

## Overcoming Intimacy Obstacles

- All right, hey, we're in a really fun series. At least I'm having fun. I don't know about you. It's really fun to see your faces as I talk about these things. We're talking about marriage and romance and sex and we're having a good time. And today we continue in the Song of Songs, Old Testament book, chapter 2, verse 8 through chapter 3, verse 5. And the big subject is, "Overcoming Intimacy Obstacles." Let me say this, if you are paying attention, you will realize that between last week's sermon and this week's sermon, there is a section in the Song of Songs that I am skipping. I am skipping it because the Song of Songs is like salsa. There's like mild and then hot. And so I decided I'm gonna preach all the mild sections. And if you want the hot sections, it's in the book, it's free. Get a copy on the way out or buy it if you're online, "Real Romance." So Grace and I have got a "Real Marriage" podcast and we deal with the section that I am skipping, amen. And some of you are like, "What does it say?" Well, I can't tell you 'cause I'd need to fire myself. But it will be helpful if you are married, and frustrating if you're single. Now that being said, where we find ourselves in the Song of Songs is this couple today is going to have a bit of a rough patch. And so let me start with a story. Some years ago, Grace and I went to Sonoma, California, wine country. Have you ever been there? We went there. And so if you're like, "Did you drink wine?" We went there. Hey, no judging. We went there to study the Bible. Okay? So in the Bible, Jesus says, "I am the vine. You are the branches. Any branch that doesn't bear fruit gets chopped down, thrown in the fire." So we were going there to make sense of the New Testament, not to drink wine. We may have drunk wine, but that's not why we went. That was not why we went. So we went to Sonoma, California, and this vineyard was run by this really sweet Christian couple, and they were telling us about how the Bible applies to what they called viticultural work, and vine dressing, and growing grapes for wine. And I'll never forget, we were going through one of the rows of the vines that had been growing for generations. This family had been carefully cultivating these beautiful vines for generations to bring forth just the right, to bring forth the right grapes, to bring forth the best fruit. And she stopped and she explained to us, and she said, "You see that that vine there?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Do you know why it's dying?" I was like, "I don't know." She said, "Well, it's been growing for generations. But some little animal creature got into the vineyard, started gnawing at the base of the vine, and eventually it severed the base of the vine. And everything that had been growing for generations died." And it just dawned on me in that moment, that's exactly the section we find ourselves in the Song of Songs, that ultimately marriage is like a vineyard. You gotta sow your seed, you've gotta water, you gotta pull your weeds, you've gotta continue managing everything that is growing. But in addition, you gotta make sure that nothing gnaws away at the vine. And ultimately, these are what the Bible here is gonna call little foxes. You're gonna deal with these in a minute. These are little issues. They're not like a chainsaw. They're like just a constant gnawing on the root of the relationship. Any of you have those? Ha ha, nervous laugh, nervous laugh, which is a lot of husbands are like, "I could get in trouble, but I don't wanna lie in church. I'm very conflicted as to how I should respond." And what the little foxes are, they're just little things that just sort of gnaw away over the course of time. Any of you have these in your marriage? Grace, do we have these in our marriage? Okay, let's talk about ours. We'll talk about ours and then you could talk about yours. So how many of you, you married someone totally different than you and when you met them you're like, "They're so

interesting." And then later you're like, "They're so annoying." The difference is pre-married versus post-married. Here's Grace and I, I'm always early like Jesus and Grace, Grace is late. Okay? I'm an introvert, like Jesus and Grace is an extrovert, okay? How about this one? I really like football.

- [Congregant] Yeah, like Jesus. I don't know if Jesus likes football. I don't know. Grace really doesn't like football. How about this one? I am very organized. Grace is, we put in the book "more random." I put "disorganized" and then I got rebuked. So it's "more random". I'll say this, too. Grace is more gracious like Jesus, just a observation. So also like we're just different. I'm more of a pessimist. She's an optimist. That's why I'm still here in this relationship. She still has hope. I am impatient. Grace is patient. 30 years with me, patient. Okay? If I didn't have to live with me, I wouldn't. I like to drive with the windows down in the car. Grace doesn't 'cause it messes up her hair. And for me, I don't really have a lotta hair. And if I could be a puppy and stick my head out, I would do that, driving down the road. That's how I would roll. We're just different. I don't get nervous speaking in public. Grace does. I think writing a book about marriage and sex is super fun. Grace does not. So thank you honey for helping. So the point is, we're different. And how many of you, the differences start as sort of, "Oh, they're interesting," and then they become really, really annoying. Because when we're dating, we're on our best behavior. So if you're single, let me tell you this. When you meet somebody, that's the best version. If you're thinking, "I'm gonna fix them," no, that's the best version. 'Cause when you were dating, you're like, "We got all dressed up. I put in a breath mint. I was on my best behavior." And when you're dating someone, you're hiding all your quirks from them, right? You're dating somebody and you're like, "That's crazy. I met someone who doesn't fart." No, you didn't. You didn't. They're holding it till you're married. It's not on your registry, but it's the gift that keeps giving. That's just, it's going be like that. We just identified all married people. All the single people are like, "I don't know." No, we do, we do. We're just telling you what's coming. You should put a gas mask on your registry. That's what you should do. Okay? So what happens when we're dating, we're on our best behavior, then we get married and then we start finding everybody's quirks. Okay, now don't raise your hand, but how many of you are in the first year of marriage and you're like, "I didn't, I didn't know. I didn't, what the? And there's these quirks about us. What do we do with those?" That's what we're gonna talk about. So here's where they start. They start with flirting and they end up with fighting. Have you ever had that? It's called date night. So we're gonna go on date night with this couple. They start with flirting. So here we go. Song of Songs 2:8-13. She says, it's a husband and wife, man and woman. They're talking back and forth. She says, "Listen, my beloved. Look here he comes." He's come to pick her up for a date. "Leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young..." That's literally a stud. 3,000 years later, guys still like that. "Look there he stands behind our wall." So she sees him coming, "Gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My beloved spoke to me and said to me." So then here's what he says, "Arise my darling." He's off to a good start. "My beautiful one come with me. See, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth. The season of singing has come. The cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit. The blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling, my beautiful one come with

