

Pastor Mark: Alrighty. Well, howdy, we're there. We're at the grand finale episode.

Grace Driscoll: It's your last date.

Pastor Mark: It's your last date. Episode number nine, as we've been going through the Song of Songs and looking at real romance. So where we find ourselves at the conclusion of the book is, I'll do a little bit of a nerd examination, that a lot of Bible commentators have no idea what to do with the section that we're about to study, because-

Grace Driscoll: It seems out of order.

Pastor Mark: ... it seems out of order and out of place because it goes back and talks about their childhood and their teen years. And this is the difference between the Western world that we live in and the Eastern world that they lived in. In the Western world, the way we tend to tell a story is beginning, middle, end. The way an Eastern storyteller would rewrite a narrative would be beginning, middle, beginning.

And so Genesis 1 and 2 is an example of beginning, middle, beginning. It's like, why does Genesis 1 do creation? And then Genesis 2? Beginning, middle, beginning. In addition, there are whole books of the Bible, like Judges.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: Historically some older popular movie movies like Pulp fiction, Sixth Sense and Memento all were beginning, middle, beginning storylines. Even current television shows like The Blacklist are going back into that beginning, middle, beginning narrative sequence. And your Bible is more Eastern than it is Western. It's a beginning, middle, beginning story. So the first two chapters in Genesis, there's God, there's the tree of life. There are human beings with divine beings. And then there's judgment following the curse. And then the last two chapters of your Bible, it's back to the beginning. In the beginning, God did this. And at the end, God goes back to the beginning.

He has redeemed creation. The tree of life is back. Divine beings and human beings are together. And so literally the first and last two chapters of the Bible are a beginning, middle, beginning, return to the beginning. And so this is the way that the Hebrews would tell a story. So the big idea is this, that your beginning determines your end. And if you don't have a good beginning, you need to have a new beginning to have a good end.

Grace Driscoll: Yes.

Pastor Mark: And so this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That we all have a bad beginning.

Grace Driscoll: Yep. We're all sinners.

Pastor Mark: We're all sinners by nature and choice. We need to be born again. And we need to begin again in a new relationship with God so that we can have a good ending that is ultimately our eternal beginning. So the storyline is beginning, middle, beginning.

And point is this, they've looked at their whole marriage and now they're a seasoned more mature, married couple. And they're looking back at when they were children and teens. And they're realizing that a lot of the way they view themselves, and the way they view their marriage and they relate to their spouse, has to do with their family of origins and their upbringing. And sometimes when you get married, you haven't even really had a lot of reflection on your parents' marriage or your family, or how you were parented, or how you were raised.

And then once you get married, you start sort of reexamining how you were brought up and maybe even the modeling for marriage that your parents had. And sometimes you realize some good things. Like, "Wow, that was great." And sometimes you realize some terrible things. Like, "That was not a healthy environment." So they're going to look back at the beginning.

So the brothers speak first. So this is regarding the woman, the wife, probably Abishag. Her father's never mentioned, which really troubles me as a dad. Her mother and her brothers are mentioned. And so the brothers here speak and they say, "We have a little sister and her breasts are not yet grown." So she's a little girl. "What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?" They're looking at their little sister saying, someday, she's going to get married. As the brothers, between now and then,-

Grace Driscoll: How do we prepare?

Pastor Mark: How do we protect her and prepare her for marriage? "If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar." We'll talk about that. And then you can read the section from her.

Grace Driscoll: She says, "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment. Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shackles are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit."

Pastor Mark: And then he says, "You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice."

Grace Driscoll: And she says, "Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains."

Pastor Mark: She literally says, he's a stud. I like that. That's my new [inaudible 00:05:15]. Okay. So the way this works, they look back and she's saying, "Okay, here's what it was like when I was a little girl. And then I entered into young womanhood. And then I met Solomon and now we are married and we're in a mature, married state." And so for her, she's reflecting back on her childhood and her perspective as a family. And so what they're talking about is when you're growing up and/or a parent raising a child, there are two kind of kids. There are doors that are open and walls that are closed. Maybe talk about this in regards to raising, for example, our two daughters.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah. So you want your daughters to be friendly, but to be virgins, which is closed. And you want them to be not flirtatious or... It's okay to be outgoing, but in a way that's provocative or that would be a door, you open yourself up to whoever's coming around. Versus a wall, you protect that for your marriage and you want to be friendly, but you don't flirt and be that.

