



Getting to Know You

Part 1 – Desire, Insecurity, and Character

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We're starting this new series, *Getting to Know You*. In it, we are going to be walking through the first two chapters of Song of Songs, talking about twelve markers of relationship formation. Today, the first three that we are going to talk about are desire, insecurity, and character. Many of you know, most of you know, and if you don't, Song of Solomon is the romance book. It is about romantic relationships. Some of you with young people in here may be a little uncomfortable right now, thinking *What's about to happen?* but we want to reassure you we are going to keep this rated PG. Every now and then, we'll have a series or a sermon that will be rated PG 13. Before we do that, we send a notice out on social media and there will be signs around so you'll know that.

Our desire in this is that even in this topic, that you as parents, with your kids, young people, we can have conversations. We want to keep the conversation open and flowing in this. In the Brawner household, we try to keep the conversation open and flowing as well. We try to practice that. Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about with this. My son, Mason, is six and he's in Wildwoods. Every week, they get a God-Time sheet, which is a page with some assignments for them to do throughout the week and activities to do with their family or with a friend or something.

This one particular week, a few weeks ago, he was given his God-Time sheet and on it was a compliment telephone game. You were supposed to pay a compliment to someone through the telephone game. Do you remember the telephone game? The first person tells the second person and so on until it gets to the last person. The first person is supposed to compliment the last person and pass it down the line.

My wife, Kari, wanted to compliment me so she tells our son, Mason, who is six, "Daddy is a good hugger." Mason then passes that on to Kaylen, our 13-year-old daughter who then tells me and I get to hear my 13 year old daughter tell me what she heard her six year old brother say, which is "Daddy is a good lover." My first thought was, *Oh, thanks, babe. What can I say?* My second thought was, *this is at least a little inappropriate for our child's Sunday school assignment.* But then again, we are keeping the conversation open and flowing, keeping it PG so that hopefully you don't have an awkwardness in having conversations in your family.

Now, I want to talk for a moment about marriage and family. We are Woodland Hills Family Church and marriage and family are woven into the DNA of everything that we do here – in our ministries, in the sermons, what our kids are learning. We have that in place for a reason. I want to talk to you about that. Efficiency is one of my favorite things. Anybody else in that business or in your family efficiency.

If I can accomplish a lot of things with a simple task, I'm all for it, I love how we can, with little energy, little effort can accomplish several goals at once. But we have an enemy – Satan – Who has one goal in mind. His primary goal is to thwart you from fulfilling your mission of fulfilling God's purposes and plan in your life. That's what he wants to do. The enemy loves efficiency as well. Why? Because you see God as all knowing, all powerful, and all present. And Satan is none of those things. He can't be everywhere at the same time. He can't do anything that he wants to do, so he must be efficient in trying to accomplish his goal of thwarting your mission to fulfill God's purposes and plan in your life.

So, if I'm Satan, I'm going to look for some way to be efficient in that, and I'm going to do my research, and I'm going to see where I can find something that creates devastation. And we know where there is deviation from God's design for marriage and family, there is tremendous downstream devastation. We know that from secular data regarding mental health, regarding crime and even imprisonment. We know it from the poverty data that we have. So, if I'm Satan and I want to get you angry, I want to get you poor, I want to get you depressed, I want to get you hopeless, and even more likely to commit crime, then target acquired. I'm going after your marriage and after your family because I know not only am I getting you, but I can also affect downstream generations as well. That's the way the enemy likes to be efficient.

The family was the first institution created by God. When He put man and woman together, he created the institution of the family before he created any church, before he created any nation, government, or anything else. And in this, we know this is a sacred institution and there are devastating consequences if we allow the enemy to infiltrate it. That is part of why we believe that equipping the saints involves talking about marriage and family.

I also want to address something else. You may have been hurt by this institution, by marriage and family, by a parent, by a child, by a former's spouse in many different ways. We want you to know that we care about you, and we are here for you in several ways. We have ministries like Divorce Care, and Grief Share. We have a prayer team. We have care pastors. We have people who want to walk through your hurt with you in that. But you need to know it was not God's design to hurt you, it was sin that hurt you. God had a perfect design when he created marriage and family, and it is sin that broke it. It is marred by sin.

