

Beloved: Longing for Intimacy

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[0 : 0 0] So, Happy New Year. It is a new year. Happy Epiphany. Merry Christmas. We're still in the Christmas season. But with a new year, it feels only right to start a new sermon series. So we're going to be doing that this evening. So let me open by asking you a question. Music lovers, what would you consider to be the greatest love song ever written? Greatest love song ever written?

I know that that might somewhat depend on your taste in music and whether you like older stuff or more modern, recent stuff. Did a little research, went to billboard.com. Here's what they had to say. Top three greatest love songs of all time. I guess that means in all recorded human history. Here we go. In third place, We Found Love by Rihanna. It's pretty romantic.

You know, we fell in love in a hopeless place. You know, that's sweet. Number two, greatest love song of all time. I'll Make Love to You by Boyz II Men.

You know, they were a big part of my childhood. I don't know if they were for you. Maybe I'm dating myself. Boyz II Men, huge when I was growing up in school. And I love the directness of this song. You know, I'm going to make love to you. That's what I'm planning to do, right? That's, there's no mystery there, right? And then the top greatest love song of all time is Diana Ross and Lionel Richie's Endless Love. Do you know this song? Endless Love. Dan is raised, it must be one of his favorite songs. Endless Love. Right? So top three, I don't know if you agree. If you open the Bible to almost the very middle of the Bible, there is another love song. And it's one that we don't often look at or pay much attention to. It's what has come to be known as the song of songs, right?

[2 : 0 4] So that's a big claim. It's not just a song. It's the song of song, the song to end all songs. And this is a great love song. And so beginning today, we're going to actually start working our way verse by verse through the song of songs. Now, this is going to require a longer than normal introduction. And so we're just going to dive right in. There are a few things that I have to say before we get started. In terms of the song of songs, this is in one sense what we consider to be wisdom literature. So the Psalms, the Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, these are wisdom literature writing. So they function to orient us to the way things are, to help us know how to live in the world. Wisdom literature. But also, as we're going to see in much more detail, this is erotic poetry.

It is very clearly about sexual intimacy. And it's notoriously difficult to interpret. In 10 years of preaching and serving as a pastor, this is hands down the hardest series I've ever had to do, simply because this book is so challenging. It's incredibly challenging. The biggest question across history regarding the song and the interpretation of the song has been this. Number one question.

Do we interpret this as an allegory, meaning it's really meant to be a spiritual book about the love between God and his people? Or do we interpret it literally, that this is actually about sexual intimacy between a man and a woman? How do we interpret it? Now, historically, up until the Reformation, the Jewish tradition and the Christian tradition, pretty much across the board, interpreted the song in an allegorical fashion. So they said, this is allegory. It's purely spiritual. It's just a bunch of metaphor. And actually, the Council of Constantinople in 550 AD expressly forbade teaching the Song of Songs literally. It was forbidden. Now, I think that's kind of interesting, because most of the time, the liberal approach to Scripture is to interpret it allegorically. You know, well, Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead, and this isn't actually about sin as we think it is. You know, it's all allegory, right? And conservatives tend to be the ones who take Scripture more at face value. Well, this is what it says. And that is true for every other part of the Bible except the Song of Songs. When you get to the Song of Songs, conservatives, for some reason, say, no, this is very obviously allegory. You know, there's nothing to see here. Total allegory. It's only about God. It has nothing to do with humans or human love. Those are definitely not breasts. I know it says breasts, but it's obviously not about breasts, right? So it's a mystery. And I think that what that does is it really reveals a lot about the discomfort that Christians have had over the centuries with sexuality.

And it reveals even more the kind of what you might consider to be a Gnostic tradition running through the church since the early days of the church that tends to artificially and wrongfully separate the physical from the spiritual and then to elevate the spiritual over the physical. So this could never be a book about human sexuality or intimacy, right? And so the fact is, if you read it, as we will, it becomes impossible to deny that this is, in fact, about human love and intimacy, the kind that exists between a husband and wife. The entire poem is about the ideal sex and intimacy that exists within the context of a marriage between Solomon and the Shulamite woman. And yet, as Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5, even marriage, sex, and intimacy, even those mysteries, he says, as mysterious as that is, it actually points us to the even deeper, greater, more ultimate mystery of the love that exists between

Christ and his church. So yes, it is about human love, and yet even human love and sex and intimacy point us to the deeper spiritual reality of Christ and his church. So as we read this, we're going to look at it through two lenses. First, we're going to read it as wisdom. There's a lot in here to help us know what love is, what intimacy is, what sexuality is, what marriage is. It teaches us a lot about those things. So it is wisdom, but it's also a window. It's a window that again and again and again will take us deeper into the heart of God and teach us more and more and more about what that love actually means.