Pastor Mark: Good job. And so, yeah, the concept, if you're raising a child that is a door, they're not very discerning. A lot of people have access to them that probably shouldn't. They can get into bad friend groups. They can get into bad habits. They can get into bad dating relationships. They can get into even abusive or...

Grace Driscoll: Yeah, they're naive.

Pastor Mark: ... sexually dangerous environments. And if your child is a little more rebellious, or a little more naive, or a little more vulnerable, the goal is how do you keep that door shut to keep them safe? Especially if it's a daughter. And they're here speaking of the daughter. How do you protect and preserve the purity and the wellbeing of that daughter until she's married?

Grace Driscoll: Yeah. That was definitely something that I had to learn to be a wall because I wasn't protected and I didn't protect myself.

Pastor Mark: So looking back, she's looking back on her childhood. You're now doing the same. Maybe explain that from your perspective, growing up as a young gal and into the teen years, your experience was more of a door than a wall.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah. I was very naive. I was a Christian, but I didn't seek wisdom from people and I wasn't protected as much as I should have been by my parents. Which as parents, we need to look out, without being helicopter parents as they're getting into the teen years. We need to protect our kids because they don't know everything, even though they say they do. And we need to train, continue to train them up, especially in those years. And if we have a good, healthy relationship with them, then we can protect them. And they'll trust that it's not just to have a rule for them, but it's to guard them for what God has for them, so that they are safe. And so for me, I got into unsafe situations because I was naive and I didn't understand boys. And so I allowed myself to get in situations and boys manipulated that. And I didn't understand that.

Pastor Mark: You had no brothers.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: This gal here, she's got brothers. And sometimes having a brother helps a gal understand boys. And I always say, if you don't have brothers, then boys are fascinating.

Grace Driscoll: Yes.

Pastor Mark: If you do have brothers, then boys are annoying. They're not as interesting. And, and part of the brother's job is to protect his sister. Like, "That's a bad guy. He's got bad intentions." I don't-

Grace Driscoll: Boys know boys.

Pastor Mark: Boys know boys just like girls know girls. And part of that is really protecting your kids when they're little. And we live in a day now, when here in this series, we're talking a lot about sexuality, sex education starts at a very young age. And I'm fully convinced that most of that curriculum is written by predators who are grooming children for abuse. That a child is not sexual at five, six, or seven, unless something catastrophic has happened to them. And so we live in a world where they're trying to sexualize children at a very young age. I think under that is a real push toward pedophilia, culturally. I think you're going to see a great war over the age of consent and maturity in adulthood because our culture, quite frankly, when it comes to sex has no boundaries.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: And when it comes to marriage and sex and relationships, it has no wisdom. It's just all the flesh. And so as parents it's how do we guard what our children are learning? And then also guard the environments that they're in.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: Not being in an abusive or dangerous environment. This oftentimes includes extended family. Because sometimes the most abusive people are relatives.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: And they gain access that's not earned, it's just inherited through relationship as a family member. And this also can include sending your kid over to somebody's house for a play date or an overnight. And even if mom is nice, do you know dad? Is there a brother in the house? Are there other kids staying the night?

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: Do they have a drunk uncle who's living with them. What's going on in that house? And what do they do with their technology? And just how do they do their life?

And so, if anything, as they're looking back at their life, she's reflecting.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: And I think it's really helpful for us to reflect on our life. And then also look at our children because what they're doing here, they're looking backward on their childhood, which then helps us heal up from pain, trauma, folly in the past. But then also raise our kids to be more sexually healthy and to be more prepared for their own marriage.

For those kids that are more walls, there's a different parenting that needs to happen. For the doors, it's how do I protect them, guard their heart, keep them in safe environments.

Let's say, you're raising, for example, a daughter, who's a wall. What is she going to struggle with? And how do you parent her? She's going to say, "No." She's going to reject boys.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: She's going to just...

Grace Driscoll: She's going to struggle ever getting into a relationship because she's so closed off. So learning, teaching empathy, teaching kindness and compassion. And there is a difference between compassion, and friendliness, and flirting. And so teaching that difference, because some kids worry about attracting the wrong guy, if they're too friendly, but there's an appropriateness with that. And we know, as women, we know the women that aren't appropriate. We can tell when there's another motive to that. And so that's where, as moms, we can help our daughters understand the difference and that you can be empathetic, you can be compassionate, without pushing the line with a guy.

