

5 Keys to a Romantic Relationship

- All right. Hey, you came back from last week. Congratulations. Even though it was awkward. I'm so glad to see ya, and we're just gearing up, heading into Valentine's Day with the Real Romance series. And so lemme just introduce it briefly and we'll be in the Song of Songs, an Old Testament book, chapter one. If you've got your Bible, you can find your place there. So the Song of Songs, it is a great epic love story. It's all about marriage and marital enjoyment. And it's got 12 scenes. And so Grace and I wrote a book called "Real Romance." You can grab a free copy here, it'll be out next month through our friends at XO Marriage and Real Faith and what we do, we go through the 12 scenes of the Song of Songs. I'm gonna cover eight of those in sermons in January and February. You'll ask, where are the other four? They're in the book or on the "Real Marriage" podcast. You can find it anywhere. Those are the four sections that are really spicy. And so if you're married, like you wanna go get those sections as soon as possible. And if you're single, don't, you'll just be frustrated for a very long time. And so we're gonna cover most of it on the weekend. And then the rest of it you can get in the book and also in the "Real Marriage" Podcast. Well, today what we're doing, we're looking back on this marriage from this couple, Solomon and Abishag. At this point in their romantic relationship they've been married for some years, they've had some ups and downs, and they're going back and they're writing down their love poetry and songs and this is back and forth. It's almost like if you could look at someone's phone and see them texting back and forth with their beloved and they're growing romantic relationship and their flirtation, that's kind of what the book is like. It's back and forth, them writing love songs and love letters to one another. And at this point, they're looking back on the early days of their relationship, kind of where it all started. So how many of you are married? Okay? Married, if you're married, hold hands. And if you're fighting, hold both hands. Okay? You really need it. Okay? And if you're single, like I said last week, we got a lobby, you guys connect afterward, okay? So and so what happens here, they're looking back on their romantic relationship. And there's always a point in our relationship where you're like, "Hey, they're interesting." You're like, "They're nice," and you're like, "I'm very interested." You start to get the butterflies in your stomach and you start thinking about them. And that's where they are this week in their story. And I want to share a little bit about that season for Grace and I. We met in 1988, so what is that, 35 years ago, March 12th it'll be 35 years to our first date. We were both in a public high school. And I remember I knew about Grace, and Grace knew about me, but we didn't really know each other. And I really wanted to meet her. So in God's providence, a friend of hers that she'd known since she was a little girl, got sat in front of me in a class, I think it was a Bible Is Lit class in a public school. And so you say, how was that? It was horrible. I don't use anything I learned in that class for my job, but nonetheless, I was in a Bible as lit class in a public high school and this gal sat in front of me. I was like, "Hey, you're friends with Grace, aren't you?" She's like, "Yeah, I've known her since she was a little girl, we grew up together." I said, "Well, what's she like?" "Oh, she's nice, she's cute, she's sweet. She's a little bit shy." "Is she single?" "Yes, she's single." "Oh, okay, then introduce me." So, she introduced us. And to this day, this is still a friend of ours and we love her and her husband. So she introduced me to Grace and I got Grace's phone number. Now some of you think, oh, cell phone? No, there weren't cell phones yet. This was a while ago. And so on our first date we rode a dinosaur. I mean, this was a while ago. And so our first date, we had a landline and it plugged into a wall

and it had a cord so you couldn't get very far away. So I called Grace, we talked for three hours, three hours, probably the first time I've ever talked to anyone for three hours of my whole life. But I was trying to work this out with Grace. So I finally got up the nerve, I'm like, "All right, can I take you out?" She's like, "Yes, come pick me up at the house and meet my parents, my dad's a pastor." Okay, at the time, I didn't know any pastors and I was sure that if he had the gift of discernment, I was gonna be in a lotta trouble. So I was nervous and worried. And so I got dressed up and I jumped in my car. My first car was a 1956, 4 door Chevy. All original that I had bought from a job that I worked when I was 15 years of age. And I love that car. It had a old spotlight on the side. Recently for my 50th birthday the kids are five kids and their spouses found an original replica, 1956, 4 door, original one owner with the spotlight car. That's actually the car on the front of the book. That was the exact replica of the car that we had our first date in. And the kids bought for me as a great gift. Well, I was going to pick up Grace, and I was so nervous 'cause I'm like, what do you say to a pastor? Now I wouldn't be near as nervous, but at the time I was really nervous meeting a pastor. And so they lived on a cul-de-sac and I drove around many times just trying to muster up the courage as a 17-year-old kid. You know, "Eye Of The Tiger," listen to the "Rocky" soundtrack, just trying to get myself, you know, in, you know. So then finally I pull in the driveway and I get out. Grace's mom and dad came and greeted me as nice as can be. They've always been great to me. Grace's dad is in heaven now. Her mom is part of our church family. Love my mother-in-law with all my heart. She's always been really good to me since day one. And so we went in and we're talking and we're visiting and I was waiting for Grace to emerge. And then she came out and I was like, oh, she had long hair, it was like springs. She got best hair in high school and it was like springs. You could grab it and it would just shoot right back up. It was like that until we had kids and they ruined her hair. But she's still got, I mean she still has good hair and so she got best hair in high school. And I remember we went to downtown Seattle and that's where we lived at the time. And it was a warm day. We hung out on the waterfront, we held hands, we had ice cream, we were just visiting, just spending time together and I thought, this is an incredible girl, I just adored her. And so then we went to dinner at Red Robin 'cause I'm fancy and I'm not like, you know, Applebee's on a date night, kinda cheap. We went to Red Robin, that's what we did. And then afterward we got done and it was getting dark and it was time to bring her home. And I was driving her home and I thought, you know, I wanna spend more time with her and I just wanna spend some time enjoying her, so I said, "Hey, can we just go for a drive?" So we drove through her neighborhood, we ended up down at the beach and no one was there and it was late at night or it was night, it was nightfall and there was a bonfire just left unattended on the beach. Now I'm getting ready to preach Elijah after this where God sent down fire from heaven to bless the man of God. So I'm gonna go with, that's what happened. So there was a fire. So Grace and I pulled over, we sat by the fire and we just visited and then we got ice cream on the way home. We didn't do anything. We didn't hold hands, didn't kiss, done none of that, but just nice to be together. And it was a short while later. Was it weeks or months when I bought you a jewelry box?

