

Catching the Foxes

Course Description and Lesson Outline Samples

A Personal Note From the Author!

When the Census 2000 results were first released, Dr. Dobson reported that the divorce rate was higher among born again Christians than among those who did not profess a faith (Focus on the Family Magazine, August 2000). Even though the statistics were only minimally higher, it was very sobering; and even more so for us because my husband and I almost brought the margin up by one.

Hank and I were married in June of 1985. We were both professing Christians at the time and were quite certain that the Lord had brought us together for His purpose, but we were presumptuous in our faith that the love we shared was enough to withstand Satan's strategies to kill Christian marriages. Like many in this day, we were caught blind-sided by the enemy who was far more adept at destroying our marriage than we were at sustaining it. After 12 years of fruitless effort to do the "married thing" God allowed us to be tested, refined and broken. The truth we faced was shocking. We were naked and blind, completely unprepared for the "terrors of the night" (Song of Solomon 3:7)!

God held true to His reputation and resurrected what was most assuredly dead. And He has answered the cry of my heart in the midst of the storm: we are progressively experiencing what it was like to live in the Garden before the Fall! Consequently, it is the desire of our hearts that we not only win back our marriage, but that we shame the enemy who even tried to sabotage our family by seeking the Lord for every and any way to restore other marriages that are hanging on by a thread. There is hope, dear friends. There is lasting hope for you!

One day while in prayer for marriages, the Lord laid on my heart the words of Habakkuk 2:2, "Write down the revelation and make it plain on the tablets, so that a herald may run with it." Up to this point I had never read through the Song of Solomon and the little I had read turned me off completely. I was nearly convinced that this book made it into the Bible by mistake. It did not make any sense to me and most of it was incredibly embarrassing to read! I left that prayer time scratching my head, wondering why God would ask me to write a curriculum for marriages from this book. But I resolved to seek Him diligently for what He wanted to teach marriages for this day! Little did I know that the book would have such a profound impact on me and I have come to believe that it contains principles that are critical "wedding day preparations" for the Bride of Christ. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7)! The Spirit of God is showing the church of today how to "ready herself" for His return, but the call is urgent that we pay attention and do what is required.

I have a genuine passion for the Bride of Christ as a united church. Hank and I have never been denominationalists, simply because we have had too many blessings from a variety of churches. I was raised in the Presbyterian Church where I acquired an appreciation for the holy countenance of God. Hank was raised in the Catholic Church and still maintains an exquisite reverence for God. Most of our married lives have been spent in the Baptist Church where we were showered with the message of God's grace. And, most recently, we

have been serving in the Assemblies of God Church where we have come to better understand the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that every church whose foundation solely rests on the infallible Word of God has a “piece” of Christ within each unique doctrine. But as we come to the latter days of the church age we must gather together a collection of all we know to be true and learn from one another. For this reason, I have written this curriculum very mindful of the precious friends and family members of various church backgrounds. Some of the teachings may be totally new to you and some may challenge the way you have always related to God, but let me encourage you to be open minded. As we grow closer to the hour of Christ’s return, religious doctrine will fall to the wayside and the singular truths of God’s word will stand. It is the teachable heart that will be found “readied”.

So What's This Study All About?

1. *The Purpose of the Study.*

It is with great conviction and faith that we believe freedom can and will come to those marriages that commit to seeking God for their marriage through this study. We are living testimonies of the truth that has set us free from the Song of Solomon and there are many more who have added their names below ours. The Song of Solomon is a book just waiting to be discovered by the modern day church because it is a book about experiential love and that is of great interest to marriages. But there is NO love without commitment and a successful marriage will take more work than any other relationship. There are no fast food lines or express delivery options. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the fruit of this study can only be found through a commitment of time, energy, focus and sacrifice. The benefits are well worth the price of admission!

The ultimate vision of this study is to bring individual couples to the place of immunity from the many foxes that perpetrate the kingdom of God today. By teaching them how to “catch for us the foxes that ruin our vineyards”, it is our belief that marriages will come to know the freedom from strongholds and oppressive thinking and become less and less dependant upon counselors and pastors to help them run the race. We are convinced that couples can feast at the “ table prepared before them in the presence of their enemies” without getting indigestion! We want to see strong, viable marriage teams that are equipped to function in their appointed callings as valiant threats to the enemy. It can happen. I will happen when man and wife are empowered through healing and restored love.

2. *How to Use This Curriculum.*

a. The flow of the class.

