

“Five Ancient Laws for Finding Lasting Love” // *Finding Love: How Does This Work?* #1 // *Song of Songs 1:1–2:7*

[Sunday only: NACP Commissioning](#)

Open your Bibles to ... *the Song of Songs* or *the Song of Solomon*, as it is commonly called. We are starting a **four-ish week series** on finding love.

There are few things that feel as traumatic as dating; it can end up being both the best and worst time of your life. Most married people I know have at least one awkward breakup story. Mine was when a girl I was dating and I broke up during the middle of a week-long mission trip ... that I was leading. Halfway through the week, it seemed clear that “breakup” was where we were headed; I assumed we’d wait until the trip was over, but she decided we needed to have the convo right then. So we ended it right in the middle of the week; in fact, right in the middle of one of the activities. Everybody was over here doing their mission thing and she and I were over there doing the breakup stuff. I remember we’d gotten some pictures developed that morning and she took one with the two of us together, ripped it, threw it at me, and said something like, “*Here’s your unity in Christ.*” For obvious reasons, she didn’t feel like finishing out the week under my leadership, so I had to drive her four hours home the next morning, just me and her in the car. I ran out of things to talk about as soon as we pulled out of the driveway.

She’s gone on to have a great marriage, and so have I, but the point is, dating can be hard, and sometimes you make it hard on yourself. **And now there are dating apps, which were supposed to make things easier—and in some ways they have**—but have they? They can really complicate things too. Maybe you wonder: *Is it ok to use a dating*

app? Or, *How do you keep from getting burned or catfished or whatever?* I mean, we all know that what people say on these things may not exactly be *true*. In fact, recently I saw a glossary that explained how you should interpret certain phrases on dating profiles:

- If a guy says he’s “huggable,” that means he’s carrying a few extra pounds and has more body hair than Sasquatch.
- If a woman says, “I don’t want someone who starts drama,” that means, “I’m the only one who is allowed to start drama, and I do it often.”
- If a guy says, “I’m laid-back and very close to my family,” that means he still lives at home, he’s unemployed, and he hopes *YOU* have a good-paying job.
- If a woman says, “I’m *never* on here,” it means she’s always on here.
- If she says, “Must love dogs,” it means her dog is always going to be more important than you.
- If he says, “I own my own business,” it means he’s sold a few random things on Ebay.
- If she says, “I own my own business,” get ready to buy some essential oils.¹

I promise I did not make any of those up. So, how do we navigate these treacherous waters?

[We’re going to turn to God’s Word, specifically to two of the most ancient texts on romantic love in human history.](#) I’m going to do the first and fourth week from Solomon’s *Song of Songs*, written in 965 BC, and Pastor Bryan will do the two in the middle using the book of Genesis, which was written about 1,000 years before that. These texts can be those fixed reference points, even in the very complicated world we find ourselves in today.

You say, “Well, I’ve been happily married for 30 years. What’s in this for me?” First of all, be honest. You may have been married for 30

¹ From Craig Groeschel ... and my own Googling.

years, but I'm quite sure your spouse would say they haven't all been happy. It's like I always say: "I've been happily married for about 21 years. And three other years, for a total of 24." I'm gonna bet it may help you to relearn some of these foundational truths about how love works.

And if you say, "Well, I'm single, satisfied with that, and plan to stay that way for the rest of my life," I'd still say that learning how God designed the human heart and how he can use other things besides marriage to meet some of those needs will be helpful for you. So I think there's something in this for everybody.

HERE WE GO: The Song of Songs opens like this: "This is Solomon's song of songs, more wonderful than any other" (1:1).

Two quick questions from this first verse. First, who wrote this song; and second, what's this song really about?