- Months.

- Months, couple months later. We're 17 in high school. I bought her a jewelry box. She said, "What's that?" "I said, well that's where the engagement ring is gonna go." That's either a good guy or a stalker or a combination of both. So here's, here's where we started. That's us at 17. At 17. And I had bangs and I miss my bangs and Grace still has best hair. So that's where we started. So if you are married, I want you to be thinking about like where did we start? Why did we fall in love? What were our memories? What lit that flame? What sparked that interest? I like to make photos and videos of everything we do together as a family and once or twice a year, sometimes more, I'll pull up Apple TV and we'll just go through photos and videos and just remember. That's kind of what they're doing here. They're looking back fondly remembering. And so I wanna deal with Five Keys To Your Romantic Relationship. What are the five things that this couple built their marriage on, that we built our marriage on that if you're married, we want you to build your marriage on. And if you're single, 93% of you will marry. Have these be the keys to your romantic relationship. Number one, the genesis of marriage. And I wanna start here 'cause the couple in Song Of Songs, they're Jewish, they're Hebrew. So they would've known Genesis one and two, they would've been told and taught this is how marriage is. God made marriage and God has a divine design for marriage. The problem we have today, we have no idea what marriage is or does. I was thinking about it, if you wanna drive a car, you need to go get a driver's license and to get the license, you need to pass a driver's test. If you wanna go get a marriage license, no test. They don't tell you. You don't even have a question. There should at least be one question like, are you gonna be nice to each other? Yes or no? I mean at least one question. You can get a driver's license and it takes a lot and you can get a marriage license and you need no nothing. And so we need to have ourselves educated. So here's the first marriage, the perfect marriage before sin enters the world. Genesis 2:18 through 14, 24 rather, "The Lord God said it is not good for the man to be alone." Okay? Yeah, every guy says amen. And this is before sin enters the world. God every said everything is good, but it's not good for the man to be alone. So God says, "I'll make a helper fit for him." That's not negative. It means the man needs help. Later on the Holy Spirit is called the helper. Not because He's weak, but because He's powerful and needed. The wife is like that. "The Lord God had formed every beast, every bird and brought them to the man. The man gave names to all the livestock, birds and every beast. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him." So lemme just set this up. I think it's kind of funny. So God creates Adam, he's dad talks to Adam, says, "Adam, you're single, you need a wife. You don't know what marriage is. You don't know what a woman is, but I got a plan. I'm gonna bring you a mate. But first you gotta name all the animals." So here's, this is what I see. I see Adam like, here comes the animals like, "Lord Dad please, that's not her right?" No that's, okay aardvark. So he's naming all these animals hoping this is not his wife. And then finally the wife comes, "Oh, please tell me that's her." So he's really excited to see her. "The man gave names, but for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. The rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man." Wanna say this real quick, the woman comes from the side, feminism wants to put her out front, chauvinism wants to put her in the back. God makes her alongside. That's where she comes from. That's where she belongs. That's why when Grace and I snuggle, I tell her, "Welcome home." "Then the man said," so he's gonna sing to her. Before sin enters the world the first recorded words of any human being is a man singing to his wife. This is why the artists always

have an advantage. This is, "At last bone, my bones flesh of my flesh. She shall be called whoa, man, because she was taken out of man." He sings to her and then here's the summary statement of marriage. Something that Paul and Jesus quote in the New Testament, "It's unchanging throughout all of history." Here's God's divine design for marriage. A man, right? Gender categories, binary, male and female. "A man shall leave his father and mother," get off the payroll, grow up, be a grown man, hold fast to his wife, pursue her, make her a priority, become a family, "The two shall become one flesh," consummated covenant, "The man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed." Not ashamed. Let me say this. The first wedding was God's design. God serves like the dad walking the daughter down the aisle and the pastor officiating the marriage. As a dad, I've had this tremendous honor, walk your girl down the aisle, officiate the wedding ceremony. This is before sin enters the world. God got it right the first time. This is what a perfect marriage looks like. So we use it as the prototype for marriage because Paul and Jesus quoted, it continues to be the perfect, divine design and prototype. And let me say this, if you add to it, you're not helping but hindering marriage. If God got it right, any adjustments we make don't make it better, it makes it worse. What we've now done, we have added to God's divine design for marriage, sleeping or living together before marriage, being unfaithful or having an open marriage ultimately as well this would include a lot of sinful behavior within marriage and or extending marriage beyond one man and one woman. Now it can be either sex or gender. And I'm just telling you that polygamy is next in our lifetime. And all of that weakens, it doesn't strengthen marriage. Think of it in this way. I love those shows where they take something that's old and it's kinda been beat up and they bring it back to life. For example, I love watching the homes, the shows where they take an old house that was really amazing and then over the years a bunch of people did some renovations and quote unquote improvements. And then they come in and they're like, we gotta rip out all these walls and we gotta tear up this carpet so that what? We can get back to the original design, back to the hardwood floors, right, back to the shiplap, back to the wood beam ceilings because they made changes but they didn't make improvements. And sometimes by removing the changes, you actually see that it's improved. Same with a car. I'm a car guy, any of you car guys, you've got the Barrett-Jackson coming up. And so what happens is, I love it when I watch a show and there's an old car but somebody's been tinkering on it, some you know, backyard mechanic and it's not running and it's not working. But somebody says, "You know what, we're gonna bring it back to the factory specifications. We're gonna bring it back to the original design, we're gonna bring it back to the original parts and we're gonna tune it to the original specs." And guess what, it's amazing. It's the best version of that vehicle. God made marriage for one man and one woman in a consummated covenant. Anything we do to make improvements is actually not an improvement. It weakens and doesn't strengthen marriage. So first and foremost, marriage is God's design. Number two, they were Jewish, Hebrew. They would've thought of marriage in terms of a covenant instead of a contract. That's Abby and Solomon in the story of Song of Songs. And I wanna hit this briefly, I've hit this a lot. This is important for everybody, but this is primarily, I think for the men. Marriage is a covenant, not a contract. I'll explain that. Two scriptures. Proverbs 2:16 and 17 speaks of the woman, the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the what? The covenant with her God. This is a married woman who has a covenant with God and her husband. And she goes outside