So one last thing before we dive in. You know, we're about ready to start, but I just want to say one more thing about this. Why study the Song of Psalms? That's what my wife asked me. She said, of all the things that you could do, why would you do this? And that's a fairly common conversation in our house, but she said it with particular vehemence, you know, as I was preparing to do this. And, you know, and there's really, there's a lot of reasons I could give. I'll give you two. Number one, I've been having conversations for 10 years about sexuality and it's a function of where we live and who we minister to. But most of the time when people think about what the Bible has to say about sex and about intimacy, they think in terms of what the Bible says is allowed or not allowed. These things are okay. These things are not okay. And the only commentary the Bible really offers us is where's the line? What's okay? What's not okay? It's very sad that that's the case because right here, the Song of Songs, in my opinion, is one of the deepest, richest, most profound sources of wisdom and beauty and truth when it comes to sexuality and intimacy and marriage that I think you can find anywhere. And yet it is very seldom preached and it's largely overlooked for maybe some of the reasons that we've already described. So that's the first reason. The second reason is this. I think everybody out there, religious, irreligious, left, right, I think everybody would agree that there are issues in our society related to sex. That we have some problems. And you look at Harvey Weinstein and porn epidemic and all these things, nobody's going to say, I think we're all in a great place. But here's the thing that I'm going to contend again and again and again over the next few weeks is that our fundamental problem in our society is not a sex problem. It's an intimacy problem. That in fact, we as a society may be over-sexed, we may be sex-obsessed, but we are starving for intimacy. And the good news is, this book is not actually about sex. What it's really about is intimacy. It's about the kind of intimacy that God designed us to experience with one another, but also with him. And so our central focus over the next few weeks is going to be understanding this intimacy. So whether you're someone who is, you're single and you're longing for intimacy, you're married and you're longing for intimacy, maybe you're dating somebody that you hope to marry one day, maybe you're dating somebody that you should probably break up with. Maybe you're in a sexless marriage. Maybe you're in a lonely marriage. Maybe you're in a marriage where the sex is good and the intimacy is good and you just want to maintain that. Wherever you are, my hope in prayer is that this will have something to say to everybody because intimacy is a core part of what it means to be a human being. So today, what we're going to do is we're going to look just at the first eight verses of Song of Songs, chapter one. We don't have time to do any more than that. And we're going to read through this together verse by verse. And along the way, I'll draw out three points about intimacy and what it takes to build intimacy. So let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, you say in your word that all scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for our growth. And Lord, we open these words together trusting that promise that we're not going to rely on human wisdom or rhetoric, but rather we deeply desire our author, our maker, to teach us about our hearts and ultimately to draw us deeper into your heart. And so we pray this with reverence and expectation. And we say all of it in

[11 : 05] the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. So Song of Songs, chapter one, verse one. Let's put it up on the screen. It opens this way. This is kind of the introductory verse, the Song of

Songs, which is Solomon's. Now I want to say a few things about Solomon. This could be translated the song which was authored by Solomon or the song which is about Solomon or the song which pertains to Solomon's court. There are a number of ways it could be translated. I tend to side with the scholars who say that the Song of Songs was indeed written by Solomon and that it was written late in his life when he was an older man. And I actually believe that Solomon wrote this almost as an act of repentance.

That as God inspired and guided his hand, Solomon, as he reflected on his life, wrote the Song of Songs as a kind of vision of the life and the marriage and the intimacy that he wishes he could have had if he had made different choices in his youth. So I think there's a kind of reflective longing that's embedded in the Song of Songs. Now in real life, if you look at 1 Kings chapter 11, we learn that Solomon in fact had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Now you can try to explain some of that away, political alliances and that's the way things were back then and yada yada. Even by ancient Near Eastern standards, this is excessive. Excessive. It's funny that you have to say that, but a thousand women is excessive, okay? And it doesn't say this in the text, but it makes one wonder, is there a sex addiction in operation here? What's going on? Now, fortunately for us, Solomon also wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, another wisdom book. And in it, he is also writing from the perspective of an old man reflecting back on choices that he's made and what he's learned.

