



Series: Song of Solomon

Passage: 2.7-17

Title: God-Honoring Dating

Speaker: Spence Shelton

STARTING POINT INVITE

Intro

We are in a series of sermons walking through this book where we are talking about what God has to say about love. About dating and romance, marriage and sex. He presents a wonderful vision for your love life through this book. And what we've been saying is that human love is like a reflection of God's love. God's love is the real deal, and you see a reflection of God's love in human love. So, we said the big takeaway of this series is about understanding God's love FIRST and then human love considering that. Big Idea:

God is love, God made love, God gives love. So, I will pursue his way of love in my life.

Each week this principle is going to become more and more important because the further we get into this book, the more

the way of God's love and the way of the world's idea of love are going to differ. You'll see it today because today we are going to talk about dating. And boy oh boy is this going to meet some of you right where you are. We spent the past two weeks in Chapter 1 talking about who we are as individuals. As godly men and godly women. Because our relationships with one another is kind of doomed if we don't know who God has made us and called us to be individually. So now we are moving into dating. We are going to see our shepherd guy come and take his girl, the Shulamite woman, out on a date. In Chapter 1 there was some flirting and some friends were around and there was this little work visit, but now their relationship is taking a next step.

Now I'll go ahead and say that the bible does not have a category for dating like modern culture has today. Modern culture has turned dating into a game and a status. Let's hook up for a while and have a good time. Maybe this will lead somewhere maybe it won't, but we are just having fun. The bible doesn't have that category for dating because God *cares* about you. So, **the bible tends to treat what we call dating as an assessment for marriage. That's the purpose of dating – to see if you should get married.** It's not cold and calculated like an algorithm. You are going to see that its actually warm and beautiful like springtime. But it has a purpose. Which I love. And by the way married people, I know this sermon is going to feel largely directed at single people, but **you don't stop dating when you get married.** That's some of y'all's biggest hurdle to intimacy right now - it hasn't felt like springtime in a long time. You are in the thick of a 20-year winter and I am

praying that God uses this series and this view of love to thaw the ice. We'll talk about that more. Here we go.

I'm going to make some observations as the passage unfolds. Going to show you the **prevailing lies of culture when it comes to dating and the better ways of Jesus**. My hope is to help singles and marrieds figure out how to pursue his way of love in your dating life. BTW I don't love using the labels "singles" and "marrieds" but in this sermon it's going to be the best distinction I can give, okay.

8 Listen! My love is approaching. Look! Here he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.

He is excited about her. He's in full sprint towards her. And she is excited about him! She can hear his steps and see his leaps. What a leaper her man is.

9 My love is like a gazelle or a young stag.

In other words - He's a stud. And this is such an intentional animal choice. He's not dangerous like a lion, tiger, or bear, oh my. Nor is he a cute little chipmunk. No, he's a stag - swift, handsome, curious, strong but not violent, and in springtime...very eager to find a female gazelle. And she is that beautiful doe.

And y'all this is one of the first things about dating here that isn't super deep theologically or anything but, it should be exciting. Like it should excite you to think about going on a date with him or her. **If you are dating just to date...or if you get a text from the person, you are dating, and it makes you**

cringe...you've got a problem. Let me recommend reassessing that relationship.

See, he is standing behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

And I know what you are thinking...that's illegal bro. Important to remember the imagery of the young stag. He's not a peeping tom. He's a stag - curious and yearning for her. Very important you understand the bible in no way encourages stalking ever. What's happening is that she has watched him come all this way. Bounding and leaping. And now he's arrived. He has come for her to whisk her away and...she is still getting ready. That's ok. He's not impatient with her. He just wants to see his girl.

Guys he is not sitting out there all impatient and controlling. Sending texts like...it's 7pm...where are you? Where were you? Blowing her phone up with 30 texts and calls. Don't be that guy. I'll explain the deeper heart issue behind the **unhealthy jealousy and control problem** (*and it is a problem that will sabotage your relationship*) in just a minute.

10 My love calls to me:

[Man] Arise, my darling. Come away, my beautiful one. 11 For now the winter is past; the rain has ended and gone away. 12 The blossoms appear in the countryside.

The time of singing has come, and the turtledove's cooing is heard in our land.