of the covenant as she violates the covenant relationship with God and her husband, Malachi two, says the same thing about men. "The Lord was witnessed between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless. Though she is your companion and your wife by" what? Covenant. Now what we're seeing here is an entirely biblical way of viewing marriage that our God does covenant relationship. We have a covenant relationship for example, with Jesus Christ. We have a covenant relationship with our spouse. This word covenant appears repeatedly in the Bible hundreds of times. And it's translated love, loving kindness, mercy, steadfast love, loyal love, devotion, commitment and reliability. And so I'll give you an example. The night before we were married, I went to stay with Grace's uncle John, he was much older, he was like a grandfather, he loved her very much. He and his wife Gladys had been married for decades, maybe 40, 50 years. And she had dementia and she lived nearby in a care facility and she didn't remember him. Every day, multiple times a day he would go visit Gladys in the facility where she was being cared for. She had Alzheimer's. He would brush her hair, bring her gifts, sit down to visit with her, and every day she would ask, "Who are you?" And he would pull out their wedding photo and he'd say, "Well, I'm your husband John." He was faithful to her and he was devoted to her even when she could no longer remember him. And I'll never forget, I sat in Uncle John's living room 'cause I stayed at his house the night before we were married. And he looked at me, he said, "Do you love Grace?" I said, "Yes I do." He said, "Are you going to love her all the days of her life?" I said, "Yes I will." And he asked me, he said, "Will you love her even if she doesn't remember you?" And I knew exactly what he was talking about. Is my commitment to my wife one way or two way? If she earns it, do I give her my love or do I just give her my love even if she doesn't know me? And so ultimately that's the heart of covenant relationship. And I've shared this a lot, but we'll hit it briefly and it is in the "Real Romance" book. A contract is between two people. A covenant is between three people, the husband, the wife and the Lord. In a contract I seek my will. I wanna win. In a covenant, we seek God's will, we pray, we open the Bible, God, what do you tell us to do?" In a contract you serve me, in a covenant we serve each other. In a contract performance is recorded. Job descriptions, performance reviews, bonuses or maybe termination or demotion. In a covenant, no record of wrongs is kept. Paul says that love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. In a contract failure is punished. You didn't do your job. In a covenant failure was punished at the cross since Jesus died. We don't punish each other, we forgive each other. In a contract it's a win lose, I'm trying to get more than I give. In a covenant it's a win-win. I give for you, you give for me. And what you get in a contract is a professional relationship, what you get into covenant is a personal relationship, here's what I'm telling you. When you go to work, it's fine to have contracts but you can't bring them home. And our relationship with God is one of grace and covenant. It's not a workspace relationship. Lemme say this, you don't have a workspace relationship with God. You don't have a workspace relationship with your spouse, but you do have a workspace relationship with your work, right? How many of you, you're, you couldn't show up at work and and say, "You know what, I don't feel like coming in anymore and I really don't wanna do my job. I don't like the whole numbers thing and performance, but we're good, right?" They'll be like, "No, you're unemployed," because there are some expectations. And so ultimately what happens is people who win at work, they lose at home 'cause they go to work and they're like, I know how to do contracts and performance and judgment and then I bring it home. Now don't

raise your hands, especially if you're here with your dad, but you grew up in a home that just felt like a second shift at work. Dad's a domineering, overbearing boss. Mama's got a job description. All the kids have got a job description. Every day is a performance review. And if you don't do your job, dad's gonna drop the hammer. It's just, it's an unloving environment 'cause it's about the rules. It's not about the relationship. They would've understood that the relationship we have with God is covenants by grace and love and mercy and forgiveness. And we have a grace based covenant with our spouse as well. And in every covenant there is a head. And in the marriage covenant, the head is the husband. It says in Ephesians 5:23, "The head is the husband." So the question is not are you the head? The question is, are you doing your job? But it's still your job. This is why we have real men on Wednesday night. It's why we had a full house of guys trying to figure out relationship with God and ultimately first and foremost with their wife and I wanna honor those men for joining us. And if you've not joined us, we'll see you on Wednesday. If you don't know, your wife will drop you off. She's very excited to see you go. So I've shared this before, but do you wanna know one of the stupidest things I've ever said to my wife, Grace? We've been together 30 years, there's a long list of candidates. You've heard me speak, I say things I shouldn't and I've turned it into a career. So, one of the stupidest things I ever said to Grace, this was early on in our marriage. Right now we're like Jesus, it's perfect. But you know, in the early days, in the early days when we struggled, we were having an argument, we were arguing and I looked at grace. I kid you not, here's what I said, I said, "You know what? If you worked for me, I would've fired you a long time ago." Yeah there was not, that was not foreplay. That was not, that did not work, that did not. So my wife whose name is Grace, but don't let the name fool you. She's a justice truth Old Testament girl and she can hold her own. She looked at me, she said, "Well that's the problem. I'm not your employee, I'm your wife." I was like, "Yep, true." But "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks," Jesus said. What I had is I had an invisible job description that I gave Grace. And every day I gave her a performance review and she was living under the weight of that contract and it discouraged her. And then I realized once we had kids, there's no way I can father like that. And then one day Grace said, "Why don't you just treat me like you treat the kids?" 'Cause I had a covenant with the kids, but I had a contract with my wife. So I had to repent of that mindset. Some of you are unbelievably successful at work and you struggle at home. It's because contracts work at work and they don't work at home. They work for professional relationships, not for personal relationships. In addition, we'll jump now into the text. This sets up the Song of Songs. Jewish Couple, they would've understood that God created marriage in genesis and it's a covenant. And then she is going to open up the Song of Songs. So we'll jump right in, key number three, Liberating The Ladies. Song of Songs chapter one verses one through six. Again it's 3,000-year-old ancient poetry. And it starts Solomon's Song of Songs. He writes, I've got it in my notes here, 3,005 Proverbs, 105 songs. He's an amazing creative. Three books of the Bible, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon and this is one of his works. And when it says Song of Songs, it means the best of the best. These are their greatest hits. When we call Jesus Christ King of kings and Lord of Lords, we're talking about the best of the best. So then she speaks first. And here's what she says. "Let him kiss me." This is getting off to a good start, "with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is more delightful than wine." And some good date nights have included that. "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes. Your