And so if we look at Ecclesiastes chapter 2, he says, he explains his reasoning in building this vast army of women. He says, I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself. And then it says he gathered a great harem of the most beautiful women in the land. Anyone, you know, the best of the best. And then it says in verse 10, and whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure. Sounds like our modern sexual ethic more or less, right? If I desired it, I did it. And then at the end of the chapter, here's what Solomon concludes.

[13 : 49] After all of that, here's his conclusion. It was all meaningless. It was all empty. I was chasing the wind. So this is a man who had all the sex he wanted with the most beautiful women in the land. And at the end of it all, he's essentially confessing, I'm empty inside. I'm hollow. All of that meant nothing. I was chasing the wind.

And I think what we can conclude is that Solomon all the while had not been searching for sex or sexual gratification. He had actually been searching for intimacy. And he never found it, at least not there. So this is the first point I want to make. I know we're only one verse in, but let's make one point here. It's a very important point as we start this book together.

Here's the first point about intimacy. Intimacy is vital for human flourishing. It's vital. Every single human being here needs intimacy. Sexual gratification is not. Now, sexual reproduction is necessary for the furthering of the species. But sexual gratification as we define it in our society is not. Intimacy is. Sexual gratification is not. See, the reason that we need to make that point is because I think like Solomon, our culture has it exactly backwards. We prioritize sexual gratification over intimacy. Like no other culture in history, we somehow have the idea that if I'm not having great sex regularly or when I want it, if that's not regularly a part of my life, then something is wrong with me. If I'm not doing that, then that's a problem. And if I go long enough out doing it, then I'm going to develop some kind of pathology. On the other hand, we treat intimacy as though it's optional. Intimacy is something that you need to be careful of. You don't want to get entangled until you're ready. And we treat it in many ways like a switch, right? We've come to treat intimacy like a switch that we can flip on and off when it fits into our life instead of understanding that intimacy is a capacity that needs to be developed over time. So we say, for instance, we say to women, you know, it's empowering for you to avoid emotional entanglement. One author says that we treat emotional entanglement and intimacy today like an unwanted pregnancy 30 years ago. You know, if you allow that to happen, it's going to derail your life. So we tell women, avoid that. What you need to do is, you know, it's okay to hook up. It's okay to pseudo date, which is kind of on again, off again. Maybe he'll text, maybe he won't, hooking up when both of us have had enough to drink kind of dating. And it's okay to do that, but as long as you don't care too much, because you need to focus on your education and your career and getting ahead. And then when you're, you've gotten to that place where you're established, then you can be open to intimacy. In other words, when you, when you arrive and you have that career, then flip the switch and look around and you're ready for intimacy. Turn it on, but keep it off before then. We say likewise about pornography. We say, you

know, pornography, part of a sexually liberated culture. Pornography is a good thing. Free speech. We need to have it out there. It's good for everybody to have the kind of society where that's out there and, and you can use it. And it's just a normal sexual outlet that you can use if you need to. But you know, we tell men just, you know, turn the switch off when you're using porn. And then when you're with your partner or spouse or whatever, flip the switch on as though you can just flip it on and off. And in reality, what this actually does is we are behaviorally conditioning people to separate sex and intimacy over time. We are conditioning people to separate those things. And so this produces men who are increasingly incapable of being sexually aroused by a real flesh and blood woman. And you have married men who are relying on pornography to arouse them so that they can then engage with their wife, right? You have men who, who simply can't feel any real desire for anyone who's actually a real person. And it produces women who struggle with, with emotional despair and self-hatred and loneliness. Yeah, I don't know if you read the piece by Leah Fessler. She was a student at Middlebury College and she did her senior thesis on the hookup culture at Middlebury. And she, so she interviews all of these women. She does a survey and an in-person interviews and tries to get a great representative sample. Here's what she concludes. I don't know if

this is going to surprise you or not, but virtually every single woman she talked to said the same thing. They play along with the hookup culture. You know, they go along with it. They pretend not to mind it either because they think it's pro-feminist or because they secretly hope that if they hook up and that leads to another hookup, that that might actually turn into a real dating relationship. So they play along for a number of reasons. But deep down across the board, all these women hate it. They hate it. And they find that, you know, she says, the problem is I would tell myself, I don't care, don't care, don't care. And then we would start having sex and guess what would happen? I would start caring and I would start checking my phone. I would wonder why hasn't he texted me? Why haven't I heard from him? And it's been two weeks, it's been three weeks. And she says, she would just start obsessing. And she says that's all she would do with her friends is they would obsess over these guys that they're not supposed to care about. And yet they care.

