

Ladies Home Journey

Role Call for Young Women

I Kissed Dating Goodbye is not just the title of a popular Christian book. It describes an entire philosophy of how young unmarried men and women are to approach relating to one another. As I understand those who adhere to the 'no-dating' scenario, since in the Bible there was no such thing as 'dating,' only courtship, then we must only court and never date.

OK, I get that. I see courtship in the Bible. But there were some other marital customs in the Bible as well. *Like arranged marriages!*

OK, maybe you *like* the idea of arranged marriages! Let me next point out that girls in Bible times were often married by the age of 15 or 16, and (obviously) to much older men.

What do you think about that? If we really want to adopt the courtship customs of Bible times, why aren't we arranging marriages and giving our consent to our daughters to marry at age 15?

I'm just wanting to highlight that we need to be careful coming to conclusions about the biblical role of the young woman.

Of course, there's a lot more to being a godly young woman than her approach to dating or courtship. But those topics do give you some idea of how difficult it can be to navigate the years between childhood and marriage in our contemporary social structure. In 2009 the average age of a woman for her first marriage was 26.9 years old. That's somewhere around twelve years longer than in the Bible. A lot can happen in those years!

We're going to approach our "role call for young women" by looking at one remarkable girl in the Bible. She's the Shulamite in the Song of Solomon.

King Solomon owned a vineyard at Baal-Hamon in the territory of Asher in Northern Israel. As was common in Bible times, he had leased the vineyard out to vinedressers. The vineyard was not producing: the keepers were not attending it, and the birds and wild animals were eating the grapes. Further, it seems that the tenants Solomon had leased the vineyard to were not willing to pay their lease.

Solomon, disguised as a shepherd, went to Baal-Hamon to inspect his vineyard. While there he met a beautiful Gentile girl working in the fields, called the Shulamite. He fell in

love with her and she returned his love. He had to return to Jerusalem, but before leaving he promised her he would return and make her his bride. Solomon kept his promise and carried her away to his palace where they were married and became one.

The Song of Solomon provides us with various scenes, snapshots, if you will, of the meeting, the romance, the courtship, the marriage, and the married life of the Shulamite and Solomon. It can bounce around chronologically and sometimes it can be hard to determine exactly who is addressing who, but you'd expect nothing less from perhaps the greatest romantic song ever written.

We see several remarkable characteristics of the Shulamite in her role as a godly young woman in the opening verses.

Song of Solomon 1:5 I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, Like the tents of Kedar, Like the curtains of Solomon.

Song of Solomon 1:6 Do not look upon me, because I am dark, Because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; They made me the keeper of the vineyards, But my own vineyard I have not kept.

The Shulamite has been taken to the palace. She addresses "the daughters of Jerusalem." These would be girls familiar with the city and all things contemporary. By way of an application we might see them as girls influenced by the thinking and the trends of the world whereas she was more the example of the Christian in their midst.

The Shulamite seems a little embarrassed by her situation as a country girl in the big city.

A young Christian girl is going to have a rough time if she wants to be modest and chaste and remain godly. She's going to stand out and, in her mind, not always in a good way. The Shulamite did, however, maintain herself in the midst of the pressure of her worldly peers.

Do you see that this is a Cinderella story! Her "mother's sons" were her step-brothers. They were "angry" with her and made her work out in the fields.

Her father was dead, adding to her personal tragedy.

There's no glass slipper without some work boots leading up to it. The Shulamite put in her time waiting for her prince to come. She didn't grow impatient and take off with the first guy who promised to get her out of Podunk, Israel.

That's to say a young woman's life may be difficult, filled with obstacles, but she **can** remain godly. The Shulamite did!

And God can bring just the right person, despite all the obstacles. I mean, what hope did the Shulamite have, really, that she'd meet anyone, let alone her soulmate? Yet God had it all under control all along.

Now because she had to work in the fields, she was pretty tanned. You might think, "Alright! Quite the fringe benefit!" But in her culture a suntan was the sign you were poor and had to work hard out in the fields.

There is always going to be some worldly standard of beauty and style and fashion that is contrary to the modesty of biblical Christianity. A young woman can always find a reason to say, "Do not look upon me." She will probably phrase it differently and say something like, "I stand out and look like some sort of freak compared to everyone else."

But she should *also* be able to say, as did the Shulamite, "but [I am] lovely." I would apply this to her inner person, to her heart before God.

A handsome young man took notice of her. She had no idea, at first, that it was the king. Her words in verse seven seem to look back upon their initial meeting, or at least their early courtship.

Song of Solomon 1:7 Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself By the flocks of your companions?

In her culture "one who veils herself" would be the sign of a prostitute (see Genesis 38:14-15). She seems to be asking him to meet somewhere appropriate rather than her going about looking for him among the other shepherds.

We'd say she wanted to avoid any and all appearance of impropriety or evil. Young women must be cautious of their surroundings and their contacts, not just for their own safety, but to bring glory to God as those concerned with maintaining their testimony.

Something else to note. She was OK with him being a simple shepherd. It certainly wasn't the greatest profession, or one that would bring wealth. But it was a profession that the Bible extols and uses often as an example of faithfulness in serving the Lord.

The Shulamite would know that King David had been a shepherd to his father's flock, and that it prepared him to be a shepherd-king over God's flock, the Jews.

