protect and provide in our own way.

Now let's get honest here, okay? Some of us really want to be in a relationship, but we're really not ready to protect and provide, and some of us are in and we have some serious work to do. I mean, we think we're ready, but really, we're not. We're not ready to give up or work through the things that might ruin a relationship- things like our anger or bad spending habits or friendship with the wrong crowd. We're lazy and not really ready to give our all to provide as we should. Or we think, and let me talk to the men, that protect and provide means it's okay to be emotionally distant and gruff. It's not, just in case you're wondering. You can still be a strong guy and manly, sure go ahead. But you need to be sensitive. The guy is described as a shade, not a fortress or bomb shelter. And so some of us have a bit of work to do learning how to be more emotionally sensitive and all. Don't stir up love if you haven't worked on this in your life.

We are ready when we can give all our energy towards this.

Text: v.5 is all about this- love is exhausting.

It will take all your strength- emotional and physical- all of it, both positively and negatively. Again, we think we're ready. You know that 50% of divorces occur in peoples' first 3 years of marriage? Why is that? I think we fail to realize how utterly exhausting it can be to deal with all the changes and challenges that come up.

And so, when is it time? When we are ready to pursue these three things.

Now, two things I want to note in response to these ideas.

1. Is this possible to becoming this sort of person?

It may seem impossible, but it's possible. And it is possible because God is the one who has loved us first. We talked about how God uses marriage to give his love for us. Well, it's true here in this passage. He is the one who has a singular focus on each of us, who eager looks to protect and provide, who has given all his energy to love us. And because of this, he is committed to transforming you and I into the people we were meant to be. We need to let Him in.

We also need to let others in as well. A key component is community, having the right sort of friends around us. Start involving your friends- friends who have your values and outlook on life, friends here at Ethnos, into the process.

2. What if I'm ready, but there's no one for me? Do I just wait around? Do I take action and get out there to meet people?

I think there is no right or wrong answer. But there are some overarching themes that we should run our motives and methods by.

Trust: do I trust God? This is the God who has singular focus, the God who protects and provides, the God who has poured out all his energy for us. Do I trust that He will take care of things for me? There are no guarantees. Please don't understand today's message is about "if you do these three things, your spouse will come." No, there isn't a promise like that in the text. But this is about a God who cares, who sees each of us precious and unique.

Conclusion

- Is there something you need to pursue to get ready, or grow better?
- Do you need to trust Him?

Extra Study Notes:

Shade- used of those with power, including God in Judg. 9:15, Ps. 17:8, Lam 4:20, Ps. 36:7, Ps. 91:1, Ps. 121:5, Isa. 25:4, 45:5-6.