

The Value of Song of Songs

The Wisdom literature as a whole is to teach the believer how to find Wisdom and to live successfully in God's world. However, Wisdom is not something anyone can gain apart from *the fear of the LORD*. The *fear of the LORD* is mentioned as the beginning of Wisdom in:

- The Psalms 111:10
- Proverbs 1:7, 9:10
- Job 28:28
- Ecclesiastes 12:13

Ultimately, just as Christ is the greater *Moses* (Luke 16:29-31; 24:27; 24:44; John 6:32-33) and the greater *David* (Psalm 2, 45, 110), just so Christ is the greater *Solomon*, as far as Wisdom is concerned (Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31) Wisdom finds its ultimate fulfilment in Christ.

The book Song of Songs consists of thirteen love poems. It is about the special and authentic love between a lover and a beloved. In the ancient world, it was recommended that a young man not read the Song of Songs until he was either married or aged thirty.

(Olyott, 1992)

There are different ways to approach the Song of Songs.

1. Naturally: As a love story, written in a series of poems, between Solomon the King (lover) and the Shulamite (beloved). There is no clear progression from beginning to end, but this love relationship has different aspects.
2. Allegorically: As an extended allegory of the love relationship between Jesus and the church.
3. Typically: As instruction on how to approach the love relationship between a man and a woman that culminates in marriage and life together thereafter. Ultimately, this love relationship is a type of love between Christ and the church.

The Song of Songs is intimidating to study, because of its statements of physical intimacy, as well as the tendency of some commentators who interpret it allegorically.

However, as all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, rebuking and training in righteousness, this book is of great benefit, especially to a couple seriously contemplating marriage, or already in a marriage relationship.

As Harry Reeder puts it so well:

***First**, this book celebrates marital, sexual intimacy enjoyed as God's good gift. It elevates erotic love with dynamics of care and tenderness, associated with the depths of transparency, intensity, and delight between husband and wife. When read, one quickly recognizes the God-designed, benevolent, and powerful instrument of sexual intimacy within marriage.*

***Second**, it extends and promotes intimacy within marriage by affirming recreational and ministerial sexual intimacy and not only procreational sexuality. Paul emphasizes the husband and wife are to give themselves to each other with this ministry mindset. They do not come together to take from the other but to give - the sexual relationship is not hierarchal but reciprocal. The husband/wife relationship and the gift of sexuality is not for personal gratification but for the joy of giving...*

***Third**, the Song of Songs is countercultural. It powerfully presents sexuality to be enjoyed within a relationship that is defined by God. It is covenantal, monogamous, and heterosexual. Any other definition of marriage will destroy a society.*

***Fourth**, When God made man - male and female - and the marriage covenant, He declared that **both the spiritual and physical are "good."** The fall brought death to both. Therefore, redemption renews both. We are not only born again spiritually, we are renewed so that our bodies become "temples of the Holy Spirit" anticipating the new body, the new heavens and the new earth. This includes God's good gift of sexual intimacy within marriage as renewed and by grace properly enjoyed. Any other use of sexuality is idolatry and is destructive.*

***Finally**, while one must refrain from allegorizing the text in its entirety to promote spiritual meaning, it is valid to see how **Christ is being presented (Ephesians 5)**, while defining the marriage relationship between man and woman...*

*[It] also declares that the marriage covenant is a proper way to understand **the relationship between Christ and His bride**, the church.*

(Reeder, 2007)

A very helpful way to make sense of the Song of Songs is to see a natural progression in the book covering the following areas:

- Discovery: The Finding of Love.
- Courtship: The Fostering of Love.
- Consummation: The Fulfilment of Love.
- Consternation: The Frustration of Love.
- Commitment: The Faithfulness of Love.
- True Love as God Intended.

A reading of the Song of Songs is provided at the end of the study to facilitate the meaningful reading of the text. As copyright limitations prevents the use of the full text of any Biblical book, the NIV and the ESV is used alternatively.

