

## Marriage Check-up



# Fresh Sheets: True Intimacy in the Marriage

**Song of Solomon 2:15**

Please open to the Song of Solomon 2:15. I don't know if you've met Mrs. Lilly Sheppard, but if you have, you know she has a servant's heart. I have never seen a lady or man who loves to serve more than Mrs. Lilly does. Not only does she love to serve, she loves to give gifts. Mrs. Lilly has been working for the church for many, many years. A couple of years ago, she gave my wife a present that I thought was just for her, but would later discover that it was not only for her, it was for me too. It was a bottle of detergent...a gallon bottle, called Glamor Wash High Maintenance. This was from one woman to another woman. And Mrs. Lilly told my wife not to use this for regular things, but to use it to wash the sheets on the master bed in the master bedroom. Now, I can't tell you how excited I get when I know that Celisa has taken that detergent, (now this is about \$100 per gallon) reserved only for our bedroom sheets. It is amazing. When Celisa takes those sheets out of the washing machine and puts them in the dryer, you can just smell the aroma of those freshly washed sheets. By the time she takes them out of the dryer, our whole house is permeated with this special scent. Then, my wife take that set of sheets and places them on the ironing board and irons them before she puts them on our bed so that there is not a wrinkle on those sheets. This is going to be a PG sermon, so don't be afraid, but I can't tell you how excited I get when I come home and as soon as I open the door, I can smell the smell, and I see this look on my wife's face. There is a big grin on her face, and she says "fresh sheets." Oh man...I'm telling you, at first I just wanted to immediately dive

into the bed and roll on those sheets, but I can't do that. Because we are now washing our sheets in the Glamor Wash High Maintenance detergent that is \$100 a bottle, we've made a covenant. Here is our covenant: when we have fresh sheets, we will not get on those sheets, or under those sheets, with anything that is on us from the farm because those sheets are so sacred to us. They are so clean, we don't want anything to defile those sheets. So when I come home and she has that grin on her face of fresh sheets, I don't even think of getting on the bed with my dirty farm clothes on. Do you know what I do? I head straight to the shower because we've made a covenant not to get in that physical bed with anything on us that might defile those sheets. I just want that to be the metaphor in your mind of the relationship of oneness that God intended between a husband and a wife, not just physically, but physically, spiritually, and soulishly, as well. Does that make sense?

We are going to talk about fresh sheets this morning. We're going to talk about how to deal with the dirt that gets on your sheets. Now by sheets, we are using this as a metaphor of the intimacy between the head and the body, between the husband and the wife. I am talking about intimacy; I'm not talking about sex or affection. I'm talking about intimacy. When this message is over, if you are a married couple, I want you to make the same covenant that Celisa and I have made, not just for the physicalness of your house, but for the atmosphere of your home. This is that you will deal with the dirt that you picked up throughout your day, so that when you come home, you won't let anything break the intimacy between you and your spouse. Every time Celisa says fresh sheets, I don't think of sheets on the bed, I think about the intimacy, the freshness she and I strive for on a daily basis before God.

We are not going to stand for the Song of Solomon because we are just reading one verse. I am not minimizing one verse because this one verse is amazing. But let me give you the context. The Song of Solomon is the Song of Songs of Solomon. According to the Bible, Solomon wrote 1005 songs, and this is the best of the best. The Song of Solomon is not a song; it is an album of songs. It is fourteen or fifteen songs that have been arranged to picture true oneness, physically, spiritually, and soulishly between a husband and a wife. It is an album of songs that have been

specifically chosen by Solomon under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit to picture what it means to truly be naked and not ashamed with your spouse. That is the true picture of the oneness that God designs in the husband-wife relationship.

I want to be honest with you, I've told you this before, but I am an AM kind of guy, not an FM. Do you know what that means? I am Mike and Mike in the morning, Rush Limbaugh, Dave Ramsey, news, and talk...I'm not song. If you get in my truck and it's on an FM station, my wife has been driving my truck. Now I like songs when Celisa interprets what the song means, but I've got to be honest with you, I struggle with songs because they don't write them in straight prose, there is a little poetry and a little imagery and I struggle with that. I am an AM kind of guy.

