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## Getting to Know You

### Part 3 – Exclusivity, Physical Touch, and Anticipation

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Today, we continue in Part 3 of this series, *Getting to Know You*. We're looking at the first two chapters of the Song of Songs, and we're looking at 12 markers of romantic relationship formation. If you have your bibles, turn to Song of Songs 2. We are going to get there in just a moment. We've been looking at this desire building in intensity and moving toward something. Last week, we talked about defining the relationship and how important that is and not just sliding into a relationship. We mentioned it last week and we will share it again here as we look at *Exclusivity, Physical Touch and Anticipation*.

Here's what we said about desire. Desire says, "I want you. I'm attracted to you, and I want to be with you." But we're moving in this great book of the Old Testament toward exclusivity and you see it build throughout all eight chapters that say "I want only you." I want to spend my life with you and, until the Lord returns or calls one of us home, we will be a couple.

Amy and I started dating at Liberty University during my senior year and her junior year. I was the assistant director of academic computing. I had about 40 tutors that were hired for the sole purpose of helping the students at Liberty pass Business 102. It was the most dreaded class at Liberty University because of this thing called Lotus123. They hated spread sheets. They were newer. And in the test, they had to put together an amortization table. I loved it. It came easy for me, but they hired all these tutors because people couldn't pass the class.

In Amy's Junior year, she took the class while I was kind of overseeing the program. She goes, "This will be awesome; I'm going to pass because you're going to do my homework." So, all I remember was the dreaded class. I had a mentor at Liberty who taught that class, so every student had Dr. Maurice Zafkey (sp). He was a Harvard graduate, and he was pretty smart. He called me into his office one day and he said, "Have a seat, Ted." I sit down and he goes, "I understand your interested in Amy Freitag." I said, "Yeah, we're dating and planning on getting married.

He lowered his head and shook it. I'm like What do you know that I don't know? And this is all he said, "You know she doesn't like my class." I said, "Dr. Zafkey, the entire student body hates your class. You just eliminated every potential candidate on campus because they all hate it."

And it's something that's interesting to me because sometimes parents have a very difficult time with their kids, knowing the difference between competency and character. I didn't marry Amy, I wasn't initially attracted to Amy on her spreadsheet skills.

What's interesting now is at this church she does more with spreadsheet than I will ever do again in my life.

We're talking about how do you know this is the one?

But now we're going to go exclusive. In Verse 1, you are going to see in this chapter some callbacks to Chapter 1 in the insecurities that the Shulamite woman has with her body and with her family and why would you even want me. So, in Verse 1, she's going to use two common flowers that are found on the plain of Sharon. When you think about the Plain of Sharon, I want you to think of this vast pasture land full of flowers. She's going to say what we looked at last week in that great Brad Paisley song, *The World*. She's going to say, "I am just one of millions. I'm just an ordinary, country girl. Why would you want me."

***I am a rose of Sharon,  
a lily of the valleys. When you look out at all that's out there, I'm just one."***

Solomon takes this word picture that she initiates, and he comes right back at her with this beautiful word picture. ***2 Like a lily among thorns...*** I hope you husbands in here are taking notes right now going I need some good word pictures. Because what he's saying is, "Those rich city girls are thorns. You, my girl, are mine and you stick out, my darling, among the young women. I choose you." That's what our passion is for young people in this church to think about romantic relationships, to think about marriage in a way that doesn't scare you, but in a way that you move out of this never defining it, never putting any words to it and just kind of working your way through the relationship as maybe you do through life.

I shared a playground toy with you last week. But you remember that old rusty, hot slide. You'd come down this thing and it would burn your legs, and you would get back up and climb right back up and do it again. This is a word picture for us of how many people move into romantic relationships. They slide their way into it, rather than decide. That's actually the blog of Dr. Scott Stanelly at the university of Denver. He says, "The power in relationship is decision. I choose you. I want you to be my boyfriend. I want you to be my girlfriend. Let's get engaged. Let's set a date – all these traditional relationship formation milestones. He said, "But that's not happening today because today, we're sliding into relationships. Some of you, in the relationship you're in right now, you slid into it, and you don't know how you got here. And commitment or exclusivity in marriage is not something that interests you.