Please note that the NIV speaks throughout of the Shulamite as *the beloved* and of Solomon as *the lover*. However, the ESV sometimes calls Solomon the beloved. A note has been added where necessary to alert the reader to prevent confusion.

This study is ideal in a group setting for young or old:

- Individuals wanting to be married and needing wise instruction and guidance.
- Couples already in a relationship, but looking for Biblical instruction as their relationship develops.
- Couples already in a serious relationship contemplating marriage.
- Couples already married wanting to enhance the quality of their marriage.

To summarise, the Song of Songs is a small book of immense value. Repetition in Hebrew indicates importance and value. The title of this book indicates that this is *the Song above all other Songs*.

The Finding of Love**Introduction**

The three main voices in this section are:

- The Beloved, or Shulamite (Shunamite), as she possibly was from the town of Shunem.
- The Lover or Solomon.
- The Friends (Daughters of Jerusalem).

H. A. Ironside provides a very likely scenario to help one understand what is happening in the book.

The Shulamite (*beloved*) is a young girl whom Solomon (*lover*) meets one day. There is a great connection between them and they fall in love. She thinks he is a shepherd (1:7). He promises that he loves her and will return to marry her, but disappears for a time. She has to tend the vineyards of her brothers and has no time to take care of her own beauty, and is therefore burnt by the sun (1:5-6). She also has a younger sister (8:8-9). One day a great cloud of dust appears as Solomon returns with a whole entourage to fetch the Shulamite to be his bride. (3:6-11)

Solomon marries her and exults her beauty on the wedding day (4:1-7). They love each other deeply and enjoy each other's company after the wedding (4:10-5:1). There appears some misunderstanding in their relationship which causes temporary separation (5:7-8). However, they solve their differences and recommit to love each other and their settled relationship grows from strength to strength (7:1-8:3).

(Ironside, 1933)

It is important to note that certain words or metaphors should not be understood with modern meanings. The word *lover* for example does not mean a sexually active partner in the relationship, but simply the king who is in love with the *beloved* or the Shulamite. Metaphors used in the Song of Songs do not carry certain hidden sexual meanings, but describe the beauty and wonder and the involvement of the senses. The reader must guard against the '*pornification*' of the text.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 1:1-8

Notice carefully from the text who is speaking.

1. Who is the Shulamite thinking of? What happens when she remembers his smell and hears his name? 1:2-3

Note: Kissing in the ancient Middle Eastern Context, does not carry the same understanding as today. Kissing often was a sign of friendship and love and not always meant to stir up desire. (Marshall et al., 1994, p.657)

2. What is the Shulamite hoping will happen? 1:4
3. Who is speaking here about the Shulamite's lover? 1:4b cf. 1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 8:4
4. Is the Shulamite proud of the one she loves? 1:4c
5. How does she feel about her own complexion and beauty when speaking to her friends? 1:5
6. How confident does she feel before the eyes of the one she loves? What work did she have to do for who was perhaps her half-brothers? 1:6
7. What does it mean that '*her own vineyard she has not kept*'? 1:6

8. What does the Shulamite want to know about Solomon? Who does she think he is? 1:7
9. What does Solomon think of her? 1:8
10. Does Solomon give her a straight answer regarding where the Shulamite will find him? What other task apart from attending her brothers' vineyards did she have? 1:8

Reflection & Application _____

1. How should a young lady see her lover? What must she experience? 1:2-4; 1:7
2. How should she view herself? 1:5
3. How must a young man see his beloved? How should he see his beloved compared to other women? 1:8

The Church & Jesus _____

1. How does the beloved (believer) feel about his/her presence with the King (Jesus)? How about your *complexion* darkened by the sun?
2. How does Jesus feel about you?

The Fostering of Love I**Introduction**

The terms *lover* and *beloved* convey the idea of a special love relationship between a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others. This is true during a time of courtship, as well as after the marriage covenant is ratified in a wedding ceremony. This will continue after the wedding in a faithful covenantal relationship.

