

life groups discussion guide

man vs. wife • song of solomon 5:2-8



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

"In every marriage more than a week old, there are grounds for divorce. The trick is to find, and continue to find, grounds for marriage." -- Robert Anderson

"There is no substitute for the comfort supplied by the utterly taken-for granted relationship" -- Iris Murdoch

"Marriage must constantly fight against a monster which devours everything: routine" -- Honoré de Balzac

Lest you might think that the last quote from Balzac is overstating the dangers routine may pose to a marriage, consider this... According to a May 2009 study published in Psychological Science shared challenges and exciting diversions are what make relationships hot long after the wedding gown has been packed up and stored away. And the opposite, boredom and a dull, daily routine, can kill a marriage, squashing intimacy and romance. Most research on long-term relationships typically focused on eliminating problems such as conflict and tension, but surveys have suggested that boredom may be even more corrosive to a relationship. The honeymoon ends, real life beckons, and later raising a family forces things to settle into a predictable place. Routine feels required. But routine can dull our perspective on our spouse. In 1992, one of my favorite comic strips at that time captured pretty well what this looks like in real life:

For Better or For Worse®

by Lynn Johnston



Familiarity may or may not breed contempt – but it can most certainly cause us to forget the things that make our spouse wonderful – the very things that made us want to commit our lives to them. Song of Solomon 5:2-8 serves as a caution of sorts against routine – and assumptions that we will always have time to respond as we should.

Q :: What are the components of routine that cause our perspectives on our spouses to become dulled?

Q :: Do those same components have spiritual parallels that cause us to have a dulled perspective about, and lose excitement for, our relationship with Jesus?

As we come to Chapter 5 of Song of Solomon, the wedding is over and Solomon and his new wife have settled into a routine. In fact, by this time she is no longer his new wife. Months, maybe even years have passed and they have both settled into the routine of being married. Solomon is busy with his work - being king; running the nation. She is busy as well – as a member of the royal harem; raising the children; teaching the new harem recruits about how to live in the palace; making sure family needs were being met. Both of their plates are full.

But because the Song of Solomon is a poem that celebrates the joy of marital love, it deals with the inevitable challenge that routine can present to the relationship between a husband and a wife if they are not careful – sapping the sense of excitement and the joy of love. — READ v. 2-8

What we see in this passage is a realistic reflection of married life. Newlyweds are passionate in their love for one another – constantly touching; making goo-goo eyes at each other & genuinely delighting in the company of each

other. But as the months and years pass - the passion cools, the intensity fades and the delight has turned into a kind of ho-hum, everyday routine. The excitement of the early days, the sense of hunger and desire that marked their first love diminishes.

Q :: What practical things we can do to guard against passion cooling? How do we keep desire from dying?

Q :: What do we learn from the events of v. 2-8 – especially regarding the fact that when she finally gets up to open the door she finds that her lover has gone? What are the implications for our own marriages?

A piece of practical advice for **each** married person might look like this – read it with an eye toward your own marriage and your own spouse:

Love needs to be nurtured and cultivated. It must be fed or it will slowly starve, and you may not even notice it's dying until it's too late. So keep growing! Work at it, put time and effort into it. Remember the passion and depth of love you had at the beginning. Identify the things that can dull your feelings for your beloved – and actively fight against them. Don't let life slip in to auto-pilot while you go to sleep at the wheel. Never allow yourself to become so comfortable that comfort turns into boredom. Stay awake and alert, remembering that you may not always have the opportunity to right the ship and repair things.

Now, both Jewish and Christian scholars have long recognized how the Song of Solomon is a broad picture of the relationship between God and His people. In the OT, God calls Israel His wife and in the NT, the Church is the Bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5, Paul uses marriage as an illustration of our relationship with Jesus wherein we are the bride, and He is the bridegroom. The story behind the Song of Solomon is rich with symbolism of Christ and the Church. The first time He came, He came incognito, disguised if you will, to check on His vineyard, the nation of Israel, to see how the keepers were doing with it's fruit, but they rejected him. A small group of the common people fell in love with Him however, and He betrothed them to Himself. Then he went away, back to His home to prepare a place for them, and one day he will come again - but this time in all His royal finery and He will take His bride to her new home, where they will be wed and enjoy a joyous marriage feast.