But I love this song. If you ask what my all-time favorite album, I will tell you it's the Song of Solomon. When we get to the second chapter, you have to get this picture. Solomon is going on a walk with Mrs. Solomon. It's unfortunate that our English translators in chapter 6:13 translates her name as the Shulammite or the Shulam woman. In the Hebrew, it is actually the feminine form of Solomon. The Bible is trying to tell us it is Solomon and Mrs. Solomon, and she is even still Mrs. Solomon in the song even when she is not married because the whole song is pictured around the relationship of them either looking forward to the marriage or after the marriage looking back. So, it is Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, and it is picturing that true intimacy. I don't want to offend any ladies by this, but I can't tell you what it does to me when I introduce my wife as Mrs. Celisa and she sticks out her hand and says, yes, I am Mrs. Bro. Ricky. Wow! Wow! I can still tell you the day when she told me, "I get my ultimate satisfaction in being your wife."

I am not talking about sex this morning. I am not talking about affection this morning. I am talking about intimacy. Intimacy is defined in the dictionary as "to be close to, to be near to, to be open to, to be accepting of; to belong to." That is what we are talking about. What we will specifically deal with though is attitudes and actions that sometimes break intimacy in the relationship. Those attitudes and actions that say to your spouse, "I don't see you, I don't know you, or I don't care about you." We

don't mean to do that, but we do. That is what we're dealing with this morning. Because there isn't a husband in here that has not heard that phrase after an action or an attitude, "YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT ME!" I thought I did, but I just didn't get what my actions and attitudes were doing to my body. That is why this song is in the Bible. We have 150 Psalms for the church to sing their theology, but then we've got this one book out of 66, this album of songs, so that husbands and wives fully understand what true oneness and true intimacy looks like. It is our responsibility to help our wives make sure the sheets are fresh and they stay clean.

In the first songs in this album, the song just opens up by saying what every man's going to learn at some point in his relationship with his wife, and that is this; she has some insecurities. The thing that she is really insecure about is her body; she's insecure in how she looks. I've said this a million times to my wife; I wish she could see herself as I see her, the most beautiful woman in the world. Do you guys have any idea what it's like to be married to the most beautiful woman in the world? I know, you think you are married to the most beautiful woman in the world. Ladies, he really does. Now I hate to hurt your feelings, but we know there is only one man who can be married to the most beautiful woman in the world, and that just happens to be me. 😊 I hope you guys understand there is a whole book in the Bible about the insecurity a woman feels about her physicalness. What Mrs. Solomon is struggling with is that she is tan because she is a country girl and she is in this palace now with all these fair-skinned maidens running around in the presence of her husband, the king, and she is insecure because she has a suntan. I know in our day and age, it is right the opposite, ladies want a little tan. But in that world, to have a tan was terrible, and so she is struggling. How is he going to deal with me and how I look when he is surrounded all day long by these other beautiful women in the palace? She is insecure.

She is also insecure about his job. Most women are insecure about our jobs. She is worried because she doesn't know if she is going to be able to handle him being the king of Israel, having constant demands on his time, and will he take the time to remember he has a wife? And will he, after dealing with all of these heads of foreign governments, will he want to

come home at night and be with her and only with her? And can he leave his work outside the palace, so when he gets home, it is just them?

In the second chapter, because she is a country girl, he doesn't show up with a gold plated chariot, he comes walking. What is he trying to show her? He is trying to show her that there is nothing going to keep him away for her. All of the mountains, valleys, and rivers, he will personally traverse over every one of them to get to her until he stands outside of her lattice. She is looking, acting like she is not looking, but their eyes meet and he asks her to come out. They go for a walk and as they walk, he knows there is something wrong. I've told you this guys, I can't preach this enough, our wives have this way of letting us know there is something wrong. Praise God, Solomon wasn't from Dexter. We Dexter boys just get to the point, "What's wrong?" "Nothing." Ok, nothing's wrong so we go on with our business. Solomon knows something is wrong with Mrs. Solomon, so do you know what he does? He does something that we men need to try to learn to do. You see, she is a country girl, so he wants to relate to her, so he just says something like this, "Oh my dove, why are you in the crannies of the clefts of the rocks?" You AM guys know that Mike doesn't talk like that! This is saying that she knew and he knew what lived in caves, bats. If we were to be honest, there are times when they do pull away from us when something is wrong, and we kind of think it's their fault, and we really want to call them an old bat! But he didn't. He asked why his dove was living where the bats live, why is she hiding from him, turning from him. Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that he notices the intimacy between them is broken, and he wants to know what is wrong. But he isn't just asking what is wrong; he is trying to draw out of her what is wrong. Guys hear me; it is our responsibility as the leader of the home to draw out of our wives what is wrong. Got it?