I know this bugs senior adults in here as you've asked young people or the next generation to do something two weeks from now... They won't commit for fear of something better coming along. It's the exact same thing with relationships. How do I know you're the one?" How do I know I should commit to you until the Lord returns or calls one of us home?" You're sliding right now. I work with couples all the time who find themselves sharing an apartment and a dog and bills and they don't know how they got there. Because some of you slid into it really fast. And some of you have slid that quickly into relationship after relationship after relationship. And you wonder *why do I keep getting my heart broken*.

I know for many in here, this is your first exposure to the scripture, into what God says about romantic relationships.

I had an older gentleman in our church tell me last week, "When we went to premarital counseling over 50 years ago, they worked through a lot. And when we got to the sex part, they said, 'You'll figure that out.' They wouldn't talk to us about it."

So, we know from a lot of you this is brand new, but you've been sliding quickly into relationships and you've just blown past all of these traditional relationship formation milestones and now your like, maybe a better way is to take it slower, but you're still sliding. Whether it's fast or slow, it's all sliding.

Dr. Scott Stanley has the best definition of exclusivity and commitment. I've used it for 15 years now. I've not found one better and it's simply this, "Exclusivity makes the choice to give up all other choices." To give up all other flowers, to give up all other maidens. It's like "I am exclusive with you."

Some of you may be thinking, Why? Why be exclusive. "Ted, we like keeping it loose because you never know. Years from now, I may find someone I have better chemistry with." Well let me give you four things that dr. Stanley says about exclusivity:

**1. When you're exclusive in a relationship, it's a desire for a future together.** You begin picturing a special future. We're going to get to that in a moment with anticipation. "We're going to do this together. We're going to build something together."

**2. We're going to have a future, but we are going to build at being part of a team. It's me and you against the world."**

When Amy and I got married, we were what you would call broke. But I guess I never worried about it because I'm like, "We're together." And if we're in a tent, "we're together." Like if we're in a cheap, nasty apartment... And we had the nasty apartment, the small... When we rented it, it said, "Cute and cozy." Which are terms for old and small and hasn't been rug doctored in a long time. But we didn't care. We were 22 and 21 and we were together.

I remember buying our first house in Little Elm, Texas. We went to a choice neighborhood. They were building this 200-home subdivisions in North Texas like in four months. We went in with our checkbook. I walked in and Amy picked out the floor plan she wanted, and the cost of the home was \$86,000.00 I was like, "Man.... We can't afford this. And then she wanted upgrades. She got \$8,800.00 worth of upgrades and I wrote a \$500.00 deposit check going, "We're bad stewards!"

Yesterday, I was driving through Nashville (true story) they had the signs up pointing to neighborhoods under construction. No lie, it said, in Nashville, on the sign, "Homes starting at 1.7 million. I would call that a completed home, not a starting home. But I want the seniors in here to go back and think about when it all started for you. You were together.

**3. Exclusivity gives high priority to the relationship.** Do you know what that means? This is why a lot of people won't go exclusive. You have to give up your single life. You may have to give up single friends. You may have to give up single activities. But there is high priority on the relationship. You've seen this joke online I don't know how many times. "The punishments we had as children are now our

blessings as adults.” You have to stay home tonight. You’re going to bed early. And some of you are in that transition right now. Listen, when it’s you and me... It’s ride or die. We’re in this together.

**4. It means you are going to have to sacrifice.** Things are going to change, but man, you desire that. How many men in here that there is no greater joy in your life than to work hard all week, bring home a paycheck, sign it, and give it to your wife to spend all of it. That is great joy.

You realize there is a joy that you might not be experiencing right now, but trust me, when you take on the responsibility, guys, of a wife and children, there’s joy in that. When you go to the mall and you look at the shoes you bought two years ago and go, “These are good. I’m good. we can’t afford buy them shoes and me shoes.”

I’m so proud of the young people in our church and I love going to young adults and students on Wednesday night and just seeing them get it. They get it and they understand how important responsibility is.

Exclusivity moves to Physical touch. **3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men.**

**I delight to sit in his shade...** What does an apple tree provide? It provides shade and shelter. This goes back to Chapter 1 when she was insecure about her body. “Dark I am yet lovely. My brothers were angry with me. They made me work in the fields.” So, what she’s saying there is “I now have someone that I’m under his shade. And I have protection. And I have shelter.”

**and his fruit is sweet to my taste.** “I get a little snack” For you Baptists, this is a three-point, alliterated outline in one verse – shelter, shade, and snack. “I’m sitting under his shade, and I can reach up and grab a little snack.”