- To the **first**, "Who wrote this?" you say, "Duh, Solomon. It says it right there in the verse: 'Solomon's "song of songs."'" True, but scholars say that this might just indicate that Solomon was the one who included it in this collection of wisdom. Solomon was the great compiler of the wisdom literature in our Bibles—Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and THIS PHRASE just indicates that Solomon chose to include this book in that collection. Or it could mean that Solomon himself wrote it. You say, "What do you think, Pastor?" I'm not sure. Part of me thinks Solomon wrote it, but there's a couple of reasons why maybe not: First, the guy in the story presents himself as a shepherd, and Solomon was definitely never one of those. Second, the lovers in this book talk like they are the only ones in the world for each other, and Solomon had, well, 700 wives, so that is a little problematic too.²
- **And that brings me to the second question:** What's this book really all about? On the surface, it reads like a book all about how awesome and thrilling and challenging and heartbreaking it is to

find true love.³ Seems pretty straightforward. But some Bible scholars say it should REALLY be read as an allegory of God's love for us, since it is weird to say that a song about romance is the "*SONG OF SONGS, more wonderful than any other.*" You say, "What do you think, Pastor?" My opinion is that it should definitely be read primarily as a love story—I say that because there's just too many really specific details in here to read it allegorically. I saw one commentator, for example, who said that the woman's two breasts that the groom describes in rather sultry terms on their honeymoon night represent the Old Testament and the New Testament. **Hear me, y'all: I love the Bible, but for me, that's a bridge too far.**⁴ That said, I do think you can see in this story echoes of God's love. Hosea and Isaiah and the Apostle Paul all tell us that God created romantic love to teach us about his love. We get in romantic love a little taste of his love. Hebrew scholar **Richard Hess** says, "*Saints of every age have found that romantic love invites them to experience a transcendent love beyond the realm of the physical.*" We'll return to that at the end.

Here's what we're going to do today. I'm going to walk you through the first two chapters of this Song and we're going to learn...

Five Ancient Laws for Finding Lasting Love

Vs. 3 (*One quick thing to note about this book: You have three speakers in this book. There's a she, and a he, and every once in a while, you have this chorus that sings over them. Think of this like a musical, and what we're reading is the stage play script. Verse 3 is her speaking*) **How fragrant your cologne; your name is like its spreading fragrance. No wonder all the young women love you!** This was my life verse in college. Just kidding. "Cologne" in those days was one of the

³ Mackie, *Bible Project*

⁴ Referenced by Richard Hess, *Song of Songs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom), 34.

² Tim Mackie, *Bible Project*

most rare and valuable things a person owned, something passed down from generation to generation. This guy's name, his reputation, has that kind of value.

What's significant about that is that the place where her attraction starts is with his reputation. And for the rest of this chapter, she's going to comment on, and fawn over, aspects of this guy's character. Believe it or not, eventually, she'll get to how good he looks, and she'll get into some pretty clear, semi-**awkward** descriptions of what she likes about how he looks, but that's not where she starts. And that's...

Law 1: Character Trumps Beauty

Our **culture tends to prioritize physical attraction over everything**. And, let me be clear, physical attraction is not *nothing*. I mean, God created it—but it's not the most important thing and certainly not everything.

Studies, in fact, show that the effects of infatuation—what we call “the butterflies,” or the liver quivers, or the honeymoon period—wears off in about 18 months. **Which is why, by the way, some of you have never had a relationship** that lasts longer than 18 months. Experts call this the “limerence” phase—and there's all kinds of hormone releases in your body; it literally creates euphoric feelings of hope in you. You feel alive. You become temporarily obsessed. You can't stop thinking about them. It's an awesome period. But the most important thing to remember about it is that it's a phase, and it lasts at most, 18 months.⁵

And here's the thing: If that's primarily what your relationship is built on, when that fades, which it will, you'll have nothing left. **Physical attraction**, you see, **fades in two ways...**

- **First, the beauty itself fades:** Things **sag** and they **wrinkle** and they **droop**.
- **But here's the double whammy—even if that wasn't true, even if through Botox and hormone infusions and Grecian formula you could stay 29 forever, physical attraction's captivating power over your partner fades. After 18 months, the intoxicating effects are GONE.** And if that's what your relationship is built on, you're going to be in trouble.