As stated before, it is important to read the implied meanings of the Song of Songs as they were intended. When the book of Proverbs speaks about drinking from your own cistern for example, it does not convey a veiled sexual innuendo, but simply states that sexual activity and love belong in marriage between a husband and wife is not to be shared with others. The book does not describe the actual nature of the activity (Proverbs 5:15-18). While Song of Songs is more specific in its imagery, the same principal applies. God's word uses metaphors in a beautiful way to convey a blessing without it being crass, crude or vulgar. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure (Titus 1:15).

John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, writes on this marriage relationship between the first man and a woman as follows:

*Of purity and place and innocence, [745]
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all.
Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain
But our Destroyer, foe to God and Man?*

*Hail wedded Love, mysterious Law, true source [750]
Of human offspring, sole propriety,
In Paradise of all things common else.
By thee adulterous lust was driven from men*

(Milton, 2000)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 1:9-2:7

Notice carefully from the text who is speaking.

1. How does Solomon feel about the Shulamite? Is it a flattering thing to liken a young woman to a horse? 1:9-10
2. What do her friends promise her? 1:11
3. Where does she imagine herself to be? What fragrance does she wear? What is nard? 1:12
4. What does his smell remind her of? What does she think of her lover? How does she describe him? What is myrrh and henna blossoms? 1:13-14
5. How did her lover see her? 1:15
6. How does the beloved speak of their future house? The house they will dwell in together once they are married. 1:16-17
7. How does the Shulamite see herself? 1:5; 2:1
8. And how does her lover see her compared to other women? 2:2

9. How does the Shulamite see the king? What ideas do the words shade and fruit convey? 2:3
10. What does the Shulamite recount to her friends regarding her first outing with her lover? Is he ashamed of her? 2:4-6
11. How did her lover treat her? 2:4-6
12. What is the lover's effect on the Shulamite? 2:5
13. What does she urge her friends not to do? What does this mean? 2:7

Reflection & Application _____

1. How should a young man see his beloved? How must he see his beloved compared to other women? 1:8-10; 1:15; 2:2;
2. How should a young lady see her lover? What must she experience? 1:13-14; 1:16; 2:3
3. How should she view herself? 2:1
4. What must you do if these elements are missing in the relationship?
5. What should one not do before the right time and why not? 2:7

6. Did the Shulamite know that the lover was the king, or was this information added later after she got to know his true identity? 1:7

The Church & Jesus _____

1. How does Jesus feel about you? Is he ashamed of you?
2. How does the believer feel about his/her presence with the King (Jesus)?
3. How much do you long to spend time with Jesus?

The Fostering of Love II**Introduction**

The courtship between the Shulamite and her mysterious lover continues. The fostering of love means to cherish it and nourish it in a healthy way.

To enjoy this exhilarating one-time experience between a young man and a young woman, together with the sexual attraction, but seeing this as holy and that this relationship will only find its fulfillment in marriage. A sacred relationship to be cherished, honoured, and valued.

The fulfilment of love is rightly satisfied in covenant marriage. D. Bonhoeffer wisely writes regarding marriage:

Marriage is more than your love for each other. . . . In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, and office.

Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man.

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.15)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 2:8-3:5

1. How did the Shulamite experience her lover's interest? 2:8-9
2. Where does her lover want her to be? 2:10-13

3. How does the lover (Solomon) see his beloved the Shulamite? What does he want to hear and see? What does a dove in the clefts in the rock make you think of? 2:14
4. Who most likely is speaking here? What do they want her to do? 2:15
5. How does the Shulamite experience the love of Solomon? What does she think of her lover? Is their love to be shared with others? 2:16
6. When does she want him to leave? What does this tell you about them? How long do they want their time together to last? 2:17
7. What disturbing dream did the Shulamite have? 3:1
8. In her dream, what did she decide to do? 3:2-3
9. What happens when she finds her lover in her dream? 3:4
10. What does she again urge her friends not to do? 3:5

Reflection & Application _____

1. Where does a true lover want to be? What will a man do if he really loves a woman?

2. What does the world look like when you are in love?
3. In whose company do lovers only want to be?
3. When a couple loves each other, for how long can they talk?
4. How does this apply to married couples?
5. What should one not arouse before the right time and why?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. With whom does the believer desire to be?
2. How does the believer view Jesus?
3. How does Jesus feel about the believer? Does Jesus see you as beautiful? Ephesians 5:25-32
4. If you love Jesus, how much time do you spend talking with Jesus?