me." So this is a man and a woman singing poetic love songs one to another, and we're getting to gaze into their relationship. First thing I wanna just sort of point out here, anticipation. So she's home, he's coming to get her. It's date night. She's really excited. She's all dressed up. She's peering through the lattice out the window. She's like, "Here he comes, here he comes, here he comes." There's something magical about anticipation. This is what happens when we're dating. You're like, "Okay, let's plan something. How could I serve you? What would be awesome? When can I pick you up?" And you're just sort of waiting. And then you get married, you can fall into a very boring routine. There's no fun on the calendar. There's no romantic getaway. There's no vacation on the horizon. And it just falls into a boring routine and rut. What they have here is that sense of anticipation, looking forward to being together. Number two, what she's really excited about is what I like to call the ministry of presence. She's like, "He's coming, he's coming, he's coming." They just wanna be together. Ministry of presence is sometimes you can't change your life, but the person with you changes how you experience your life. And what happens is, we said in our first marriage book, "If you are friends with your spouse, it makes the good days twice as good and the bad days half as bad," 'cause you're together. It's the ministry of presence. How many of you don't like being alone? How many of you don't like going to bed alone? How many of you just like having your significant romantic over? You just like 'em there? I like to hold Grace's hand. I like to have Grace nearby. If we're in the car, I wanna hold her hand. We're at church, I wanna hold her hand. When I used to travel all the time, I would go into a low level depression before traveling just 'cause I don't like being gone. If you're a man who's married and your wife isn't home and you're home alone, it's just weird and you feel like you did something very wrong, you know? But there's this ministry of presence just being together. And what we have in our culture is a lot of selfishness. And it's manifest itself in this trend called living alone, living together alone, which I don't even... Like what? How can you be alone and together? You're not. That's like Grape Nuts. No grapes, no nuts. That's like Christian Science. No Christians, no science. You can't be alone and together. That doesn't make any sense to me. But it's couples that have decided, "You live in your house, I'll live in my house. You have your schedule, I have my schedule. You make your money, I make my money. We're not divorced, we just live apart and we're still married, and we see one another whenever it's convenient." Marriage is about doing life together and being together. And she's expecting and anticipating this. Number three, they have nicknames for one another. This is really important. We only give nicknames to two kinds of people, the people we really love and the people we really hate. Ha-ha, that's a nervous chuckle, but thank you for testifying. If you hate somebody, you don't even refer to them by their name. You've got a nickname for them. And if you really love someone, you refer to them by the nickname. And so nicknames are either cursings or blessings. Cursings are, it's a negative nickname for somebody we don't like. Positive nickname is a blessing. And it's calling someone into the fullness of what we believe they can be by loving them. And what they're doing here, they are practicing the ministry of presence and they're blessing one another. You know, and this... Let me just revisit this on the ministry of presence. You know what's amazing? Our God pursued us. His name is Jesus Christ. He came down to the earth. He came to be with us. What she senses waiting for her groom is what God's people should be sensing waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Can't wait till he gets here. It's gonna be so much better. And in the meantime, since he's

returned to heaven, he's left us the Holy Spirit so that we're not abandoned or orphaned. God is always present with us and in us. And so we learn a lot from our relationship with God about how to have a relationship with each other. There's anticipation, and there should be anticipation for the coming of Jesus. There's the ministry of presence and the Holy Spirit is the ministry of presence. And they give each other nicknames. And God does give us nicknames in the Bible, like son, or daughter, or child, or beloved. He gives us nicknames that are positive and loving, and they're blessings to us. And what we see here is that she has a nickname for him. She calls him the young stag or stud. Guys, do we like that? We do. It's good. And ladies, he gives her a lot of nicknames. My darling. Is that good?

- [Congregant] Yes.

- Darling, okay. My beautiful one, perennial favorite. And he says that she is like a dove to him in chapter 2, verse 14. Now what a dove denotes is peace. What he's saying is, "When I see you, there's peace." In addition, a dove is the symbol of purity and fidelity. Doves have a faithful mate their entire life. Once a male and female dove decide that they're going to be together, they're together forever. He's looking at her and he's saying, "I see peace, I see fidelity." And ultimately he is calling her into that sort of faithful relationship. And so they have nicknames for one another. Don't say it out loud, but just think for a moment if you're married, what nicknames do you have for each other? And if you don't have one, come up with a good one. And if you have a bad one, never say it again. Amen. Okay. I call Grace beauty and best friend, and she calls me Pastor Mark. Just checking. And so what they're talking about here as well... And sometimes the bishop. So anyways. What they're talking about here as well, they're talking about season. So what he says is, he says, "Winter is over, spring has come." In your relationship, there's different seasons. Solomon says it in Ecclesiastes 3, there's just different times and seasons. So think of it like this. When you first meet someone and you're getting to know each other, you're in a season of building a friendship. And then let's say you start intentionally dating and really getting to know one another. Well now it's a different season. Then you decide to take a premarital class here at the church and to seek wise counsel. Well now you're in a different season. Then you get engaged, a different season. Then you get married, different season. Then you add kids, completely different season.