And so, if you are looking for lifelong love, in the dating process you'll prioritize character, not butterflies, because character is a **beauty that lasts after the butterflies are gone.**

Matt Chandler, a pastor friend about my age, got brain cancer a few years ago and had to undergo pretty severe treatment.⁶ **He talks about how during that season, his good looks and his wife Lauren's beauty were utterly meaningless to them. He says, “When I got cancer, everything that was sexy about me vanished for two years—my strength, my vibrancy, my sense of humor, even my hair ... I became a shriveled-up version of what I had been. But Lauren had entered into a covenant with me, and she loved the character that God had formed in my heart. All that mattered in that chapter of our marriage was her character and mine. Character sustained the marriage, fueling and reigniting all the rest.”**⁷

Maybe you've met a new guy and you are like, “Oh, but he's so cute and his eyes are beautiful and when he takes his shirt off he has that six-pack ... and he's got a great job and he'll be wealthy one day.”

- **Let me tell you:** When you are on the way to the emergency room at 3 a.m. with one of your kids, it doesn't matter what kind of six-pack he has, or how wealthy he may be. All that is going to matter to you is **if he's the kind of guy** who can **petition God** in prayer; if he's **a spiritual rock** you can lean on as you trust the promises of God together.

⁵ <https://www.gottman.com/blog/share-fondness-and-admiration/>;
<https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-3-phases-of-love/>

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/10-questions-on-dating-with-matt-chandler>

⁷ Edited last sentences for flow.

- Y'all, I look at my wife sometimes. She's always been beautiful, several numbers higher than me on the 1–10 scale, for sure, but we're getting older; that's no secret. And yet, there's a beauty in her character that just gets MORE beautiful year by year. She has a body that has given birth to four children—and every woman will tell you that has an effect. But what I see is a body that has sacrificed itself for 24 years to serve me and our kids. And that's even more beautiful than what I fell in love with in college.
- I look forward to growing old with her because she gets MORE beautiful year by year, even as our bodies get older. Have you ever noticed that sometimes you meet older people who are just the sweetest, most gracious people, and then others who are just mean and grumpy? *Why do some people become so much better and some so much worse in old age?* I know sometimes there can be physiological factors, and I'm not trying to be simplistic, but a lot of times what has happened is that the inner person has just overtaken the outer. As charm and beauty fade, all you're left with is the person on the inside. And when it's unfiltered by natural charm and beauty, all you see is the beauty in there. I want to be with someone who is moving toward the beauty of Christlikeness.

You say, "J.D., are you saying physical attraction should mean nothing at all?" No, I'm not saying that, and neither is this woman in Song of Songs. I would never encourage someone to date a person they are *not* attracted to. I mean, don't do that for their sake. **No woman wants to be with a guy who doesn't find them physically attractive. Guys, no girl wants to hear you say, "Your looks don't matter. I don't really find you physically attractive at all, but I admire your quiet time routine."** No, go with someone you're attracted to; I'm just saying that the thing you should prioritize first is character.

Law 2: Be with Someone Who Builds You Up

In vs. 6 she says, **Don't stare at me because I am dark— the sun has darkened my skin. My mother's sons were very angry with me; they forced me to care for their vineyards, so I couldn't care for**

myself—my own vineyard. (You know, it's funny how beauty standards change from culture to culture and age to age. Today, many of us seek a tan—at least, white people do that—and we'll lay out in the sun for hours or spray weird chemicals on ourselves to get darker. In those days, however, a tan was considered unflattering because it meant you worked in the fields, which meant you were po'.)

Bottom line is that this girl is insecure about how she looks. So, in vs. 9 he responds: **I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.** I'm not sure it's advisable to compare your girlfriend to a horse, but go with me here ... the Egyptian pharaoh had these famous white mares that pulled his personal chariot—they were considered the most beautiful horses in the world; Egyptians thought they originated from the garden of the gods themselves. This man says to his beloved, "I see you like one of them."