13 The fig tree ripens its figs; the blossoming vines give off their fragrance.

It is full on springtime. They are using the seasons as depictions of their love. What is springtime? It's a time for new life. For blooming of new flowers. Winter was that cold dark time before they knew each other. But this is how new couples act. It's at the same time inspiring and a little bit annoying. OH, THE TIME OF SINGING HAS COME! The turtledove is cooing. Here's what I'll say – this young love is to be CELEBRATED! This is part of how you know you've met someone good for you. Springtime in your dating is a little bit like a Disney movie for you. You know your boo isn't perfect...but their flaws just don't bother you. Those are just cute little quirks. Your friends can see it in you because you aren't as negative as you used to be. Panthers lose last year, and you'd be screaming at the TV and tweeting about refs and stuff. But now you are like...There's a game today? I forgot because was writing a sonnet about Courtney's smile.

You can tell by this point they are now coupling up. This is *Can You Feel the Love Tonight* from The Lion King. And the natural reaction to this for some of you may be...well yeah that'd be great but who is this mythical stag or doe? I'm looking! Well, let me first point out a couple of lies I see poisoning the prospect of dating that may be blinding you a little bit to God's way of love: **THE ONE AND THE LIST**

The One – Some of you are waiting on the one. And you keep holding out for *the one*. And once you meet the one, then everything will just click, and you are kind of functioning like somehow the one will make everything right that has been wrong about all your relationships up to this point. Listen to

me – I believe in the sovereignty of God, and I do believe God knows what is going to happen in your love life. BUT the modern idea that there is just this ONE sitting out there who will complete you...It's a lie from the pit of Hollywood. Tom Cruise has lied to you. And I'm sorry. But there is no ONE man or woman who can complete you. That's because the only way you can be a complete person is in CHRIST! A man or woman CANNOT complete you. **When we, as the Church, buy into the “you complete me” idea of “the one” we are telling our single brothers and sisters that they are INCOMPLETE without a spouse.** We must not do that. Here's why:

- Ephesians 5.30 – This mystery is profound, but I am saying it refers to Christ and the Church. The mystery he is referring to is marriage. **And he's saying MARRIAGE isn't even the point of marriage.** Marriage is a message. It's supposed to tell people about the all-fulfilling love and intimate forever commitment that people find in CHRIST. **So, you don't need a picture of the real thing, you need the real thing.**
- You were designed for love. You were. All of us were. So, the tug to be loved, to be accepted, to be known by another...that's a good thing. Don't run away from that. Just be cautious that you are running to the right source to fill that need.
- Listen let me say something right now: I'm not sure what your situation is...maybe you aren't experiencing love at all. Maybe you are experiencing the furthest thing from it. **Middle and High schoolers listen up** - Often high schoolers who bounce from one hook-up to the next are doing so because they don't have confidence that anyone really loves them. So let me

say something: John 3.16 is for you. For God so LOVED **YOU** that he gave his only son.

- **See you will never be able to love others correctly until you embrace God's love for you.**
- Romans 5.8 – God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. HE LOVES US!
- Jesus is The ONE! Only he will complete you. And that means - listen. Cause this aint easy to hear in a romance saturated culture - some of you God is going to call to remain single the rest of your life. And that is not just "OK," it's a gift.

Back to the one - you try to put that weight – the weight of something only Jesus can carry...on another person and they won't live up to it because they can't. Well, what does that mean for dating? **It means you take the pressure off finding the mythical one and you instead look at who God has sovereignly placed around you.**

Tommy Nelson – run the race & start looking to your right & left. Who is running same race at same pace...let's run together.

- **Second lie – THE LIST.** You know what I'm talking about. Sometimes Christians have a shopping list of check boxes that a potential spouse needs to check off for you to even have a conversation with them. And listen you should have standards...I'm not talking about just dating anyone. But I'm saying sometimes our standards are so specific that Jesus himself could not meet them. Don't take that godly man & godly woman list from the past two weeks and weaponize it against a potential spouse.

- Yes, he or she needs to love Jesus. YES. For sure. **THAT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.**
 - Limerick
 - If his abs are fantastic but his bible is still in plastic – he's not for you.
 - But if his abs are flabby and his bible is worn and shabby – you can say I do.
- And yes, you should enjoy being with them & be attracted to them. BUT that person will have flaws. Because Christ is not done with them yet.
 - Kathy Keller – block of marble example
- BTW I am not going to tell you whether or not dating apps are sinful. Here's what I'll say – they seem to promote the idea of a shopping list spouse. So, you need to be aware of that. And if you do use match, hinge, coffee meets bagel, bumblebee tuna or whatever else – please oh please make sure if you decide to date that person that you get into community TOGETHER. That's coming in a second...