- [Congregant] Amen.

- And then your kids get a little older, and then they're launching, and now you're empty nest. Another season. You grow old together and you welcome your grandkids. It's another season. And the key is to just know what season you're in to prepare for it and to enjoy it. And what happens in your marriage as well. Grace and I were talking upstairs. Even if you love each other, and you love Jesus, and you got a good marriage, you're gonna go through certain seasons. There are certain seasons in your relationship, they're gonna feel like winter. "It's a little cold. We're not doing so great. A little chilly at my house." And then spring comes, you're like, "Oh, we're doing better. Like I think we're warming up, like we're making progress. It feels like more hope." Then summer comes and you're like, "It's red hot." And then it's fall. "It feels

like we're cooling down again." You just need to know that every relationship goes through these seasons. And the key is to just be honest about where you are and constantly be working towards spring and summer. Grace and I have had winter seasons. We've had fall seasons. We were talking upstairs and I asked her, I said, "Honey, what season do you think we're in right now?" And she said, "I think we're headed into spring." So pray I don't screw it up 'cause that's good. All right. Maybe that's even a good conversation for you as a married couple on the way home. "What season are we in? Is it winter, spring, summer, fall? Like where are we and how do we get towards spring and summer?" So far it's going good. They're flirting and then they start fighting. Have you ever had this? On the drive in to church today? It happens, okay? Here we go. So they go from flirting, which is kind of spring and summer, to fighting, which is kind of fall and winter. Song of Songs 2:14-15. He says, "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face." Grace and I talk a lot about some of life is shoulder to shoulder getting things done, but the key is face to face. That's friendship. "Let me hear your voice, your voice is sweet, your face is lovely." He says, "But we have a problem, sweetheart. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom." So what he's saying here is this. He's saying, "I love you. I love the way you look. I love your voice. I love being with you. But honey, here's the issue. We've got a vineyard called our relationship. But there are some things that are little foxes gnawing at the root of the vine." And those little things over time can jeopardize the entire vineyard, everything that we're seeking to do. Couple of things I wanna say here. First, you'll notice that she is very verbal and he is very visual. Is this still true of men and women? All the women said, "Yes." Yes. Okay? Women tend to be more verbal, okay. In your relationship, does the woman have the majority of the words? Gentlemen, don't answer that. Just nod your head, you know? But with men, they're very visual. So she has a lot of, she speaks first, she speaks last. She speaks most, she's very verbal. He's very visual. When he talks about her, he talks about her appearance. What he says is, "Your face is lovely. I like looking at you. Your eyes are like doves." He's very visual. Number two, they are sharing a lot of compliments. And so what he says is, "Your voice is sweet and your face is lovely." These are compliments. And I told you last week, but I'll reiterate it, your relationship is like an account, and criticisms are withdrawals, and compliments are deposits. Every time you make a compliment, you're making a deposit. Every time you make a criticism, you're making a withdrawal. Do you have to make some withdrawals in your relationship? Yeah, "Hey, this really hurt me. That didn't work. You know, we need to figure this out." That can feel like a bit of a criticism, but it's something that needs to be worked on. The key is to make so many deposits that you're still okay when you make a withdrawal. And he's giving her a lot of compliments, and he's about ready to give a criticism. What he's saying is, "I love you. Your eyes are like doves. Your face is beautiful. Your voice is sweet." Deposits, right? "And we gotta talk about this fox in our vineyard." So all of this is compliments and there is gonna be one critique, one issue to work on. How many of you have struggled with this in your marriage being encouraging and complimentary? Grace and I, when we first got married, I probably should have got permission to talk about this, but we're there. We were terrible at compliments and encouraging one another. I tend to be a guy with a critical eye. I see everything that's wrong. I can walk into a room, walk into an event, read a book, hear a sermon, whatever. I can pick out what's wrong. And so I tended to be more of a critical person than a complimentary person. And

