



Getting to Know You

Part 2 – Compliment, Quality Time, and Attraction

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're in this series, Part 2. Travis kicked us off last week with *Getting to Know You*. We're looking at these markers of relationship formation, romantic relationship formation. How do they start, how do they form, how do they grow. And we are trying to bring some clarity to the confusion of our world. And I am so grateful to God for his Word when it comes to romantic relationships, so we know how to move forward.

Today, we are looking at *Compliments, Quality time, and Attraction*, the next three markers. Amy and I were in New York last week. The two of us went to our first unisex bathroom. We had not experienced this yet. We walked into a door way that said restrooms above it and I just assumed that when we walked in men would go to the right and women would go to the left. Nope. We both walked in and there were just stalls just right there for everyone. We just stood there for a moment. I know the rules in a men's room. You get the urinal furthest away from the other guy, but I've never gone to the bathroom with my wife. I'm trying to figure it out, people are walking by us, looking at us like we're the weird ones. One guy looked at me and it was like, "What's your problem, man." And I'm like, "Hey, we're from the Midwest, give us a little bit of time here. We don't have these there."

My wife says to me, "Get the one all the way down there, farthest away from me." I said, "I'm not letting some stranger sit between us in a stall." So, we got stalls right next to each other. I was trying to make it as romantic as possible, let's just say that. It was our anniversary trip. When I get nervous, I do one of two things. I either tell jokes or I sing. It didn't feel like an appropriate time to tell jokes, so I started singing. I'm sitting in the stall next to Amy singing "Shall we gather at the river where bright angel feet have trod."

Then we go out and we wash our hands... it's just everybody together and it's so weird. I'm not used to it. I'm like, "Amy, how was that for you? I'm still not really comfortable with all of this." I'm grateful that God's Word gives us clarity in all of the confusion that we see around us today.

Today, and through this series, we're putting romantic relationships under a microscope to see how they form and how they grow. Speaking of romantic relationships (Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce) can we give them their space please people. "It's a love story, baby, just say yes." That's all you're getting from me from Taylor Swift. But we know this about romantic relationships. Every romantic relationship starts with chemistry, attraction, and desire. But what you need to see as we move through the first two chapters of the Song of Songs and actually through the whole book of the Song of Songs, we're just looking at the first two chapters in this series. You're going to see intensity.

We're moving from chemistry onto character and to commitment. If you're looking for commitment in a relationship, it doesn't flow from chemistry, it flows from character. And you are going to see this progression in the book. We have to be very careful because we get a lot of our understanding of relationships from movies. And there are some things that are only in the movies. Do you know what I'm talking about? I watch movies all the time and I'm like, "That's not real life." I'll give you an example of the couple that wakes up from a dead sleep and they start making out. No. You get a Sprite or some Scope or something.

Eating out to fine dining every night. No, you'll break the bank. You can't afford it. Or the couple that snuggles all day in a Manhattan apartment. Every time I see a couple snuggling all day in a movie, I'm like, Don't get your hopes up. I got a job! Can I get an amen on that one. I can't sit around snuggling all day.

Or how about this one. I want the guys to try this one today. The guy is working in the kitchen, and he takes the sprayer from the faucet and as his wife walks by, in a playful way, he just kind of sprays her. And ten minutes later, they're being romantic. I want you to try that today, when you get home, guys. And see where you are ten minutes later. I guarantee you that it ain't romance. Only in the movies.

Some of you have walked through this before. And some of you think about a romantic relationship series and you think to yourself, *I don't want it. I've been on the ride before, and it's broken. I'm thinking about marriages that didn't work, I'm thinking about boyfriend/girlfriend that didn't work.* And when you think about taking another ride on a romantic relationship, you think about this from the playground we all grew up with (playground merry go round). You knew every time you went on there, someone was getting hurt. You see the playgrounds today. The playgrounds today are not real playgrounds. They've got Sunshades. Parents today are concerned about their children getting sunburned. Did you see one sunshade on a playground when you were growing up? All I remember is the goal on the merry go round was to throw somebody off to see how fast someone gets hurt. You walk your buddy with a dislocated shoulder over to the teachers all leaning up against the building. "I think he dislocated his shoulder" "Get him to the nurses' station..." That's how we grew up.