The Fulfilment of Love I**Introduction**

The fulfilment of love is rightly satisfied in covenant marriage. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wisely writes regarding marriage:

As you gave the ring to one another ..., so love comes from you, but marriage from above, from God. As high as God is above man, so high are the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of love. It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.18)

For a while, the Shulamite's mysterious lover went missing. She must have longed for him, as he said that he found her beautiful and wanted to be with her. She could not find him and perhaps she looked for him among the shepherds (1:7-8). And then one day, as the Shulamite was out in the vineyard or the fields, she saw a cloud of dust like a plume of smoke rising up from the wilderness.

She or the friends called out in wonder: "Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke?" (3:6) It was none other than Solomon the King. He came to fetch her for their wedding!

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 3:6-4:9

1. What do the Shulamite's friends call out on the day her lover returns? 3:7-8
2. What did she realise about her notion that he perhaps was a shepherd? 3:9-10

3. To whom does the Shulamite call out in excitement? 3:11a
4. What did Solomon come to do? Who was his mother? 3:11b, c
5. How did her lover, i.e. the king, feel about her? 4:1, 7
6. How did her lover describe her? Was there anything about her that he did not find beautiful? 4:1-7
7. What did Solomon want her to become? 4:8
8. What has she done to him? 4:9

Reflection & Application _____

1. Should the bride be proud of her bridegroom?
2. How should every bridegroom feel about his bride?
3. Will the bridegroom ever tire of her love?
4. What should every bride do to the bridegroom?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. How does the believer experience Jesus? Will you be surprised when he fetches us as the King?
2. What is the great event every believer is waiting for? Isaiah 63:3-5; Revelation 19:7; 21:2

Isaiah 62:3-5

Revelation 19:7

Revelation 21:2
3. Are you certain that you are an invited guest of honour at the final wedding?
4. Can someone think they love Jesus and still miss the wedding? Matthew 25:1-13

The Fulfilment of Love - II**Introduction**

Marriage is a witness to the world of the goodness and blessing and order of God! Needless to say, when any of these above breaks down or is violated, this causes tremendous pain and hurt and damage to all the parties involved.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

“Welcome one another . . . for the glory of God.” That is God’s word for your marriage. Thank him for it; thank him for leading you thus far; ask him to establish your marriage, to confirm it, sanctify it, and preserve it. So your marriage will be “for the praise of his glory.”

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.17)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 4:10-5:1

1. How does her lover experience her love? What do these words convey? 4:10
2. What was her fragrance like to Solomon and what were her kisses like? 4:11
3. Which metaphors did Solomon use to describe her? 4:12-13
4. What do these images convey? 4:12-13; Proverbs 5:15-19

5. What is the experience of this garden like? 4:13-15
6. What does the love of the Shulamite promise her lover? 4:16
7. What does the lover call his beloved? Why? 5:1
8. How happy are the friends for the Shulamite and her lover? 5:1c; Cf. 1:4b
9. What is the experience of the lover from his beloved? 5:1b

Reflection & Application _____

1. Should lovers, that is a husband and wife, find enjoyment in one another?
2. What does this love relationship bring?
3. When only can lovers truly enjoy all the physical, spiritual as well as emotional benefits by becoming one?
4. In a marriage where both the man and the woman are believers, what are they to each other, apart from being lovers?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. Is the relationship between Jesus and the believer exclusive? Why?
2. Why is the relationship between Christ and the church (believers) described in terms of a marriage relationship?
3. Describe the love between the beloved and Jesus. Isaiah 62:3-5

The Frustration of Love**Introduction**

After courtship and the wedding, things do not always run smoothly for the Shulamite and her lover. There is always room for misunderstanding and frustration in marriage. This can happen concerning parents, money, having children, raising children, spending time with friends, or giving attention to or neglecting one's spouse. How did things turn out for the lovers and how did they solve the problems? How must the husband and the wife live together in a broken world?