[19 : 45] And it's driving them crazy. And here's what she says. She says, in reality, talking about herself and her friends, listen to this. We were desperate to know what it felt like to be wanted.

We were desperate for a chance at intimacy. Now, while most women hate the hookup culture, most men love it. That's simple, simple truth.

And just to be totally honest, it is very hard, I think, for many women to sleep with a guy and not start to develop feelings.

It's very easy for guys to do that. Guys can, we can, a guy can literally sleep with a woman, have a great time, and literally walk away and never care about them again.

I mean, that's just the way it is. That's not to say it doesn't do damage. It's just not felt quite so quickly.

[20 : 48] I think a lot of men are very much like Solomon. It can take us maybe years before we start to realize there's something really wrong in here. I'm really empty.

It can take us years to begin to realize, and maybe only after we get into a marriage where we begin to realize, I actually don't know how to have intimacy. I have never developed that capacity. I've not cared and not cared and not cared, and now I'm really good at it.

I don't even know what intimacy means. Right? So, as we reflect on this, I want to contrast that with an example of a man that I know who got married.

He and his wife were very attracted to each other, and soon after they got married, she developed a medical condition, which meant she was unable to have sex. And so this couple, they were together for over 30 years until she passed away.

30 years of a sexless marriage. And you know what he says in the aftermath of that? He says, we had an amazing marriage. And he says, at first, at first I panicked, and I didn't know what I was going to do, and I didn't know if I was going to make it, and all my friends told me to trust the Lord and stay in it.

[21 : 58] And he says, very soon I began to realize something that totally took me off guard. He says, I began to realize that my deep emotional need for intimacy far outweighed my need for sexual desire, sexual gratification.

And he says, it wasn't easy, and ideally in a marriage you have both. Ideally you have both. He said, but what I learned is that what I really needed is intimacy. In their marriage, they had an

amazingly, profoundly intimate marriage.

In many ways, he says, the fact that they couldn't have sex forced them to develop intimacy in all kinds of other ways. He said it was profoundly intimate and profoundly satisfying and fulfilling marriage. But no sex.

Now I will say this before we move on. Ideally you have both. Right? And here's the way it works. The more intimacy you have, the better the sex.

The more intimacy you have, the better the sex. Good sex has nothing to do with technique. It has everything to do with intimacy and emotional connection. So for those people who are married, that is where the focus needs to be if you want a great sex life.

[23 : 02] Develop intimacy. And that's what we're going to be talking about for the next few weeks so you're in the right place. We're going to be moving on now. We have to look and actually get into the song itself. I want to say this.

This is a song. So it's meant to be sung. So imagine we're at a wedding and this is a song that could have easily been sung across the week of a Jewish wedding celebration.

And there are multiple parts. You know, I toyed with the idea of having people come up and sing the different parts to kind of illustrate that. And then I realized that would be horrendously awkward. So we're not going to do that. I mean, have you read this?

So, you know, and I don't know who would even volunteer for that. So, but imagine, if you will, you have instruments playing and, you know, people playing instruments and then we have three singing parts.

There's, there's the Shulamite woman and she sings over half the verses, about 55 verses. Then there's the Solomon, the man. And then we have the chorus and the chorus chimes in throughout the song.

[24 : 02] And that's very important. We'll come back to that. So, let's get into the song itself. Beginning with verse 2. This is the Shulamite woman as she begins to sing. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.

For your love is better than wine. Your anointing oils are fragrant. Your name is oil poured out. Therefore, virgins love you. Draw me after you.

Let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. So that can be translated, may the king bring me into his chamber. Now, let's go forward. Here the chorus chimes in and they say, we will exult and rejoice in you.