Our lives now, are lives of waiting for Him to come. We are betrothed, engaged, and long for the day that He comes to take us home. While we wait, we serve, and enjoy a relationship with Him by the Holy Spirit. The question is - has that life of waiting and service become mere routine? Has the passion and desire that marked us when we first came to faith dimmed?

Q :: Shulammite probably wasn't keenly, intuitively, aware that her passions for her beloved had cooled.

We see that manifested in her actions, but she was likely not even aware of what her actions were truly representative of. Might the same be true for us in the spiritual sense? Might our passion for Jesus wane and us not intuitively know it? (see: Judges 16:20) How can we know if this has happened?

In Revelation 2, Jesus wrote to the Church at Ephesus. He commended them for their diligence in service - they were the church of the 10-page bulletin they had so much stuff going on. He commended them for their doctrinal purity and how they refused to put up with error – from all outward appearances, they were a right-on, faithful church. But they lacked something so critical, that Jesus said if they didn't repent and return to it, in His eyes, they would not even be a church, they would be nothing more than a crowd of good, religious people with busy day-planners. That one most important thing they had left behind and must recapture - was their first love.

It can be tempting to read “But I have this against you, that you have forsaken your first love” (NIV) as them having turned their back and walked away from their faith and think that because we have not gone to that extreme that we are exempt from the critique. The verses prior to that, and God's prescribed remedy in v. 5 shows this not to be the case (and ties nicely into what we see happening in Song of Solomon 5). Rev 2:5 says:

“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”

There is such rich application BOTH to our relationship with God AND to our marriages. This is talking about actions that at one time were manifestations of our great passion – but now have come to be symbolic of a love that has decidedly cooled.

Q :: Might the same prescription for a church to rekindle what has been allowed to burn out be applicable to our marriages that may have suffered the same fate? How might that look?

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on Song of Solomon 5 offers great insight into its spiritual applications:

Churches and believers, by carelessness and security, provoke Christ to withdraw. We ought to notice our spiritual slumbers and distempers. Christ knocks to awaken us, knocks by his word and Spirit, knocks by afflictions and by our consciences; thus, Re 3:20. When we are unmindful of Christ, still he thinks of us. Christ’s love to us should engage ours to him, even in the most self-denying instances; and we only can be gainers by it. Careless souls put slights on Jesus Christ. Another could not be sent to open the door. Christ calls to us, but we have no mind, or pretend we have no strength, or we have no time, and think we may be excused. Making excuses is making light of Christ. Those put contempt upon Christ, who cannot find in their hearts to bear a cold blast, or to leave a warm bed for him. See the powerful influences of Divine grace. He put in his hand to unbolt the door, as one weary of waiting. This betokens a work of the Spirit upon the soul. The believer’s rising above self-indulgence, seeking by prayer for the consolations of Christ, and to remove every hinderance to communion with him; these actings of the soul are represented by the hands dropping sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the locks. But the Beloved was gone! By absenting himself, Christ will teach his people to value his gracious visits more highly.

There is a thread that runs through Scripture that carries with it the idea of a limited window of time – of doing something while there is still time...before it’s too late. Jesus does stand at the door and knock – but we know He does not do so forever. Jesus told His disciples “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4 ESV).

We may not always have the time to respond to the knock (either from our beloved – or from our Beloved) if we fail to do so now. As we close, I think we can look back at the example of practical advice for each married person and notice that it is equally helpful advice when it comes to maintaining the passion and delight of our spiritual “first love” – that of our Savior. Read it again with an eye to your relationship with Jesus:

Love needs to be nurtured and cultivated. It must be fed or it will slowly starve, and you may not even notice it’s dying until it’s too late. So keep growing! Work at it, put time and effort into it. Remember the passion and depth of love you had at the beginning. Identify the things that can dull your feelings for your Beloved – and actively fight against them. Don’t let life slip in to auto-pilot while you go to sleep at the wheel. Never allow yourself to become so comfortable that comfort turns into boredom. Stay awake and alert, remembering that you may not always have the opportunity to right the ship and repair things.

We do not have forever. None of us are even guaranteed tomorrow. Let us do TODAY what is necessary to keep our love passionate – both in our marriages and in our relationship with God – and not merely routine.

I’ll close with this anonymous quote:

“There’s a difference between having a real relationship and just being together because that’s all you’re used to. There’s a difference between meaning your “I Love You’s” and just saying them every night because “that’s what you do.” There’s a difference between being together and wanting to be together. It’s a relationship, not a routine.”