

## **Solomon on Sex - Why have a Wedding?**

Sign Title: Solomon on Sex - Why have a Wedding?

**February 12, 2012**

Good morning Faith family. We are in the seventh week of the Solomon on Sex series. This is a series where we are studying an Old Testament book of the Bible called the Song of Solomon. This book is composed of small melodic snapshots that are a window into the relationship between King Solomon and his first wife, a rugged farm girl from the area of Shulem --- a farming area in the hills of Lebanon. We often refer to her as the Shulamite since her name is not revealed in the book.

The little melodic windows into their relationship are not necessarily in chronological order. We began with the Shulamite getting Solomon's attention at their wedding feast when she used her knock-em-dead perfume. Next, we saw her reaction to the beautifully decorated bridal chamber Solomon prepared for their wedding night. It was decorated in green, her favorite color. Next, we studied a snapshot that was a flashback to their dating days. On the date, they went for a walk in the country where she shared her fears about marrying the king. She worries his stately duties will overwhelm his husbandly duties. She worries she will be married but find herself alone.

This week, the text is a window that gives us a glimpse of their wedding. This message is particularly important for those yet to marry. If you are already married, I encourage you to listen closely anyway. There is much all of us need to hear.

Before we put our finger in the text, let's talk about marriage in our culture. Traditional marriage is on a steep decline. The marriage rate dropped 43 percent since 1960. The number of cohabitating couples in the United States rose from half million in 1960 to 4.2 million in 1998. The number of babies born to unwed parents has increased five fold since the 1930s. The majority of our culture is rejecting traditional marriage and the wedding ceremony that goes with it.<sup>1</sup> This morning, I want to talk about why we should not be so quick to let the traditional wedding go.

Before we jump in, I need to explain how dating and marriage in ancient society is different than our modern society. That will help us better understand the text.

### **What were weddings like in the ancient world?**

1. **Betrothal** - This is a time when arrangements for the marriage were established. The couple was considered married once they were engaged. The engagement period *was not* a time when a couple continued contemplating their marriage. The decision to marry was already made. The engagement period was simply a time of preparation for the wedding. The engagement was so binding a couple figuratively take out a mortgage. Their commitment was that binding. Today, unfortunately, many couples get engaged and propose long engagements. During the engagement the couples hopes to determine if they are marrying the right person. That is not the biblical way. You only ask a woman to marry you when you are sure the

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<sup>1</sup> Akin, D. (2003). *God on sex: The Creator's ideas about love, intimacy, and marriage*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers. Chapter 7

marriage should move forward. Engagement is only a time of preparation for the wedding.

2. **The wedding procession** - This is when the groom went to the home of the bride in a big parade. He brought her to his home for the wedding (Matthew 25:1; Psalm 45). If the groom didn't go himself to fetch his bride from her home, he sent a wedding party to do it. He joined her outside the city gates. The couple paraded through the streets on the way to the wedding ceremony. It was a large, noisy parade where everyone was invited to join in cheering for this man and woman on the happiest day of their lives. This wedding parade is the part we will study this week.
3. **The wedding ceremony** - This is the time when the couple was formally recognized as husband and wife in a legal sense. It was not conducted in a synagogue or church. It was conducted in a home and was more of a civil than a spiritual matter.
4. **The wedding feast** - This is the party after the ceremony. We studied this in our second week of this book. It was the passage where the Shulamite was trying to get Solomon's attention at the wedding feast with her strong perfume. We celebrate a marriage the same way. We have a party after the ceremony. The difference is that the Jews partied much harder. They partied for an entire week. This morning, we learn why they thought it was important to celebrate their weddings.
5. **The wedding night** - This takes place on the first evening of the wedding party. Two weeks from today, we are in the fourth chapter of this book. The

entire fourth chapter deals with this couple's wedding night. It is sex to the glory of God. Next week, we kick the kids out. Everyone who is nervous about sex will stay away because they are afraid God will convict them in this area of their life. Everyone who is interested learning how to honor God in their sex life will be here scribbling down notes like court-room stenographers.

Don't worry. We have two weeks until the wedding night begins. Today is the wedding party.