When I was a surgical intern at the OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City, I was on the trauma team. There was this young man that had survived this car wreck that he should not have survived. He was wearing a seat belt, and he had some injuries from the seat belt. But again, he shouldn't have been alive. I remember the trauma team saying, "I've seen this before. That's why I don't wear my seat belt. Look at the injuries he has because of that seat belt." The logic blew my mind. I'm thinking *he's alive*. *We are going to fix his injuries and he's alive*. Because the seatbelt caused injuries doesn't mean it's not a good design and that it doesn't save lives, right? You see where I'm going with this. We're asking you to not throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. God's design is the best design for romantic relationship, for marriage, and for family.

Now, a little bit more doctrinal house keeping as well. I want to talk to you about mankind and what we believe about mankind. We believe a lot of things about mankind, but a couple of things.

One is every human being is knitted together in their mothers, womb, at the genetic level. At the time of conception, God creates us, male and female. We heard it from the beginning. God created them, male and female, he created them. And as God knitted each of us together, he determined male or female.

And in the romantic relationships, we understand that ***for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and become united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.*** So, what we understand from that is one man, one woman, for a lifetime. That is God's design. And we can sometimes come under attack, being told "As Christians, shouldn't you love everyone. And shouldn't you allow people to love whom they want to love?" The answer is yes but let's define the terms. Because this English word *love* is pretty simple. It can be rather blurred sometimes and used in the wrong way. I believe the Greek is better about this. You see there are six Greek words for the word love. We tend to just use love to describe all of them.

Agape is a love for everyone. Yes, we believe that we should love everyone. An unconditional love for human beings who are image bearers of God, therefore we love them. That's loving your neighbor.

Philia is brotherly love. You love your brother or your siblings, or your family in a different way than you love your neighbor that you may not even know.

Philautia is self-love, a love of self. You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Ludus is playful love. It's Ludus that allows me to approach my buddy, slug him in the arm, and tell him he's ugly, and that was an expression of love.

Pragma is a deep, knowing love, an understanding of someone, long standing. So, you think of the couple that has been married 20, 30, 40 years and beyond. A deep, knowing, knowledge of one another.

Eros – romantic love, which is the subject of what we are talking about in Song of Solomon. This marriage relationship is unique. Yes, we should love everyone. People can choose to love whom they choose to love, but God tells us that this relationship, his design for eros, romantic love relationship is one man and one woman for a lifetime. What's interesting is that that marriage relationship is really kind of unique blend of these three, but you can have Ludus, playful love, with someone that is not your spouse. You can have pragma, a deep, knowing love, with someone that is not your spouse, but eros is where it gets exclusive in this romantic love relationship.

So, Song of Songs is the subject of our study. If you don't know, Hebrew poetry is part of the wisdom writings, and this section of scripture is the poetry and wisdom writings. It is allegory, which means it's a symbolic narrative, written kind of in the form of a play. We've got main characters in it. One is the Shulamite woman. If you will, this is basically a country girl. We know about country girls around here, right?

We've got the shepherd, also referred to as the king in the allegory. And we have the daughters of Jerusalem, which are basically like the choir in the background, the friends in support and speaking into

this relationship. We have our characters, and this sets the stage for this picture of God's design for this eros, romantic love relationship. We also want to address something. We understand that some of you may say, "I've blown it in this." Maybe you look back on your past and you have regret in this type of relationship. I want you to think about someone that you think has gotten it right. Think of a couple or the husband or wife that you look to and you say they have done it right. Even someone that you might say, "If they were to write the book on godly marriage, it would be them, it should be them."

Now, let's jump into the scripture Song of Songs 1: 1. Verse one is very short. **1 *Solomon's Song of Songs***. Solomon, most believe, wrote this book, this allegory, this play. Who is Solomon? Solomon was King of the Jews, he was very rich, thought to be one of the wealthiest people to ever live. He was very wise, thought to be one of the wisest people to ever live. And, oh, by the way, he was consumed by lust. In all of his wealth and popularity, he spared himself no desire. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He spared himself nothing. And yet, this is the guy God chose to write his inspired word on the godly design for marriage. Interesting, isn't it? Tony Evans puts it this way. *"Given what we know of King Solomon, it might seem strange that he would be the author of the Song of Songs, a love poem about a monogamist romance. Never the less, God sovereignly used this man to give us a divine perspective on what real romance ought to look like."*

So, what does that tell us. It tells us that God redeems broken people. It tells us that God redeems broken relationships. Speaking of having blown it, it tells us that God makes beauty from ashes. This beautiful picture that we now have through Solomon. It also gives us a display of the redeeming power of Jesus Christ, and how through his forgiveness and his grace and his transforming power, he can change you. It also tells us that it's never too late for you to decide to do things God's way and in his design.