We will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you. Now, this is the community weighing in and saying, we approve of this. We love you guys together. More of this.

You guys go spend time together. We're so excited that you love each other, right? And then, as we move forward, now it comes back to the woman and the woman gets personal. And we begin to learn a little more about her heart.

[25 : 03] She says, I'm very dark, but lovely. Now, that's not a racial darkness. This is, she's, it's a suntan. We'll, I'll show you why a little bit further on.

She says, I'm very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I'm dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. So what's happening here? Well, we're, we're, we're beginning to see a little more about this woman.

This Shulamite woman is obviously attracted to the man. She says, I want him to kiss me right now. I want him to take me into his chamber, which means sexual intimacy, right now.

And she's obviously attracted to him physically. She says, you know, I like the way he looks. I want him to kiss me. I like the way he smells. Men used to wear scented oil, a lot like ancient Near Eastern Cologne. But then, what does she say?

[26 : 05] She says, you know, I'm not only physically attracted to him. He says, she says, your name is like its own form of perfume. And I'm drawn to that. Now, by name, she means his whole person.

In other words, she's attracted not just to his physical appearance, but to his character. You have a good name. You have a good reputation. You're well known. You're well respected. And I'm drawn to that. I'm drawn to the fact that you're a man of integrity.

So that's what she's really drawn to. Now, if we go to this passage, beginning in verse 5, we learn that not only is he a man of good character, but she is as well. She's here talking about her insecurity.

She goes, you know, don't look at me. And notice she's not saying it to the man, she's saying it to the women. Sometimes women can be really critical of one another's appearance, right? And so I know some women who worry way more about what other women think than they do about what the guys are trying to impress think, you know?

So she says, oh, you know, daughters of Jerusalem, don't judge me because I have dark skin. And she goes, I'll tell you why I have such dark skin. Her dad's not in the picture.

[27 : 06] He's never mentioned once, which is odd, so he's probably dead. And so her brothers have more than likely had to take over the family business. And so they're very resentful, obviously, about that.

And so they've put all that responsibility on her. So she's been so busy tending to the family business that she has not been able to keep up her appearance. And so notice what she's saying. She goes, I'm very insecure about this. Don't judge me about this. Don't judge my appearance. Here's why I look the way I do. But under that, we see that she's also a woman of tremendous character. She's a woman who's willing to sacrifice her appearance in order to do what needs to be done to provide for her family, to be responsible.

And so we see that this is a couple where both the man and the woman are people of deep character. And that's really, really important because it leads us to the second point we want to make about intimacy, that intimacy involves the whole person.

It involves the whole person. And the reason I need to make this point is because there are a lot of people these days who say that they're terrified of getting married and terrified of losing their desire.

[28 : 10] What if I get married and then we stop being attracted? to each other. But the thing we need to realize is that the thing that gives long-term satisfaction in marriage is not physical attraction.

It's not. And to be totally honest, no matter how attractive you are, no matter how attractive the person is that you marry, give it enough time and two things are going to happen.

One, it's just going to ebb and flow. Ask anybody with young kids, elementary school or younger age kids and they're probably in an ebb. It's just a reality.

It's a reality. Or there's not quite as much flow as they would like. So that life just does that to you. And the other thing that's going to happen is over time we all just become less physically attractive.

attractive. In our society if we thought age was attractive which we probably should it would be different. But in our society we will all be considered less attractive 10, 15 years from now as we are right now.

[29 : 11] It's just going to happen. But the thing that matters and the thing that remains is character. In other words who are you when no one is looking?

That's what I mean by character. So for those of you who are looking for someone to be with trying to figure out who you want to date and actually marry physical attraction matters. Don't let anyone tell you that physical attraction doesn't matter.

It does. But it doesn't matter nearly as much as character. It doesn't matter nearly as much as what a person is like on the inside. So I'll ask you these questions. Are you attracted?

Think about the person you're with or want to be with. Are you attracted to their character? Is their name like a perfume that draws you? If you lost your sight and could no longer see them would you still want to be with them?

Right? Do they share your values? Do they share your love for the Lord? Do they prioritize faith the way you do? Is there a commonality of personhood there or not?

