

Protect Your Marriage – Song of Solomon 2:15

Thank you for worshipping with us this weekend. If you are:

- 1) New to Coram Deo. Welcome.
- 2) Following online. Welcome.

My name is Jason Taylor. I am the Biblical Soul Care Pastor here at Coram Deo. It is my privilege to share the Word of God with you today.

Intro

Let's turn to **Song of Solomon 2:15**

If you don't have a Bible, then one of our ushers are happy to give you one of ours.

Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom

The book of Song of Solomon is a love story between two Israelites. For those of you who love poetry, romance novels and watch Hallmark movies, then this book is for you. It is a picturesque portrayal of the sexual, emotional, and spiritual intimacy that a couple can experience in a relationship that follows God's design.

When Adam ate of the fruit in the Garden of Eden, everything changed—even his marriage to Eve. His sin affected so many things in the world, even our marital relationships. For Adam, you could see right away that his relationship was affected. After he ate of the fruit and he and Eve made clothes out of fig leaves, he was confronted by God. God wanted to know why he ate of the fruit which He commanded Adam not to eat, Adam started pointing fingers...It was her fault! **“She gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate.” (Genesis 3:12).** Relationship broken. This reminds me of me. Unfortunately, there have been times in my marriage where I have sinned and I blamed it on Karla.

God's desire is to redeem marriages—to make them what He intended them to be in the first place. Song of Solomon is written to show what a redeemed marriage looks like. In this book God shows that He desires for us to have stellar marriages where oneness, intimacy, and romance grows.

Two key themes of the book:

- 1) God's established covenant of marriage provides the right framework to enjoy oneness and intimacy.
 - a) **Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh**
 - b) Marriage is a sacred, unconditional promise of life-long commitment between, you, your spouse, and God
 - c) IOW...God is in it...One biological man, and one biological woman, and God Himself—He is a part of the union.
 - d) It is a relationship context that provides the opportunity to hold fast to your spouse and be intimate. This means that we are exclusively devoted to one another—pursuing unity with and affection for your spouse in all the ups and downs of life, as well as being sexually one. We hold fast with exclusivity and affection. **Ecclesiastes 4:12 “...a threefold cord is not quickly broken”**

- 2) Marriage is a blessing from God.
 - a) When we **“hold fast” (Genesis 2:24)** to our spouse, marriage:
 - i. Satisfies our desire for companionship
 - ii. Meets our need for partnership
 - iii. Gratifies our longing for relationship
 - iv. Fulfills our passion for intimacy
 - b) The book of Song of Solomon puts a big exclamation mark on God's creation of marriage. Obedience to God in the covenant of marriage brings Him glory and us genuine delight.

(Parenthetical Statement)...At this time, I want to verbalize that there may be some listening who are feeling emotional pain because of this topic. Maybe you are a widow. Maybe you are divorced. Maybe you are single and have not married. As I discuss themes of relationship, marriage, covenant, and intimacy, this could bring feelings of angst in your own heart. I recognize your sorrow and grief and just want to encourage you.

Singles:

- a) Being single doesn't mean you're second class (**Gal 3:28**)
- b) If you're single, don't settle (**Ps 15**)
- c) Marriage is for most but not all (**Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 7:6-9**)
- d) Being single has its advantages (**1 Cor 7:25-40**)

For those who are widowed, divorced, or single, I encourage you to check out one of Pastor Rob's previous sermon series: Biblical Principles of Marriage, parts 1-4. These are encouragements from your pastor on being single. You can find them under the resources tab on our church website

But for today's message, we will focus on the blessings and joys found in the covenant of marriage. So...

1) **Protect your marriage from spoilers**

(vs. 15) “Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards”

Now remember, this is poetry, so the imagery is not literal. Solomon (who wrote the book) is not literally asking you to catch foxes.

- In the context of the poetry, **the vineyards** are representative of their relationship and the foxes picture anything that would damage marital oneness and intimacy.
- So, the encouragement from the bride to the groom to **“Catch the foxes for us”** is a plea to take preventative measures to protect their love from anything harmful.

When I think of **“foxes”**, I think of a few of their qualities:

- Cute spoilers**—I can hear it now...the collective “AAAWWWW”. Foxes are just that cute. Bushy tail. Furry. Cute face. For some, they are the kind we just want to sit on the couch and cuddle with while watching a movie.
- But, that is what is dangerous. They are not your friend. They are wild and yet attractive...like some of the desires that ruin marital oneness. We think they are so cute and we can befriend them, only to end up causing pain.
 - Prioritizing friends over spouse falls into this category. Men you need time

to go golfing, hunting, or work on some project with your bros. Women you need time with your friends...doing whatever it is that girls do.