Because this is a study designed to equip married couples to find their own answers from their own relationship with the Lord, there is a rather strict adherence to a specific order of the class. Churches often make efforts to encourage married couples by offering events/studies that facilitate a light, social atmosphere through an emphasis on fellowship, but “Catching the Foxes” is not designed for that purpose. Many couples are not comfortable with one another and tend to gravitate to friends when in gatherings. Through the schedule outlined, we make intentional effort to pull the husband and wife together by discouraging any distractions from their focus on one another.

This study requires a commitment of two hours a week for eight weeks as well as four nights of homework each week. Class should always begin on time to reemphasize the responsibility of commitment. Marriage is NOT a casual relationship, so we must learn to demonstrate the high priority of commitment even in the church by attending the study on time. Classes should begin even if everyone is not in attendance. Likewise, the class is to come to a close within two hours leaving NO time for fellowship! Do not allow the couples to linger afterward. This is an important factor in generating focused conversation between the couples on their rides home. Again, the goal of this study is not fellowship, but Holy Spirit counseling which takes place as the couple studies the Word together.

The class begins with about 30 – 45 minutes of sharing. Each spouse is required to share 3-5 minutes on what they learned from their home assignments. The intention of this time is to draw people into transparent sharing. The Spirit of God does much healing when couples discover that they are not the only ones who struggle with various issues. Transparency, however, begins with the leaders and your persistent willingness to share personal struggles and how the Lord brought you to places of victory. This is essential!

Following the sharing, there is a short, ten, minute break when people can use the rest room and get a drink. We discourage any other refreshments, again, because it tends to facilitate a fellowship atmosphere. This is a needed break, because the sharing can become rather intense and you do not want the entire evening to be focused on struggles without answers. All together, the sharing time and the break should be done within the first hour.

The last hour of the class is focused on the teaching for the following week. Because we wanted this teaching to be “user friendly” the curriculum is to be read, out loud by the leaders. We believe there is greater retention when the leaders read the curriculum and the individuals follow along using their own copies of the text. With this method, everyone has the benefit of receiving the same documented teaching, which enhances clarification and collective understanding. In addition, the entire lesson is re-read during the home assignments when couples have the time to focus on the teaching with more thought and consideration. We strongly encourage the leaders to both take turns reading the lessons, frequently interjecting comments based on relevant experiences for clarification. There are several “What Do You Think” questions sprinkled through the text that will help to facilitate discussion, however, the class is predominantly a lecture format.

The class should be opened and closed with prayer.

b. How to Read the Curriculum.

There are eight lessons, beginning with an introduction, to be read out loud at every class by the couple leading the group as the class reads along in their books. Every spouse should have their own copy of the course and bring a Bible to class. The yellow pages that precede each lesson contain the lesson outline, specific recommendations for object lessons that can be used to emphasize the theme and answers to the “What Do You Think?” discussion questions. The appropriated places where these object lessons should be used are described in the instructions on the yellow pages.

Following every lesson, there are four nights of home assignments to be completed before the next scheduled class. This is truly the heart of the study where the Holy Spirit has the chance to do the most intrinsic work. These are lengthy assignments designed to foster communication on a variety of topics and should be completed at separate times. Do not shy away from their commitment to finish each home assignment. You will note at the beginning of the course that there is a place for couples to designate the specific time they will set aside to complete their work. Often time this is the first step in teaching them to prioritize their time for one another. Before anyone shares, the following question should be asked: “Have you completed your home assignment and did you do it together?” as a way of holding everyone accountable.

3. *Ideal group size.*

We recommend that the class size be limited to 5 couples at a time because it becomes more difficult to share in a larger group within one hour. If more than five couples are interested at the same time, we would suggest that two separate classes be offered rather than combining them. In addition, this is a study that requires the participation of BOTH spouses. Again, this is an expectation that needs to be communicated clearly from the start. There are many marriages where only one of the spouses is interested in working on their marriage, and our hearts truly go out to them. The Lord has not overlooked their need. But this study is designed for husband and wife to be in attendance together.

4. *The First Meeting*

a. *An Overview of the Course*

The first page of the book includes a note from the author, which is helpful in giving a general overview of what motivated me to write the curriculum and our sincere desire to see marriages in all denominations and backgrounds restored in the fullness of God. You may choose to read it to the class or allow them the opportunity to read it on their own.

The second page entitled, "What Does This Study Involve?" includes specific details regarding the flow of the class. It is important that each person clearly understands these expectations and agrees to them by signing their name along with designating the time they will set aside as a priority to complete the home assignments.

b. *Confidentiality Agreement.*

The goal of each class is to generate honesty and transparency. This can only happen if confidentiality is assured. There is a Confidentiality Agreement to be signed at the meeting of the first class. This is to be taken very seriously! Any breach of confidence will discredit your ministry testimony as being trustworthy and defer your opportunities to lead future groups.

c. *Special Dates to Remember.*

The final page preceding the first lesson is an announcement page to inform the class of two lessons that will involve a step away from the routine. During the week of Lesson 5, the home assignment will involve some private time for the couple to share. It is always good to prepare them for this in advance because some couples will want to use this as an opportunity for a short get-away.