name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you." This may be anticipating their honeymoon night. "Take me away with you. Let us hurry. Let the king bring me into his chambers. How right they are to adore you." She says, "Dark am I yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards, my own vineyard I had to neglect." So here's what she does, she speaks first. One of the knocks on Bible-based faith is, well just it oppresses women, it doesn't give them a voice, that's actually not true. That's fake news. Everywhere that Christianity is spread, so has freedom and liberation for women. If you don't believe me, go to some Muslim country and just walk around and see how it's going. That ultimately here she speaks first. How many of you are kinda surprised? 3,000 years ago, conservative, religious, middle Eastern Jewish environment, there's a series of love songs and she speaks first and she speaks most, as you read the book, she does most of the talking. How many of you men, you've got a biblical marriage if your wife gets in more words than you. If you're getting married, just so you know, she's gonna get more words in than you. And that's the way it works. She speaks first, she speaks most, he gets a few words in, but she does a lot of the talking. In addition, she's very free, she's very overt, she's very passionate. She knows what she likes, what she doesn't like. She doesn't mind speaking her mind. She's got a clear voice, this is a very strong woman. Let me say this. There's a massive difference between being strong and independent. If two strong people are together, that's great. If two strong people are independent, then the rest of their marriage is a tug of war and they're just gonna wear each other out. Strength is never a problem, independence is. You're supposed to be one. So she's strong but they're one. And so she speaks first. She speaks most. You're gonna see in the book she flirts a lot, right? If you wanna build your theology of flirting, just go through the Song of Songs, it's all there. And she invites him to do what? What does she invite him to do? Kiss me on the mouth. Kiss me on the mouth. This is a very bold gal 3,000 years ago. Couple of benefits. Number one, you can burn two calories doing this. And so it's health related, right? I know some of you are naturopathic girls. I just wanna give you a little incentive. In addition, it's also proven that if you kiss it boosts your immune system. like the COVID hit, We were fine 'cause we've been working. COVID wasn't a thing in our, we've been working on our immune system for 30 years. So we're good. We were COVID ready. Now what she mentions about him, she really likes his character. "Your name is like perfume poured out." His name would be his character. And she says, "The women love you," meaning he's the kinda guy, her friends are like, "Oh, he's a great guy." For a woman Grace tells me that the highest need and value is safety and security. When she's with her man, is he physically safe and secure? Or is he domineering and overbearing? Is he emotionally safe and secure? Is he spiritually safe and secure? Can she depend on him? Can she trust him? Like if she marries him, is he good for 50 years? If they have kids, is he gonna show up and be the active present dad that they need? It's being able to trust character. And she says that his character or his name is like perfume poured out, it's sweet. She's like, "Your character is attractive to me." And then she also talks about his grooming and she's gonna say this multiple times, but she talks about his mouth and she talks about his fragrance, his cologne. Later on she's gonna say, "Ruddy and Radiant and outstanding is my man." Literally, she calls him a stud. Literally it's in the book. Okay, so she flatters his character, but she likes also that he has

practiced something, gentlemen, that we will call grooming. So just a few, just a few pro tips, okay? Just a few things. Maybe things to pray about. So we'll do a little test, ladies, one eyebrow or two? Two? Okay. Should the man figure out what to do with his eyebrows, his nose hair and his ear hair? Yes or no?

- Yes.

- Yes, otherwise you're like my husband snorted a cat and you know, it looks like it's trying to escape his cranium. That's terrible, okay? Should he use a breath mint?

- Yes.

- Yes. Otherwise you're like, I know what Satan smells like. You know? And so how about this? Is it a good thing if a man has a healthy relationship with soap and water?

- Yes.

- Yeah, yeah. You're gonna be okay, guys. And it's good to get at least one shirt with buttons maybe on date night. Go to somewhere that you're not ordering food from a high school kid, you know, through a clown that's eaten with a sport. Just things to pray about. So she's talking about his grooming. And so let me just tell you guys, your character matters, but also most women do care about your grooming and I would say too, like cut your nails. Like nobody wants to be with Wolverine, you know, like, you know, and I grow a beard, but I've learned to put conditioner on my beard 'cause Grace is like, "Hey, your beard, you know, it's like porcupine." And when the girls were little too, like, "Dad, you know, you've wounded us." And so I've learned to put conditioner on my beard. Just, just things to pray about. Grooming, she's talking about his grooming. Now what she also talks about is her personal insecurities. Okay, let me just change temperature in the room ladies, since you and I are friends now we've had this interaction and we're on the same page. True or false? Most women are really aware of all of their appearance and they don't need their husbands to be criticizing them.

- Yes. Amen.

- Okay? I feel like I'm dancing on ice. I think I was very, all of a sudden I feel very dangerous. Okay, so here's what I've, I'll just blame it on Grace. So what Grace told me was that women are aware of their appearance. That women tend to be critical of one another comparing and sometimes catty. And as a result they don't need their husbands to be critical but to be complimenting. And what she does, she mentions the fact that she has some insecurity. She's basically the Cinderella story of the Old Testament. Here's what she says. She says, "I was working in the vineyard but I didn't get to take care care of my own vineyard." And in the book her mother is mentioned, her two brothers are mentioned, but there's no mention of her father. My assumption and presumption is she was raised in a single parent family. Her dad wasn't around. Many of you, this is your story. We don't know if her parents got divorced or he died. We