Verse 4 is really going to frustrate the Baptists. **4 Let him lead me to the banquet hall...** Banquet hall literally means house of wine. And in the Bible, wine is a symbol for joy. And drinking wine is for joyous occasions and for celebration. And for weddings. She’s saying, “We are exclusive...” We talked about this a little bit last week. It’s a signal to family and friends that we are a couple and now he is going public with the relationship. He is going to raise a flag over me or a banner. **...and let his banner over me be love.**

Let me just say this to our seniors in here that it’s been some time. But early on in the relationship, this was natural. Now you need to be intentional with continuing to raise the flag over your spouse. Speaking words of high value over your spouse. How do you raise a banner of love over your spouse after you’ve been married 10, 20,30, 40, 50 years? We encourage something at this church called an honor list. That you would write down all the reasons why your spouse is highly valuable and gift it to your spouse, but more than that, read it out loud in front of family and friends. Speak words of high value. Raise the banner of love. She says, “I am protected when I am with him. I am shaded under him, I am refreshed when I’m under him. His banner over me is love.

### **5 Strengthen me with raisins,**

**refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.** I think every single person in here, no matter how long you've been married, remembers the time you were faint with love. You literally, physically felt the effects of love. How many remember that? How many it's been a while? But you remember. We called it weak in the knees. I would get around Amy when we were first dating and I would stumble over my words, I was shaky. That's called being faint with love.

She's saying, "I need to be refreshed." And in an ancient song, raisins and apples were like aphrodisiacs. Like, "The desire is building, and I want to be with Solomon." Remember, if you're new to this book, in chapters one and two, they are dating. They don't get married until chapter 3. In Verse 6, we move into physical touch, intimate touch

### **6 His left arm is under my head,**

**and his right arm embraces me.** There are some senior adults in here right now. You haven't touched your wife like this in a long time. You know research says your wife needs 12 non sexual touches a day and it's not all at one time. So, I'm challenging every married man in here this week. Sometime, when she's least expecting it, walk up and take your left hand and shoot it there behind her neck and bring her down. There are seniors a little more feeble going, "We are going to end up on the floor." And that's okay. Put your arm around her and look her in the eyes...

I have to tell you that I got this text after the 8:15. I don't know if people want me to share their texts, but here we go. "A granddaughter, after the 8:15 gathering, was in the car on the way home with her grandparents. This is the conversation in the car. Grandma was telling grandpa that he didn't need to try this because he would fall and then she would fall. "So, I told them they could do it if they had at least two spotters." They both said, "We better avoid it altogether.

Then the granddaughter says, "The local headline – "Local hospital see a rise in admission after pastor advises older couples to spice up their marriage.

This is natural for dating and engaged couples. You need to be intentional with it.

Years ago, probably over three decades ago, Focus on the Family put out what they called *12 steps of stages of physical intimate touch*. I think this is helpful for us to go through because it will show you the steps that you should take... Again, in this series, we're not encouraging any couple to rush marriage. We're not encouraging anyone to rush a relationship. You'll see it through these. They are kind of slow.

**1. Eye to body.** You notice someone. She may notice him, he may notice her. But they haven't looked back. That may be a while. I can tell you that at Liberty university, I noticed Amy six months before she ever knew me.

**2. eye to eye.** It's reciprocated and she looked at me, quickly. Didn't spend a lot of time there. I didn't give up.

**3. Voice to Voice.** This is when you begin having a conversation. Can I just encourage the young people in our church who are considering dating or are dating. Go on a first date with zero expectation of anything other than conversation. Maybe say that up front. "It's just coffee." I'm going to tell you number three is a long step for a long stage. If you are going to be examining character, that can take a while. Don't rush number 3.

**4. Hand to hand.** It may be a handshake. There could be handholding, but that's not really this stage. But you get closer and there is that first physical touch.

**5. Hand to shoulder.** This is kind of the good buddy. I'm going to give this to a lot of people today. "Hey, what's going on! Get in there." That's a non-sexual touch, but it's moving, it's progressing.

**6. Hand to waist.to waist.** You're not going to see me go up to any of my buddies and take them by the waist. If I did, I wouldn't be your pastor. The waist is more intimate than the shoulder. I'm only going to share eight of the twelve with you this morning. Nine through twelve are sexual and private, twelve being intercourse. I hope you understand why the relationship derails immediately if you jump from number one to number twelve in a week. Or on a first or second date. That's not how you were wired. It's not how God has planned relationships for you and for me.