If you'll indulge me one more time, let me give one more example of God's great gift to me in my wife. If I could list out all the qualities I love most about her, near the top, and maybe at the very top, is how I feel about myself when I'm with her. She's my biggest fan. I mean, she will tell me when she thinks I'm wrong, and we get into it sometimes, but she is my constant *encourager*. From the very beginning, she's helped me see the unique way God has made me and helped me believe in what he has for me. I have flaws like everyone else that make me feel insecure, and we talk about them every once in a while, but she mainly calls out the strengths that make me feel "*like a mare among Pharaoh's chariots.*" Or whatever the male version of that is. Mare's a female, right? What's the male version of that—stallion? Stud? I like "stud." Be with someone who locks in on that inner beauty, that inner image of God in you, and calls it out.

Maybe you are a girl in here who says, "Well, I'd love a guy like that, who leads with character and focuses on character, but I seem to attract guys who only want one thing." First, I'm sorry about that. No woman deserves to be objectified. There are shallow guys like that,

who are only into women for their looks or for sex, and I'd encourage you to avoid them. But I would also encourage you to make sure you consider how you present yourself. *What does how you present yourself communicate about what is most important to you?* Does your social media scream "daughter of the King who cares about character" or "look at me—how I look, what I'm wearing"? Hear me—I'm not asking this to heap shame; I'm just urging you to make sure that in all the ways you present yourself—what you post, how you dress, any of it—that you communicate that what you value most is **character**. **And that brings me to a really important question.**

Instead of only asking, "What kind of person am I looking for?" you should also ask, "What kind of person am I BECOMING? I love how Andy Stanley asks it: *Are you becoming the person that the person you are looking for is looking for?*

For example, ladies, you want a spiritual leader in a husband. And that's right. Are you the kind of woman that that spiritual leader is looking for? Focus on becoming *THAT person*. **Become the person that the person you are looking for is looking for.** (By the way, this is great advice even if you never marry. Focus on becoming Christlike, because ultimately, that's the point of life anyway).

Law 3: Build the Pyramid Properly

Eventually, they get to the physical attraction. Vs. [15] *Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.*

And in chapter 2, **she describes the growth of physical, sexual desire** in their relationship.

- In fact, in vs. 5 of chapter 2 she says, "Strengthen me with raisins..." (If this were a Hebrew audience, when I said that, everyone would have giggled. Raisins in those days were considered an aphrodisiac. She's basically saying, "*Pour me some wine and turn on the Marvin Gaye.*") Then, vs. 6: "His left hand is

under my head, and his right hand embraces me!" This is about as sultry as the Bible can get, y'all, because she is describing a romantic position. She wants to give herself to this man.

What is most instructive is how she's gotten there.

- She admires his character. He's built her up and helped her feel **secure** about herself.
- In vs 1. of chapter 2, he makes her feel **special**. He calls her "a lily among thornbushes."
- In vs. 3 of chapter 2, she talks about how **safe** she feels around him. "With great delight," she says, "I sat in his shadow." She feels protected by him, cared for, covered by him, loved.
- And now she's ready to give herself to him.

There's a joke that **Dr. Danny Akin** told me in the early days of my marriage. He looked at me and Veronica and said ... We laugh at that—and some guys tell me they feel so seen when I say that—but this lady in the *Song of Songs* would probably respond by saying, "Well, we're not as mysterious as you think." A man who makes his wife feel secure and special and safe opens up all kinds of pockets of love from her, like this woman in the *Song of Songs*. **That's why the old proverb is that for her, great sex starts in the kitchen, not the bedroom**, because that's the place where these things are communicated. By the way, this is good news for all you average-looking guys out there. The way girls are wired is actually good for you. You might be average-looking, but when you know how to encourage her, and you're a spiritual leader, she starts to think you're better looking. You may not have chiseled abs or a beautiful voice like Hank Murphy's or gorgeous John Muller hair, but you can be a person of character who knows how to love and build up and make her feel secure, and special, and safe. What this lady shows us in chapters 1–2 is that's how many women are wired.