In addition, the final class will involve a special teaching on the Banqueting Table. The lesson does not include a meal, but you could ideally schedule the last class to meet earlier to accommodate this if you so wish.

5. *Bible References*

Catching the Foxes was written using the New International Version Bible, therefore all home assignments and "What Do You Think" questions will be better understood when this translation is used. However, when studying the Bible, it is always helpful to refer to several other translations in order to get a fuller interpretation of the text. The use of a concordance, and Bible dictionaries are also very helpful reference tools.

6. *Helpful Hints for Those Using This Curriculum For the First Time.*

We are so eager to share what the Lord has given us for your ministry to marriages and we want to encourage you that you do not need to be well versed in the Song of Solomon or even have a perfect marriage to teach this course. God always teaches us new things every time we lead a group, and he can use anyone who is willing. However, there are a few things that we have learned along the way that may help you get off to the right start.

- a. Read through the material before you teach it to the group. Believe it or not the first time we taught this class was the first time my husband ever laid eyes on the material! That can be just a bit anxiety producing to say the least. Thankfully he agreed with everything I had written, but we recommend that you both take the time to become familiar with the lessons prior to the classes. By far the greatest preparation plan includes prayer. Pray together daily, for those the Lord has entrusted to you and for your own need of wisdom. (James 1:5 is a good place to start!)
- b. If you have never taught a marriage class, and/or your marriage has areas of obvious need, it would be wise to hand pick the four or five couples that would be in your first class. The issues that marriages struggle with are far and numerous and it would be helpful to begin with relatively healthy marriages until the Lord establishes strength in your own relationship and confidence in working with other couples.
- c. Make sure that you are leading this group with your pastor's blessing. This study was written with the lay minister in mind, however, the pastor is the God appointed overseer of the flock. Marriage ministries of any kind should be in submission to their leadership as they function in the role as a spiritual covering of prayer and support. The enemy will not be pleased with your decision to lead a group of married couples into areas of freedom, and he will do all he can to frustrate, discourage and distract you from following through with the call. A healthy working relationship with your pastor will serve as a comfort and a guide throughout the eight weeks.
- d. If you or anyone in your group has never asked Jesus Christ to be Lord of your life and your marriage, we encourage you to begin praying specifically for the Spirit of God to show everyone in your group the truth of God's plan for salvation during these eight weeks. Accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ is an essential step because foxes cannot be caught when Jesus is not the "Master Gardener" of your life. Each of the prayers found in the home assignments are written to help you articulate the need for Christ and His intervention in your life and marriage. We encourage you to pray them with sincerity.

***May the God of all peace, strengthen and encourage you
as you answer the call to***

*"Build up, build up, prepare the road!
And remove the obstacles out of the way of my people."*

Isaiah 57:14

Introduction/ Fox of Disappointment

Goals: To introduce the theme, characters and potential setting of the Song of Solomon.

To establish Jesus Christ as the sole source who can meet all our needs.

Lesson Outline:

Introduction

An overview of the book of the Song of Solomon including a historical perspective and possible interpretations.

A review of the main characters in the Song of Solomon and tips on how to identify various speakers in the text.

The allegorical perspective that involves a dialogue between Christ, the Bridegroom and His bride, the Church

The significance of the Vineyard, and Solomon's curious introduction of the fox

The Fox of Disappointment

Relevant facts pertaining to the fox's habitat

How expectations can lead to disappointments in your spouse

The one expectation that every spouse should have

Healing comes with confession; an introduction to the "Model of Mutual Confession"

Suggested Object Lesson:

Items Needed: an uncommon kitchen instrument or carpenter's tool that does not have an obvious purpose.

Before you start reading the Introduction text, pass around the kitchen instrument/tool and ask people to try and identify what it is used for. You can give them several hints such as what room it is usually stored or what time of the year it is used, but they need to guess what it is used for. The goal of this lesson is to better understand the challenge of explaining revelation. We engage in a process of elimination while observing an uncommon instrument through our own personal experiences. A woman who has done a lot of canning will be more likely to recognize a kitchen tool than an object used for hunting. We don't have the full picture of love this side of heaven therefore we tend to view what God reveals to us through the limitations of our experiences.