"In a word, live together in the forgiveness of your sins, for without it no human fellowship, least of all a marriage, can survive."

"Don't insist on your rights, don't blame each other, don't judge or condemn each other, don't find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your hearts."

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.50)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 5:2-6:3

1. Is this a description of an actual event, or a metaphor for some misunderstanding? 5:2
2. What did the beloved reply when she heard the knock and the call? 5:3
3. Where did her lover desire to be? 5:4

4. Did the beloved respond with anticipation? 5:5
5. Was she quick enough to respond? 5:6
6. Where did she go and look for him? What did the watchmen do to her? 5:7
7. Is this a literal event, a parable, or a metaphorical description? 5:7
How does this compare with her previous encounter with the watchmen? 3:3.
8. Does she seek help from her friends? 5:8
9. Do they respond kindly to her request? Do others always understand or respond kindly to our marital problems? 5:9
10. How does she still feel about her lover, her husband? 5:10
11. How does she describe him? 5:11-16

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12. Do the friends respond kindly to the Shulamite? 6:1

13. Where did she think he went? 6:2

14. What was she well sure of? 6:3

Reflection & Application _____

1. Are there misunderstandings in marriage? Give some examples.

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2. What is the inevitable result?

3. Is it sometimes necessary to seek external help?

4. In what way must one always think of one's lover?

5. What must we be sure of in marriage?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. Can there be a temporary separation between the believer and Jesus?
2. What causes separation of the believer from Jesus?
3. Do we sometimes need external help?
4. How must the believer see Jesus?
5. What can the believer always be sure of?

The Faithfulness of Love I**Introduction**

Think about marriage. The separation and misunderstanding did not last. The Shulamite (beloved) still loved her lover. Whatever the misunderstanding was or caused the pain, she still thought of her lover as beautiful and handsome. She longed for his presence and went out to search for him. She knew that she still belonged to him and him to her.

“As the head, it is he who is responsible for his wife, for their marriage, and for their home. On him falls the care and protection of the family; he represents it to the outside world; he is its mainstay and comfort; he is the master of the house, who exhorts, punishes, helps, and comforts, and stands for it before God. It is a good thing, for it is a divine ordinance when the wife honours the husband for his office’s sake, and when the husband properly performs the duties of his office.”

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.82)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 6:4-7:9

1. How does Solomon (the lover) view his beloved? Does he still love her? 6:4
2. How does he experience her person? Does this sound familiar? 6:5-7

Note: This is a shortened description of her as compared to his wedding song or speech. 4:1-5

3. How does she compare with other women? 6:8-9

Note: It is difficult to understand Solomon's involvement with all the queens and concubines. However, long before Solomon's heart grew cold towards the LORD and long before he became obsessed with sex, as all his wives and concubines indicate, Solomon experienced true love. This was probably his first love. However, despite Solomon going astray and falling into apostasy (1 Kings 11:1-11), the LORD still used him to write this beautiful love song which is the Song of Songs.

5. What is the response of the friends? 6:10

6. Where did she go? 6:11

Note: Solomon loved plants and had orchards and groves. He also named many plants. cf. 1 Kings 4:33; Ecclesiastes 1:5-6

7. What do the friends call out? 6:13

Note: A *dance before two armies* (ESV) or *dance of Mahanaim* (NIV). Probably when two lines of dancers face up, men on one side and women on the other, the after a while they switch partners.

- As at the dance of the two companies? (Sol 6:13 NAS)
- ...dancing between two lines of dancers? (Sol 7:1 NJB)

8. What does the lover speak of in his love song? 7:1-5

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9. How does he still see her? 7:6
10. How does he experience her love physically? 7:7-9

Reflection & Application _____

1. After a misunderstanding between two lovers in marriage, what should follow?
2. What must never change in marriage regarding two lovers' view of one another?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. When we sin and experience separation from Jesus, what must never change?
2. Will there ever come a time when Jesus will not love the believer anymore?
3. What must the believer do after he / she has experienced separation from Jesus?