The flip side of this, men, is that **when a man stops making his wife feel this way**, he makes her vulnerable to another guy stepping in to

do that. Hear me: I'm not excusing anything she did or blaming you; her sinful choice was not your fault. But when you hear some of these heartbreaking stories of adultery, and I've heard dozens, you see that usually it doesn't start out with some guy who was a sexual deviant who seduced her, or with a wife with an out-of-control sex drive. It was just that some other guy started to make her feel seen and secure and special and safe in ways that her husband stopped doing years ago. And, again, that doesn't justify any unfaithfulness on her part; I just mean you can help sustain your marriage by continuing to do these things after the dating phase is over. As I've heard it said: **If you don't date your wife, somebody else might.**

So, married men, it's a good question for us. (And I'll direct this toward the men, since the woman is the one talking in chapter 2, though it would apply both ways.) How well do you do in making her feel secure, special, and safe?

- Do you act interested in what she is saying? Do you stop looking at your phone or the TV when she's talking? (I'll be honest: sometimes I feel fully capable of watching whatever show I'm watching AND hearing what my wife is saying—I'll say, "I can repeat back what you said word-for-word," but Veronica likes me to listen *with my face*. With lots of nodding and grunts and so forth.)
- Do you plan out date nights? And when you do, do you make sure you face away from the TV in the restaurant so you can focus on her?
- Do you shave and put on cologne and wear something that doesn't have a sports team name on it or a picture of a big-mouth bass or something about Darryl's chili cook-off?

These are all implications of what we see here in chapters 1–2. **But I labeled this point "3. Build the Pyramid Properly"** because I wanted to highlight how sexual desire develops in this relationship, because it has **massive implications for dating.**

Here we go: God made us so that sexuality, the best sex, physical oneness, happens when it is the icing on the cake of oneness in every other way. I've taught on this a lot over the years, but sex is supposed to be a oneness that corresponds to oneness in every other way. Spiritually you are one; emotionally you are one; financially; your families are one; your futures are one. That's why it is supposed to happen only in marriage, and it means that the best sex, the best romance, happens when the relationship has been built on complete oneness of persons.

But let's back this up one step further. Why did God create marriage in the first place? What was his *primary, functional* purpose in creating it? You say, "It was to give us a picture of Christ and the church, to reveal God's love." Yes, but what was his earthly, functional purpose? Was it for procreation? For the alleviation of sexual desires? No. His primary purpose was companionship, friendship. After God made Adam single, did he look at him and say, "How is he going to have kids and reproduce himself? We better make a female"? No. What was the problem he was attempting to solve? "*It is not good for man to be alone,*" so God created a *companion* for Adam. **And** the word God used for "companion" in Genesis 2 is a fascinating Hebrew word, "*ezer kenegdo.*" (if you are looking for a great pet name for your spouse, there it is. My 'lil ezer kenegdo.) It means "different but the same." You are two different genders, and that brings difference to the marriage—difference of perspective, difference of temperament, all of that. But you are also the same—companions and friends in this task called life.

And HERE'S WHAT THAT MEANS for dating: *If marriage is fundamentally about friendship, then what you should most be looking for when you date is someone who can be your friend.* Because that's God's ultimate earthly purpose **for** marriage. Let me show you this.

Think of building a relationship like building a PYRAMID...

The first layer is SPIRITUAL. If you're choosing a companion, a friend, and you are going to be partners in life, then choose someone who shares your **deepest and most fundamental commitments**. Let me just say this plainly: **If you are a Christian**, I'm not sure why you'd ever intentionally date or marry someone who is not a Christian, and not just a Christian, but someone without the vision for life that you have.

Scripture says it plainly: **2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."**

- **Don't see that as a restrictive rule**; see it as a LOVING INSTRUCTION. I mean, this is going to be your companion for life, your life partner, and if they are not a Christian, you are never going to be able to share the deepest parts of you with them, and sometimes the two of you are going to be pulling in opposite directions. Long after all the butterflies have worn off, you're going to have questions like how to spend your money or what values to raise your kids by. And if they are not a Christian, you are gonna be like two oxen in a yoke trying to pull the sled in two different directions.
- By the way, sometimes we have people in here listening to me who are not Christians, and they are dating a Christian here at our church, and they think I'm being mean when I tell the Christian they shouldn't date a non-Christian. I'm not. In fact, if you're not a Christian, I'll tell you, for your sake, **you shouldn't date a Christian unless you plan to become one. Because let me be very clear: That Christian you are dating right now really wants to convert you. YOU WANT ME TO PROVE IT? THEY INVITED YOU HERE TODAY.** And every once in a while they side-eye over at you to see if I'm connecting with you.
- By the way, their whole family is praying for you this morning (they know you're here), and nobody in the family is ever really going to be happy until you become a Christian.