Vs. 10 Arise, my darling. Come away, my beautiful one.

What I want you to see here is him leading. This is the second time he's said this in 3 verses. Men, lead! Remember what we said about a godly man? **A godly man rejects passivity and accepts responsibility.** I want you to be courageous and lead. Ask the girl out.

- Bat Boy Barry – Wait till she's all alone and then appear out of nowhere. Waiting by the bathroom guy. Just kind of always around but never stepping up to the plate.

- Perez the Player – guy comes in so strong. Talking himself up. Tries a smooth line that feels like he heard it on tik tok. Listen if you are a player, you have a problem. Because dating isn't a game. It's a marriage assessment process. So, stop playing.
- Friend Zone Frank – He is just kind of always in the group of friends you are with. Y'all talk and get along great, but he never makes his interest known. Cause that way he doesn't have to face the possibility of rejection.

Don't be these guys. Step up. Ask her out. And do so gently but clearly. Look.

14 My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crevices of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

Like coaxing a dove to come out of the rock face – that's how gentle he is to her. And what is he interested in? Her face & her voice. That's what is attractive to him. He's honoring her. Talk about this more in a minute but this is why sex sabotages dating. Because I can't get to know the true you if I'm all about satisfying my own sexual impulses. He is a student of her. He sees her. Oh man you need to double major because you need to get a degree in HER. Know your woman! Not in a creeper way though.

So, guys, step up and ask her out. Don't be vague about it like "hey I'd love to get together sometime." Sometime is not on

the calendar. NO, instead say "hey there is a concert at PNC next Tuesday night and I'd like to take you there on a date." Be specific.

AND THEN GIVE HER A MINUTE. You've been planning this moment for months. You've rehearsed it with your community group guys. And you texted them to tell them "Today is the day." Y'all fasted for a week, but she is just getting this news. So don't stare at her. Follow it up with something that gives her an out – "can you think about it & check your schedule?"

LADIES – listen I told you last week your words are so powerful. So please honor your brothers if they are courageous enough to treat you with this kind of honor. It's OK if you aren't interested. But let him down in a way that honors his courage.

BTW married men & women – men you need to ask your wife out on a date. That you plan. That you already know the destination for. When you say "Wanna go out? where you want to go?" That's a problem because it doesn't show you value her enough to plan. You can plan all kinds of strategies at work but when it comes to her you are just gonna wing it? No, plan something. Buy her flowers to give to her at the start of your date. Go so far as to know what is happening in your family calendar and plan accordingly.

Take her out to a place with no TVs. Or if it's not a restaurant because y'all's idea of romance is something different like a picnic in the park that's cool too! You just make the plan! Guys

I know you can do this. Somehow you got *her* to marry you. That's amazing. So this I know you can do.

And married ladies, listen – I'm trying to help him thaw the ice in your relationship. So, I need to ask you to be open to his advances, no matter how rusty or clumsy. Celebrate it. Remember we men are easy to train. Like puppies. You celebrate it, we'll repeat it. And together you and he will work towards the kind of intimate companionship that God created for us to have in marriage.

Woman

15 Catch the foxes for us — the little foxes that ruin the vineyards —
for our vineyards are in bloom.

Catch the foxes. Remember, its springtime in a garden. And when buds are just beginning to show, foxes can come in and eat them and ruin the vineyard. The vineyard needs protection. So, the natural question is what are the foxes that can ruin the vineyard of a budding romance? What are the foxes that can ruin the vineyard of a marriage that is finally thawing?

- **Sexual Immorality** – nothing sabotages romance like sexual immorality. By that I mean any sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Sex is for marriage. But not only that – like I said a minute ago physical intimacy short circuits the important work happening in the dating process. **You need to be listening to one another. Sharing about who you are & what God is calling you to in life and trying to figure out if you want to run**

the race together. And this is why some of you need to break up. Because you chose physical intimacy first and really your relationship is a hot mess because you never got to know the person apart from the physical. That's why RIGHT BEFORE this whole date starts...she reiterates to her friends - **7 Young women of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and the wild does of the field, do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time. -- Song of Songs 2:7 (CSB)**