I just needed to learn to shut up. It's a spiritual gift that I was needing to work on. Because everything you see is not everything you need to say. And so for me, Grace constantly felt discouraged, like critique. Like, "You know, when you say something, it's probably something I've done wrong." And so Grace didn't compliment me either. She felt, this will shock you, young in our marriage. She felt that I was arrogant. I know, I was like, "How, how?" So she felt I was prideful, and so she wanted to help the Lord humble me. A ministry, you know, and so... Now the problem is the Bible says that the only way to be humble is to humble yourself. Your spouse can't humble you. They could try, but only you can humble yourself. So Grace would critique me a lot 'cause she was trying to get me to deal with my pride. Well in my pride, I argued with her. And so I needed to grow in humility and not seem as if I was beyond correction. And I needed also to encourage and compliment her. And what she told me was, she said, "I don't wanna encourage you and compliment you 'cause you're already arrogant and it's just only gonna get worse." Shots fired. And so early on we got into a really bad habit of sort of being each other's worst critic. And we weren't complimenting one another. Let me say that if you're only criticizing someone, you're sort of pushing them down. When you're complimenting them, you're pulling them up. Like, "I do love you, you're capable of more. I see God doing a work in you. I'm seeing progress. Let me encourage that." Some of you struggle with it. We certainly did. And what happens here, they go from flirting to fighting. And really what sabotages the relationship is this proverbial fox in the vineyard. And again, a fox in the vineyard is just an analogy or an illustration of something that is not a big deal, but it's a little deal that can become a big deal over time by gnawing away. So let me talk about some common foxes in the vineyard. Let me see if any of this sounds familiar. Any of you just married to someone who's totally different than you, and so you just kind of annoy each other? Can I get a witness? No, I can't. Okay, that's great. Okay, next sermon will be on lying. And bearing false witness. Because what happens is we tend to get attracted to people that are different than us. So the spender marries the saver. The night owl marries the early bird. The introvert marries the extrovert. And the neatnick marries the messy person. And so you're different. And just those differences can be like foxes in the vineyard gnawing away. How about this one? Priorities. Maybe one of you has a little different priorities and as a result you've not agreed on your priorities. You're like, "Why do you stay at work so late? Why don't you come home?" "Cause work matters more to me." Okay, wait a minute. We have different priorities. "Why are you not home for family dinner?" "Well, that's not a priority." Okay, different priorities. And what happens is when we have different priorities, we trigger the law of jealousy. And the law of jealousy is, "Hey, that's my place. Don't put work in my place. Don't put school for the kids in my place. Don't put your hobbies or your mother in my place," hypothetically. It's an issue of different priorities that can be a fox in the vineyard. What I care about is not what you care about. We need to agree and align on our priorities. Sometimes it's boundaries. Any of you have any fox in your vineyard with some other person that doesn't respect your boundaries? Maybe it's an ex, somebody you used to be married to or date and you're like, "Hey, no direct communication. They're not healthy and well." That's a fox in the vineyard. Maybe it's extended family. They are sort of butting into your relationship, telling you what to do, giving you advice that is unsolicited and unhelpful. Maybe they're bringing their problems to you. "Hey, we're outta money. Can you help us? Hey, we're fighting. Can you just be the person that I vent to? Hey, holidays are coming. We expect you to

give us your time and energy. We're going on vacation and you need to join us." And it's a fox in the vineyard. You're like, "You know what? It seems like a little thing. But if we have this gnawing away for 50 years, it's gonna sever the vine." In addition, common foxes that I have seen, just disorganization. Your schedule's not organized so you're missing each other. Your budget's not organized, and so you can't live according to your priorities. Or maybe your physical space is just disorganized. And it's like a fox in the vineyard. Like, "How come we never have our life synced up and we don't get to do the things that we care about, and why when we get home are we just sort of busy with chores and not enjoying our time?" How about this one? Past pain or shame. You did something, you're ashamed of it. Someone else did something, you're pained by it. This is where you probably needs some professional help. Like how do we get beyond that pain and that shame? I'll just say this and I think it's obvious. What do you think today the greatest fox in the vineyard is for marriage?

- [Congregant] Money.

- It's your phone. It's your phone. Because your phone just demands to be the center of your life. The average person touches their phone a lot more than their spouse. The average person looks at their phone a lot more than their spouse. The average person listens to their phone a lot more than their spouse. The average person talks to their phone a lot more than their spouse. And if you don't manage the technology, what I'm telling you is this, it's just a fox that gnaws away at the vine of the relationship. Like, "How come you never listen? How come we never talk? Why are you always distracted when we sit on the couch? Why are your hands on the phone rather than with me?" I believe that technology is absolutely deadly if not properly managed for a relationship. And I believe in most relationships it's just a little fox that gnaws away at the vine. "When we're in the car, you're on the phone. When we're at the table, you're on the phone. When we're in bed, you're on the phone. In the morning you start with the phone." And here's what we tend to do. We would never have our phone more than an arm's length away. And if our phone would beep or buzz, we ignore everyone and everything to tend to the phone. I would just encourage you practice the art of turning your phone off or destroying it. I'm just telling you, if you don't have your phone, all of a sudden you'll stop looking down at your phone. You start looking up at your spouse. All of a sudden your hands are free, you're like, "Hey, nice to see you." All of a sudden you're not being interrupted, you can listen. All of a sudden you're not distracted, you could talk. I think if you just literally put your phone away, you'll probably do a great service to your relationship. And what happens is the foxes in the vineyard most expose themselves when we have time together. The more time we have together, the more the foxes gnaw at us. So if you're busy working, let's say your a husband, you're at work all day, wife's home with the kids, the fox is not gnawing away until you can come home and now you're together. Now you're annoying each other. You're irritating each other. This is why people tend to have the most conflict when they have the most time together. Day off, that's where you're gonna see the fox gnawing at the vine. Go on vacation, see the fox gnawing at the vine. Holidays, time together, fox gnawing at the vine. Statistically they tell us that during the holidays, after a few hours, the average person is on their phone the rest of the day because they just can't deal with their spouse anymore. One thing that is frequently a fox in