The Faithfulness of Love II**Introduction**

When the relationship is recommitted and settled, it develops further. The lovers want to spend their time together. She also wants other little beings to share their home!

God establishes a rule of life by which you can live together in wedlock: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives" (Col. 3:18, 19). With your marriage you are founding a home. That needs a rule of life, and this rule of life is so important that God establishes it himself, because without it everything would be out of joint. You may order your home as you like, except in one thing: the wife is to be subject to her husband and the husband is to love his wife.

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.94)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 7:10-8:4

1. What was the Shulamite's response? 7:10
2. Does she want to spend time with her husband? 7:11
3. Where will they go? What is the promise? 7:12
4. What was she desiring? What did the Shulamite want? 7:13

Note: Mandrakes are believed to have medicinal properties to enhance fertility and conception. Lea bought Jacob's love with mandrakes from Rachel (Genesis 30:14-17).

5. Is their love sexual or physical in nature only? 8:1
6. Where would she take him as a friend? 8:2
7. Is this relationship only friendship? 8:3
8. What must the daughters of Jerusalem never do? 8:4

Reflection & Application _____

1. Should the beloved view herself with unshakable confidence, knowing that she is loved?
2. Twice the lover speaks of *my sister, my bride*. Why is this significant?
3. Three times the Shulamite warn the daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken love until it so desires (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). What does it mean and how important is this?
4. If your sexual desire will cause you to sin, what is it better to do? 1 Corinthians 7:9

The Church & Jesus _____

1. Should the believer view herself with unshakable confidence, knowing that she is loved?
2. If you plan to get married, how important is it that your future husband or wife will be a believer too?
3. Should a believer ever marry an unbeliever?
4. Can you be spiritually unfaithful to Jesus and expect blessing?

True Love as God Intended**Introduction**

What is true love? How do we find, nurture and mature true love as God intended? How do we receive the blessing that true love brings? How should we love to expect God's blessing? How should we love emotionally, relationally as well as physically?

Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance, through which he wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time. In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to his glory, and calls into his kingdom.

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.136)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Song of Songs 8:5-14

1. How are two committed lovers when they are together? 8:5
2. What is true love like according to the Shulamite? 8:6
3. Can you quench or extinguish true love? 8:7
4. How should we protect the young, especially girls? 8:8-9

5. How will a young girl grow up well according to the Shulamite? 8:10
6. How exclusive is love? 8:11-12
7. Who alone can give the fullness of love to her lover? 8:12
8. For whom is the lover's desire alone? 8:13
9. What promise does the future hold? 8:14

Reflection & Application _____

1. Is marital love to be shared with anyone else except between one man and one woman in a permanent covenant relationship?
2. Why is pre-marital sex so devastating? 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
3. Why is adultery so devastating? 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
4. If we are living and loving as God intended, what can we expect?

The Church & Jesus _____

1. To whom alone does the believer's love belong?
2. How does the special love relationship in marriage give us a glimpse of the perfect love between Christ and the church? Ephesians 5
3. What is marriage a copy of? What is the original?
4. Can we tamper with God's design and expect blessing?

The Influence of Song of Songs

What does the Song of Songs teach us about intimate human love and marriage? Is there godly instruction for those who plan to get married, as well as husbands and wives already committed to one another in a covenant relationship?

God makes your marriage indissoluble, and protects it from every danger that may threaten it from within and without; he will be the guarantor of its indissolubility. It is a blessed thing to know that no power on earth, no temptation, no human frailty can dissolve what God holds together; indeed, anyone who knows that may say confidently: What God has joined together, can no man put asunder. Free from all the anxiety that is always a characteristic of love, you can now say to each other with complete and confident assurance: We can never lose each other now; by the will of God we belong to each other till death.