Pastor Mark: Well, and you're talking about raising daughters. And here, she's talking about her brothers and the brothers are speaking in as well. And it's raising sons who use their strength to defend women and children. And have a heart for their sister, in particular, that they're going to have a healthy, loving, appropriate relationship with her, and that they are going to help ensure that she's not in dangerous environments.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: And so what we're looking at here is very specific gender roles. Something that our culture knows nothing about. And our culture tends to teach us how to raise children, not how to raise sons and daughters. But God-

Grace Driscoll: The Bible's very clear about it. So that's why we need to go to the Bible to understand this if we are confused by the culture.

Pastor Mark: Yeah. Because he made us male and female, and it has specific instructions to males and females because God sees us in our gender categories.

Grace Driscoll: Because he created us. Yes.

Pastor Mark: And so part of it here is that the brothers have a responsibility to highly regard, to love, to protect, to stand guard for their sister, which is-

Grace Driscoll: And she appreciates that relationship because she referred to it before. "I wish you were like my brother." She feels comfortable around her brother.

Pastor Mark: Safe.

Grace Driscoll: She feels safe. She doesn't feel like she has to guard herself. She enjoys them.

Pastor Mark: And so maybe one of the best things for kids is, if you're growing up and you have a brother and sister, that loving, healthy relationship is really the beginning of how to understand what marriage is going to be like. That is a safe friendship.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah, absolutely.

Pastor Mark: Where you have fun together. And she talks about, as well, she says when Solomon was growing up, they're reflecting back on their childhood, that he grew up wealthy and rich and his family had a lot of vineyards. Part of his responsibility for the family business was overseeing the vineyards and that side of their business. And she said, "I had a vineyard to tend to as well. And that was my character, my purity, my relationship with God, and my integrity as a young woman." And she sees that as herself as a vineyard that needs to be tended to.

Grace Driscoll: Yep.

Pastor Mark: Maybe explain that from a young woman or a woman's perspective.

Grace Driscoll: Just self care, whether it's emotional, spiritual, physical, we need to care for our bodies that God gave us. We need to care for our minds. We need to care for our souls. When we're saved, God gives us the word and prayer and healthy relationship to be in, to tend to ourselves so that we can be the healthiest version of ourselves. And so we need to tend to that first so that we can offer that to whatever spouse God brings into our life.

Pastor Mark: And that's what she says. She says, "I tended to my own vineyard. And then I met my young stud, the stag coming for the relationship." And she said, "And then I was able to share with him the fruit of my character and my conduct that I had been cultivating since I was a little girl." And our culture is so confused. First of all, we don't know when someone becomes an adult. So we have now created adolescence, which is this extended period. The average person in their twenties is spending a lot of money, looking at a lot of pornography, drinking a lot of alcohol, going on a lot of dates, living and sleeping with people they have no intention of marrying. And they're not really cultivating anything. They're wasting and squandering all the opportunities that God has given them.

And so the hope and prayer and goal is even if we come from that kind of background, that as we grow in wisdom and marriage, that we're raising our kids to start in a better place than we did.

Grace Driscoll: Yes.

Pastor Mark: And that there would be generational legacy and progress where it's, each generation hopefully gets healthier and more godly and more wisdom and starts a little closer to the will of God than where we began. Because where we started was wrong.

Grace Driscoll: Yep.

Pastor Mark: I, yeah. I mean you were not walking with the Lord. I was not a believer. We were sexually active. And then I get saved and we had to reset everything.

Grace Driscoll: Absolutely. Yeah. And even with single gals that are super anxious to get married, I tell them first seek the Lord, as to where he wants to grow you. Become the best version of yourself that God has, so that you attract the best version of whatever guy God has for you.

Pastor Mark: Yeah.

Grace Driscoll: And maybe you're, obviously you're not ready yet if that person isn't in your life or maybe they're not ready yet.

Pastor Mark: And so what they're doing here too, they're a mature, married couple, but they're looking back on their previous life, childhood, maybe teens. We could add twenties in our cultural context. And what they're saying is these are the things that were really helpful and these were the things that were really harmful coming into our marriage.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: Why is it so important that we don't just look forward, but we also look backward so that we can have a healthy marriage and be a healthy person?