the vineyard is just two people who have not agreed on how to architect their home and their life. And sometimes it's little things, and sometimes it's pulling back and just asking, "Have we put life together in a way that we agree?" So let me share this with you. There are three types of homes. And what happens is, number one, sometimes you grow up in a home and you assume that your home is gonna be like the home you grew up in, and your spouse grew up in a different home. Number two, you grew up in a home and you didn't like it, so you're gonna do the exact opposite. A random home, and a closed home, and an open home. Let me talk about these briefly 'cause these can be foxes in the vineyard. A random home is a home that really has very few boundaries and rules. And so it's like, "When's dinnertime?" "Whenever, like we just kinda graze." "Well, what's bedtime?" "Ish, between nine and 12-ish." Okay, well, "What's our day off?" "We don't really take a day off." In a very random home, people can just come by all the time. Sometimes they don't even knock, they just come on in. Family, friends. It's just kind of a public place. I've seen in very random homes, kids don't even have assigned beds to sleep in every night. They're like, "Well, whatever bed you crash in, or whoever gets that." And there's not clear lines between these are members of the family and these are not. So all of a sudden, friends are just kinda living there and squatting there and it's just very random and chaotic. Okay, don't raise your hand. But how many of you grew up in a random home? It was a little chaotic. There was no structure, there was no order, and it was a little overwhelming, especially if you're an introvert. The exact opposite of that is a closed home. Closed home, very structured, lots of rules. Like if somebody knocks on the door, you're like, "The Jehovah's Witnesses are here," 'cause they're the only ones that ever come to your house. Everybody's up at eight. Breakfast is on the table at 8:30. Dinner is at 5:30, not 5:31. Okay? Bedtime is at eight, not 8:02. It's at eight. Friday is our Sabbath, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Everything's according to plan, schedule, budget, sequence. People tend not to come over unless they have asked permission and schedule it well in advance. You're like, "Would you like to have a play date?" "Yes." "Okay, how about 2025? We've got a window." How many of you grew up in a more closed home? It was very structured, lots of rules, very consistent environment. How many of you married the random home person and you're driving each other crazy? And so an open home is sort of in the middle. It's not as chaotic as a random home. It's not as controlled as a closed home. There's, you know, meals are about this time, day off is usually this day. These family and friends can just come by without calling or asking, but it's a very short list. Other people need to get approval and they need to schedule it in advance. So when Grace and I got married, I grew up in a home that was a bit more random. We lived in a poor neighborhood. My dad coached baseball. I had the only dad in the neighborhood. My parents decided that our home would be the safe home. We had the batting cage and we had fun for kids, and it was kind of a dangerous neighborhood. So my parents decided, "Hey, all your friends can come to our house. We're gonna be the safe place. Mom and dad will make sure everybody's okay." But the result was, we had so many kids who were latchkey kids and no dad, they would literally just come stay the night at our house, or they needed shoes or a coat, or they hadn't eaten in a day, and so there was a little more chaos. Grace's home that she grew up in was a ministry home. Small church, her mom and dad loved everybody, and everybody just came over to the house and it was like extended family. So it was more random. So we got married and we thought, okay, you do random home. So we started a college ministry, and man, if you wanna see what people without



organizational boundaries looks like, do college ministry. They got nothing else to do, so they're at the house all night, we're feeding 'em, we're teaching 'em the Bible. They're knocking on the door at 10 o'clock, they're staying late. We had one year we counted over 2,000 people in our home. And I'm an introvert with a nervous eye twitch. And I finally, Grace, I was like, "I can't do this anymore. I can't do random home." And so we had to discuss and dialogue, "Okay, well what kinda home do we want? The home that we grew up in was random. And then it reached a point, even with our family, there were really genuine safety issues. It's like, well safety issues, even if you were a little more random to open, you get a little more closed just for safety and security. And so part of our discussion early on was just like, "Okay, who can come over and who needs to call in advance?" You know, "Who do we spend the holidays with and who do we don't? Who do we not spend the holidays with?" You know, kind of what is bedtime for the kids? What is the structure and the routine? But is there some flexibility to it? This is oftentimes one of the major foxes that gnaws away at the vineyard. Sometimes the husband and wife just can't agree on what kinda home structure they're going to have. And so what we're seeing here is they start by flirting, and then they're fighting, and somehow a fox got into their vineyard. Somehow a date night ended up in an argument. Somehow a weekend away ended up in one sleeping on the couch and the other sleeping in the bed. And we're gonna see here that even godly couples, even loving couples have moments where they have conflicts. Do not freak out when you have a marital conflict. It is just part of being human. And so we're gonna see how they resolve it here. Fight for your marriage, not with your spouse. So she says, Song of Songs 2:16-34, "My beloved," that's a great way to start, "is mine and I am his." That's the principle of mutual ownership. The Bible says to cleave to one another, which means to pursue one another. "He browses among the lilies until the day breaks and the shadows flee. Turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the rugged hills." Do you know what's happened? They've had a fight. You know where he is? He gone. He gone. "All night long." He didn't come home. "On my bed I looked for the one my heart loves. I looked for him but..." he gone. So she says, "I'm gonna go look for him. I will get up now and go search the city, its streets and squares. I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but..." he gone. "The watchman found me," right? Security is out there like, "What are you doing?" "As they made their rounds in the city. Have you seen the one my heart loves? We started with a date and then we ended up in a fight. Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves." Now they're back together. "I" what? "I held him. I held him. And I would not let him go till I brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me." They go back to where they had their first date. So they have a fight. They start with flirting. "Oh, you're beautiful. Your eyes are like doves. I like your face. Your voice is amazing." She's like, "You're such a stud." Next thing you know, mushroom cloud over date night. And he's like, "I'm gone. I can't do this anymore. The fox is in the vineyard and I feel offended. I'm walking away." She's like, "I was looking for him and I found him." And so what we see here is it seems like the woman, Abby, in this occasion, it was her fault 'cause she's the one that pursues him and holds him. He's the one that's offended, so she probably was the offender. In bringing him back to her mother's house, that's where they had their first date, what she's saying is, "Let's go back. We do love each other. We committed to one another. Let's not sever the vine." Right? "It's been gnawed at, but let's go back to the beginning." And what she does here is important because Solomon here