- So I'd just urge you, for your sake, not to date a Christian if you don't plan to become one.

So, **SPIRITUAL**; then **EMOTIONAL**—by this I mean, how good of a partner do they make for you in life? I don't mean you have to like all the same things—you don't have to both love sports or hunting or Taylor Swift or home design. But is this the kind of person you want to process your day with for the rest of your life? To go on vacation with? *Is he or she going to be your best friend?* That's why God created marriage—for companionship, for friendship—not just to give you someone to have sex and kids with.

SPIRITUAL, EMOTIONAL ... the last layer here is **PHYSICAL**. This is supposed to sit on top of all of these other layers. As we've seen, it's the **least substantive** of the three layers, which is why it's the smallest. **This** is how a healthy marriage is supposed to look. When this fades, you still have these. If you flip it over, **this** is how it looks. Does that look like a stable structure to you? And now, when the power of the physical fades ... what happens?

Law 4: Sex Sabotages the Clarity Process

2:7, Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and wild deer, not to awaken love until the time is right. Gazelles and wild deer represent youthful, sexual vigor. This young lady says, "**Keep 'em hibernating** until it's time for them to run. But then, let 'em out the cage and let 'em go wild."

Why is she saying that here at the end of the dating process? Is it because sex before marriage is sinful? Yes, but she also says it here because **physical intimacy clouds the judgment process**. *Even secular scientists say that the intoxications of physical intimacy keep you blind*

to things in the partner that you really should pay more attention to. Sex early in the relationship makes incompatible people think they're compatible.⁸

The purpose of dating is to allow you time and space to gain **clarity** about someone's character. The purpose of dating is not to give you a "romance appetizer" or allow you to experience "marriage light." That's why she says, "Don't awaken love until the time is right."

Write this down: **Date for clarity, not intimacy.** The purpose of dating is to get clarity on someone's character, to see what kind of companion they'll be, not to sample intimacy with them.

- And too much physical intimacy early on just messes up that evaluation process.
- **Physical intimacy works like a drug—it intoxicates you.** When you are sick and your body is in pain, the doctor prescribes a codeine pill and you take it and you feel awesome. Your body is in fact not awesome, but the drug deceives you into making you think you feel awesome. **And that's fine when you're sick.**
- **But think about the harm that comes if you let the** illusion that drug creates in you keep you from taking whatever steps you need to really get better. When I'm sick and pump myself full of medicine, I want to get back out there, but my wife is like, "You need rest." But I say, "I feel fine," and she says, "That's the drugs talking, but your body needs rest." But I usually ignore her and work anyway, and then my body stays worn down and I stay sicker for longer.
- The intoxication of physical intimacy keeps you from seeing what is really going on in the relationship and who they really are.
- And when the **physical excitement of sex** fades, all you are left with is a sick relationship.

⁸ From Ben Stuart, *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*

So if you're wise, in the dating process you should keep physical intimacy to a minimum and heed this woman's advice: "**Do not awaken love until the time is right.**" (2:7) Honestly, you should believe this whether you are a Christian or not.

When I was a teenager, my dad gave me **four practical laws** when I was a teenager that served me well. They have come to be known as "**Lynn's Laws.**" They are:

1. **Nothing in the dark.**
2. **Nothing below the chin.**
3. **Never lie down.** Like **Matt Chandler** says, "*Never in the history of humankind has a guy and girl lying down to watch a movie together led to discussions about cinematography or the symbolic resonance of the director's body of work.*"⁹
4. **Nothing should last longer than five seconds:** Because once it crosses five seconds, it almost for sure has become sinful.