Grace Driscoll: Because sometimes there's things that we need to heal up from, or people that we need to forgive, so that we can be healthy moving forward. A lot of times we say, well, I never want to be like my mom or I never want to be like my dad. But what you're doing is actually becoming just like them because you're so consumed with-

Pastor Mark: You're focused on them.

Grace Driscoll: And so, and maybe you need to forgive them and bitterness will cause you to just repeat or become worse version of what you don't like. And so there's a lot, you don't need to get stuck in the past, but sometimes like we've talked about, sometimes Christian counseling is helpful. Guiding you through what you need to pinpoint from your past that you've brought into your future, that you need to leave in your past, and forgive and move forward in a healthy way. God has all kinds of new ways for us to be healthy in our marriages. And it's so important to examine the things that were hurtful, or make us stuck emotionally or physically or spiritually.

Pastor Mark: So I'll ask you kind of a dangerous question. So looking back, childhood, teen years, the most helpful and harmful things that were brought into our marriage? And then I'll give you my thoughts for me.

Grace Driscoll: Probably for me, codependency was something that-

Pastor Mark: Unhealthy boundaries and relationships.

Grace Driscoll: Yep. And I didn't understand how to guard well. And so I was giving all of myself emotionally, relationally in different ways that weren't healthy because I wasn't focusing on you and the marriage. And so that was detrimental for sure. I didn't totally leave and cleave the way I needed to start our family. And so I didn't understand that boundary well. And God revealed that and convicted me of that. And we've worked on that.

Pastor Mark: Yeah. For me looking back, growing up, I think the most helpful was I had a mom and a dad. Which the neighborhood I grew up in, I was the only one that I remember had a mom and a dad.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: I grew up in a poor neighborhood, first generation immigrant neighborhood next to the airport. I remember my dad being the only dad. And my dad coached our baseball team, not because he ever played baseball, but because he was the only dad.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: And he would go buy used gloves and cleats in the off season because the kids would show up for baseball with no gloves and no cleats. And so one of the most helpful things, for me growing up, was just seeing the difference a dad makes. He provided for the family. He was present. He was involved in our life and I love my dad very much. And today I'm super proud of him. I talked to him this week. I'll get teared up. He's a godly man and he's doing a really good job being a grandpa. And so I grew up with the benefit of just seeing a mom and a dad. And there was no, there wasn't any other real examples in our neighborhood.

The harmful was in my upbringing, in neighborhood, there were a lot of strip clubs, and prostitution, and Green River Killer, and Ted Bundy, and serial killers. I mean, it was a dangerous environment. And what I saw was a lot of guys who were very perverted and then a lot of gals who were very manipulative.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: And so gals would use the perversion of the guys to manipulate them in all kinds of ways. And so I grew up really kind of distrusting of women in general and not wanting to be like those guys, because I had sisters.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: And having sisters, like you don't treat girls like that. That's not right. I don't want to do that. But at the same time, I don't want to get manipulated and controlled. And I mean I knew kids in my neighborhood growing up, where the gal literally would get pregnant at 18 just so that he couldn't leave. And that kind of sick relational structures, so I knew what unhealthy looked like, but I didn't really know what healthy looked like. I knew what I didn't want, but I didn't know what I wanted. And it wasn't until I got saved in college, and started reading the Bible, and then attended the church that had some really beautiful, healthy, godly marriages, starting with our pastor. It was like, "Oh, okay. That's what that looks like." But I didn't have a lot of those examples.

Grace Driscoll: Right.

Pastor Mark: And so that's where the church, for me, became a second family. It became the family of God. And now there's mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters in the faith, and there's generational modeling, and you could start to see older married couples that do love each other and are healthy and holy and happy. And they've got kids and grandkids that love the Lord, and love each other, and love them. And it's like, okay. So for me it was life changing just to walk into a Bible teaching church, hear that God actually had a plan for marriage and gender and sexuality and family, that the Holy Spirit was going to bless his plan.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: And that there were mentors and models in the church that could help you figure out what that looked like in your relationship.

Grace Driscoll: Absolutely.

Pastor Mark: And so for those of you who are watching, if there's trauma in your past, you need to get some help.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: If there's abuse in your past, you need to get some help.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: If you come from a broken family or a divorced family and there's a lot of anxiety there about marriage or trust or family, you need to get some help.

Grace Driscoll: Yep.

Pastor Mark: If you grew up in a family that had a lot of addiction and it was dysfunctional, you need to get some help. If you grew up in a family-

Grace Driscoll: We all have our [inaudible 00:22:03].

