

"I CHOOSE TO CELEBRATE YOU"

EXALTING AND MAGNIFYING MARRIAGE'S GREATNESS

One of my most prized possessions in the world is a \$0.99, cheap, brass colored picture frame that I purchased when I was a brand new Christian. I can't remember where I got the idea, but I bought this frame from the mall, removed to token "happy couple" picture from the inside and set it on my nightstand (knowing what I was like before Christ, I knew that all of the romantic relationships in my life had to be radically different than before). Then I sat down one night with the Scriptures and wrote out a multi-page prayer to God with the qualities that I believed God would have me pursue in a potential mate. I remember wanting to be married very badly, but never wanting to compromise what God wanted for me. I then folded these papers and stuffed them into that 2"X 3" frame and prayed something like this, *"Lord, I promise that I will only marry someone who either matches or exceeds the character qualities found in this list, where I can safely take the list out and put her picture in its place."*

To my surprise, I found that frame nearly 2 years ago, buried beneath a pile of other collectibles as we were preparing to move to Nebraska. With great fear of being discovered, I opened it up to see 1) how cheesy I was when I was first saved; and 2) how closely what I thought then matched the Scriptures and the wife God provided. It was a joy not only to discover that the criteria I had laid out was still sound (okay, most of it was), but that in every detail, Jana (my wife) matched them to a tee. God had not only answered, He had provided "far more abundantly beyond all that [I] could ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

I remember wondering what she would look like, blonde, brunette, or redhead; short or tall; athletic or dainty; fun-loving and gregarious or quiet and gentle; and okay, to be totally honest, smoking or not. I remember wondering again something that I had wondered since I was a little boy – what would our wedding day look like? How would we do it? Big or little? A small gathering with a couple of friends or a giant gala? Outdoors or indoors? So many questions..."why does it have to take so long" I muttered. Looking at my frame didn't help much with quelling those desires, but it brought me back constantly to what was most important – the character of the woman that I would not only share this moment with, but the rest of my life.

So it has been throughout the ages—daydreamers longing to know who, where, and when it would be their turn. By the time we arrive in **3:6-11**, Solomon has gone away in the ancient custom, to finalize all of the preparations for his bride, so that when he comes for her, all that remains is to commit their lives to one another. The wait is finally over. The long awaited day celebration has arrived; the consummation of their union has finally begun and it is the biggest party of their lives. This moment of celebration is both the relief of all their pent up passions and the thrill of entering into what they have dreamed of since they were little kids. It is for Solomon, according to **3:11**, **"the day of his wedding."**

This is a ceremony like no other. Modern weddings, even royal ones with all of their regalia, pomp, and circumstance, can't touch the celebration like the one in this book – which from God's perspective, honors His design. Therein is the main principle in this section: marriage, being from God, has a glory, dignity, majesty, and enormity to it, it should be exalted, magnified, and celebrated in a way that befits its Maker. Having experienced righteous, romantic love in all of its fullness up to this point, a small, private ceremony before the “Justice of the Peace” and a couple of witnesses just doesn't do it justice. Therefore, in honor of his bride, and in a way that is worthy of God's special design, Solomon pulls out all the stops and honors the Shulamite by lavishing her with everything he can to show her how special she is to him, particularly on this day—a choice he must make every day for the rest of his life.

To CELEBRATE your lover means that you _____ him or her with exquisite displays of _____, _____, AND _____, not just on the wedding day, but for the rest of your lives together.

In specific, this celebration has 3 impactful features, each of which is worthy of God's majestic, glorious, precious design. A celebration worthy of God is:

1. P _____! (3:6-8)

- A. Who is speaking in **v. 6** and what do they see?
- B. According to the ancient custom of weddings in Israel during Solomon's day, why is this picture so meaningful?
- C. What, besides the dust of the entourage, makes the “**columns of smoke**” that can be seen from afar, according to **v. 6**?
- D. Who attends Solomon in this entourage, according to **v. 7-8** and how are they described?
- E. What is their role and function, based on **v. 8** (cf. **2 Samuel 23:8-39**)?
- F. What kind of personal impact would this event have on the Shulamite bride?

- B. What is the impact of this statement: **"Go forth...and gaze on King Solomon..."** especially in light of who said it?
- C. What kind of **"crown"** is Solomon wearing in **v. 11** and what is its significance for him and for all grooms?
- D. Who specifically has given this to him and what is the meaning behind the gift? How is that an important feature of both marriages and wedding celebrations today?
- E. Who is conspicuous by his absence in **v. 11**? What does this suggest?
- F. What one word describes Solomon's attitude on this day in **v. 11**?
- G. How does that display honor the Shulamite?
- H. What are some examples that you have seen of *joyful* celebrations?
- I. What are some modern ways that a couple can follow this example and communicate the joy in their hearts to finally be one in their wedding ceremony? For the rest of their lives?

TAKING IT HOME AND MAKING IT REAL:

Marriage is a gift so precious, every aspect of it, from beginning to end, should reflect God's worth. It is certainly a gift worth waiting for. Celebrating your spouse is not merely about a big wedding. Many couples pour more time into the wedding ceremony itself than the rest of their marriage. This kind of celebration however is a choice you make every day for the rest of your life to magnify and exalt the precious gift God has given to you in a life-partner and to live it out in a way that is worthy of God.

1. If you are not married, resolve today that you will only marry someone with whom you can stand confident he or she is indeed worthy of God and the design He has put into marriage. Also, pick one couple in your life that you will commit to pray for throughout the rest of this series, that their union will stay strong and grow deeper than the day when they first said, "I do!"

2. If you are married, whether you a veteran or a newly wed, it's time to party. This fall, we are planning a massive marriage party to celebrate your love and God's design, partly as a reaffirmation of your original commitment to one another and an opportunity to publicly renew your promise to live out the choices in the "When I Fall in Love" series. If you were married before you came to Christ, if you wish your wedding ceremony had this kind of impact, or if you have ever considered renewing your wedding vows, this party is in your honor—you don't want to miss it. More details to come...
3. For the next two weeks – it's date night time: the first one planned by the guy, designed to honor and celebrate his gal; the second planned totally by the gal, designed to serve and surprise her man. Take the time that would normally be spent in this class and enjoy 2 weeks of powerful, personal, joyful celebration of each other. A babysitter list is in the back.