[30 : 07] If not if the answer to those questions are no you should probably get out because you're setting yourself up for disaster. By the way this is why it's really important that the chorus is chiming in and saying we approve of this relationship.

because it is very, very, very easy to allow physical intimacy and physical attraction to blind you to major characterological red flags.

You can have red flags in the relationship red flags in the person's character but you can be blinded if there's enough physical connection. You can be tempted to minimize those things.

Five or ten years from now those things are massive. It's why it's very important to have a community involved every step of the way. For married people I would say don't worry about losing the spark.

It happens. It comes and goes. And don't worry about getting old as though somehow this will fade. You know some people say well when I get older I'll just get a little nip-tuck. I'll get a little Botox and I'll be okay.

[31 : 10] And you know if that's your thing then good on you. But I'll say this. That's not going to make for a healthy intimate marriage or a great sex life. The thing that is going to make a massive difference is if you spend between now and over the next five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years focusing on your relationship with the Lord allowing the Holy Spirit to work in you to transform you to shape and to mold your character then the older you get the more beautiful you will become.

It's a promise. It's a guarantee. So this is the second point. So first point intimacy is vital for human flourishing. Sexual gratification not necessarily.

Second point intimacy involves the whole person. It's not just physical. It's much more about who we are. It's a person on person life on life union. Third point very quickly as we're coming to the end of our time we're going to get a little more into we're going to hear from him for the first time and we're going to see the way they interact.

Let's move forward. Verse seven tell me this is the woman speaking to the man tell me you whom my soul loves where you pasture your flock where you make it lie down at noon for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions.

Interesting. So now he responds if you do not know oh most beautiful among women follow in the tracks of the flock and pasture your young goats beside the shepherd's tents.

[32 : 41] Let's unpack some of this. What's happening? They're flirting with each other. This is playful. It's actually wonderfully playful language. She's essentially saying hey where are you going to be later?

Yeah I know you got a break coming up. Where are you going to be? I kind of want to hang out.

And she's putting herself out there. Whoever said by the way that the biblical model is for the woman to wait and for the man to kind of act and pursue has never read Song of Songs.

She's incredibly bold and confident. She's like hey where are you going to be? I want to be there with you so we can connect and spend time together. Right?

And so she's putting herself out there. She's taking a massive risk. And so she's being flirtatious because she says you know you can tell me where you're going to be and if you don't I'll just have to go looking among all of your friends tents.

They're probably going to think I'm interested in them. So if you want that to happen then okay.

That's what she's saying because a woman with a veiled face is a prostitute. She's like all your friends are going to think I'm a prostitute.

[33 : 46] Just tell me where you're going to be. It's great. And then he responds playfully as well. He doesn't just say well meet me here at this time. He says hey I've left some clues for you. Follow the clues.

And you follow the clues. It's kind of a romantic game. And he says and I'll meet you there. And they're arranging a kind of rendezvous out in the fields so they can be alone together. It's incredibly romantic.

So this is what's going on. And this leads us to the third point I want to make really quickly. Third point about intimacy. Intimacy is a rhythm of invitation and response. It's a rhythm of invitation and response.

She's inviting the man to connect with her and he is reciprocating in kind. Now what do I mean by this? How does it apply to us? There's a man named John Gottman who's done a lifetime's worth of research on what makes marriage work.

And he can famously predict, some of you know, with 94% accuracy, he can listen to a snippet of conversation and predict with 94% accuracy whether or not a couple will still be together in five years time or if they will be divorced.

[34 : 55] Now you ask, well how does he know? How can he be so sure? Well, one of the most groundbreaking discoveries he made about marital intimacy involves what he calls bids. He says over the course of the day, couples will make bids for one another's affection and engagement.

They will, in other words, invite connection like this Shulamite woman is doing with Solomon. Now sometimes this can be more overt, like she's saying, where are you going to be? When you're on break, let's hang out.

But a lot of times it's more subtle, right? So it could be I'm sitting in my living room, and maybe Laura's reading a book or a magazine and I'm working on my computer and Laura looks up and says, hey Tommy, can I read this quote to you?

Now I could say, yeah, and I could close my laptop and I could say, yeah, what is it? Or I could say, no, I'm really busy, maybe later, right? Now that doesn't seem like a big deal, but Gottman says what's actually going on is it's not actually about the quote.