don't know what happened. So what happened in their family as happens in any family, if dad is gone, income goes down. Now everybody in the family has an additional burden of responsibility to generate revenue, to make money. So the boys would've went to work, mom went to work and ultimately she's the only daughter, she has to go to work, which means she's outside working. She says that she's basically involved in farming, she's keeping vineyards. And so what that means is she does not meet the cultural standard of beauty. The cultural standard of beauty in that day was not that you were tan, but you were pale. Every culture has different standards of beauty. In our day it's the opposite. Tan is what people tend to prefer. And that day it was pale 'cause if you were pale, it meant you were rich. Then you got to sit inside all day while somebody worked outside. And if you were tan, that meant you were poor, not rich, and you were outside all day. So she's a gal who's got a farmer's tan, she's a gal who's got dirt under her fingernails. She's a gal who's hair's up in a ponytail. She's a gal who's sweating and when you see her, you're like, she works outside. And what she's saying is, I feel a bit insecure about that because I don't meet the cultural standard of beauty. She's the Cinderella story, as I said of the Old Testament. And so within this, what you're gonna see throughout the book, the husband continually compliments her. Let me say this, men, I'll get into this later. But compliments are like deposits and criticisms are like withdrawals. With your wife if you make too many criticisms and you don't make enough compliments, you're gonna bankrupt that relationship. You're gonna be upside down. So he is going to compliment her continually. And he, let me say this, he has her, at least early on in the relationship as the standard of beauty. When God created Adam and Eve, there was not a standard of beauty. There was a spouse that served as your standard of beauty. The worst thing you can do is compare your spouse to someone else, that is coveting someone else's spouse. That's a violation of the 10 Commandments. So he has eyes for her. Job 31:1 says it this way, I made a covenant with my eyes not to look upon other women lustfully. That old love song, "I only have eyes for you," it actually is theologically accurate. And so what she's saying is, you know, this is not exactly how I'd want to look and, but I had to go to work and you know, life has its requirements and and he comforts her and he compliments her. And let me say this as well, men don't understand the pressure and the self-awareness of women. Okay, let me just prove it. So you guys help me with this. How many of you guys have been to a locker room at a gym? How many of you, you're like, do you not have a mirror? Do you not understand what you are? I mean like if you go to a locker room with a bunch of guys, they're not self-conscious of their body image and how they present it, amen? That's where I'm going. You're just like, hey, you need a mirror, a scale and a robe, like immediately that's what you need. But dudes are just walking around, there's no awareness at all. You're like, I need the hand sanitizer for my eyes. I can't unsee this. And so for most guys, we don't have that level of awareness, amen? But, but women tend to, I'll move along 'cause I could see it's already nervous. Grace will be up in a minute to save this. All right, key number four, healthy family and friends. She says Song of Songs 1:4, "Take me away with you." She wants to go away on a getaway, romantic night away. "Let us hurry, let the king bring me into his chambers." And she wants to be with her husband, she's flirting with him. And then her friends jump in. "We rejoice and delight in you. We will praise your love" or your love making if you like that Hebrew translation, "more than wine." So what she says is, I really love him and I wanna marry him and I wanna live with him and I wanna go on the honeymoon with him. And I wanna do life with him.

And the friends come along and they say, "We agree." This is really important. How many of you have met somebody, they fall in love and they lose touch with reality? You're like, "They're great, they're my soulmate, I love them, we're gonna do great." And you're like, "Have you asked their probation officer if that's a good idea?" You know, like, you know? they couldn't pick you up 'cause they don't have a license 'cause of all the DUIs, this may not be the one, you know? And so what happens is, if a guy is a good guy, let me give you this illustration. So let's say there's a gal, she loves the Lord, she has healthy friends, healthy family, healthy church family. If there's a good guy, he comes and he wants to know the people who know and love her. And he's open, overt and honest. He's like, well, I wanna get to know her. You know, any, any questions? You know, I come over to your parents' house for dinner, go out with your friend group, visit your church, go to your Bible study. Hey, I'm happy to meet everybody who loves you. I wanna love you out. You know what a bad guy does? He isolates her. All of a sudden it's like, where'd she go? Well, I don't know. We don't really know that guy. Yeah, we've never really gotten to talk to him. We don't actually have his number. We, the parents are like, "Well, when are you gonna be home? Who is this? What's going on?" And so ultimately a bad guy isolates a gal so that she can be in danger and he can control her. A good guy gets to know the people who know and love her so that they can confirm that he's a good guy. And that's what she's saying here. She's like, "Here's who I think he is," and what her friends say is, "We agree, we agree." I got two daughters, of course, like if you wanna marry my daughter, you gotta get to know the family, gotta get to know the church family and the friends. Otherwise we don't know you, we can't trust you. You can't trust someone you don't know. And that's what's happening here. So what we would call this is wise counsel and what you don't wanna do when you're in a relationship, you don't wanna just vent to whoever's in front of you, verbal process. You don't wanna just invite in extended family members. Unless they're godly and helpful, how many of you have tagged your family into your romantic relationship and that did not help at all? All right, what you don't wanna do is you don't wanna post on social media. I mean, amen? I mean that's just, I mean like, and I know some of you're online, like some of you posted questions, we're gonna answer them. They're awesome 'cause but they're crazy. They're like, "My husband drives me nuts. He's like a baby, I hate his guts. What should I do?" Post, and you're like. I don't know, maybe stop drinking. I don't know. You know, like, I don't know. I don't know if I would've just put that out in public, you know, I don't know. And so what you wanna find is what we would call, and Proverbs would call wise counsel. Who do you talk to? Who do you seek for wise counsel? For Grace and I, there are men that I talk to, women that she talks to. These are godly people who are older and have good marriages and love the Lord. And she agrees that these are the guys I'm gonna talk to. I agree that these are the gals she's gonna talk to. Otherwise we just go get people who agree with us, which is how you get a riot, you know? Just go get some people involved who shouldn't be involved. And so we agree on that. We have counselors that we talk to. We have older pastors that are our pastors and overseers. We have wise counsel, we don't talk to these people every day. We don't make them carry our marriage, but they're there when we need them and we can talk to them and they help us. We're gonna get with one of them here coming up in a few weeks and so the friends throughout the book, these are family, friends, church family, and you need church family. They come to help and support. Here at our church this would include the premarital class where you're gonna get taught and it has mentoring couples,