- These are some cute spoilers,
 - “When was the last time I went out with my spouse rather than my friends?”
 - “When is the last time just my spouse and I went on a trip?”
 - “What intimate details do I share with my friends but won’t share with my spouse?”
 - “When was the last time my spouse and I prayed over some of my hurts and struggles or dreams and desires?”
- When friends have more time, energy, and connection with you than your spouse then, you are missing out on God’s design for your marriage. The oneness you could have with your spouse is being shared with another.
- Wine parties, country clubs, sports events, bars—with your friends over your spouse, all have the potential of being marriage spoilers. They’re attractive yet potentially dangerous.
- Intimate friendships, distant marriages.
- Protect your marriage from cute foxes by prioritizing your spouse over your friends.

Sly spoilers—Foxes are talented hunters. They rely on their dominant sensory traits but can adapt depending on the climate or season and type of prey available. Unknown to their prey, the fox is often present and just waiting to pounce. It is their talent of taking in information, adjusting to changing environments, and skill of finding the weakness in their prey that makes them dangerous. There are some weaknesses in our marriages that we either ignore or go unnoticed until a sly fox pounces.

- Look but don’t touch is a sly spoiler. I have heard many times from couples that they feel it’s okay if their spouse looks lustfully at others whether real people or images. I have been told that it’s harmless and everyone does it.
- But, I have found that building affection for others whether real or imaginary is harmful, insidious, sly.
- Man...regularly viewed pornography and felt he needed more in his marriage. The couple introduced pornography in the bedroom. After some time, this no longer satisfied him so he requested a third person, a woman, join them in the bedroom. The wife, wanting to make him happy, agreed but felt completely unloved. Her confusion grew because, over time, she had a greater connection with the woman they brought in. Dissatisfaction. Unloved. Intimacy destroyed. Marriage broken. Divorce.
- Protect your marriage from sly foxes by only having eyes for your spouse.

Small spoilers—Foxes are small in comparison to wolves and dogs. It’s even noted in the verse, “*the little foxes*”. It’s the small things that eventually creep up on a marriage and destroy it.

- Neglect is in this category. When we neglect our spouse to deal with other things, and this becomes a pattern over time, relational damage can be done.
- Couples can just simply be too busy. Careers and other activities can consume. While these are worthwhile to be a part of, we often neglect each other.
- Dangerous neglect of spending time together, leads to broken relationships. Protect your marriage from small foxes by making your relationship with

your spouse your priority.

Elusive spoilers—Foxes are everywhere and yet nowhere. They live on every continent of the world except for Antarctica. Present everywhere and yet difficult to find, and even harder to catch. They can climb trees, fences, and roof tops, jump three feet in the air, and run more than 30 miles in each day. In England, fox hunting was formalized as a sport. It takes a team of dogs and hunter to catch foxes as they tend to outwit, outmaneuver, and outlast their attackers. It may take much work to “*catch the foxes*” that destroy our marriages.

- Potentially dangerous indulgences fall into this category. The spouse who runs to an indulgence when stress effects them is soothing themselves in ways that push them away from the Lord and their spouse.
- Certainly, alcohol and drugs fall into this category but there are other indulgences that can drive relationships apart. These might include but not limited to: 1) social media, 2) television shows, 3) eating habits, 4) workout habits, and so on.
- Anything that becomes an escape rather than finding safety and comfort in the Lord and your relationship with your spouse can potentially divide rather than unite.
- Protect your marriage from elusive foxes by openly sharing stressors, hurts, and future plans/desires. Run to the Lord and each other rather than indulgences.

Destructive spoilers—In some places, foxes are known as pests. Ancient Israel was one of those places. When verse 15 says, “*...that spoil the vineyards*” that’s because the common thought at the time was that foxes were pests. The foxes don’t really eat grapes. In fact, like most dogs, grapes can be poisonous to the fox. But, a fox will chew on the vine ruining the whole plant. It will also dig around it exposes the root system, killing the vine. No vine, no grapes. Ruined.

- Letting your guard down and opening the door to other relationships fits in this category.
- A good example of this is going out to lunch or to the bar alone with the opposite sex. At first glance, this may seem harmless, and even commonplace. But, it opens the doors to a closeness with others that God does not intend for you.
- I can remember when I became engaged to Karla, we decided that I would no longer go to lunch with some friends of mine of the opposite sex. A man, my friend, who was also engaged at the time thought I was stupid and my viewpoint was antiquated. He continued to go out with girls who weren’t his fiancée, and his wife was with that at the time. However, when he had an affair that ended their marriage. She was no longer fine with it. Oneness separated. Intimacy destroyed. Marriage divorced.
- Protect your marriage from destructive foxes by installing guard rails that prevent temptation.

For some, the foxes may have started to destroy the vine of your marriage. But, I want to encourage you that it is not too late. As I said in the beginning, God desires to redeem romantic love in the covenantal marriage. He is ready and willing to restore your marriage and make it healthy again. So, take steps to protect and restore your marriage...

Marriage Mentoring is a ten-session program here at Coram Deo that works to mediate,

teach, and confront the “foxes” in your relationship. For those couples who feel disunified, distant, and in conflict, then I encourage you to sign up. It is very inexpensive, and it is a productive way for you to begin to bring back the oneness and intimacy God desires for your marriage.