Again, these are just guidelines—they are not biblical rules. But they helped me "not awaken love until it was time," and when I held to these, it kept me out of a lot of trouble. One of our campus pastors, **Eric Gravelle**, distinguishes between **acts of affection** vs. **acts of passion**. Acts of affection when dating can be appropriate; acts of passion awaken love before it is time, so avoid those.

(Singles! Listen, I know living like this is difficult, counter-cultural. Sex is common in the dating culture, even expected. So is divorce. And I think you are here because you want something different than what the world is putting out there, but here's the thing: ***If you want something very few people have, you have to be willing to do what very few people will do:*** Build your relationship differently.)

Sometimes I get asked, "How does this apply to high school kids? Should they be able to date?" Full disclosure: We don't have a rule against that at our house; we've allowed our kids to go out on dates

⁹ Matt Chandler, *Mingling of Souls*, 61.

at age 16, but since they are not ready to get married, and won't be until they are 30, dating is a road it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to go very far down. I tell my kids to prioritize friendship in these years, even the dating years. Don't awaken love until time. We always told our kids the **three ideals to pursue** in this stage are:

non-exclusive; non-physical; non-escalating. Once you go exclusive, physical, and escalating, you are "awakening love," and getting up into this realm.

Law 5. Give the Relationship a Little TL,C (Time for Learning, and Community)

Remember, you are dating for clarity, not intimacy. And character is best seen not through the lens of intimacy (in fact, that usually just clouds things). What you need for clarity, that you see in Song of Songs, is time for learning, and community.

I say "time to learn" because usually it takes time to reveal

someone's character. Time gives you a chance to observe them in different seasons, different relationships. In the beginning of the dating stage, they are in the **used car salesman mode**, trying to hide all the defects. You hear a rattle in the engine, and they turn up the stereo.

- You need time to see ... **How they treat their parents.** Because the single best predictor of how they'll treat you is how they treat their family.
- How they **treat their friends** and their siblings.
- Do they **keep their word**? Newsflash: If they don't keep their word to others, they won't to you either.
- How about this one—and this might be a bit of a gut punch: **Can they keep their hands off of you? If they don't have the control to keep their hands off you now, why do you think they'll have the control to keep their hands off someone else when your intoxicating effect on them inevitably wears off?**

You need time to see the real them. You also need enough time for the intoxication to wear off for you so you can see the real them and not the romanticized, idealized version of them you created in your head because you were all hopped-up on pheromones.

- And yes, I know there are people who meet and two weeks later they are engaged, and they make it ok. I'm not saying that never happens; I'm just saying it's not best practice, especially when you are young.
- One of the greatest gifts God gave to Veronica and me: I met Veronica right before I left to be a missionary for two years, and during those two years we wrote lots of letters, and in those two years of letters I was able to see the real her. I'm not saying you should all move to SE Asia for two years, though it would probably be helpful for some of you. But you need the time and emotionally cool space to really see their character.

And that leads me to one of the most important things you need...

Community:

- **Notice, this whole time in these first two chapters, she's talking to her community and they are singing back to her,** making their own observations. She evaluates this guy's character in the context of community.
- Dating in our culture has become a highly privatized thing between just you and the person you are dating. And the online dimension just amplifies that. You start dating someone that literally no one else in your life knows.
- In **what is arguably the most monumental decision** of your life, you isolate yourself and tell yourself that your heart knows best precisely when your heart is in the worst possible condition to know what's best ... Y'all, **if there were no other practical reason to be involved in the church as a single, this would be it,** because people who love you can see **potential problems** with this person that you can't see.

- **Matt Chandler:** “One sure way to walk in foolishness in a romantic relationship is to date someone who troubles the godly counselors in your life.”¹⁰
- So if you’re young and single, plug into the church. Get to know some older people. Do that by volunteering at the campus—that’s the best way to get to know people. Ask those people to speak into your life. In return, you can show them how to dress and use the flashlights on their phones or whatever. Older people, invite single people into your lives. Invite them to sit around your table and have dinner with you.