There are some of you that will listen today and say, *I'm not getting back on this ride. I'm not doing it. there's too much heartbreak. I've been hurt too much.* I've been asking young people, 18- 20 years old. And then some of the older in our church have participated in this through a social media post here and there. I've been asking this question of young people. "What are some red flags on a first date that would keep you from going on a second date?" Because what I've seen is this confusion between chemistry and character. This confusion between "Oh we have sparks and we have good attraction, but then there are some things in dating we need to really inspect and it's primarily character. I love the answers I have received. I have over 100 of them collected over the years. I'm going to give you my favorite seven. And I want you to participate. As I share one of these... I've been told this is a red flag on a first date that would keep me from going on a second date. I want you to see if you agree. We had a lot of fun with this in the first gathering.

1. Rude to wait staff. Yeah, that will tell you a lot about a person's character – how they treat people.

2. Ain't good at grammar. See, it gets a little muddier. I don't think you need to have someone with great grammar to have a great relationship.
3. No sense of humor. Some people are going nah, that's not a big deal. You know when you go on an online dating sight and check the box, I'm looking for someone with a sense of humor, you're not looking for someone that's going to tell you jokes for the rest of your life. You're looking for someone that laughs at themselves and invites you in. They don't take themselves too seriously.
4. Says I love you. That's moving pretty fast. My senior year of college, my friend, Steve, was getting himself psyched up one night. He said, "Tonight's the night I'm going to tell her. We've been dating a while and I'm going to tell her I love you. I said, "Man, you go get her. I'm cheering you on." He came back to the room that night with his head down. I said, "How did it go?" He said, "I said I love you." I said, "What did she say?" He said, "Thank you." That's how you know it's too soon.
5. Shows up drunk. Yeah, that's a red flag to leave the first date, if you need help with that from your pastor. Don't even get in the car, obviously. Today, you're going to see a lot of the Hebrew term, run.
6. Interrupts your stories.
7. Invites you to hot tub. And in order to do so, you have to break into a hotel.

After the first gathering, I had two staff members tell me, "That's just called growing up in Branson." If he asked you to bring a swimsuit on the first date, the answer is no.

Some of those were chemistry, some of it was character. You can see why this is so important and why we're moving in the book from chemistry to character to commitment. What is the most important question to ask about character? *Does the person I'm dating walk with Jesus and keep scripture in the driver's seat.* Do you know what isn't a great question? Is the person a Christian? That's not a great question. *It* doesn't answer enough. You want to know does this person walk with Jesus. Is this person sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and when the difficult season and stages of life and our marriage come, is this person going to be led by emotion, by experience, or will this person be led by scripture. You want to decide that early on.

So, we are big fans of dating at Woodland Hills Family Church. Dating is spending quality time together. You go on a few dates that go well, there are no red flags, so you keep going on some dates, but dating needs to move in a direction where you're doing several things:

1. you're examining character. How does this person – man or woman – treat the wait staff. That tells you a lot about who they are. How do they tip? That will tell you a lot about generosity. How do they talk about their parents? Respect for authority begins at home. And if you want someone that's going to be able keep a job, you're going to want someone who knows how to respect authority. So, there's a lot. You're inspecting character. And there are a lot of markers within that.

2. You need to define the relationship. A lot of young people today believe just keep it fluid. There are all sorts of terms we can look at – hooking up and all of that – "but don't define it because when it falls apart, you won't hurt so badly." But you're going to see the value today in scripture of defining the

relationship and moving to exclusivity. Desire says I want you. Exclusivity says I want only you. And defining the relationship is important. We're going to talk about how that conversation can be difficult.

3. Establish boundaries. This is part of character as well. We're actually going to look at this more next week when we read, "do not arouse or awaken love until it's so desires." We're going to look at eight markers inside of one marker on meaningful touch and we're going to save nine through twelve for the marriage bed. And we're going to see that sexual touch and sexual relationship between a man and a woman is reserved for the marriage bed, between a husband and a wife. So, we establish those boundaries. You want someone who knows how to honor that.