godly, awesome older couples that you can get to know and then pick one as your wise counsel. Hey, in the first year could we talk to you guys? Yeah, we're here to love and help and serve. And so they're now isolated, they're in relationship, which is the safest place to be. And then lastly, key number five is protecting priority. She says it this way. Song of Songs 1:7. She says, "Tell me, you whom I love." She's very overt with her affection, she's very passionate, very verbal. "Where you graze your flocks and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?" So she's using an analogy here. He is the king of Israel and she uses the analogy that he is a shepherd and that everyone under his leadership is like a flock. The Bible uses this a lot, says that Jesus is a shepherd, we're His flock, I'm the senior pastor at our church and you're my flock, okay? And so what she's saying is he's got a lot of leadership responsibilities and what she's saying is that his job has now taken so much of their life that there's no room for the couple to be together or for her to be a priority. And if you ever had this where work takes over and your marriage takes a backseat and all of a sudden you're like, "Hey, we're not doing so good. We're not getting time together. I don't feel like I'm a priority." That's what she's saying. She's asking him at midday, right, when you get your lunch break, I know you're working, I wanna come get lunch with you, but you gotta tell me where you are. I don't know where you're gonna be for work. She says, "I don't wanna be like the veiled women." The veiled women were the corrupt women. They were the seductress women. They'd wait for men to go on their break and then they would veil themselves and they would go out to flirt and do nefarious things. She says, "I don't wanna be chasing you around," right? I want to be a priority. I don't wanna be at the end of your day, I wanna be in your day. She's asking to be a priority. And here's a great myth. One great myth is that when you find the right person, marriage is easy. You just fall in love and you stay in love and you live happily ever after. It's like two pieces of a puzzle, we just fit. Is that true? No. Oh no, no. No, it's true for the first 15 minutes of marriage and then it's over, it's gone. To have a good marriage, it takes a lot of work and intentionality and priority. You don't get healthy, you don't learn the Bible, you don't do ministry, you don't grow a business, you don't cultivate a marriage unless you make it a priority and put some effort into it. Furthermore, Satan didn't even show up until after the wedding. Satan didn't even show up until Adam and Eve were married. You know what that means? In addition to the fallen world we live in, Satan is gonna do all he can to attack your marriage. That means it's gonna be some work. After the wedding comes the war. And so what she's saying is, I wanna spend more time together. She just showed them in chapter one, verse four, take me away. She wants to go for a romantic retreat. We're gonna look at that next week when they go to a place called, Engedi, a place that Grace and I actually have been in the Middle East as well, but what she's talking about here is their priorities are out of order. And what happens in marriage is our priorities get out of order, so for Grace and I, we got married, we were broke in college, we graduated, we moved back, we couldn't even afford an apartment, the first and last in damage. So I'm working nights, she's working days. Now our schedules don't sync up. In addition, then I start a Bible study that becomes a college ministry. Now we got a bunch of college kids and they don't have a house, so they're always at our house. We have hundreds, thousands of students a year literally coming through our house. Bible studies and classes. They start getting saved. So now they need counseling and now they wanna get married. So they need premarital. Well, there's no money. So I'm working a full-time job. Grace

is working a full-time job. And then we start having kids, which is a blessing. But now we add kids to the mix and they gotta go to bed at a certain time and they have expenses and needs and eventually school and sports. And by the time, and then it turns into a church and then it turns into five kids and book deals and speaking and travel and just, it feels like an avalanche. You're like, where are we? I can't even shovel out from all our responsibilities. And so we had to reset according to our priorities. And unless you intentionally architect your life, you won't enjoy living in your life. It's your life, it's your marriage. You gotta figure out what it looks like. You gotta figure out what you bring in and what you leave out. Couple of things that help Grace and I to protect our priorities. And that's the heart of what Abby here is talking about. Number one, we went to a shared calendar. I know this seems simple, but if you're gonna be one, you probably should have one calendar and it's digital. And so we know, okay, you're gonna do this, I'm gonna do that, we're busy here, we're busy there. And what we do every week, we have a calendar meeting every week. We also have a date. Our date is fun and romantic. Our calendar meeting is a little more practical. When the kids are little, it's like, okay, who's gonna pick 'em up at school? And what are we doing for date night? What are we doing for dinner? And who's gonna take 'em to get their, you know, orthodontics appoint, whatever the case is. And what I like to put on the calendar as well, I like to have dates on the calendar. We've always had a weekly date. We keep it as sacred. And here's the big idea, marriage is not a finish line. It's a starting line. You don't stop dating when you get married. You just upgrade your dates. That's what you do. I always tell the guys, either date your wife or someone else will. I would just encourage you to make it your priority. And so at the end of the day, we have a date every week. We always have. We had our date yesterday. It was great, we sat in the sun, we hung out, we went out to dinner, it was a beautiful day. I got date with my wife, it was fantastic. And I like to have dates on the calendar. I also like to have holidays and birthdays and vacations. And I like fun. How many of you like fun? I really like fun. I'm very committed to fun. I think that ultimately most Christians don't have enough fun, right? And, so I like fun. I like going places, I like doing things. I like spending money. I like eating things. I like sleeping in. I like hammocks. I do. I'm just all about it, I am. And so I want, I always need at least two fun things on the calendar to look forward to and to plan for. And if I don't have two fun things on like big things, like we're going to another country, we're going to a beach, we're gonna, you know, leave the kids at grandma's and we're going to a hotel for a year or two, you know, just big things. Big things. And I like to look forward to having fun 'cause I don't want life just to be grind, grind, grind. I want it to be get to the fun, get to the fun, get to the fun. And so I'm the party planner for the Driscoll Nation and Grace and I do this every year with a vision retreat, it's January. It's a good time to do that. One of our pastors, Jimmy Evans, has a resource at XO Marriage where it's a vision retreat. You get together, you pray, and you put together your priorities for the year. So let me share this with you in closing. Here's your priorities, here's our priorities. Number one, healthy relationship with God as a Christian. Bible reading, prayer. Love Jesus, worship, you know, relationship with God. 'Cause if you don't have a good relationship with God, then that lack, you're going to want your spouse to meet. Let me say this. A good spouse is still a bad God. And sometimes if you don't have a good relationship with God, you're giving God's responsibilities to your spouse and you're gonna crush 'em. Healthy relationship with each other as a married couple. You're married before you have kids and you wanna be married after