does something called stonewalling. We'll talk about this in a moment. And so she pursues him. By her pursuing him, what she's saying is, "I was at fault." Now later on he's gonna sin against her and he's gonna pursue her, and this is marriage. If you're the one who caused the pain, then you need to own it and pursue the person that you have pained. And then he is going to forgive her, we'll deal with this in a another sermon coming up, so that they can have a relationship again. I didn't mean to say this, but it comes to mind. The reason that it hurts so bad is not because they did a big thing, but because to us they're a big deal. This is why in a marriage relationship you're like, "What is it? Is just such a little thing." "Yeah, but you're a big person to me. And this relationship is a big deal. So if a total stranger did or said, I would not be hurt. But because you are a big deal, it's a big deal." So you need to be careful in a marriage when someone feels offended, or hurt, or rejected, and you can't say, "It's not a big deal," 'cause the answer is, "Our relationship is a very big deal." And if this little thing has the possibility of gnawing away and severing the vine, then it's a little deal, but it's a big risk, and this relationship is a big deal. I'll never forget, I was in a counseling meeting, it comes to mind some years ago there was a husband, I think if we put this in the book, every time his wife said or did something wrong, he just had this little glib saying he is like, "That was a fail. That was a fail. That was a fail." So we met in counseling and she was very hurt. And he said, he said, "What? It's not a big deal." She said, "No, but you are. And when you say that it hurts." See, it's not just what is said or done, it's who says it or does it. And if it's the one person you love the most and you trust the most, even if it's not a big thing, they are. Something here got between them, and it really hurt the husband and he walked away. And so let me close with this. There is a guy named John Gottman, before the slide comes up, John Gottman is a researcher. He studied marriage. I don't think he's a Christian. But he's got great clinical insight. He's been able to predict divorce with a 91% success rate. Okay? And he says that the way that a relationship gets off track is with quote unquote a harsh startup. Meaning there's a fox in the vineyard and where you start is very negative, and it is sort of putting the other person down rather than pulling them up. And so what he talks about is kind of four horsemen of the marriage apocalypse. And first is criticism. The person does not have a problem. They are the problem. Now, I dunno if somebody just turned on the AC in the room, it got very chilly up here. I think we just hit a nerve. What's the difference between having a problem and being the problem? Having a problem, together you can work on it. Being a problem, that's just who you are. That's criticism. Okay? We talked about criticism is withdrawals, and compliments are deposits. Well then it moves to contempt. Sneering, mocking, name calling, eye rolling, volume raising. Some of you grew up in homes like that. As soon as your parents disagreed, you just knew it was gonna go bad fast. What happens then is defensiveness. The person who's wrong makes excuses and blame shifts. "Hey, this is my personality. You're just like your mother." Here we go. We bring in, you know, extended family. What happens then is you know you're wrong, but you don't wanna lose, so you double down. And if you feel like you're losing, you change the subject. And then if it continues, it leads to stonewalling, you tune out, you practice the silent treatment, you leave the room, or you drive away. Most often it's the husband, just as in the Song of Songs. What happened in this couple, they started with flirting, they immediately go to fighting. Then what happens is the little fox gets in the vineyard and the husband is very frustrated and he doesn't stay to fight with his wife. Ladies, would you like to know why? You don't? Well your husband

would like me to teach you this, so thank you for listening. Gentlemen, let me just ask you a question. Has any men ever want to fight with his wife?

- [Congregant] No.

- It's a married guy. Because if you fight with your wife, if you win,

- [Male Congregants] You lose.