Since we are talking about the wedding, I thought I would share a picture from my wedding. As you can see, Cindy hasn't changed a bit. As usual, she is beautiful and has aged gracefully. On the other hand, you can see I have aged. In my wedding photo, I was still using a shaver with training wheels.



Here is a piece of fun trivia. If you look closely, you can see in this photo that I am wearing women's makeup. The night before the wedding, I playfully wrestled with a friend and ended up with a black eye. Cindy didn't want wedding photos where it looked like she punched my lights out. I humbled myself and agreed to wear women's makeup for the first, and hopefully the last, time. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life having friends ask me if Cindy continued to beat me after the wedding like she did before the wedding.

### **What does the text teach us about weddings?**

Let's put our finger in the text and see what the Bible teaches us about weddings.

## **A wedding is a time for celebration.**

What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant? Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Song of Solomon 3:6–7 (ESV)

When it says litter, do not think kitty litter. That is a totally different thing. This is not King Solomon's cat box. It is King Solomon's car. It is a luxury car. In that day, luxury vehicles looked like stage coaches without wheels. They were enclosed boxes carried by poles that men put on their shoulders. Why didn't they use wheels? Wheels gave a bumpy ride. Monroe shock absorbers were not invented. If you are a king and you want a luxury ride, you have people carry you around town. This is the luxury car he sent to give her a ride to the wedding.

He didn't just send the luxury car to pick her up, he sent an entire luxury motorcade. As we learned earlier in the book, this couple enjoy great smells. Solomon knows his bride has a sensitive nose. In that day, a fancy marriage motorcade had a censer of burning incense at the front of the motorcade and another at the back. Solomon has spared no luxuries. This is not a little incense burner you buy for the resale shop for \$1.50. The censurs were large because they were putting out columns of smoke that rose into the sky.

Picture this in your mind. To arrive in Jerusalem, this ancient motorcade would travel to the Dead Sea, which is the lowest place on the planet. The next 15 miles would be a straight climb to the city of Jerusalem, which was located, like a crown, on top of a hill. People in the city were looking down the mountain at the columns of incense rising in the sky. They could see this motorcade arriving from miles away. When the bridal motorcade arrived outside the city, if

Solomon wasn't already on board, he would join his bride. The marital motorcade would then weave its way through the city like a city-wide parade.

First, the countryside was bathed in the smell of incense. Now, the city was bathed in the smell of incense as the marital parade slowly wove its way through the streets to the wedding ceremony. This ancient wedding ceremony was serious celebration.

**Application:** The lesson we need to learn is when a couple weds, they should have a good party. It should be a celebration. Today, partying has a bad reputation. There is nothing wrong with partying for the right reason. By partying, I don't mean getting drunk. I mean getting together, having fun, eating food and celebrating. Study the Old Testament calendar. Israel was commanded to party multiple times a year for national holidays. The wedding party lasted a week. Jesus thought a big wedding party was important. That is why his first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding feast so the marriage celebration could continue.

**Why is it important to have a serious celebration?:**

**The wedding is hoped to be a once-in-a-life-time event.** The wedding is a big deal. The most important decision you will make in your life is either for or against Christ. The second most important decision you make is who to marry. If you have the person God wants as a soulmate, you should celebrate. It is one of the greatest days in your life!

**A wedding celebration sets off the marriage as important.** If you don't celebrate the wedding as important, it subtly makes a statement that the

marriage isn't that important. Your wedding day is not just another day; it should be treated like it is a special day.

**What are practical ways I can apply this?:**

**Help young couples celebrate their wedding day.** Let me give some advice. If you are a parent or a grandparent, chances are you will have children or grandchildren getting married. If they are like most young couples, they won't have any money. They will want, and need, to celebrate the wedding cheaply. Help them financially. Help them celebrate. That doesn't mean to be lavish, just help them have enough money to celebrate their important day.

When Cindy and I married, we were poor. Cindy's wedding dress was bought on clearance. Our reception hall was the church gym because we had no money. The family that took Cindy under their wing and disciplined her when she trusted in Christ blessed us. They took care of the food for the reception meal. It was just sandwiches and lunch meat, but it was enough to make a party. Other friends volunteered to help us celebrate by playing music. Other friends shot our wedding photos. Another friend shot the wedding video. There were probably at least a dozen people that came together that made it possible for us to celebrate that special day.