Listen to what she does, ladies listen. She says to him, "Can you catch the little foxes that ruin the vineyard? Our vineyard is in full blossom." She appeals to his manhood.

If I could pause for a moment, we are going to talk about this in a couple of weeks, but young girls here that are not yet married, listen to me. Take a lesson from Mrs. Solomon; don't marry a man who you do not believe

can deal with your insecurities. Do not marry a man who you do not believe has the ability to solve problems. If you marry a man who cannot solve problems, cannot solve your marital problems, you will be miserable for the rest of your life! If you are a single guy here, you need to learn problem solving 101, 102, 103, 104, and then you had better get a master's degree. Amen? We have to learn how to solve problems correctly.

So Mrs. Solomon is appealing to his manhood when she asks if he can catch the foxes. That would be like before I got married, Celisa saying to me, "Honey, I'm afraid of snakes, can you kill snakes?" Of course I can kill a snake! Or because we live out in the country and she is afraid of the Coyotes, it would be like her asking me, "Honey, can you kill a coyote?" Well of course I can kill a coyote! That is what is going on here, except what Mrs. Solomon is doing is putting it in a way where he can get it. Ladies, please help us get it.

This little fox she was talking about wasn't a gray or red fox. It was a little animal that burrowed under the ground and nibbled on the roots of the things that grew in the vineyard. It just gnawed the hairs off of the roots, which disabled the root to take water and nutrients up into the plant. Within a few days to a week under that hot, Middle Eastern climate, pretty soon with the root system gone, the plant dies and the vineyard is ruined.

Do you get this? That is why she asks if he can catch the little foxes. That little fox that you can't see, that is under the ground, nibbling away at the relationship, but the guy doesn't get that there is a fox in the vineyard. She is wanting to know if you are going to be observant enough. Can you catch the foxes? Can you deal with the problems? Can you deal with my insecurity about myself? Can you deal with my insecurity about you and your job? Are you going to deal with these problems in a way that we will grow together and not apart? That is a big question.

Then she lets him know that our vineyard, our relationship, is in full blossom. Guys, so that we get this, don't picture this creature as a big buck, or a rattlesnake, or a coyote, or a wolf. Let's picture it for what it really is, and that is a mole. Do any of you have moles at home? I had an immaculate yard about three years ago, and then all of a sudden, underneath my ground, here came these moles and they just burrowed

away. Eventually, the grass dies where they burrow, and I have these dead circles all over my yard.

Guys, how are you doing at catching moles? Are you like some of the dogs I've had? You try to catch the mole but you make a bigger mess. Or can you deal with what's wrong in your marital relationship wisely and correctly, so that you don't have anything that's eating away at the roots of your marriage. That is what we are going to talk about this morning.

Jesus said what God joined together; do not let man separate. He basically told the Pharisees that the reason God granted divorce was because of the hardness of man's and the woman's heart. You've heard me say for years that divorce only acknowledges publicly what has already taken place privately, and that is a separation. I personally believe that Jesus not only wanted you to deal with anything that might cause a divorce, I think Jesus wants you to make sure you deal with anything that might even cause a separation, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. I am so thankful that I am part of a church that believes in the covenant of marriage. Many of us are going to stay married regardless, but don't pat yourself on the back. A marriage that only stays together for the kids, or the church, or for God is not the kind of marriage God designed them to be. He designed me to be in such a relationship with Celisa that the moment I can tell she's not near me, or close to me, or one of my actions or attitude has hurt her and she is no longer open or accepting to me, doesn't even want to belong to me at that very moment, right then, I have got to recognize it and deal with the attitudes and actions that said to her, 'you don't see me, you don't know me, or you don't care about me.' I have to deal with them at the moment, because divorce only acknowledges publicly what has already taken place privately, and that is a separation, and many of us are living separated lives even though we are married. That is why it is such a shock when we hear someone got a divorce! You held hands in public, you talked nicely to each other publicly, and you sat beside each other in church. But we had no idea there was a separation going on at home, and some men have the audacity to tell me they didn't see it coming! Are you kidding me? The only reason you didn't see it coming is because your heart is hard. We have to learn to deal with our actions and attitudes in a Christ-like way so that there is never a separation. But the moment there is a separation, we have