- You lose. And if you lose, you lose. So you leave. Okay. Now the ladies think it's funny. The men are like, "That's not funny at all. That's Tuesday." No men ever wanna fight with his wife. So what men do, they leave the fight. It's called stonewalling. Stonewalling. This is where the guy turns up the TV. He's trying to drown you out. This is where the guy takes a call just to ignore you. This is where the guy goes into the man cave and shuts the door. This is where the guy goes out with his buddies to pursue his hobbies. This is where the guy gets in the car and drives away. This is exactly what happened in this scene in the Song of Songs. How many of you are shocked it's in the Bible? Do you know why? The Bible's honest. Fairy tales aren't. "And they lived happily ever after." That's not true. The Bible shows us here a conflict, a fight, a disagreement. Because it's going to happen in your marriage and you need to know what to do with it. And because in this occasion, Abby, the wife, she somehow brought the fox in the vineyard. We don't know what it was, it doesn't say. And what's curious about this, after you've fought, usually if you give it a little time, you can't remember what it was about anyways. Like I was thinking about it this week, I was like, "okay, what are some of the times that I've stonewalled Grace? And what was the issue?" And honestly, I couldn't remember. Grace laughs. Because it probably wasn't a big deal, but I just felt hurt or offended, and as a result I reacted in a negative way. We don't know what it is that she did, or said, or failed to do, or failed to say, and it doesn't really matter. I'll close with this, and then I'll bring Grace up. We've been married 30 years. Couple of things, number one, you and your spouse are both sinners. You're gonna sin against each other. Jesus died, so you don't, you don't need to kill each other. Jesus forgives, so you can forgive each other. For the big stuff, like, you know what? That's why we have Jesus. We need Jesus. We're both sinners. Now here's what I know. You're more aware of your spouse's sin than your own. True? We are. Because that's what marriage is. Marriage is finding out the best and the worst of each other. And for the best you encourage, and for the worst you get Jesus involved in forgiveness and grace. Number two, let me say this creatively. I'll ask it as a two-part question. Are people annoying?

- [Congregation] Yes.

- Are you one of those people? Are people annoying? Yeah. Are you one of those people? Yeah. You're an annoying person married to an annoying person. And so what you've gotta decide is, would I rather be annoyed or alone? Now, and some of you are like, "No, I wanna be married and not annoyed." Back to my first two questions. Are people annoying? Yes, and are you one of those people? So if you are married, you are married to an annoying person, and

your spouse is married to an annoying person. You are equally yoked in the eyes of God. You're both annoying people. And so your only choice is, would I rather be annoyed or alone? Would I rather be annoyed or alone? I'll close of the story and then I'll bring Grace up. I was talking to a man some years ago. He was married for a very long time. And he would always go to bed before his wife and it annoyed him 'cause she always took forever to go to bed, and he couldn't go to sleep unless his wife was in bed. So he'd just kind of sit there annoyed, like, "Could you please come to bed?" For like 50 years. Literally. Just laying in bed like," Jesus, do you see this?" And then she would get in bed and by that point he was always warm and the bed was warm and she had notoriously cold feet. Okay? And she believed in Jesus, but not socks. And so she would get into bed and where would she put her feet? On her husband who was almost asleep having waited so long for his wife. And then he would wake up. And then after many years his wife died. And I remember talking to him and I'll never forget, he said, "It used to really annoy me when I had to wait for her, and it would annoy me when she'd put her feet on me." He said, "I miss waiting for her, and I miss her cold feet. It's better to be annoyed than alone. Amen?

- [Congregant] Yeah.

- All right, I'll bring Grace up. You guys welcome my best friend. Thank you. How you doing, baby?

- Good.

- Good. Thanks, James. All right, we'll do one question.

- Okay. This is a doozy. I'll have to answer it 'cause he'll get in trouble answering it.

- Ah!

- It's from a woman.

- Oh, I'm out.

- You ready?

- I'm out. I'll just sit here as eye candy. I'm hoping, I'm hoping that she regrets sending this after hearing it from me. Like, I'll just read it. "How do you handle arguments regarding housework, like laundry, dishes, cleaning, et cetera? I am feeling like I am the maid, but I work full-time and so does my husband. It feels like I have a child and we don't have kids."

- Shots fired, ah,

- I just, yeah, I hope hearing this out loud, she feels like, "I wasn't in a good place."

- So for them, we're talking about foxes in the vineyard or little things that can gnaw away over time, and can actually ruin a whole relationship if you don't deal with them.

- Yeah, and she has a critical spirit, which is a harsh startup, right? We have these moments and they're honest in marriage, but we shouldn't verbalize them this way because again, he's doing something annoying, but she's probably equally annoying.

- I would say she should pray about hypothetically having potential bitterness.

- Yes. There's definitely resentment

- Yeah.

- in this question. And I think, you know, we talked about some of this stuff because it was in our pre-marrieds class about oh, who does what and, and all that. And you know what? It honestly doesn't matter. And I remember getting embittered because you wouldn't take the garbage can out. And I look back now and think, "That was so silly."

- That's why we had kids. Delegate.

- Yes. They don't do it either, though.

- So it's my issue because I didn't train them well. But anyway. I think there's so many, like you said, it's the person rather than the issue. The issues are so silly when we look at them, and we get just annoyed and frustrated at things that they don't matter, like they shouldn't break a relationship up.

- So the issue, so I always like to say, "Is the issue over the relationship or is the relationship over the issue?"

- [Grace] Yeah.

- And you gotta be very careful that you don't make any issues so important that you're willing to break the relationship.

- [Grace] Yeah. And I like to say attack the problem, not the person. Here, she's attacking the person. She's calling him a child. That's super disrespectful and she may feel that, but that's not a great way to communicate to your spouse. I don't wanna be told that I'm like my mother, and you don't wanna be told that you're like a child. I mean it just doesn't... It's very critical. And so first of all, I would inform her to spend some time with the Lord, and ask the Lord to help her forgive because there is some bitterness in here in this critical spirit. And I would, if it was me, I would repent of that to the Lord. And if she feels like she needs to repent of that to her husband,

I would do that too, because you don't wanna have a harsh startup with this conversation. And I think it's not about the roles. It's about sharing responsibilities as much as you're able. But if you're both working, you're both tired and you're both giving out. And so understanding, what are you able to do? What am I able to do? But Titus also talks about the older women training the younger women to be busy at home. So we are supposed to keep our homes, and I don't think that it's supposed to be equal. I'm sorry ladies, I don't agree with that. I think that it's just supposed to be serving one another.