**Ensure you couples have good wedding photos.** Another practical piece of advice deals with wedding photos. Get a good wedding photographer. Take photos. Make memories and post those pictures in your home to remind you of your special day. If you want help finding a good wedding photographer, talk to me. I have some recommendations.

## **A wedding contains a promise of protection.**

Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night. Song of Solomon 3:7–8 (ESV)

Not only does the Shulamite get a heavily-scented motorcade, she gets a heavily-protected motorcade. These 60 guys are not there to carry the luggage. I was studying the history on this and both Saul and David had 600 highly-skilled warriors that reported to them directly.<sup>2</sup> I believe Solomon followed the family tradition and had 600 of his black-ops unit report directly to him as well. It appears Solomon took a tenth of his black-ops unit and deployed them as body guards for his bride's marital motorcade.

They were not for show. In 1 Maccabees 9:37-41, which is an ancient book that tells some history of what happened between the Old and New Testaments, it tells us how a king's wedding day was ruined when his bride's marital motorcade was attacked leaving her dead. Killing a husband's bride on the wedding day tends to get husbands-to-be very angry. Solomon promises to protect her.

**Application:** The point of application is a wedding involves a husband's public statement to take a wife into his care and keeping. The father gives away the bride. The woman moves from her father's protective care to her husband's.

Ladies, when you skip the wedding and just live with a guy, who is promising to look out for you and protect you? If you live with a guy, he is not taking out a life insurance policy so that if he dies, he knows you are protected

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 13:15; 14:2; 27:2; 30:9

financially. In a wedding a husband makes a public promise to protect his wife. You skip the wedding, you skip the promise of protection, which is something every woman needs to be under, either from her father or her husband.

**A wedding contains a promise of provision.**

King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Song of Solomon 3:9–10 (ESV)

This is a detailed description of the wheelless vehicle the Shulamite is riding in on the way to her wedding. The point of the description is that this wheelless carriage is extravagant. This is the kind of vehicle people wanted to car-jack in the ancient world. It is a Bentley. Not only is it silver and gold, but the fabric is purple. Purple was the color of kings. One of the reasons purple was associated with kings is because only kings could afford the purple dye which was extracted from a shellfish.

To make it especially comfortable, the ladies who worked in the palace did the interior decorating of the vehicle as a way of honoring Solomon and his bride.

For a moment, I want you to think about this from the Shulamite's perspective. She grew up as a simple country girl in a fatherless home to a single mother. When the wedding ceremony is over, she becomes the queen. All that is Solomon's becomes hers. He promises to provide for her.

**Application:** This is another reason I love a wedding. The husband promises to provide for his wife. When the marriage certificate is turned in after the ceremony, the couple becomes one. They have the same last name. What I want to point out is when a couple gets married and a woman takes her

husband's last name that is a way he promises that all he has is hers. It is a way she says to her husband, all I have is yours. Both names go on all bank accounts. Both names go on all properties. The husband and wife do not keep separate bank accounts with only one name on it. The reason the husband puts his wife's name on his stuff is that he is committing to provide for her.

When Cindy and I were getting married, she met a woman in the store who encouraged her to keep one form of identification with her former last name. That way, it would be easier to change back to her old name if I divorced her. What do you think I said to that idea? If you need to keep one form of identification with your old name, you are not ready to marry me. Honey, your name goes with mine on all bank accounts, all property and vehicle deeds. What I have is always yours. I intend to give everything I have to be your provider. Take my last name in everything as your full commitment to me.

### **A wedding makes a public declaration.**

**Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon,... Song of Solomon 3:11 (ESV)**

In the ancient world, the wedding was a very public event. It was a public event because it formally stated to world that a new couple was formed. The guests at the wedding party were not just there to be scenery for the photos. They were present because they cared about the couple, and they promised to support the couple in their marriage.

The guests at a modern wedding should look at their role in the wedding from the same perspective. They are present to witness the vows and to pledge to support the couple in the good times and in the tough times. When you hit

those marital tough spots, the friends that stand behind you and hold you to your commitment make a world of difference.