Let's move into this as we look at these three markers today. More than flattery, compliments are clues in defining the relationship. More than games, more than little tests that we can throw out there to see where the relationship is when you begin complimenting... And beyond, "You're beautiful." Beyond "You're special." You are going to see how specific Solomon gets to the Shulamite woman in Verse 9.

We are going to pick up where Travis left off last week as he was dealing with the insecurity of the Shulamite woman. We're going to see that compliments go directly to the insecurity of your spouse.

Verse 9 - I liken you, my darling, to a mare

among Pharaoh's chariot horses. Now, if you've had our devo set we have for kids here at the church, that is the M in our series. Song of Songs 1: 9. And the talk time is – to compare a woman to a horse is never a good idea in our day. This is Hebrew poetry set in a very specific culture, but the lessons from it are very clear for us today.

But when Solomon compared his soon-to-be wife to a horse, he was honoring her. When he likened his lover to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots, he was using an emotional word picture to tell her that she was the most important woman in his life. 1 Kings 10: 26 we read that he had 12,000 horses, 1400 chariots. And in that day, to compare a woman to a horse...

10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings,

your neck with strings of jewels. He's talking here now about the costly harnesses that they would put on horses. And he's saying we will adorn you likewise, but he's saying "Think of all the other chariots that come with Pharaoh and all of the stallions that are pulling those horses. You are with me, and you stick out, you are special."

***11 We will make you earrings of gold,
studded with silver.***

His compliment is more than flattery. His compliment is saying, "Hey, of all the women out there, you are the one." It's a compliment of exclusivity. We have a great word picture to help you understand this better and it is found in country music. No other genre of music is going to explain this better than Brad Paisley and his song, *The World*. The song goes, *To the teller down at the bank, you're just another checking account. To the plumber that came today, you're just another house. At the airport ticket counter, you're just another fare. At the beauty shop at the mall, you're just another head of hair. That's alright, that's okay. You don't feel important. Honey, all I've got to say is to the world, you may just be*

another girl, but to me, baby, you are the world. Oh, at the end of the song... Get ready for this. *You think you're one of millions...* That's exactly what we read last week. ... *in the sea of women, you think you're lost. You're not lost on me.* And this is what I loved about what Travis shared last week. Gentlemen, Let your spouse be your source of beauty. Let her be your standard of beauty. *But you're one in a million to me.* That's exactly what Solomon is saying to the Shulamite woman in our first three verses today.

When you wonder if you matter, baby, look into my eyes and tell me can't you see you're everything to me.

Our friends at All Pro Dad put it this way. *Nothing works its way to the core of a woman's heart like the right words from the man she loves.*

A good match is a good start. Chemistry is good, but you eventually need to define the relationship. Examine the character, define the relationship. This is called DTR and how do you have the conversation from when we met to when it's official. From when we met to it's official is like an old, creaky, scary bridge. But it's a conversation we must have. In defining the relationship, it can be challenging, it can be difficult, it can be unnerving. Most people won't have this conversation until they are pretty sure where the relationship stands.

I heard one Penn State professor say it this way this week, *"The more uncertain you are, the more reluctant you are to have the defining the relationship conversation."* Because some of you are like, "I've had it before and it felt more like the scary old creaky bridge." "I've walked across the bridge before and it didn't go well." "I've had the conversation before."

Let's just talk about it. This is where this book, Song of Songs, is moving. From chemistry to character to commitment. So, you have to talk about defining the relationship.

There are three factors that keep a lot of us from having this conversation early on in relationship formation.

It's a risk. You don't know how it's going to turn out.