- I didn't say anything.

- It's supposed to be about serving one another.

- Yeah.

- I mean you can't cook.

- Well I can, but...

- You do cook your breakfast now.

- I don't cook for health and safety reasons. But I'm really good at going out to dinner.

- Yeah, you are.

- I'm really good.

- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- Which is helpful at times.

- But I can grill.

- You can.

- I have the spiritual gift of grilling. I didn't know I had it.

- Yes.

- Apparently me and fire--

- Yes.

- Were good.

- When we came to Arizona all of a sudden that gift came on you.

- Yeah, just the spirit, just fire, you know? But in that, sometimes in a marriage people have different expectations for how to keep the house.

- Yes, we do. And you don't like dog hair and we have a dog.

- Oh, no don't, don't talk about that. But you've got your way of doing things, too. Like here's what I don't understand.

- Totally.

- Okay. No, it's real. . So Grace demands that the dishes are clean before they're put in the dishwasher.

- [Congregant] Woo!

- And I don't understand 'cause the dish, now wait, now wait, now wait, now wait, now wait. Men help me here. This is a riot situation. I don't know why I need to wash the dishes before they go in the dishwasher. [Male Congregant] Amen!

- The dishwasher--

- [Male Congregant] Preach!

- has one job and it should not delegate it to me. I don't understand.

- I don't wash them, I scrub them off.

- All right, we'll just settle some other things.

- And it makes chunks--

- Okay.

- in the dishwasher and then it smells.

- Oh, we're doing this. We're doing this.

- Okay, so toilet paper over under. How many of you are under people? Over people? Whoa.

Okay, okay. Since we're in this room, lit up, lit down. How many of you lit up people?

- [Female Congregants] Down. Down.

- All the ladies are down. Okay, fine. All right. But there's a lot of things like that in marriage, right?

- Toothpaste. We don't share toothpaste though.

- No, we don't.

- We just buy separate.

- So should the couple then discuss, like, "Okay, let's find an agreed upon condition in which to keep the home."

- Yes, so for instance, you hate the dog hair. I don't like the dog hair, but the dog hair's our reality 'cause we have a German shepherd.

- It looks like--

- So I vacuum regularly, but you have to like have no hair all the time. So you bought a special like--

- Well, I bought two Roombas and the dog killed 'em.

- Yes. The dog killed the Roombas.

- So you bought a special like hair thing that collects it and so you go over the rug with it.

- Well then I bought a TV upstairs so I just don't even be on the same floor as the dog. So now I have the upstairs, the dog has the downstairs.

- Stonewalling the dog.

- That's true. I stonewalled the dog. I feel like we've done good. We should pray, now.

- They want a solution though.

- Oh, okay, it's easy. Hire a housekeeper. You're both working.

- No, it's a conversation.



- What do you mean, no? That was a great idea.

- It's a conversation that is regular, and you can't just keep the same chores and roles all the time. As life changes, different things. I mean, when we had little kids it had to change and you stepped in and did some different things, sort of. Yeah.

- But I had to learn to not get embittered about it and actually turn those times, like I love laundry and--

- And I love that you love laundry. Yeah.

- And I learned to pray while I'm doing laundry. It's my time with the Lord. I have had a lot of laundry to do through the years with five kids. So honestly if we're doing it in a way that we're actually praying or thinking about the Lord or seeing it as serving, we're not gonna have a bad attitude about it. So I had to change my attitude in my heart. And then we had to talk about those things and figure out what we could both contribute to. Because I can't do your job and you can't do mine. But there's things that we can do together to help each other and serve.

- But I like a very organized, tidy home, storage place for everything. I've got a little OCD, ADD-ish. And so I need to help on the, I help on the organizational side, storage, taking things out, throwing things away, cleaning up. I like the house tidy. And so we've had to work those things through. Sometimes it's good to just kind of rotate chores. Sometimes it's good you each take a room or zone in the house. Like this room is yours, this, you know, ♪ This land is your land ♪ ♪ This land is my land ♪ Each get a portion. And sometimes literally though, I think it is okay to say, "Okay, if we're both busy and working full-time, can we bring in a housekeeper once a month just to get everything caught up so that we can maintain and keep up with it?"

- Yep. Yep. And you're good at systems so you help me start 'em and then I can keep going with them. So just talking through what you're good at and helping each other out in that and not calling each other names.

- Cool. You wanna pray? I think we did enough.

- Okay. Dear Lord, thank you that you can help us order these things in our lives and we don't have to become resentful or bitter. Thank you that you take bitterness from us when we're willing to repent and confess to you our frustrations. Lord, I thank you that we are unique in our gifts and that we are different because that makes it interesting in our relationship. But I also pray that as those foxes try and come into the vineyard, that we would see them and we would talk about them, and that we would get them out of the vineyard so that we can have healthy marriages and enjoy time together and not be picking at each other. I pray against the spirit of criticism that we would not have that toward one another, even as we did early in our marriage, but that we would learn to encourage one another and respect one another. So, Lord, just bring love that only you can give into our marriages and help us to serve one another well. In Jesus'

Name. Amen.

- Thanks.