Solomon chose to explain the revelation of God's love through poetry and it ended up as the inspired word of God! Therefore, you cannot read the Song of Solomon with the expectation of understanding it fully; you will soon be frustrated and discouraged. But when you approach this book with a simple curiosity that is similar to the deductions needed to determine the purpose of an uncommon tool, you will come to discover endless pleasures of revelation through this unique book.

Answers to Discussion Questions:

Introduction

1. *"Who do you think is speaking in Song of Solomon 2:14? Why?"*

The speaker in this text is her Lover, the Shepherd boy as he tenderly identifies her as "My dove". The rocky terrain of a mountainside was far more familiar to a shepherd than to a king and the reference to a dove is indicative of the peaceful influence the Shulamite had on him.

2. *"Like the dove 'in the cleft of the rocks' how do people 'hide' or withdraw from relationships?"*

"Hiding places" generally allude to a state of mind such as fear, anxiety and/or shame. People withdraw from a relationship for many reasons, but in a marriage a spouse will find a "hiding place" most of the time either out of fear or as a form of control.

3. *"How does he communicate comfort to her?"*

The gentle tone of the Lover's voice cannot be mistaken. He approaches her without a single hint of condemnation, allowing her the freedom of emotion. In addition, he compliments her. He gently reminds her of the pleasure he receives from their relationship by identifying how she consoles him simply by her appearance and voice. This is a very endearing text.

4. *"In what season of the year is the text 2:15 referring to and what might that suggest about the stage of their relationship?"*

The reference to the "vineyards that are in bloom" suggests the spring season. Spring typically denotes new beginnings. It is possible that Solomon was identifying a relationship between two young lovers who were not yet married or who are currently in a new stage of their relationship.

5. ***“How might the enemy find a way into the vineyard during a season of new beginnings?”***

New beginnings in a marriage are typically happy times filled with a sense of euphoria. Foxes have an easy in because the vineyard is not well guarded because they are not expected. During the spring season, foxes generally come in as “kits” (which are born in the spring) and appear rather harmless and can even be misinterpreted as blessings.

6. ***“How do you suppose foxes ruin vineyards?”***

This is a trick question. As explained in the following text, all the years of research on foxes has yet to provide me with the literal answer to that question. Every wine dresser that I’ve spoken to does not have a remote problem with the fox! Being the wisest man in the world, Solomon drew from an abundant source of innate knowledge so vast that an entire library could not have contained every detail. But there still remains the curiosity of why Solomon identified the fox in the vineyard.

The Fox of Disappointment

1. (Husbands)

Something happens that bothers your wife, but you are clueless about the issue. You know it’s got something to do with you, but she won’t talk about it; all she’s doing is crying. Finally, she says, “I just need to get away and think”. You leave for work just hoping that she’ll get over it, but by mid-morning she’s still not answering your phone calls. Distraught and worried, you leave the work and start searching ... everywhere! Finally, she calls your cell phone, to tell you she’s hanging out on the roof landing of an office building down town. It’s about dinner time when you find her sitting on the edge of the roof in deep thought. Describe your thoughts.

(Wives)

Somehow you’ve managed to disappoint him again (or at least this is your perception) and you are nearly convinced this time that he would much rather live life without you. All you want to do is run. You just need to sort it out and regroup. Is he married to someone he really doesn’t love? Is he thinking of being with someone else? Does he want a divorce? In desperate search for God’s voice, you reason that height will help you get alone with God in your thoughts better. Your path leads to the roof of a tall office building. Even looking down on life happening below, somehow helps the problems feel smaller. Finally ready to face truth and you call your husband. Within moments he appears, and his face shows deep concern and relief. Describe your thoughts.

Allow for time to discuss their thoughts concerning this scenario.

The Lover recognized her need to be affirmed from the start. Rather than focus on his needs for comfort or companionship, he gently calls to her. It is not uncommon for the husband to overlook the wife’s emotional

needs because he is typically a more practical thinker. He can easily right her off as being too emotional and unknowingly communicate subtle rejection that eventually feeds division. The Lover probably had a number of needs and wants that were obvious to him, but he lovingly put them aside to affirm her. In addition, a woman finds great romance in a husband who will seek her out of hiding. Affirmation and the time taken to listen are keys to a woman's heart!

2. *The key phrase in 2:15 is "us". How do his instructions convey love to her?*

The terms "Catch for us" and "our vineyard" specify a significant perspective of the shepherd. He viewed her fears, as their problem! And this outlook conveyed love in its purest form. Because of this perspective he was able to side step accusations and blame and she could receive the instructions spoken out of genuine unconditional love. No matter what the issue is in any marriage, it will not be solved unless both partners take responsibility for it. Whether or not the Shulamite is literally in the clefts of the rocks or this is an analogy to her presence of mind, the Lover instructs her with a prevention plan that will insure their relationship through any test or delay. Foxes are mindsets that rise up when fears are left to germinate and grow like weeds. He seeks to protect her from unnecessary pain, by instructing her to overturn fear with hope and perseverance. The foxes of the mind do not have to "ruin our vineyards" unless we allow them to roam freely in a garden locked with blame.