Uncertainty. I read one report this week that said 63% of people will not have the conversation until they know for sure what the answer is. They've given all the clues. That's why the how we met to we are now official as a couple feels a lot like **games**. Sometimes it can feel like drama. But there is a better path forward. For risk, we just have to take on courage. We have to step up and be willing to have the conversation. It will bring clarity and it will give us answers. It may not give you the answer you want though. That's the hard part. I know most are going to go into the defining the relationship conversation obviously looking for answer number one. "We are a couple. So, I can now tell family and friends we are a couple." Have you ever walked up to a young couple you've seen together for a while and ask if they are dating? They won't give you a definitive answer. Some of you just haven't had the conversation. When you get the answer, we are a couple, it's a signal to family and friends, and it's moving you toward exclusivity.

But some of you may get this answer right here – You're moving too fast. Saying I love you on the first date. “ It doesn't mean we won't be a couple, but just not right now. I'm enjoying dating you, I'm enjoying the direction this is headed, but you just need to slow it down. I'm not talking family planning on the second date.”

Here's one... Some of you have had the defining the relationship and it feels like that old bridge and you've had missteps, the board was taken out from underneath you because you got this answer right here – We don't want the same thing. Maybe some of you need the courage in this series to be able to say it's time for me to walk away from the relationship, because I am pursuing marriage and the person I'm with doesn't want marriage. The person I'm with doesn't want exclusivity. They want to keep it loose, they just want to have fun.

I just hope that in this series, short as it is, I hope some of you will get the courage to have the defining the relationship conversation and know yes, we're moving forward, or this is where it ends. We're not a church that's trying to break people up, but we do know there are a lot of relationships that need a break up. And by the way, when I say this, you know I'm talking about dating relationships. I'm talking about couples in dating relationships. Because I'm here to tell you... I used this illustration in the first gathering. Marriage is a lot like COVID. It's awkward, I know, but stick with me for just a second. COVID didn't cause a lot, COVID revealed a lot. People say, my business, my marriage, my church, my city, it really revealed where you were at as you dealt with the effects of it. My marriage grew stronger through COVID. Some marriage didn't and I get that.

I just want to encourage the young budding love in here... In this series, we're talking about young, budding love and well established vineyards. For those of you in young, budding love, you're dating. Let me tell you, if he is intimidating now in the relationship, marriage won't make that better. Run. If he's controlling and manipulating now, marriage will not make that better. Run. I have to be careful here because I also know that marriage can mature us. I say it all the time. You can get married young and grow up together, but there needs to be a commitment to that growth. There needs to be a commitment to that maturity. Some of you need to begin thinking about this defining the relationship conversation.

Here's the next marker on Quality time. I need my senior adults, those who have been married for 30, 40, 50, 60 years, to lean in on this. *When I think about you and we spend quality time together, I am refreshed.* I think Travis said it 3 times in the message last week. *What was natural early on needs to be intentional later on.* So, what we're talking about with this marker... you're going to see young dating couples who have chemistry and attraction and sparks flying and it's like breathing. But after you've been married for a while, you have to be intentional with it. And you know the heart of this church is not marriage is hard, it's difficult, it's painful, it'll suck the life right out of you. We say marriage requires you to be intentional. Take these markers for those who have been married for a while and I want to ask you the question if you've been married 20,30, 40, 50 years. Are you a refreshing spouse? When your spouse thinks about you, are they refreshed? Don't think about this for another person, think about this for yourself right now.

You've been around the couple that's not fun to be around. Amy and I have been to dinner with couples and we're like, never again. That was painful. They're not refreshing each other, they're not refreshing us. That should have been in an office somewhere, not at dinner. And they need an intensive.

Watch what happens in Verses 12 – 14 about this quality time, and even the thought process. The Shulamite woman says in **Verse 12, While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.** So, now we are going to get this great word picture in the sense of smell with Verse 13. **My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts.** In that day, to perfume their body, the women would go to sleep with a sachet of myrrh resting between their breasts. They would go to sleep smelling it – it would fill their nostrils – and it's this idea of just as myrrh fills my nostrils, so does the thought of Solomon. I can't get him out of my head. I go to sleep thinking about him. I dream about him. I wake up thinking about him. And all throughout the day, I can't stop thinking about him. That's a refreshing spouse. When you're not with your spouse, is your spouse refreshed thinking about getting back together with you.

How many of you remember, early on in the relationship, fighting over who was going to hang up the phone first? Let me ask you, old people, when was the last time you fought over that?