### **A wedding is a chance for parental approval.**

...with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart. Song of Solomon 3:11 (ESV)

This verse sounds out of place until you understand the ancient wedding custom. On the day of a Jewish wedding, the bride and the groom wore laurel crowns given by their parents. The crowns were worn because the wedding was a time when the bride and groom were to be treated like kings and queens. When a parent gave the crown to their son or daughter, it was their way of publicly approving of the wedding. It was their way of supporting the wedding and telling everyone they were proud of the marriage.

There was a lot of information this morning but not a lot of application. Now, I want to use these principles from the text to answer two commonly asked questions.

- Why can't we just skip the wedding and live together?
- What is wrong with eloping?

### **Common questions about weddings.**

#### **What is wrong with skipping the wedding and living together?**

**Cohabiting takes away your opportunity to celebrate your marriage.** I know some of you are cohabiting in hopes that *if* the relationship work, you will celebrate a wedding later. If that is what you choose, the celebration will ring hollow. It is like celebrating Christmas after you open the presents. The joy is just not there.

**Cohabiting doesn't bring a woman under a man's protection.** Since there is no commitment of a man to protect the woman he is living with, she is vulnerable. If he changes his mind about her, he moves out leaving her to fend for herself. If there are children involved, often it is the woman left holding the bag of responsibility.

**Cohabiting bring no promise of provision.** Why should the husband marry the woman he is living with? He is getting all the benefits of a married man without any of the financial responsibilities of marriage. Why should a husband put his life-worth on the line when he doesn't have to?

**Cohabiting provides no public proclamation of love and not invitation for relational support.** Since there is no wedding, there is no cadre of friends committed to support and encourage the couple in their relationship. They will struggle alone.

**Cohabiting doesn't provide a chance for public parental approval.** It doesn't provide a mother and father a chance to bless the relationship.

Besides the clear biblical reasons for marrying and having a wedding instead of cohabiting, thanks to a study done by Rutger's University, there is plenty of practical data to back this up.

1. Only one-sixth of live-in relationships last at least three years and only one-tenth endure five or more years.<sup>3</sup>
2. Living together before marriage increases the risk of divorce. One study found an increased risk of 46 percent. It also increases the risk of domestic

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<sup>3</sup> Karen Peterson, "Wedded to Relationship but Not to Marriage," USA Today, 18 April 2000.

violence for women and the risk of physical and sexual abuse for children.

One study found the risk of domestic violence for cohabitating women is double that of married women.<sup>4</sup>

3. Couples who live together before marriage are more likely to have an affair during marriage than those who don't.<sup>5</sup>
4. Cohabiting couples are three times more likely to say, "hitting, shoving and throwing things" occurred in the previous year.<sup>6</sup>
5. Cohabiting couples report less sexual satisfaction than married couples.<sup>7</sup>
6. Not only is sex more satisfying for married couples but those who report the highest level of satisfaction with sexual intimacy are those who have experienced only one sexual partner.<sup>8</sup>
7. Those least likely to suffer clinical depression are those who are married and never divorced. Those who cohabit are more likely to be depressed than those who are single and those who are divorced. The only category more prone to major depression than those living together are those who experienced multiple divorces.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Popenoe, "Cohabitation: The Marriage Enemy," USA Today, 28 July 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Holman, "Co-habiting First May not Improve Marriage," Scripps Howard Foundation Wire, 5 August 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Murray Dubin, "A Mission to Remedy Marriage," Philadelphia Inquirer, 6 August 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, and Edward O. Lauman, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1994), 124.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 124.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Robins and Darrel Regier, *Psychiatric Disorders in America: The Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 72.

There is much more data than time will allow me to share. Young people, let me say it clearly, marriage, not cohabitating, is God's plan. It is a plan with your best interests at heart.

### What about eloping?

Let's look through this passage again and briefly think about the eloping question.

Does eloping allow a time of celebration of one of the best moments of your life? No.

Does eloping provide a woman marital protection and provision from a husband. It does, because they become legally married.

Does eloping provide a time for a support system of family and friends to come together and put a blessing upon the couple and promise their support? No.

Eloping is better than cohabitating, but it is not everything God wants you to bless you with when you start off your marriage.

### Questions and Answers



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