**2 *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.***

**3 *Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.***

No wonder the young women love you!

4 *Take me away with you—let us hurry!*

Let the king bring me into his chambers.

This is the Shulamite woman, the shepherd girl, one of our characters, right? She is expressing to the shepherd king how she feels about him. She's basically saying she's got the hots for him. She digs his chili. He tickles her fancy. She has eyes for him. Some of the youngest generation might not have heard any of those phrases. For that young generation, let me sum up verses 2-4 for you in one single Hebrew word, which is *Hay*. Some of you have never heard that word said that way. I have never said that word that way. And frankly, it feels awkward.

What we are talking about here is desire. The first marker of relationship formation is desire. Desire starts with a physical attraction, a visual attraction, someone that you see and you find attractive. We're not going to talk too much about attraction because that's one of the markers we're going to talk about next week. But physical attraction is part of desire.

And the thing about desire and physical attraction is that it can change over time, can't it? Again, we're talking about single, dating, married, married for a long time. So, that can change with time. But let me tell you it doesn't have to change with time. Because here's what happens if you're willing to, spouses. At the time of your marriage, at the time you decide on who your spouse is and your marriage, you, at that moment determine that your spouse is the standard of beauty. Your spouse is your standard of beauty... period.

A pastor I once heard communicated this very well. I'm going to speak in terms of Travis and Kari, my wife. So, if someone was to say, "Travis, do you prefer blonde or brunette? I would say, "I prefer Kari." We've been married 25 years and I still prefer Kari. That's what I desire. They say, "What color hair do you prefer?" I say, "I think she's going to salon tomorrow. Babe, are you changing anything? You're going to shave your head? Looks like I'm into bald." You see, something happens when you establish the standard of beauty. When she changes, beauty changes. She is now my standard of beauty.

Now, desire moves beyond the physical attraction to those other loves, right? The pragma and the Ludus. Desire is you have a desire for someone. From this attraction, you get to know them, Getting to know you is what we're talking about. This pragma, this deep, knowing love. You want to lean into that more. And you learn more about the person and you want to know more, and you want to have fun with them, that's Ludus love. So, desire runs deeper than just a physical attraction.

Proverbs 31: 30 says, ***Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*** Follower of Jesus, this should be the most desire inducing attribute of someone that you are seeking. Here's how that plays out for me. My wife, Kari, whom I desire, and my desire grows deeper and deeper because as she fears the Lord and she's seeking Christ, a maturing in her faith and leaning into him, what happens is it derives other desirable characteristics that continue to drive that desire such as kindness and compassion, integrity, loyalty. That should be utmost for those who are followers of Jesus – seeking someone who is seeking the Lord.

The Shulamite woman said it this way in Verse 3. We already read it, but we'll read it again. ***...your name is like perfume poured out.*** What we're talking about is character and reputation. You see, proper desire for a relationship then should take character into consideration. This character is one of the other markers of relationship formation that we should be utmost concerned with as we're seeking a relationship. How do you do that? You observe how he or she treat people, how he or she handles stress, how he or she responds and respects authority in their life, how he or she honors their parents. Not obeying necessarily at that age, but honors. We should honor our parents for the rest of our lives. How are they doing that. That you can observe, and you can see someone's character. Proper desire for a relationship should take character into consideration.

Moving on in Verse 4. These are the daughters of Jerusalem that we are hearing from now. The friends, the backup singers:

Friends

We rejoice and delight in you;

we will praise your love more than wine.

How right they are to adore you!