From our dorm rooms at Liberty University, Amy and I would call one another and then she'd be like, "Okay, we gotta get to sleep. Yeah, you hang up." "No, you hang up." Now, watch an old couple on the phone. They're impatient to be talking on the phone. Are your thoughts of your spouse refreshing you or are they draining you? Will you commit in this series to do the work, to be intentional with becoming a refreshing spouse?

We get this now in Verse 14. It moves beyond just my thoughts to the time we spend together.

14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms

from the vineyards of En Gedi. En Gedi is this lush, desert oasis that rejuvenates, refreshes, replenishes, relaxes us.

Amy and I view the world as the desert. We spend all day in it and then we come home. Let our home be the place where we don't sit in the driveway and be like, "Lord, give me one good reason why I should go in there right now... I want my home to be a place where I can't wait to get through those doors. I know we're empty nesters; I don't want to brag about it because there are some with young children. You have to find ways to refresh yourself. Make bedtime earlier. Make them sleep in. Put them in a room where you can't hear them when they do wake up. We've made the commitment in our home to be a refreshing home. Will you make that commitment, husband and wife.

Again, when we say what was natural early on needs to be intentional later on... To young budding love, those who are dating, engaged, or newlyweds, this is still pretty easy for you. But I want to tell you in the defining the relationship conversation, you need to ask yourself the question of the person you're dating right now. Are they refreshing. That's an important thing. Remember what she said last week? The thought of Solomon, just his name, refreshed her. His character refreshed her. That's why these conversations are so important.

Now, let's look at this last marker today. Attraction looks at the beauty inside and out. I loved it when Travis said, "Let your standard of beauty be that of your spouse," and it is. You're not one of millions, you're one in a million to me. You're the only one I think about. You're the only one I want to have an image of in my head.

15 How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes are doves.

In that day, beautiful eyes meant beautiful character, beautiful soul. The eyes were a window into the soul. So, they are moving from beauty on the outside to beauty on the inside. When I think about you and your outward looks. As your beauty fades... Again, at 50 years old, I am not Red Lobster's fresh catch of the day. I 100% get that. Tim Hawkins says, "This is as good as it's ever going to get. It's all downhill from here." I can't do a whole lot about this. I try... I don't try all that hard, but you know what I'm saying. I've resorted to vests and untucked black shirts. You know what I'm talking about. But the inside I have a lot to say about. And the inside you have a lot to say about. As your beauty fades on the outside, I hope your beauty is growing on the inside.

In 1 Peter, we read this in Verses 2 and 4 of Chapter 3. **2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.** Please hear me. This is not prohibiting you from dressing in nice clothes. This is not prohibiting you from wearing jewelry. This is not prohibiting you from wearing makeup. What he is saying is don't let this be your source of beauty. **4 Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.**

That's something all of us can do something about here. Growing our beauty on the inside. Making sure that is of great worth in God's sight. As beauty fades, let the inside be growing more.

Then she says back to him... If you are new to this book of Hebrew poetry, the Song of Songs, it's this duet between Solomon and the Shulamite woman. The daughters of Jerusalem are back up singers. So, she sings a lyric back to him.

How handsome you are, my beloved!

Oh, how charming! She moves from the outside in, speaking of his personality, that it is growing on the inside.

And our bed is verdant. It's green and lush. This is very important. We've got all these great word pictures of the home. You need to understand that here she is speaking of their marriage bed. They are not yet married until Chapter 3. They have their honeymoon in Chapter 4. Next week, we are going to read in Chapter 2 – do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. Sex is reserved for the marriage bed between a husband and a wife. You know we are clear on that at this church. We aren't into the hookup culture. We are into building toward exclusivity in marriage and saving the marriage bed for sexual intimacy. She said, "I see you as handsome and charming. I love your personality."

Then Verse 17 – **The beams of our house are cedars;**

our rafters are firs. She's speaking here of this mansion of security. Our house that we are not yet in together, are cedars and firs.