Pastor Mark: ... that was filled with adultery, you need to get some help. And sometimes people, they want to have a healthy future, but they're unwilling to go back. And the truth is sometimes it's like a bow and arrow. Sometimes you need to go back so that you can go forward.

Grace Driscoll: Yep.

Pastor Mark: You need to go back and heal from some stuff, fix some stuff, forgive some stuff, seek wise counsel, maybe meet with a Christian counselor professional, deal with those things so that then you can move forward.

Grace Driscoll: Yep.

Pastor Mark: And so going backward is literally just, it's just preparing yourself to go forward at a faster rate, at a faster rate.

Grace Driscoll: Healthier rate.

Pastor Mark: Anything you would add to that, and then we'll bring our daughter out.

Grace Driscoll: I don't think so.

Pastor Mark: Okay. So we got something special for you. She wasn't really prepared for this. But we just asked our oldest daughter, Ashley, who is the Director of Real Faith, and coordinates the studio and the platform and all of this for us. And she's our oldest daughter and she was married just over a year ago. And so we thought we would invite her in for the last few minutes of the conversation, and just ask her to be honest. We'll see how honest in just a moment.

Well, howdy, welcome to the final segment of The Real Romance Study in the Song of Songs. And this is our oldest daughter, Ashley.

Ashley: Hello.

Pastor Mark: How old are you? Maybe tell them how old you are.

Ashley: I'm 23.

Pastor Mark: And you look young.

Ashley: Hmm. Yeah. I put a lot of makeup on, so I wouldn't look 12.

Pastor Mark: You were recently in the airport and they asked-

Ashley: Oh, they always asked me, "Honey, like, are you lost? Where's your family at?" I'm like, "I am traveling alone. Thank you."

Pastor Mark: And you run Real Faith and you've done an incredible job in designing of studio.

Ashley: Thank you.

Pastor Mark: So thank you. And you were married just over a year ago.

Ashley: Yeah. Last January.

Pastor Mark: Last January. And I got to officiate your wedding. So thank you for that. That was awesome. And growing up, we're looking at the end of Song of Solomon. She's looking back at her life and she's saying there's two kind of gals, there's doors and walls. Which one were you?

Ashley: Yeah, I was the opposite of mom. I was definitely, I was the wall. I didn't let anybody near me.

Grace Driscoll: That's good.

Ashley: Well, yeah, except that I didn't have any friends either.

Pastor Mark: So mom talked a little bit about the struggles being a door. What are some of the struggles being a wall?

Ashley: Well, I think, I mean, when you grow up as the oldest child of Pastor Mark Driscoll, who is infamously aggressive towards young men to become men. And I. As a young child was like, "Yeah, yeah, these guys need to grow up." Like as like a three, four or five year old. So I go into school and I'm like, "Geez, boys are terrible. Boys need to grow up." Like I was, I was very hard on all men and boys. And so I think I had a hard time figuring out how to make friends and not just be afraid that they were going to hurt me or that they were evil or bad. Like literally not every single kindergarten boy is evil.

Pastor Mark: So you had very high standards for men.

Ashley: I had very high standards for five year olds. Yeah. And yeah. And I had those standards for myself too, but I felt like I was doing a pretty good job. So it made me able to judge other people. So yeah. Yeah. You're laughing because that's, it's true. This is how it was.

Pastor Mark: I remember there were certain boys who would want to get time with you or start to see you and you'd be like, "Yeah, they're not the one." And I'd ask, "Well, do you want me to talk to them and deal with that?" And you would say-

Ashley: "No, I'll handle it." There was no question. I didn't really want to be, I never was in a relationship. I went on a couple dates through college, but I was always kind of, I treated them like my younger brothers, and because I have younger brothers, and I love them, and they're amazing. But I met my now husband, Landon, my senior year of high school. He immediately heard from God that he was going to marry me.

Pastor Mark: You didn't hear immediately.

Ashley: I was like, "Bro, you're crazy. That's not going to happen." But he waited like five and a half years of me going through this process, learning what it looks like to have a healthy friendship with a guy. We would talk and read books together, hang out, or he'd pray for me or different things. And showing me that he wasn't there to hurt me and he wasn't irresponsible. He wasn't trying to have another mom in his life. He didn't want that. And so that was really different. But I think that's hard to find.