Maybe in the moment, in Laura's mind it is, but what's really going on is it's an opportunity for me to emotionally connect, to validate the things that she cares about, to take a moment out of my time to enter into her world.

[36 : 08] And that's a bid. And Gottman says, in fact, that when you look at people who either habitually accept one another's bids for connection or habitually reject, you see a massive difference.

Here's the difference. Couples that end up getting divorced, the average number of times they engage one another's bids, 33% of the time. So three out of ten times they're engaging.

The rest of the time they're saying, no, I'm too busy. Now compare that to healthy marriages, couples that stay together. On average, they respond in one another's bids, they engage 87% of the time.

That's almost nine out of ten times that they engage. That difference alone, Gottman says, can account for whether or not people stay together. So here's the thing we need to understand.

Intimacy is not the fruit of major, you know, expensive nights out and nice presents and things like that.

Intimacy is the fruit of daily interactions, many of them quite mundane. Taking a moment out of your time to engage in what your spouse is doing.

[37 : 19] That over time, maybe one or two times of saying I'm too busy doesn't matter, doesn't seem like much, but over time it has a massive cumulative effect. This is how intimacy is built.

Dozens and dozens of invitations and responses. So here's the point I want to make about this. If you're dating somebody right now or thinking about or if you find yourself dating somebody, you need to very seriously ask this question.

Does this person actually care about the things that I care about enough to engage with me on them? Do they just want to hook up with me?

Do they just want to hang out with me when we're talking about things or doing things that they want to do? Or will they regularly take time and energy out of what they're doing to engage with the things that matter to me?

That's a massive determiner of the capacity that you will have for intimacy. That's a massive determiner of the quality of your sex life. Five, ten years down the road.

[38 : 16] Whether or not somebody will shut their computer or turn off their iPhone and take that moment to say yeah, what was it you wanted to say? That's it. It's not rocket science. And if you're married, intimacy again is not about the big showy displays of affection like big trips or weekends at B&B's although those things are fun.

By all means do them. But intimacy is built through these small mundane daily interactions. Do you have a posture of turning toward or a posture of turning against? So these are the three points we got to stop here for the sake of time.

Three points that I want to make opening our series about intimacy. Intimacy is vital for human flourishing. Sexual gratification is not. Intimacy involves the whole person. And thirdly, intimacy is this rhythm, this dance of invitation response dozens of times every day.

So there's one final thing we need to see, one final point I need to make before we close for tonight. As we've talked about all of these forms of human intimacy, we also need to acknowledge that no matter how much intimacy we have as human beings, it will never be enough.

You'll never arrive. You'll never be fully satisfied. You'll never be in a marriage and say, now all my needs are met. And the reason for that is because we're made not just for intimacy with other human beings, we're actually made for intimacy with the Lord.

[39 : 42] So at the end of the day, the thing that is most important is not whether I ever have this intimacy with another person, because some of us will and some of us won't. What matters is, will I

ever have this kind of intimacy with God?

Because that's the primary relationship that we're designed to have. And Jesus' prayer in John 17 is about that. He says, through my sacrifice, I desire that all of my people would experience perfect oneness with God.

He says in verse 21, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us. That's intimacy.

intimacy. The problem is, I think, many of us approach God, many of us approach life feeling like the Shulamite woman. I think all of us do.

In the sense that, you know, she says, don't judge me because of my skin. But I think a lot of our insecurities go way deeper. We say, don't look at me.

[40 : 45] If you only knew. If you only knew. Even as we're sitting here talking about sexuality and past and bad decisions, I know all kinds of things are coming to our minds and we're thinking, man, if anybody knew that thing I did, if anybody knew what I'm like in this situation, if anybody knew what I was doing earlier today, if anybody knew, they would run.

We're like that woman who says, don't look at me, don't look at that, don't look at that part of me, just focus on the good stuff, don't look at the bad stuff. And we're terrified of intimacy because we're terrified of anybody seeing that stuff and rejecting us.

And the great news of the gospel and the reason that all of us have hope for this kind of intimacy is that when we come to Jesus, when we confess those things to Jesus, who is by the way the truer and better Solomon, he's the one who says to us, just like we read, you are the love of my life.

You are the one my soul loves. He says, you're the one for whom I gave my life. And then he raises our eyes to meet his and he says, and you belong with me.

Because I made you and I made you for myself. Let's pray.