- **Relationship Idolatry** – resting the weight of your soul on the other person. Jealousy & Control problem from earlier – you need Jesus. Here's the way I'll say it – if you have all you need in Christ you will be able to honor this person in the dating relationship. Not idolize, but honor. **And man, a good way to think about this is that IF you two break up...you've treated each other in such a way that you don't have to change churches because you broke up.**
- **ISOLATION** – This fox ruins so many relationships. The two of you have googly eyes and you intentionally create a relationship that no one can see. I mean some people know you & others know him...but nobody knows both of you. And so, some serious unhealthy patterns can develop because you have massive blind spots. How do you date in community? You ask your friend to be their friend. This is especially true when you go from initial dating to courtship. Like if you've been on more than...I'm gonna say 4 dates...then this is getting real & **you need to get in community.**
- **Not knowing how to fight & forgive** – the unwillingness to fight – oh man that's a fox. Sometimes

people will get into our home for pre-marital counseling and be like “yeah we’ve never had a fight” and they leave, and Courtney and I say “ohhh boy.” Cause that’s a part of marriage! Fighting and forgiving.

And guys – she calls him to lead out in this. The bible says you are to be a leader, but it is a Christlike leader. Which means your leadership is in serving her. Clearing out the foxes that threaten your vineyard but doing so with the gentleness and love that lets her see Jesus in you. AND if you are not ready for that, then you are not ready to date.

But if you are ready...if you are both ready...look at the direction this takes next...

Woman

16 My love is mine and I am his; he feeds among the lilies.
17 Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn around, my love, and be like a gazelle
or a young stag on the divided mountains. -- Song of Songs 2:8-17

So, we’ve kept the metaphor of springtime and gazelles. But in verse 9 he was gazing and in verse 16 he is grazing. In verse 8 he is leaping over the mountains and in verse 17 he is on them. The lilies are her body. The divided mountains are in Hebrew - mountains of Bether. OR literally – The Two split mountains. What does that mean? EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS! She’s expressing her desire for that stag to come and spend all night with her.

And married couples, this is the healthy and good destination of a date. Not always I know but the natural progression of thoughtfulness, of romance, of listening and sharing...the natural progression of emotional intimacy is physical intimacy. But look this is not a bartering situation. Give me emotional connection and I’ll give you sex. No. It’s a serving situation. We will look to serve one another and enjoy one another and give one another that intimacy.

If you are single and dating – what you need to see is a right and good desire for physical intimacy. Which is part of the reason dating is a pathway to marriage. I want to join with the chorus of friends who say, **“Do not awaken love until the proper time.”**

Now let me draw your eyes back to verse 16. My love is mine and I am his. What a statement of deep love. This is the statement of marriage. You know in God’s economy math works a little different and in marriage one plus one equals one. You plus me equals us. We are inseparably one. And THAT is what Jesus says is a picture of Christ’s love for you.

Y’all I’m not ignorant of the world we live in. I only briefly talked about sexual immorality, **but I recognize most of you come in here with past riddled with sexual sin.** And plenty of you have told no one. But you carry it around. And you will carry that sin into a relationship. Others of you have a history of dating that is rough. You just haven’t been the man or woman God calls you to be in dating. In other words, I’m talking about a future that you CAN HAVE but you are looking

at your past every time you think about dating. Whether married or single.

You know Luke tells this story in his gospel in Chapter 7 about Jesus coming to Peter's house for dinner. And while there this woman of the city (read: prostitute) comes and starts weeping at his feet. She's wiping his feet with her tears. She's anointing his feet with perfume. And the pharisees are like SHE'S A SINNER! Doesn't he know this! Why is he associating with her!?!? And Jesus says listen Peter...If a lender is calling in his debts and one guy owes 5 bucks and the other 500...and the lender decides you know what...ALL DEBTS forgiven. Who is going to love the lender more? Peter says – The one who owes 500. And he says BINGO. That's what is happening here. You took me for granted, but this woman has not stopped kissing my feet. She gets it.

47 Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 Those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." -- Luke 7:46-50

And I want to say to you who feel like the church is the place where you CAN'T be because you aren't clean...because your dating past is a sinful past – I want to direct your eyes to the heart of Christ who says THAT is how you come to me. Look at

verse 50. Your faith has saved you...go in peace. Her works didn't save her. Her faith did!

Believe the gospel! Listen the hope of us talking about all of this is that because of THIS kind of grace...you can change direction no matter how far gone you are. And you can find forgiveness. Isn't that incredible!!!

REPENT AND BELIEVE. Spouses – maybe you need to go back to that grace & maybe you need to extend it to one another.