The Shulamite could look beneath the outward, the exterior, and value character and virtue. She was looking for someone who had spiritual depth. Before she knew this was the king she valued his inner man.

There are three verses in chapter eight of the Song of Solomon that give us additional commentary on the Shulamite's years as a young unmarried woman:

Song of Solomon 8:8 We have a little sister, And she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister In the day when she is spoken for?

Song of Solomon 8:9 If she is a wall, We will build upon her A battlement of silver; And if she is a door, We will enclose her With boards of cedar.

Song of Solomon 8:10 I am a wall, And my breasts like towers; Then I became in his eyes As one who found peace.

Regardless that her step-brothers made her work in the fields, they did see to her safety and they understood she would eventually be wed. They looked forward to the “day when she is spoken for,” meaning the day in which she would be betrothed to someone.

In the years between her being a “little sister” and a woman to be betrothed they indicated there were two choices open to her. She might choose to be a “door,” or a “wall.” These seem to refer to her attitude towards her virginity, or at least to what we would call promiscuity. A “door” indicates she was open to the sexual advances of men. A “wall” indicates she was guarded against prohibited sexual activity.

She proudly proclaims, “I am a wall.” She kept herself sexually pure and, when her “breasts” were “like towers,” i.e., when she was mature and marry-able, she and her husband “found peace.”

Here’s a question to mull: Did Cinderella think she was in a ‘Cinderella’ story? *Of course not!* That’s what makes it so powerful.

You are ultimately in a great Cinderella story. It may not play out in your lifetime exactly like on film. You may never feel as though you get to try on the glass slipper.

But one day you *will* live happily ever after! You see, the Song of Solomon is also an amazing allegory of the love of your heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, for you - His bride.

Solomon laid aside his kingly garments and glory and went to Baal-Hamon clothed as a common shepherd. The vinedressers at Baal-Hamon did not recognize Solomon. There was one who did receive him, a Gentile woman, the Shulamite. Solomon and the Shulamite fell in love. After a short time Solomon had to return to Jerusalem. In the Song, Solomon leaves the Shulamite in his vineyard with the promise that he will return for her. One day, as she is working in the fields, she looks to the horizon and exclaims,

Song of Songs 3:6 Who is this coming out of the wilderness Like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, With all the merchant's fragrant powders?

Song of Songs 3:7 Behold, it is Solomon's couch, With sixty valiant men around it, Of the valiant of Israel.

Song of Songs 3:8 They all hold swords, Being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh Because of fear in the night.

The Shulamite's betrothed was returning to her - not as the lowly shepherd when he came the first time, but as the mighty king surrounded by an army with drawn swords because the night is coming in which there is much danger. Solomon catches up his bride and sweeps her away, back to Jerusalem, where she reigns as queen.

At the conclusion of the Song of Solomon, when the Shulamite returns to Baal-Hamon with the king, she is so changed that no one recognizes her, as you read in 8:5,

Song of Songs 8:5 "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, Leaning upon her beloved?"

Solomon and his bride eventually return together to Baal-Hamon to enjoy and express their love:

Song of Songs 7:11 Come, my beloved, Let us go forth to the field; Let us lodge in the villages.
Song of Songs 7:12 Let us get up early to the vineyards; Let us see if the vine has budded, Whether the grape blossoms are open, And the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

Song of Songs 7:13 The mandrakes give off a fragrance, And at our gates are pleasant fruits, All manner, new and old, Which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

Most of you have already figured out the typical meaning of each of these details. Jesus, even though wealthy and glorious as God in heaven and Creator of the universe, laid aside His wealth and glory to come to earth clothed as a man - God in human flesh. You see, Israel was God's vineyard, but she was not producing fruit, and her vinedressers - the religious leaders - were withholding the obedience that was rightfully owed to God. When Jesus came to Israel He was not recognized by the vinedressers; as you read in the Gospel of John,

John 1:11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

Even though rejected by the Jews, Jesus would be received by others:

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Believers of all ages are like the Shulamite as they fall in love with Jesus.

Just like Solomon, Jesus had to leave the vineyard and return to His palace:

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

John 14:2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Jesus promised His beloved He would return:

John 14:3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

Solomon returned for the Shulamite, taking her back to the palace under guard "because of fear in the night" it said in Song of Solomon 3:8. When Jesus returns for His Church, He will take her back to Heaven - to the place He has prepared for her - prior to the fearful night that is coming upon the world. The Bible calls this terrible, dark time the Great Tribulation. You won't go through it; you will be caught away by Jesus in the Rapture:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Once in the palace, the Shulamite was changed into Solomon's queen. At the Rapture, you will be changed - transformed into a glorious, heavenly body:

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed;

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Solomon and the Shulamite returned to Baal-Hamon. He was revealed in all his kingly glory, and the Shulamite was not even recognized for her glory. The Bible says that, at the conclusion of the seven year Great Tribulation, Jesus will return in all His glory, and that you will return with Him as His bride. From then on you will enjoy the love of Jesus in His kingdom of heaven on earth, and then on into eternity.

As the Song of Solomon ends, you read in its final verse,

Song of Songs 8:14 Make haste, my beloved, And be like a gazelle Or a young stag On the mountains of spices.

As the Bible ends, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, you read,

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

And they all lived...