So, bottom line is this. Of all we talked about today, building security from Verse 17, defining the relationship, refreshing one another and honoring boundaries and building security into the relationship. Many of you who have gotten on the merry go round ride on the playground or you've walked across that bridge, part of the struggle... Again, not everything that happens to you in life is your fault. So, I understand some people pulled that plank out from underneath you. Some people were the ones on the outside spinning that thing... Stuff outside of your control. I totally get that. But maybe some of it was because you did not have security in the relationship. Why? Because you never defined the relationship, you slid into everything in the relationship.

You find yourself living with someone who is not your spouse, not because of a decision you made, but because you never made a decision. You never defined the relationship. You just kind of slid into it. You don't refresh one another and there is so much drama that marked the relationship, there was never this *when I think about you and I spend time with you, I am refreshed*. And you didn't honor boundaries. God's boundaries or the boundaries of the other person. You didn't have security, so go God's way with the security.

What happens when you are secure in the relationship. So many great benefits of security in a relationship.

1. When you are secure in your relationship, you let me process out loud without fear of judgment. I have a lot of stupid ideas. I'm the king of stupid ideas. Here's why I'm so grateful. This week, I listened to a guy, Jeremy Utley. He's a Stanford professor. He wrote the book called *Idea Flow*. He was at an event I was at. He was talking about genius ideas. I don't know if you know this, but everyone who worked around Steve Jobs said "The number of dopey ideas he had far outweighed his brilliant ideas, but you have to go through the dopey to get to the delightful.

This is what this guy came up with. To get a truly genius idea, you have to have about 2,000 dopey ideas. I looked at Amy and I'm excited because we drive down the road and I bring things up. We should try this. We should do this. And she's just like, "That is... I know in her mind and she's going *That is the dumbest thing I've ever heard*. But every now and then... Like we're thinking about our next space that we need to create here at Woodland Hills, to handle some of the overflow, and we were trying to figure out what to call it. I wish I could give you the list of all the ideas I came up with and most of them are completely and totally stupid. But you have to go through the process to get to that one. I'm just grateful for a wife that lets me process out loud without saying, "You are an idiot; that is dumb" and I know it exhausts her.

2. You don't nitpick my flaws and shortcomings. Have you been around that couple? They can't get on the same page for nothing. "Last week, we were at..." "NO! it wasn't last week; that was two weeks ago." I don't even want to hear the rest of the story; this is so brutal. I don't want to be a nitpicker and I'm grateful to have a wife that doesn't nitpick.

3. When you're secure in the relationship, you don't try to fix me. I have to ask Amy this quite often when she's sharing a struggle or a problem with me. I'll ask her, "Do you want me to fix it, or do you just want me to feel it?" there's a big difference.

4 When you're secure in the relationship, you listen to my opinions and feelings without seeing them as an attack on you. You are secure in who you are. I want to be secure in who I am, and we bring that to the table.

5. When you're secure in the relationship, you've defined the relationship, you refresh one another, you have boundaries that you honor. We'll talk more about that next week. You ask questions for greater understanding rather than responding with your point of view. You don't always have to be right. And for that, I am grateful.

For the one in here who has blown it... I know there's always... I just want to encourage you. We say this at our church all the time. As we talk through forming relationships, and you think about the last relationship that blew apart, whether that was a dating relationship, maybe an engagement that fell apart or maybe a marriage that fell apart. Here's what we say at our church all the time. Stop feeding your regrets and ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days. Press top on the narrative that says, "I can never be healed. I can never find joy." Don't feed all those narrative and don't feed those regrets. Learn what God's Word teaches. Thank God for his Word and go God's way.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I thank you for what you continue to do at our church, how you continue to bring a church family together that desires to help those in our community. Give us wisdom and discernment when it comes to relationships. Let us give the solid answers that you have in your Word to a generation and to a culture that is clueless and chaotic in the forming of relationships. These are not our ideas that we are coming up with; they are yours that you have spelled out clearly for us in scripture. May we teach them and give the authority behind them that come straight from you and may we do so with a clarity and conviction that that clarity and conviction can be found in the relationships of our church. From those with young budding love, to those with well-established vineyards.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.