And so I'd kind of walled myself off because I just hadn't seen that. And so many guys don't grow up with dads, or dads that love the Lord. I mean, they have a hard start from the beginning and then they just don't become the man that God wants them to be. And Landon was a very refreshing example of what you're supposed to be like, and what you're supposed to grow up and lead a family as. And so I was able to see how he could lead our family, and grow and learn, and we could have relationship, but I don't think there's anyone else that I ever could have married. I mean, I'm a very difficult person. So he's-

Pastor Mark: I apologize for that. That would be your dad's fault. Yes.

Ashley: But he's great. He's wonderful.

Pastor Mark: Well, and he waited years.

Ashley: Yeah.

Pastor Mark: And he fasted and prayed weekly that God would speak to you and change your heart. And I'll never forget because he got to know all of us.

Ashley: Oh yeah. He would hang out with the whole family. The dog loved him. Oh yeah.

Grace Driscoll: The only person our dog hasn't barked at.

Pastor Mark: So your brothers loved him. Your sister loved him. How did your grandma feel about him?

Ashley: Oh yeah. She sat me down and was like, "I think you need to pay attention to this Landon boy."

Pastor Mark: But he and I met and he was like, "I love your daughter. And I've been waiting for years and she won't even call me back. She won't talk to me. She'll have nothing." You were a wall. I mean, you were a bank vault. He couldn't figure out the combination. He couldn't get into the vault. And I told him, I said, "Well, you got a couple options. You can wait, and fast and pray, and hope that her heart changes. And if it doesn't, that's just a lot of time and energy and emotion that you're just sacrificing. Or you can move on and go find a nice gal that loves the Lord and move on with your life."

Ashley: It's not so difficult.

Pastor Mark: Yeah. And what he said was he is like, "I have to be with Ashley." And I always say, there's two kinds of people. There's a lot of people you can live with. And then there's one person you can't live without. And my prayer for you girls is always that your husband would wake up every morning and say, "This is the one I couldn't live without." That's, mommy is mine. The one I can't live without. And for you, I wanted that. I wanted that for you and your sister. The man who's with you every day would wake up and say, "This is best case scenario. This is what I want to do. This is where I want to be."

So maybe talk then about how the courtship went, and the engagement, and how God had to really sort of prepare you for marriage. And I want you to be honest, maybe not too honest, but we're looking at the end of the Song of Songs. They're reflecting back on their childhood. And I want you to be free to reflect back on your childhood. What are the things that mommy and I did that were helpful? What are things that could have been more helpful or were even harmful? Because sometimes you don't see your parents' marriage until you have your own marriage and then you've got fresh eyes.

Grace Driscoll: Yeah.

Ashley: Yeah. I think it was really good just to see your guys' friendship always. And even if we were going through a hard time, or I knew you guys were disagreeing about something or whatever, I never worried about it because I knew you'd just figured out. And you modeled friendship and conflict resolution. So there wasn't this like anxiety about how your relationship was, you guys are, you just did a good job of modeling that. And so I think that I had to think about, when we started dating, about what it looked like to be Landon's friend and he had to figure what that looked like for me, for him to do for me. And we just both felt like, why are we wasting our time? We're really good friends. We're dating kind of. We're like, we might as well just like work towards marriage.

And so we got engaged pretty quickly. We dated for like maybe two months and got engaged. And that's when we really started working on what does a marriage actually look like? We were trying to figure out how do we make our lives go together? What does it look like to actually build a life together? How do we make a vision for each other and our time together? And how do we be intentional about our relationship? And you guys always did a really good job of being intentional. And you talk about this a lot, of all the planning that you do and all of the vision that you have for the future. And so we just sat down and brainstormed and were like, yeah, I think God's bringing us towards ministry together. And we both wanted to work at the church, and we felt like our giftings were really complimentary, and it was all just kind of working out.

And so we started to talk about boundaries and what that looked like. And we're like, yeah, we just didn't really want to date very long. So we just decided we were going to get married and not worry about any of that. And just felt very strong peace from the Lord that that was what was supposed to happen. And so I finished school, and we got married, and bought a house, and started working at the church together. And I think it was just perfect timing that God brought our desires together and our paths together and our jobs. And even just him moving here and us moving here and everything just kind of collided in a way that we saw the Lord working.