to deal with what separated us, no matter how little or insignificant it is, because while it may be little to us, it is big to our body, or it is big to our head. We don't want to see what we are doing only through our eyes; we want to see what we are doing through both of our eyes. That is why as a head, I need a body. That is why Celisa, as a body, needs a head. Does this make sense?

I've told this story before, but we have some new folks here this morning and I think it just nails it. So I want to tell it again. I don't always see the little moles. You know that our family loves to vacation at Disney World. Every time we go, Celisa wants to go to Cinderella's castle and the family eats with the princesses. I don't know how many years we've been going to Disney, or how many times Celisa calls to make the reservation six months ahead. But when she called, they only have a table of three if we have four in our family, or a table of four if there are five in our family, and so on. We just could never get a table. I can't tell you how many times we are there, in the Park, and she is on the phone looking for a cancelation. Many times, I hear the conversation knowing there are nine of us, there is an opening for a table of eight, and I am saying, "Take it! Take it! I'll go ride Space Mountain!" She won't do it...she won't do it. But I'm that sacrificial; I would do it for her and my family! Sometimes it's tough being the head of the family.

A few years ago, I was driving down the road and I was thinking about our anniversary that was coming up. I was thinking about what I could do for Celisa, and I had this thought that I would love to take her to Disney World, just she and I, and us get a table for two at Cinderella's Castle. But here is what I know...they are only going to have a table for one. I honestly do this; I pray to the Lord, "Lord, if I'm supposed to take her and You could be honored in this, would you make a table of two be available when I call (actually I didn't call, my secretary did). When she called, she said, "They have a table for two," I said, "Take it." She booked it. I then got a luxurious hotel, a one-way flight there, and I tell Celisa that we are going somewhere down south for our anniversary and to bring something nice for at least one meal. I don't tell her where we are going until we get to the Nashville Airport and get on a flight to Orlando. She now suspects we are going to Disney, but she does not know we are going to Cinderella's

Castle and sit at the royal table. So two days later on our anniversary, we are in the Park, she is looking good, I am looking good as I can look, and we go up to Cinderella's Castle, and it starts to hit her that I have reservations. We go in and sit at the royal table, and leave it to Disney; they got me a table over in the corner with a window overlooking the whole Park! All of a sudden, Belle comes out, Snow White comes out, and then Cinderella herself comes out! At one point, I am surrounded, literally, with three princesses plus my wife. I am sitting here thinking *wow I am married to the fairest princess of them all!* We had the last flight home that night on our anniversary, and as we are flying into the Nashville Airport and getting ready to land. I don't know if you know this about me, but Celisa will tell you that I'm high maintenance, and she is low maintenance. If I do something, I need you to brag on me and tell me I did it right. I need feedback. I give out the survey of how I did, marked 1-5, 5 being strongly like. So we are getting ready to land, and I have to know how I did. So I just say, "Hon, in the last three days, tell me what you liked best." Well you know what I'm thinking it's going to be! But do you know what she said? "You left your cellphone home for three days." She had been telling me about that 'little mole' for years, and I never got it. I really thought it was ok just to have my phone in my pocket when we sat down at the dinner table, and as long as I just looked at it but didn't answer, that was ok. I don't do that anymore. By the time I got to 1204 Redbud Road, I had made a decision that from 6:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m., I would not answer my cellphone. If you are going to die, you had better die between 6:20 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., or I am not going to know for twelve hours! Guys I struggled with that. But I had to come to understand, if I make myself available to all of my sheep twelve hours, seven days a week, my wife deserves the other twelve. You will love me when I'm helping you save yours, but when I lose mine, you are going to fire me as pastor, and I am going to blame you. But I can't blame you; I have to blame myself because I couldn't use to kill the moles. Let me just say that now there is not a better mole killer anywhere than me.