**7. Face to face.** You won't see me out in the lobby holding somebody's face close to mine. It's too much. You'll see that level of intimacy between a parent comforting a child, and you'll see that in romantic relationships.

**8. Hand to head** with face to face, we can be hugging, we can be kissing. But it's hand to head and now it's intimate.

We are going to leave out 9 – 12.

You're like, "That's where we are in our relationship. We have moved on. We're at step six, seven, or eight, but we are not yet married. That's Chapter 3. And if that's the level of intensity... By the way, we are not looking here at this church for the passion, the desire to stay at that level and never be defined into exclusivity because that's what we call infatuation. Infatuation is short-lived passion that doesn't build toward anything. So, if you're like, "We're there and the desire is so intense. Please hear from this church there is absolutely nothing wrong with desire. God wired you in that desire, but... this is why we said last week, after defining the relationship, examine the character, and then what? Establish boundaries.

That's verse **7 *Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you...*** I love that this is the opening weekend of hunting season. ***...by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.***

What is Verse 7 saying and what sexual ethic follows throughout all of scripture? It's this simple right here. Don't sexualize a relationship before marriage. Don't go to steps 9 through 12 before marriage.

I know when we talk about this there are couples in here that are living together now. There are couples not living together, having sex. I want you to know our desire at this church is never to put you

on a guilt trip. Our desire here is that you would know Jesus, would know what he did for you, that you would seek forgiveness for your sins. Some of you have sinned and the guilt and the shame in this area walks with you. That is not God's plan for your life. Do not feed your regrets, but ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days. He died for your sins, even this sin, the sin of sexualizing a relationship before marriage. And we are clear in this church to call it that. It is sin. Sexual relationships outside of marriage.

I just want to share the gospel for those who are letting the guilt and the shame set in. Be reminded today of 2 Corinthians 5: 21 – ***For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin.*** And all God's people said... Amen.

He died for you so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

In 1 John 1:9, this is all that we're asking that you do today. Confess your sins. "We're going to establish boundaries, we're going to change today." Before you establish boundaries, confess, repent, and then out of that, establish boundaries until the day of your wedding. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And to be reminded there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the lifegiving spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

I think one of the greatest challenges we see in this area are couples who are not on the same page with this. There are some of you right now falling under conviction for the way in which you're living, but you're with somebody right now who is not. You repent. This is not something you need to do as a couple. This is something you need to do individually first and foremost and then you establish the boundaries. But there is no condemnation. This isn't about a guilt trip or shame.

Then you're also a new creation. ***If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come.*** We want God's best for you and that includes his plan for your life in relationships, in marriage, and in sex.

Anticipation – I want young people to know this church pictures a special future for you and for your marriage. Some of you are single and you've been single for a long time and that's God's plan for your life right now, and he's using you in that area and that's great. You know this is a message for romantic relationship formation. So, we go to Verse 8 as we learn that anticipation pictures a special future for your marriage. And this is a church that wants to be a backup singer to your young, budding love and your future duet in marriage.

***8 Listen! My beloved!***

***Look! Here he comes,  
leaping across the mountains,  
bounding over the hills.***

So, get this imagery and this energy in your head.

***9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.***

***Look! There he stands behind our wall,***

***gazing through the windows,***

***peering through the lattice.*** If you're brand new to Hebrew poetry, you're like, "This guy is a peeping Tom. This is kind of creepy." That's not at all what this is. He's wanting to see if she's home. I don't know if you remember those days. Amy and I were dating, and we lived in dorms. I just remember standing there with a bunch of guys on date night, waiting for our girlfriends to come down, but we just couldn't wait. We'd hear someone coming down the stairs... Anticipating which girl was coming down the steps. Guys, I just want to encourage you. Get back to anticipation. Like You long to get home. "Can't wait to see her." Splash on the Old Spice. Get cleaned up. Get some energy back into your relationship.

***10 My beloved spoke and said to me,***

***"Arise, my darling,***

***my beautiful one, come with me.***

***11*** You're seeing this young, budding love moving from winter early in the relationship, now it's ready to go. We're ready for marriage. Spring and summer is what's pictured the relationship moving through the seasons. ***See! The winter is past;***

***the rains are over and gone.***

***12 Flowers appear on the earth;***

***the season of singing has come,***

***the cooing of doves...*** The turtle dove was a migratory resident in Palestine, and you would hear the cooing in spring, knowing they were staying through the summer.