Also, for healthy couples...there is a great sense of unity experienced when you give back. We are in need of mentor couples to help hurting couples. Would you consider signing up to help? No marriage is perfect, but if you feel yours is one and intimate, then this can be a chance to serve others. Matt Loehr will be training mentor couples on July 8th and 9th.

There is a QR code by point number one on your sermon notes. Scan the code to sign up for help or to sign up for training to be mentors. One QR code, two ways to protect your marriage—getting help OR giving help.

For all marriages everywhere, Solomon encourages us to...

2) Keep Romance Alive

(vs 15) “for our vineyards are in blossom”

The relationship is blooming in Song of Solomon. They are longing for each other; affectionately wanting closeness. Betrothed (engaged). Devoted to the other. There’s romance in the air.

While there are some who have close, intimate marriages and some who have marriages in trouble, most of us have typical marriages. The type of relationship that is not on the brink of divorce, but still needs to be intentionally protected from the foxes of seasons of marriage so that romance may blossom:

Seasons of marriage (Dr. Mike Emlet, MD and CCEF Biblical Counselor)

1. Engagement—oneness anticipated

- Discovery and newness
- Broad and deep conversation for hours
- Live to please the other—not in an idolatrous sense but in genuine love looking out to their interests.
- Put your best foot forward—not in deception, but because you truly want to do that
- Love is often blind...overlook, don’t see, or choose not to see
- I might also be blind to my own issues

2. Newly weds—oneness realized

- Learning to live as one
- It’s often a time of saying stupid things: As a newly wed, Karla asked me how she looked in her dress. Instead, of saying something like, “Perfect”, I told her she looked average.
- For some its smooth for some its rocky
- Many assume intimacy is happening just because you are spending time together
- It is often hard to accept differences...how do you handle your disappointments...retreat? Attack? Bring issues to the table?

- Fear is a challenge to intimacy. When hurt by your spouse the wound is deeper than any other relational wound because the commitment level is deeper than any other commitment. Fear keeps you from being honest—it is so quiet

3. Children—oneness challenged and sharpened

- Main task is family oriented...raising children who are disciples of Christ
- Conversations are pragmatic and problem oriented. Often limited to problem solving and scheduling due to perceived necessity. Little to no sharing of personal desires and thoughts. Little to no praying together. Little to no laughing. Little to no sharing of how God is personally growing you.
- Relational scatter—energies are spread out—survival mode
- Fatigue—Driving kids to activities, caring for them while sick, playing with them often, and being so exhausted at night that they simply crash into bed and sleep.
- Warning—Children become substitutes for our intimacy. We are not in covenant with them but we are in covenant with our spouse
- It is a stage where the couple is battle tested—but can be sharpened if proactive and intentional

4. Empty nest—oneness rediscovered

- Working to finish “the race” well
- Barriers of health and finances
- Caring for elderly parents or each other during illness
- It is a stage of contemplation—what is my legacy?
- New opportunity to minister together
- If intimacy wasn’t nurtured earlier than it is a time of loneliness

We can let the season of life take over and become romance killers. So, be intentional to develop oneness and intimacy in every season of life.

10 Strategies to keep romance alive:

- Remember God’s work of redemption in your own heart
- Regularly pray together
- Serve one another and others together
- Talk regularly, intentionally, and heart felt topics
- Go screen free for an evening. Focus on each other.
- Often express good qualities about each other to each other and in front of others
- Be less serious. Laugh much together
- Find an activity that you enjoy together
- Make date nights a priority
- Pursue periodic marriage retreats
 - Therefore, Coram Deo has a new opportunity for your marriage. Check out this video. (Transforming Marriage Retreat video)

Fifteen Marriage assessment questions: True or False

If more are false than true, then it might be helpful for you to come to the Transformed Marriage Retreat, September 9-11.

- 1) We discuss our greatest joys and sorrows.
- 2) We pray together on a regular basis.
- 3) We share on a regular basis how the practices of corporate worship are impacting us.
- 4) We regularly assess the health and direction of our marriage and make plans to improve it.
- 5) We have dinner together more nights than not during the week.
- 6) We are very satisfied with our sexual relationship.
- 7) On a regular basis, we verbally express thanksgiving for each other.
- 8) Our marriage has a proactive rather than a reactive feel to it.
- 9) We don't keep a "record of wrongs".
- 10) We are not afraid to fail in each other's eyes.
- 11) We feel free to raise issues of concern and can work through those conflicts in a healthy way.
- 12) (For those who have children) We are on the same page on how to parent our child(ren) and are open to hearing from each other on our parenting mishaps and successes.
- 13) We continue to learn new things about each other.
- 14) We still hold hands frequently.
- 15) We remember what we did on our last three date nights.

There is a QR code by point number two on your sermon notes. Talk to your spouse today. Use the code to sign up. Go all out for your marriage—don't let any excuse keep you from growing together.

Closing