What mole, or moles, is just gnawing at the roots of your relationship? What are those little things that you know when you do it, you feel her pull away, but you just continue to do it anyway? Then you have the audacity

to say, "What's wrong?" when you know what's wrong? I want our marriages to be what God intended them to be, and that is ultimate oneness, ultimate intimacy, so there is no separation between us and our spouses. I want to give you five tips, five practical things that I think will help us men be great mole killers. It will help our wives as well. I am going to base my remarks off of 1 John 1:5-2:2. It is a passage of Scripture that deals with how we deal with sin with God. I think this not only helps us deal with sin with God, but it is also applicable in our relationship with our spouses.

### **1. Conscious**

I need to be so walking with God, so into God's Word, so looking at the reflection of Jesus Christ in the mirror of my life and have such a desire to be like Him, that I am conscious of anything that causes her to pull away from me, or separates from me, and I know it the moment it happens. Does that make sense? I am going to quit trying to shift this to her and make my behavior be ok. We may not be dealing with sin here; we may be dealing with something that irritates, or something with a different perspective. But the first thing that has to happen with me is that I will now be conscious of anything I am doing in my life that is causing my spouse to separate from me. I don't want it to be an inch, but I want to notice it when it's an inch before it gets to a foot. I want to notice it when it's a foot so it won't get to a yard. I want to notice it while it's a yard before it gets to be a mile. I don't want to live with an inch between Celisa and I. How about you? All I want is what God wants for me and her, and that is fresh sheets, a relationship washed in the blood of Jesus that makes me conscious of anything I might have gotten on me during the day that will spoil what she and I have!

### **2. Convicted**

Once I am conscious of it, I want to be convicted of what it's doing to her because she is my body. I don't just want to see how she makes me feel when I realize something's wrong. I want to be convicted about what my attitude and actions did to her that caused her to pull away from me. I don't want to be able to do it and then keep doing it. I want to be convicted! I want to hurt because I have hurt her. Do you hear me?

### 3. Confess

I am not going to be like the first couple, Adam and Eve. When I am conscious of it and convicted of it, I don't want to try to cover it up, I don't want to try to hide it. Let me just tell you guys to quit being foolish! You can't cover it up. You may think you are hiding it but you're not. She may not know exactly what you are doing, but she knows you're doing something, and she feels you're pulling away from her too. If you cover it up and hide it from your spouse, when you get caught, you will play the blame game just like Adam did. As men, we ultimately blame God, just like Adam did. Did you hear what Adam did? He said it was that woman You gave me. I mean, all of us prayed for the woman, God gave us the woman He wanted us to have, and now we got problems. So you know whose fault it is; it's God's fault...really? "God, I had life made in the Garden of Eden, all by myself, until she showed up!" Now we are blaming her, and you guys know that many of you blame your spouse for the separation that is taking place in the marriage rather than admitting you couldn't kill a little mole that you let run in your marital relationship for months and years. He just gnawed away all of the roots, and the next thing you know, that marital faithfulness and that marital love withered and died. No...confess it. The next time you feel her move away from you an inch, I want you to look her in the face, get her attention, and say, "I sinned against you." Then tell her what you just did so that she knows you know what you just did that hurt her.

I've told you this before, but I don't want any of our guys to ever again say 'I'm sorry' first, because when you first say I'm sorry, you are telling your wife that you are dealing with the fruit of the problem, but you aren't ready yet to deal with the root of the problem. What you are saying is I am sorry I hurt you, but you are not saying you are dealing with what hurt her. Does that make sense? "Honey, I sinned against you by..." You tell her the attitude and action you did that was wrong. Don't make excuses of why you did it, just admit it; you blew it, you sinned. After you tell her you've sinned, then you can say I am sorry I hurt you. But now, she will believe you won't keep hurting her over and over again because now, you are going to deal with the mole, with the sin, with the attitude, the action that

has been saying to her for a long time that you don't see me, you don't know me, and you don't care about me.