So, we see we've got the people around this couple, the Shulamite Woman, the country girl, and the shepherd king. And then we have these backup singers that are now speaking into the relationship. What they are doing is confirming this relationship. Remember that you should look into character when desiring a relationship with someone. So, for those that are dating, this is going to be different for you than for those that are married. How it works in dating is you have people around you that are speaking into this and advising you. You should seek advice and wisdom. Just like you seek advice and wisdom in everything in your life, you should seek the counsel of those that know you best, that maybe even know this other person. Is this a good relationship. What do you know about the character of this other person? Is this something I should pursue or not pursue? That's how it works with that dating relationship with the backup singers in that setting.

If you are married, this is very different. You should not look to your friend for an opinion about the character of your spouse. The backup singers in marriage are just that. For my wife, Kari, and me, our backup singers are for team Brawner. They're not for Travis, they're not for Kari, they are not offering opinions on individuals. What they are doing is they are supporting us in our marriage. That is how that works with the backup singers.

Song of songs 1: 5 says

5 Dark am I, yet lovely,

daughters of Jerusalem,

dark like the tents of Kedar... this is the Shulamite woman again. Kedar was a region where the tents were very dark and tan because of the type of animal skin that they used to make the tents.

...like the tent curtains of Solomon.

6 Do not stare at me because I am dark,

because I am darkened by the sun... Why is she ashamed of her complexion?

My mother's sons were angry with me

and made me take care of the vineyards;

my own vineyard I had to neglect...

So, she is speaking, first of all, of physical insecurity here, that she was ashamed of her appearance. Why did she appear the way that she did? She says it's because her family made her work in the vineyard, physical labor out in the sun. So, that clearly shows that she is insecure about her family of origin. She is embarrassed, she's ashamed. What we find then is that insecurity can be for a lot of different reasons. We know then also that she would have looked at herself, looked around her at the other women, maybe the friends or the backup singers and seen them and their complexion.

Maybe their family came from more money where they hired people to work the fields and weren't darkened by the sun as she said, so she's insecure about that. We know comparison is at the root of insecurity. As we look around at others, as husbands look at other husbands, and wives look at other wives, we can find ourselves comparing ourselves to others. We can even find ourselves comparing our marriage to someone else's marriage and be insecure about that. Comparison is at the root of insecurity. Men and women tend to do it differently. Women tend to be insecure about physical appearance, tend to be insecure possibly in their role as a mom or a wife.

May be insecure about contribution to organizations and activities and am I doing enough. I'm not doing as much as so and so. I'm not as good a mom as so and so. You find yourself comparing yourself to others, creating insecurity.

Guys are different about this. When it comes to the physical, we always think we got it going on, don't we? I can gain 20 to 30 pounds, lose every ounce of athletic ability I now have, and I still think I've got it. But we have our own insecurities in different ways. We can be insecure about our profession, our vocation, about work, about accomplishments that way, about financial situations. We can be insecure about our influence in a community or a group, whether or not we think we have enough clout. And it's bad enough that we can compare ourselves to others...

I want to speak to something for just a moment, very carefully and sensitively, to say that as husband and wives, we have to be very careful and cognizant in understanding that as you are speaking highly of someone of the opposite sex, your spouse is listening. And in a context where you're not providing encouragement to your spouse, that can create significant insecurity. It's very important for us to understand. Spouses, we should be A source of security to one another for encouragement and compliments. We'll talk more about compliments next week. But notice I said we should be A source of security to one another in our encouragement.

Why A source? Because I think you all know Jesus is the source. Jesus is your source, not your spouse. So, what we have then in this relationship, best case scenario, is to individuals who are plugged into Jesus as their source and who are constantly building one another up, encouraging one another, helping in any insecurity they have, knowing that individually, we are plugged into our one and true source which is Jesus Christ. Be encouraging, pay compliments, tell your spouse every now and then, "Hey, you're a pretty good hugger." Some of you are going to be using that for code now around your house. We're going to have a whole generation of kids at Woodland Hills that are going to grow up wondering why their parents were always talking about hugging.

7 Tell me, you whom I love... This is the Shulamite woman again.

***...where you graze your flock
and where you rest your sheep at midday.***

Why should I be like a veiled woman

beside the flocks of your friends? This is her saying, "Bro, don't leave me hanging. I'm putting myself out there. I'm showing you that I have interest, but don't leave me hanging here. He responds in this way...