This verse is also indicative of the extraordinary love of Christ that not only extends understanding and care to His Bride (the composite of the husband/wife team) but He has willingly shared responsibility for our sinful condition. In love, He took on our sin and by so doing empowered us to "catch the foxes" that are ruining the vineyard that He shares with us.

3. *"How does her immediate response in 2:16 describe contentment?"*

"My lover is mine and I am his" is a central theme of the book and is an exquisite term of endearment. It is an expression of completed joy that can only be found in the experience of romance between two lovers. It denotes autonomy in the relationship that lacks no good thing!

The Fox of Jealousy

Goal: That each couple will truthfully identify the degree to which lust has infiltrated their relationship and begin the steps necessary to walk free of tolerance.

- During the sharing time be sure to ask the couples to display their wedding photo and have them describe a pleasant memory.

Lesson Outline:

Relevant facts pertaining to the fox's habitat

Godly Jealousy

The Law Concerning Jealousy

The Lure of Unfaithfulness

The Prevention Plan for fostering a "fox-free" marriage.

Love Languages

Intimacy

Making Your Romance Public

Carnal Jealousy

Suggested Object Lesson:

Items Needed: Two rolled up socks

This lesson is at the beginning because it is rather heavy and it's an issue that must be faced before any other areas of concern can be addressed. Most Christian couples struggle in the area of lust to some degree, but are either in denial or are not sure how to address it. During the teaching entitled, "The Lures of Unfaithfulness" take time with these truths by demonstrating how sin causes us to stumble in our faith walk as well as our relationships, by throwing the socks into the middle of the room. While describing any situation where lust might be a temptation (including the church setting!) walk toward the socks and pretend to trip over them. Explain how lust is a counterfeit for God's plan of intimacy and that wherever sin is active, God's love is absent. Now demonstrate the walk of victory by throwing the socks into the middle of the floor once again only this time walk around them. Explain how the temptation to lust will always be present in varying degrees and that freedom does not mean that we will never have a lustful thought again. But victory is found with confession and subsequent avoidance of the sin. We do not have the power on our own to remove sin patterns, but the blood

of Jesus is sufficient to break any powers of darkness that control us through repentance. God then empowers us to consciously choose to avoid the sin of lust by not “giving place to the devil” or, by walking around it!

Answers to the Discussion Questions:

1. *What is the key action word in the first verse that explains the sin of idolatry?*

“Do not follow ...”.

2. *“Explain how idolatry causes the Lord to feel Jealousy?”*

To be Lord means to be in first place. When we “follow after other gods”, we reject His rightful position as Lord in every area of our lives. This grieves Him because his ultimate desire is to know us and to be known by us. We cannot do that as long as we seek after other affections.

3. *“What are some of the ‘gods’ of today that people follow and how do they grieve God?”*

Money, pursuit of success, material possessions, education, career, fashion, ministry, popularity, religion (acts that appear godly but are shy of a personal relationship with God), sports, family, children, marriage

4. *“Can you name the love language(s) that your spouse communicates with the most often?”*

Have fun with this! Go around the room and ask each spouse to identify their spouse’s love language. Most couples really enjoy this time of sharing and willingly elaborate. Give them room to do so (3 minutes max per person).

- Please remind the class to bring a framed photo that was taken on their wedding day or when they were dating.

Special Note! In Day 3 of Vineyard Defense, couples will be asked to talk about the four common voices that lure people into unfaithfulness. Obviously, this is a very sensitive subject and has the potential to be very painful. We remind you that truth can be painful, but according to Jesus, it is the singular way to find freedom.

There is a note in the text that encourages couples to seek additional counsel with you or your pastor should the need arise. If you are not comfortable with this role, please contact your pastor to make him aware of the possible need. You are welcome to copy the section from Dr. Dobson's book, so he is informed of the teaching. Should a couple contact you please note that your primary role is to be good listeners. Give them room to talk, cry and vent. Do not attempt to give them direction. How they choose to handle the future must be their own decision. Particularly if there has been an affair, the couple will be in need of formal counseling beyond the scope of this course. Become their advocate and help them locate sound, Christian counsel, however, encourage them to finish the course. There really is hope beyond the truth and God offers many people the grace to rebuild.