#### **4. Cleanse**

Once we really deal with what's wrong with us, the Bible says that God cleanses us. The word for 'cleanse' means that when He cleanses that wound, He takes the infection out so it heals and doesn't leave a scar. Here is what's wrong; we have too many marriages that still want to bring up what happened a year ago, five, ten, or twenty years ago. The reason we keep bringing it up is because that wound never healed properly, and there is a scar in our life that proves it. We can't get over that scar. The reason we can get over the wound in our life without it making a scar is because I know when I bring something before God and I really deal with it and see if as He sees it, He forgives me. I am released of that. I want to ask the offended spouse to forgive your spouse. I want you to forgive. Listen to me, I don't ever want to hear an offended spouse say again, while you are walking away, it's ok, it's ok. It is not ok! The very fact that you are walking away is saying it is not ok. You are trying to hide the fact that you haven't forgiven. You don't want to deal with what is now wrong in your life, not forgiving, you want to get away by saying it's ok, and it's not ok. Trust me, when I sin against my wife, or others, I will not leave the relationship with them saying it's ok. I have to know they are ok, and they will not be ok until they forgive me. If you don't forgive me, that is going to fester and fester. You will get angry and mad, and you will question how and why I could have done that. It will be terrible and you will pull away. Are you getting this? The spouse who sins says I sinned against you, and tell how you sinned. The other spouse says I forgive you. Once you say I forgive you, what you are really saying is "I am ok." If I am ok, then we are ok, and now we are back close again. So don't say I am ok until you are, which means if you can't forgive at that moment because this is the forty-fifth time we have dealt with this, and you don't really believe they have dealt with what's wrong or repented, then you just say, "I am not ok, and when I forgive you I will let you know." Don't hide, and don't try to cover it up because that is what's wrong in too many of our marriages. We have covered this stuff up and hid it. Now we are playing the blame game. I am saying let's deal with it, and let's deal with it at the moment.

## 5. Change

Now hear me. If I've sinned against Celisa and I'm conscious, convicted, confessed it, I'm cleansed, what I am not going to go back to the dirty clothes basket and take that shirt and jeans out of the dirty clothes hamper and put them back on and bring that junk back into the marital relationship! I'm telling you that when you get conscious of sin and convicted of sin, and really confess sin and get cleansed, you don't want to do it again. So instead of going to the dirty clothesbasket and continually doing the same thing you've been doing that's hurt your wife and broken the intimacy, I am going to the closet of sanctification that God has given me. I will put off those old habits and put on new habits, new attitudes, new actions, and I will come out clean and strive for attitudes and actions that say I am clean before God! I am telling you that when you really deal with what's wrong with you, there will be a change. Amen?

In closing, I need to tell you that sometimes you get a stain on the sheets that your washer and dryer will not get out, no matter how much Glamour Wash you put on it. I will never forget a year ago Christmas my staff gave me a Montblanc roller pen. I love Montblanc pens. They gave me the kind that is a roller bearing pen. It was the very night we had just had fresh sheets. Celisa rolled over and went to sleep. When she goes to sleep, sometimes I read. While I was reading, I had my Moleskine journal, my new pen, and somehow I fell asleep...that pen rolled off of my journal and onto the fresh sheets. When the tip touched the sheet, it just sucked all of the ink out. We got up the next morning and there was a big stain on our sheet. We doubled the Glamour Wash, tried Tide...nothing worked. Our last resort should have been our first resort, Boone's Cleaners. Guess what? They came back, ink stain gone!

There might be a time in your life when you need a professional. If you will come when the inch is turned into a foot, or foot turned into a yard, to the pastoral staff, our counselors then before it turns into a mile or two, you will be amazed at the wisdom we have. Do you get it? There is a time when you can't do it alone. Your cleaner is not your mother, not your mother-in-law, or girlfriend or buddy. The stains that break intimacy must stay between the husband and his wife as best we can. When we have to

bring someone else in when we really want to get the stain out, you turn to the church. You turn to a pastor, a trained counselor from a Christian perspective. I desire fresh sheets for the families in our church. Will you make the covenant not to bring the dirt into your relationship and you will deal with it, and once you get clean, you will stay clean?