8 If you do not know, most beautiful of women... Stop there for a moment. Most beautiful of women. Remember the description she just gave of herself. Put all subjectivity aside. What you find attractive or not. She described herself as someone who had to work out in the fields. And clearly had a lot of sun damage to her skin, it may have been kind of leathery. Probably disheveled hair, dirt under her fingernails. I think it's safe to say if there were magazines then, she would not be put on the cover, as the cultural and societal idea of what ideal beauty looks like. And yet, what does he say? "Most beautiful of women." She is his standard of beauty.

***...follow the tracks of the sheep
and graze your young goats***

by the tents of the shepherds. What he's saying there is, "Let's do this." He's saying, "I have desire for you as well." So, what we're talking about there is pursuit. Pursuit tends to follow desire. We have desire between the two of them. The backup singers say, "Yes, this is good. We affirm his name as character. We delight in your love more than wine. That desire to get to know each other then progresses. So, now that they are attracted to one another, and they've expressed that they are interested in getting to know each other. That's what they desire. I want to get to know you. I want to have fun with you. Remember that? Those that have been married a long time? What was natural early on must be intentional later on, getting to know you, having fun with you, pursuing you. We have to remember that.

Now, the other wonderful thing about this book and these passages is that this is part of the symbolic narrative of Song of Songs, which we read about in Jeremiah 2: 2. **"This is what the Lord says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.** This is speaking of the desert wandering of the Israelites when they were out in the desert and the Lord would give them a pillar of smoke to follow in the day and a pillar of fire to follow at night. What did they do. They pursued Him. They fixed their eyes on that pillar that he gave them. And they pursued him.

Ephesians 5: 31-32 – **For this reason, man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.** This is Paul quoting Genesis. But then he says this. **This is a profound mystery...** because we think he is talking about a man and a woman being married, which he had just, in that passage, finished talking about. But then he follows up. **But I am talking about Christ and the church.** We understand that the church – followers, the collective body of believers – are the bride of Christ.

And what does he desire of the eye? To fix our eyes on him, to pursue him.

You may have been a follower of Jesus for many, many years. And you may remember the day of your salvation and remember the energy and the desire to pursue the Lord that you had at that point. The question is are you still pursuing him? Do you still have that desire? Are you still living in the character he wants for you? Remember, just as in relationship, in our faith, what was natural early on, must be intentional later on. This is God's design. The symbolism there is beautiful as we understand our relationship – the church – with our groom, Christ, and the pursuit that he desires.

Again, you may have blown it, you may have been hurt, but we understand that brokenness is not because of God's design, it's because of sin. Because sin has entered the world and broken God's perfect creation. God created everything in a perfect way. Our physical condition, we know that we get sick, we get injured, things go wrong. In this institution of marriage and family, we know that because of sin it is broken, and people get hurt. But remember, buckle your seatbelt because it is still the best thing we have, God's design for marriage and romantic relationship.

Seeking relationship... We're talking about a romantic relationship now. Remember the proper desire for a relationship should take character into consideration. Plug into those around you. Is this person

one that I should pursue? Spouses, be a source of encouragement to one another, while you yourself are plugged into the one and only true source of life – Jesus is your source.

Father, we're grateful for this book that you've given us through a broken human being. We know all human beings are broken. We're so grateful for the fact that we can see that you can make broken things beautiful, Lord, that you can transform people, that you can transform relationships, that you can redeem people and relationships.

We're grateful for the instruction that you give us in your design for this romantic relationship, God. We know that we, frankly, screw it up because we are sinful people, but we look to you for grace, for forgiveness, and for guidance, that you would give us a pillar to follow, knowing that your way is best.

We pray for the families, that conversations would in fact be open and flowing and that we would fortify our defenses against the enemy who wants to infiltrate this institution of marriage and family.

We pray blessings on the families that are here, those that are involved, those that are visiting, Lord. We pray blessings on their marriages, on their children, and on their children's children that you would protect us from the enemy and his tactics and his ways of trying to distract us from what it is that you desire for us. That he would not thwart our mission to fulfill our purposes in our plan in our life that you have for us. We love you and we give praise in Christ name... Amen.