And we didn't have to worry about all of the little things that can be stressful in relationships, because we knew that God literally moved us here from separate states to be together and to work together. And he found the church. And just all these crazy things that were like, it must be the Lord speaking. And so, yeah, it was, but the friendship was the foundation of it and still that's the foundation of our relationship. And so it was important for us to see you guys model that and to be able to live that out as well. Yeah.

Grace Driscoll: Wonderful.

Pastor Mark: Well, and you're super strong. I mean, you've got your Master's Degree from one of the top Honors programs in the country. You've traveled the world alone, even as a young woman. You lived overseas in another country for a season.

You're very strong. Strong personality, strong opinions, strong theological convictions.

Ashley: Wonder where I get it.

Pastor Mark: Yeah, you're welcome, honey. But there's a difference between being strong and being independent. And I think a lot of young women get confused in that. They're like, "Well, I can't be strong and independent." You can be strong without being independent. And in a marriage being strong is not a problem. Being independent, that's a problem. And so you're very, very strong, but you're not... You and Landon, you're both actually very strong leaders, but you're not independent. Maybe explain the difference between being a strong woman and being an independent woman.

Ashley: Yeah. I think it's really important that prayer is the foundation of everything that we decide together. When we bought a house, when we decided to get married, when we've decided on our jobs, we both pray independently. And God, of course, always tells us the same thing. And then we're able to put both of our full energy towards that one thing.

Pastor Mark: Well, and one of the things I appreciate about Landon, he loves you. And I know that you're safe with him. And so I don't worry. I know he's going to protect you and guard you.

And when he's trying to figure you out, he calls me. And he's like, "I love Ashley. I'm her husband. You're her dad. You raised her, you know her, you love her. Coach me on how to be a good husband." And you know, I'm not in the marriage. You guys have your own marriage. I'm not to insert myself. But if he wants to call and have me help him figure you out, so he can love you better. It's an incredible position to be as a dad.

And that being said, just kind of looking back on your childhood and now looking at where you are, I'll ask you two final questions. As you were going off to study overseas or go to college, your Master's Degree, get married. Do you worry about us not making it?

Ashley: Oh, never. No. Yeah. No. I don't think you could do any better than mom.

Pastor Mark: This is my honest daughter.

Ashley: I think that's pretty much the best woman you could have gotten. You did good.

Pastor Mark: So last one, for younger couples that are getting started and for parents that are sending their kids off to get married, how crucial is it that you're not joining his family, he's not joining our family. But that as parents and as children, we all agree, you are starting your own family and you get to decide how you're going to do stuff.

Ashley: Yeah. I think that, I mean, that kind of goes along with like the independence versus strength kind of idea. That we're not, neither Landon nor I are inherently rebellious people, but we still need to lead our own family and decide things for ourselves. We don't want to be codependent with his family or with you guys. God has called us to be married and for us to have our own kids. And you guys let us decide because we have to set our own priorities, and hear God's call on our own marriage and our own family. And it can be hard and confusing when parents come into that. And we decide this is what our job is. We're going to live here. And then if you say, "Oh you shouldn't do that job. You shouldn't buy that house." It's confusing. We're trying to figure that out for ourselves.

Grace Driscoll: Yes.

Ashley: And we need to learn to pray and listen to the Lord.

Pastor Mark: Well, we love you. Thanks for letting us be your mom and dad. And thanks for running Real Faith. And thanks for letting us have an optic into your marriage, so that we can celebrate what God is doing in and through you kids. Maybe just close our time together in prayer for the couples.

Ashley: Happy to. Dear Lord, thank you so much for this whole series. I just, I know that it's been a blessing to so many people already. And I pray that it continues to be, Lord. That we would not stop here and just finish listening and just move on with our lives, Lord, but that you would just highlight ways for all of us to grow in our relationships, whether we're single or dating or engaged or married. That you would just allow for the Holy Spirit to come in and allow for continued growth and reflection. And I thank you that your word is timeless, Lord, and that you've written these things to be relevant to us even today, even in our struggles, Lord. And I pray that as your word is living and active, that you would just allow it to penetrate the hearts of those listening now, and that you would strengthen these marriages, these relationships, Lord. Because we know that's your will. /that you want us to have healthy marriages so that we can go and raise good kids, and have great ministry, and just glorify and honor you in everything that we do, Lord.

So I pray that for everyone listening. Thank you so much for my parents, just opening up and being vulnerable and teaching through this series. Amen.

Grace Driscoll: Amen.

Pastor Mark: Amen. Thank you, sweetie.