



LOVE LIFE

GOD'S DESIGN FOR DATING, MARRIAGE AND SEX.

Small Group Discussion Guide
LOVE LIFE



PREPARATION

■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Song of Solomon 2:8–17. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

■ DETERMINE

Which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

■ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

■ LANDING POINT

Total honesty, acceptance, and oneness with Christ and each other produce relationships that last a lifetime.



GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

THE NEXT STOP

This week we'll look at the next stop on the Road to Romance—courtship. Dating is about observation, trying to figure out whether a relationship can last. Courtship is about involvement and commitment, laying the groundwork for marriage. An important shift happens during this stage. You go from passionate love to compassionate love. Things like communication, caring, affection, and support create a firm foundation that emotional highs and butterflies can't create.

Before you say "I do," honesty and vulnerability are essential. You let the other person know the *real* you. If you want a relationship that lasts a lifetime, you've got to have total honesty, acceptance, and oneness with Christ and each other.

Q: *How would you define courtship in your own words?*

Q: *In what ways do honesty and vulnerability make a relationship strong?*



LEARN

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

LOVE IN SPRINGTIME

Clearly, this couple is deeply in love. But there are obstacles, "mountains" and "hills" they must climb over. We're given a vignette of the young man standing behind a wall, peeking through the window into this young girl's house. Something separates them.

The young man speaks to his future bride with tenderness. "Arise, my love, and come away with me. Spring has arrived and there is new life, beauty, and singing in the land." His affections are for this young girl and her alone. Before, they showed restraint to not awaken love. Now love is ready to bloom in marriage.

But something's wrong. She seems distant. She's hidden "in the clefts of the rock." The young man appeals to her, "Oh, my little dove, where are you? Let me see your face. I want to hear your sweet voice." Then the man makes another appeal that sounds like a petition to God: "Catch the foxes that destroy the vineyard of our love." There's danger. Little pests threaten their relationship. The young man wants their love to be protected.

READ: *Read Song of Solomon 2:8-17. How would you describe the young man and woman's love for each other in 2-3 words?*

Q: *What obstacles have you experienced in relationships?*

TWO BECOME ONE

Then the woman responds. "My beloved is mine and I'm his. Turn to me." Her heart is prepared, she is ready for marriage. This isn't puppy love. It isn't a tryst or some one-night stand. This is a deep and abiding love that endures all seasons, that lasts a lifetime. She is dedicating herself—mind, body, and spirit—to him and him alone.

Q: *What's the difference between puppy love and one-night stands and a deep and abiding love?*

Q: *What does it mean to dedicate your mind, body, and spirit to someone?*



LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

BACK IN EDEN

God designed marriage to be a place where two people can be totally honest and fully accepted by one another. Courtship cultivates this kind of openness and vulnerability. Like Adam and Eve before the fall, nothing is hidden and there's no guilt or shame. No obstacles stand in the way of love.

Total love gives you freedom to be the real you with your partner. The more you know the other person, the more you understand their heart. You know their story, their hopes, dreams, fears, needs, etc. When you experience this kind of freedom, you're on the path to a rich and fulfilling relationship. Being vulnerable can be scary, but it's the best way to make a relationship strong.

Q: *What's one thing keeping you from experiencing freedom with your partner (or in relationships in general)?*

CATCH THE FOXES

A relationship that glorifies God is always under threat. The enemy doesn't want believers to experience the freedom and enjoyment marriage gives two people. Don't be surprised when you feel your relationship is under attack. Don't be surprised when the enemy tries to sow lies or drive a wedge between you and your partner.

We need to fight against the enemy, but the greatest threat to a relationship is you. Your flesh is selfish. Your flesh doesn't want to submit to God or the other person. Let's take a look at some of the foxes that can threaten any relationship:

- Mistrust
- Unspoken expectations
- Jealousy
- Selfishness and Pride
- Uncontrolled desire or anger
- Excusing the other's actions
- Resentment and an unforgiving spirit
- Unclear ambitions and goals

Q: *Which of the "foxes" in the list above do you struggle with? How does God's Word give you hope for change?*

TOTAL ONENESS, TOTAL LOVE

Marriage unites a man and woman in mind, body, and spirit. Being united doesn't mean you're exactly alike. God doesn't join two halves to make a whole. He brings two whole people together who are wholly given to one another.

To be one, you must be united in:

- *Mind.* You express ideas, opinions, and desires openly. You confer when making decisions and consider each other's thoughts. You have a desire to reach shared goals together and see problems as opportunities rather than obstacles.
- *Emotion.* You share in the joys and sorrows of your partner. When they hurt, you hurt. When they're excited, you're excited.
- *Spirit.* The glue that bonds your relationship is your relationship to God. You regularly pray together and discuss how God is working in your heart and in your relationship. As a couple, you see yourselves as being on mission together. You seek God's will and take steps of faith and obedience to Him together.
- *Commitment.* The language in verses 6–17 is covenant language. God commits Himself to us with a promise (a covenant): "They shall be my people, and I will be there God" (Jeremiah 32:38). Solid, lasting marriages have a foundation of faithfulness and devotion. Both partners trust that, no matter what, the other person is wholly committed.

🗣️: *Describe a couple you know who's united spiritually. What are they like? What do they do?*

🗣️: *What's one thing you can do this week to be more united with someone in mind, emotion, spirit, or commitment?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

JESUS, YOUR BELOVED

The Song of Solomon shows us what total love between two people looks like. It's also a picture of God's love for you. He committed Himself to a relationship with you. Jesus overcame the obstacles of sin and death to make you His beloved. He called you to come away with Him into new life, joy, and growth. He knows you fully and accepts you. His love and His forgiveness are complete. You are His, and He is yours forever.

Q: *What does it look like to love like God loves? How is that different than the way you love now?*

Q: *Think of someone who needs to hear the truth about God's complete love. When and how will you share this truth with them?*



PRAY

Thank God for the gift of marriage and the freedom and joy it brings. If married, ask God to give you a commitment to your partner like His. If single, ask God to give you a love and desire like His in singleness or dating.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Romans 8:31–39 and reflect on how God's love shows His commitment to you.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



COMMENTARY

LEAVE YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER The vignette in the first part of 2:8–17 speaks to the biblical belief that, for marriage, a man should leave his father and mother and be united with his wife (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5).

SPRINGTIME IMAGERY The author uses images of flowers (smell), singing (hearing), doves (sight), and fig trees and vines (taste) to arouse the full sensual experience of love.

ON COVENANTS “Biblical covenants involve lifelong commitment, progeny, and a code of behavior, and they are rooted in a historical association. While all of these elements may not be present in the simple phrase, it is patent that she feels comfortable describing her relationship as one of mutual ownership and fidelity. This is love when pleased to awaken.”¹

AN ALTERNATE INTERPRETATION Duane A. Garrett believes the dominant metaphor in verse 15 is the “chase that is really a game. The operative metaphor, therefore, is not the foxes or the vineyard but the chase itself. It is the kind of childlike play that young lovers often engage in. The verse thus speaks of the playfulness of love. He is calling her away to a game.”²

ENDNOTES:

1. George M. Schwab, “Song of Songs,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III, Garland David E., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 390.

2. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 394.