they're gone. Number three, healthy relationship with each of your children as parents. As you add kids when they're little, you could treat 'em like a group, when they get bigger they've each got their own personality, their own life, their own issues, need to pursue them individually. Number four, healthy work-life balance as employees at work. And then number five, healthy relationship with extended family members and close Christian friends, those are your priorities. Now let me ask you this. Let me ask you men, if you're gonna make a mistake, which one are you gonna push too high up the list? Work. Men will put work at one or two. Women, let's be honest, once you have kids, you take number three and you make 'em number one or two. This is where our priorities get inverted. I've seen Christian couples mess up, take two and three, marriage and parenting and morph it together into something they call family. That's not right because what holds the family together is the kids. And once the kids leave, the marriage falls apart. Or the parents over parent the adult children or they start bugging the adult children to give them grandchildren. 'Cause the only thing that held their marriage together was children. Now, I just explained all the dysfunction in all your relationships. You could send this to your parents and tell 'em I love 'em. So, let me close with this. Your priorities need to manifest themselves in your schedule. They need to manifest themselves in your budget. You need to be able to say no to certain people and things so you can say yes to the most important people and things. And if you are in, first priority is with the Lord, He's gonna love you, so you can love, He's gonna forgive you, so you can forgive. He's gonna teach you about covenants so that you can live in covenant and then your spouse. And one of the greatest gifts you can give to your kids is a healthy marriage so that they can grow up and launch and not be looking back, wondering and worrying. Are mom and dad gonna make it? They're like, they're fine. They're actually on a date night. They don't even know that we've moved out. They're doing fine. And we love our kids, but I want to launch our kids and I wanna just make sure that our marriage is our priority. And then when God gives you grandkids, of course they're a priority. That being said, I love you and I see that marriage is in crisis and I believe that the couple that obeys the Word of God has a 100% success rate in marriage, right? God made Adam, he had a relationship with God, then He made Eve, now he's got a relationship with Eve. Then He gave them kids, you could see that creation, the divine design are these priorities. We want you to fall in love. We want you to be happily married. We want you to grow old together. We want the last day of your marriage to be your best day. We want there to be fun on the calendar. We want there to be love in the household. We want your children to grow up in an environment where they're pro-marriage and they're hopeful for their future. And we love you and we want God's best for you. And if you obey His Word, that's what you get. I'll bring Grace up at this point, we'll answer a question. I went a little bit long. You're welcome. Hey babe, thanks for joining me. We're gonna do one question. Is that okay?

- Yeah.

- You guys welcome Grace for me? Sit right there. I feel like I did better this week, last week I think I probably said some things I shouldn't, but.

- You did great.

- Thank you. Okay. Gift of encouragement. Thank you. All right, what's the question?

- The question is, "What are practical ways to remain close to each other in difficult seasons of life?" And then do you have a regular date night, which you answered.

- Yeah, so maybe we'll hit the regular date night first. What would be some things that would help date night be not, you know, not legalistic, but healthy habits?

- We were really strict about our date night and it changed a lot through different seasons of life. But we made sure that once a week we had a date night or date day when the kids start getting into school and stuff, it's important that you keep it a priority and there's gonna be lots of things that come in and wanna try and take that date away. And we were very strict about it. And in ministry it can be hard whether you're working a regular job or ministry job or whatever. It can be hard because stuff comes up and it seems really important and it might be important, but it's not as important as your marriage.

- It's not the most important. Yeah.

- So we, in the beginning of ministry especially, we a few times gave up our date and then it really did affect us and then it sets a bad habit for people constantly interrupting it. So it's what you teach and what you tolerate. So we pretty much just said, this is our date. And people knew and learned that they didn't get to call us or interrupt our date day or night, whatever we were doing. So keep that on the calendar, keep it priority, and it says to each other that you matter. It's one of the first things that it says to you. And then you can just enjoy each other's company. And I think on dates as well, I mean, we started out, like you said, super poor saving for the dollar theater once a month, which was fun, I mean, it made us be creative and just hang out a lot. But make sure you don't end up just talking about work or kids or other people, but have something. There's even questions in the back of our book, but something where you're together answering questions about each other or acting interested in each other. And if you need a book to help you do that, or even going through Song of Songs, yeah.

- Most guys do by the way. Most guys do.

- Yeah, going through Song of Songs and asking what you think about what they're saying to each other. I mean, it can be very simple, but it needs to be intentional discussions about your marriage and each other and how you can better love each other and get closer. Otherwise you will get, and I'm guilty of this, like I get on tangents talking about other people all the time and you're like, "Okay, so how are you doing?" Oh yeah, sorry. And so we really have to work at this and it's so important to do that, otherwise you're never investing in each other.

- Well, and we say one of the keys to marriage is friendship. And they're gonna say in Song of Songs 5:16 B, she says, here's her definition of marriage. "He's my lover, he's my friend." And

the thing is like, well, I wish things were better in the bedroom, well, that's the lover. It starts outside of the bedroom with being friends and making memories and laughing and having fun. How about early on when we were broke, we're college students, we're broke and then we started ministry and you know, first three years, I'm a volunteer unpaid pastor running a church and working a job and then kids come. I mean, how do you have a date with kids when you're broke?

- We were blessed to have both grandparents switch off every other week, that was huge.

- Yeah, A plus plus grandparent date night.

- Yeah. We kept our dates super cheap. We'd go down to the beach and just hang out. We'd just go sit in places and not even necessarily spend much money.

- Go for a walk. Yeah.

- Yeah, just hang out together and enjoy each other's company or the view or whatever. But when you don't have a lot of resources, you can still get creative. I mean there's a lot of things you can Google for creativity on date nights. But when we were in college, especially we did, we just found places to go, new places to explore. And-

- We did a lot of picnics and visited a lot of parks.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Go for walks and I love sunsets.

- And then when kids come, if you don't have sitters or can't afford sitters, we had in our ministry before, a lot of couples did co-ops. So they would, there'd be like four couples with all with kids. And one week, one couple would get all the kids while the other three couples went out. And then they'd switch around once a week, once a month you'd have to have all the kids and the rest of the weeks.

- So, you got three.

- Yeah, exactly. So it worked out really well, free childcare.