Conclusion

Let’s return to the beginning: “This is Solomon’s song of songs, more wonderful than any other” (1:1).

For some of us, romantic love is all we’ve ever dreamed about. It’s the song of songs we’ve always yearned for! We don’t see how we could ever have a full and complete life without it!

But the Apostle Paul, a single man, made clear that romantic love, as awesome as it is, was only a signpost to a greater love, the love we were created for, the love we’ve always been missing, whether we recognize it or not. The arms we yearned for in romance were actually his arms.

*Tim Keller says there’s a myth that many people in our culture believe called “the right person myth.” This myth says that **there is a perfect, right person out there for you, and if you don’t find that person, you’ll never be happy.***

Let me tell you why it’s a myth: You ALWAYS marry the wrong person. Go home and say that to your spouse today: You’re the wrong person for me. But it’s true.

¹⁰ Matt Chandler, 56.

And that’s because the love we were created for, the love you yearn for, the PERSON you were designed to be complete in, is Jesus. And when you’re looking for that completeness in somebody else, they always become the wrong person.

- *Over the years I’ve described it like this:* Most people approach dating like a man drowning in the ocean; he’s drowning in a sea of loneliness and despair and along by floats a 5’4” brunette **life preserver. So what does he do?**
- *Listen, I’ve told you this:* Lonely, insecure people become lonely, insecure married people, because problems like loneliness and insecurity aren’t cured by another human being; they are only cured by the love of God. Marriage doesn’t solve emptiness; it just exposes it.¹¹
- That’s why I always say that **you’re not really ready to date until you’re ready not to date, because until you’re ready not to date**—that is, until you know that you can be a happy and complete person even if you’re single—you’ll try to turn that marriage partner into something they were never designed to be.

Furthermore, that person you are marrying is also a sinner, which means they are going to let you down. No sinner will ever be able to understand you completely, love you completely. No sinner will ever be a perfect companion. The way *Tim Keller says it: **The best you can hope for in marriage is “less of a bad match” for you, since everyone ends up disappointing you.***

But that gives you a certain amount of freedom in marriage, doesn’t it? I’m not counting on you, Veronica, to complete me. Jesus completes me.

And it takes a lot of the pressure out of dating, doesn’t it? You see, rather than being on a rabid, obsessive search for the right person who is **the** absolute and necessary key to a happy life, I can find my

¹¹ *Sacred Search*, 209.

completeness in him and trust him to meet my companionship needs in whatever way he sees fit.

There are other ways God can meet our companionship needs when we're in a situation where marriage isn't possible. Marriage might be the first way that God dealt with our "problem" of loneliness; you might even say it is the preferred way, **but it is not the only way.** In fact, what the New Testament tells us is that all earthly family is just a shadow of the body of Christ, the church. The church is ultimately how God supplies our companionship needs. When Jesus was asked about his earthly family, he pointed to his followers and said, "These are my family, my brothers and sisters and mother!"

Listen: Every time you pray, you pray to a man who died as a 33-year-old single adult and never had a single romantic fling throughout his whole life, and yet he was the happiest and most fulfilled person who ever walked the face of the earth. And you are complete in him. He's the right person for you. His song is the song of songs, his song is the one more wonderful than any other, and it's one he sings over you now! And when you receive it, you can date out of fullness, not out of emptiness..

Bow your heads...

- Maybe you need to be reconciled to God. Receive the love of God offered to you in Christ—Jesus Christ died for your sins and wants to come into your life and save you. What if you let him in right now? Say, "Jesus, I believe you died for my sin and I receive you into my life. I surrender to you and I'll follow you as Lord."
- **Here's another application:** If you're single, will you tell God that you'll trust him and do it his way?
- (Summit, there are important things happening around you. If you're already married, pray for the single people in our church, that they'll have the faith to trust God and do it his way and wait on him.)

Let me leave you in this moment, sitting with the Holy Spirit at work in your heart, and in just a moment our worship teams will come to lead us...