***...is heard in our land.***

***13 The fig tree forms its early fruit;***

***the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.***

***Arise, come, my darling;***

***my beautiful one, come with me.*** "It's you and me."

We believe in marriage here. We don't want you to rush it, but we want you to pursue it. We want you to see it as a value. So, even if you're not married, we understand marriage might not be for you right now, but the scripture in Hebrews 13: 4 says marriage should be honored by all. That means even if you're not married, you should be for marriage. You should see it as a building block of society. You should see it as God's plan for the family, for the church, and for culture.

I'm sad today... Look at this research out of the University of Virginia. Brad Wilcox does a great job with the National Marriage Project. He's been doing that for years. He surveyed adults ages 18 to 40 and 75% said making a good living was crucial to fulfillment in life while only 32% said marriage was crucial to fulfillment in life.

Where do they get this from? They get it from their parents. And by the way, I get a lot of heat on this. I have people come at me because of my enthusiasm for marriage, the ministry God's given me in marriage, and they say, "You have turned marriage into an idol." They are the ones pushing education and career. I go, "How have I turned marriage into an idol, and you didn't turn education and career into an idol. An idol is anything you put before God. We honor and esteem marriage as highly valuable, but we don't put it before God. We know this is his plan for the church and for culture.



Parents are like, “What’s one thing I can do to help my kids early on in the home?” Honor marriage. Show them what a good marriage looks like. Practice it every day. Grandma and Grandpa, I need your grandkids to see that, so they see it’s a good thing. For the parents, the stats are even more staggering. Pugh Research Center’s survey says 88% of parents said it was extremely or very important for their kids to be financially independent and 21% of parents said it was extremely or very important for their kids to marry. I think they believe that when their kids are in their 20s, but I don’t talk to a lot of parents with children in their 40s calling the office saying, “My son or daughter has had a crisis in their career, can you talk to them?” I get that they had a crisis in their marriage. “I wish we would have been a home that honored marriage more and would have been concerned about marriage more than what school they were getting into, what degree they were getting.’

Listen, I’m for education, I’m for career. I just don’t put it before marriage. The author of an article in the New York Times, who actually put all this research out, David Brooks, wrote “To be happy, we know from research marriage matters more than career.” Here’s what he said, If he were to sit down with a 20 something, this is what I would share with them. There are many reasons you may not find marital happiness in your life. Maybe you won’t be able to find a financially stable partner or one who wants to commit. Maybe you’ll marry a great person but find yourselves drifting. Sliding takes place before marriage and it can take place in marriage as well. But don’t let it be because you didn’t prioritize marriage. Don’t let it be because you didn’t think hard about marriage when you were young. My strong advice is to obsess less about your career and to think a lot more about marriage.

I’ve been using the research of Brad Wilcox for over 15 years now. Here’s what he said, “When it comes to predicting overall happiness, a good marriage is far more important than how much education you get, how much money you make, how often you have sex, and yes, even how satisfied you are with your work.”

We anticipate marriage and I’m just shocked at the number of young people that tell me, “I can’t wait to be married,” but the parents are saying whoa, whoa. May this always be a church that we don’t rush marriage, but we avoid the unnecessary delay of it. And we, followers of Jesus, begin painting a beautiful picture of marriage for our children. Mom and dad, grandma and grandpa, it starts with you enjoying your marriage. Give them a marriage worth repeating. Give them a marriage worth imitating. Let them see it. When you’re just sitting there and your communication is slurping soup together all day, you’ve got to find new ways to be intentional with what was natural early on, so they have something to look forward to.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray for the one who is dealing with guilt and shame right now to know that anyone among the living has hope. That they would confess their sin to you right now and that they would have the conversation that needs to take place between and boyfriend and girlfriend or a fiancée establishing clear boundaries in the relationship, so that as they pursue exclusivity and they work through these stages or steps of physical intimate touch, they can anticipate the joy of marriage. That they can establish boundaries early on so they can enjoy steps 9 through 12 later on. Let this be where we are clear as a church. 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 and believe in their heart he’s been raised from the dead that they will be saved. We pray this in the authority of the name of Jesus... and everyone agreed and said... Amen.