- And for birthdays and Christmas and holidays, we'd ask for gift cards for movies or for restaurants or hotel points and just, and we'd stack it up so that then we could go out on some fun dates. So what was the other half of the question? One was date.

- How do you. Sorry.

- That's okay. We're not gonna fight in front of everybody, just so you know, usually when we start a marriage series, we're fighting the whole time, it's just.

- What are the practical.

- Not now we're doing good. So.

- Well, the practical ways to remain close to each other in difficult seasons of life.

- So what would some of those difficult seasons be, for example?

- I mean, that can be physical. Maybe you're going through a health issue.

- Injury, illness, health issue issue.

- It can be spiritual. Maybe you are under spiritual attack and really it could be emotional. You're dealing with something like, when my trauma came up, we were having to deal with processing that. I've had, you know, five baby surgeries and you've had health stuff come along from stress, I mean, we didn't know that those seasons would come, but we had to navigate them and make sure that we were connected during them. I think the thing is, is if you're doing this regularly, like we just talked about a date night, if you're doing that regularly, when those hard times come, it's already set into place so that you're just continuing to do that, you're just, the trial comes, but you're already addressing the relationship in a good way. And so for us, you know, really learning to pray together, especially when those hard times come. But if you're doing that regularly, dig in more and pray for each other more. Be specific and ask the Lord how you can really serve your spouse in that season. Ask a lot of questions. I had to learn to say, "Hey, you know, I think I know what you need right now, but maybe that's not what you need. What do you need from me right now to be helpful and to help you feel more loved in this moment through this circumstance that's hard. And just ask each other.

- Well, in other hard seasons too, sometimes it's your parents get divorced or they get sick or one passes away or you have a miscarriage or one of your children is struggling or has a health issue or some, I mean, life has plenty of complications. You lose a job, whatever the case may be. And in those moments, I think it really reveals, at least it did to me, just my degree of selfishness. 'Cause I don't like to be inconvenienced. I have, you know, I got my way of doing things and I got my priorities and you've always had the gift of service and I've always had the gift of being served. And so, you know it. And then in those moments where like you have kids or something happens, it's, it's like, okay, I'm selfish. And I find that most of my frustration when life gets difficult or hard, it really is just exposing my selfishness if I'm totally honest and it's like, I don't wanna serve, I wanna be served. And it says, well, Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve, so if I'm gonna be like Jesus, I gotta stop being selfish and I gotta think about serving. And in those moments, I think what makes those moments really hard, at least for me, when difficulties come into life that maybe were even unexpected or unplanned, I just get selfish and

I've gotta just be honest about that with the Lord, I know you already know it, but I need to talk to the Lord about it nonetheless. And sometimes we do get in a routine as a married couple, you're like, it's working, you know, everything's, you know, we're doing pretty good, and then boom, I didn't plan for this, I didn't anticipate that, I didn't expect it. And now we've gotta pivot and now things are different and you used to not get as frustrated in those moments. I would get frustrated. Why do you think that was?

- Well, I mean it, it was my gifting to serve, but then I would get caught up with only serving other people and not keeping you priority. And so I had my issues with that too. So then when you really needed me, then I at times would get resentful because then I couldn't serve all the people that I thought I was supposed to be serving because I hadn't had you as priority. And so it exposed my wrong priorities. And usually that's what trials do. It exposes something in us that's out of alignment, whether it's with the Lord or with each other. And so we need to be willing to not double down in those moments and say, okay, this isn't working. So how do we get back on track? How do we love each other in this moment? How do we forgive if there's forgiveness needed? And just practically, how do we connect in this moment and don't allow it to become a place of resentment or bitterness. Sit down and pray together, calmly talk it through. And if you're frustrated, you can say that. But you need to do it in a way that you're willing to own if you're frustrated for wrong reasons. And I think that was what we had to learn to talk through a lot because we didn't know how to communicate. We came from completely different communication backgrounds and mine was passive aggressive and yours was say what you want. And so it didn't work. And so we had to learn to come toward the middle.

- I think that's still my communication style though.

- sometimes, yeah. But I think it's so important to not be afraid to learn how to communicate together and give each other grace in that process. I mean that's why like when you said that about, you know, you would fire me if I was your employee. I mean, it shocked me, but I thought, okay, you know what? That's his real feeling and that's exposing his heart. That's wrong, but we need to talk that through and figure it out because I'm not going anywhere, he's not going anywhere. So how do we figure this out? It's hurtful, but I need to forgive. He needs to see that that's not a good way of looking at me. And then we need to pivot and figure out what that looks like, so it doesn't have to be, I mean it can be if the enemy lets it be a place for bitterness for sure. I mean, I could have hung onto that and just gotten cold and you know, we could be married but not happy or divorced. So I mean, those are really your options. You work it out, you pray it through, you'd be willing to talk through and have those conversations. And if you're implementing these date nights and this time together in the Word, time together praying, learning about each other, 'cause we had to learn about each other's pasts and why we were the way we were and the choices we made and had to own. And there's a lot of learning even though we dated for a long time. And so you always need to get to know each other more. And it's fun once you get in a rhythm of it. And then you're, you learn how to be gracious with each other.

- Love you, thank you for being a good friend and then I'll close this in closing prayer. I think one of the things, especially when the hard times have come that it took us a while to learn. We just ask, how can I be a good friend to you right now? How can I be a good friend? I can't fix it, I can't change it, but how can I be a good friend? And even recently it was just like, we need to go for a walk, hold hands and just verbal process for an hour and just talk and just be together. And that didn't fix everything, but it fixed us.

- Yeah.

- And so the friendship is always crucial. Why don't you pray for 'em and we'll spend some time in worship.

- Lord, thank you that You show us in Your Word what You intended marriage to be. I pray that we would go there and that we would start there. And that we would ask You how to make our marriages better. We all have areas that we can work on, Lord, I pray that we would make You a priority. And out of that we would make each other a priority. And then after that, the areas that Mark talked about, Lord, I just pray that you would bring health and healing and joy into these marriages as you have done with us. And it's been a process, Lord. And it's been amazing to watch your hand guide us throughout it, and Lord, thank you that You forgive us. Thank you that You're patient with us and I pray that we would do the same for our spouses in Jesus name. Amen.

- Thank you.