(Bonhoeffer, 1997 in Piper, 2009, p.166)

The Song of Songs:

1. Speaks of the exclusive love relationship between a man and a woman during courtship. It provides godly instruction with regard to the relationship and sexuality during courtship and what to look out for in a truly loving relationship.
2. Repeatedly warns against early sexual arousal, desire and physical intimacy (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). The Song of Songs also provides much pastoral use on the issues of marriage and biblical sexuality.
3. Speaks of the culmination of wise courtship and love in a covenantal marriage relationship between one man and one woman for life, not determined by worth or performance or beauty or achievement. YAHWEH is a covenant God and he does not measure his love towards us based on our worthiness or performance.
4. Speaks of the enjoyment, pleasure and friendship of the beloved and the lover of each other's company and presence. It speaks of the exclusivity of the sexual relationship between a husband and a wife, although never explicitly or crassly.

The Song of Songs provides a lot of practical advice regarding a settled covenantal marriage relationship.

5. Teaches the reader to refrain from allegorising the text in order to promote spiritual meaning.

However, it is valid to see how Christ is being presented. While defining the marriage relationship between man and woman, it also declares that the marriage covenant is a proper way to understand the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

6. Teaches that even the greatest and most blessed and most happy marriage is but a dim copy, and a pale shadow of the blessed eternal reality. The love between a husband and a wife is not the template, design or blueprint. The design is the love between God and his people.

7. Teaches of the love relationship between the believer and Jesus. Marriage is a blessed copy of the reality. It gives a reflection in the blessed marriage of the ultimate reality of God's design of Christ and the church. The Song of Songs points to its glorious and ultimate use is to point the people of God as the bride of Christ to our glorious, majestic, and intimate relationship with the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

This is a short book, but it has immense value in teaching the believer about the unique and special love relationship between a man and a woman. How to recognise, nurture, commit, and apply this love so that it leads to a blessed marriage. Although the Song of Songs does not mention the name of the LORD, it gives the believer a foretaste of the love between Christ and his bride.

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Song of Songs - A Reading

The Finding of Love

Beloved	Lover	Friends
1:2-4a		
		1:4b
1:4c-7		
	1:8	

NIV Song of Solomon 1:1 Solomon's Song of Songs.

Shulamite: 1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth--for your love is more delightful than wine. ³ Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the maidens love you! ⁴ Take me away with you--let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.

Friends: 1:4b We rejoice and delight in you (masculine singular); we will praise your love more than wine.

Shulamite: 1:4c How right they are to adore you! ⁵ Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Salma. ⁶ Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected. ⁷ Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?

Solomon: 1:8 If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds.

The Fostering of Love I

Beloved	Lover	Friends
	1:9-10	
		1:11
1:12-14		
	1:15	
1:16-2:1		
	2:2	
2:3-7		

Solomon: ^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 1:9** I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh. ¹⁰ Your cheeks are beautiful with ear-rings, your neck with strings of jewels.

Friends: 1:11 We will make you ear-rings of gold, studded with silver.

Shulamite: 1:12 While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance. ¹³ My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts. ¹⁴ My lover is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi.

Solomon: 1:15 How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.

Shulamite: 1:16 How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant. ¹⁷ The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs.

^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 2:1** I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Solomon: 2:2 Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.

Shulamite: 2:3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. ⁴ He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. ⁵ Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. ⁶ His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.

⁷ **Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.**

The Fostering of Love II

Beloved	Lover	Brothers
2:8-10a		
	2:10b-14	
		2:15
2:16-3:5		

Shulamite: ^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 2:8** Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹ My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. ¹⁰ My lover spoke and said to me,...

Solomon: 2:10b "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. ¹¹ See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. ¹² Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig-tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me." ¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding-places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

Brothers: 2:15 Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

Shulamite: 2:16 My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. ¹⁷ Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.

^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 3:1** All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. ² I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him. ³ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. "Have you seen the one my heart loves?" ⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me.

⁵ **Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.**

The Fulfilment of Love I

Beloved	Lover	Friends
3:6		
		3:7-8
3:9-11		
	4:1-9	

Shulamite: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 3:6** 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?

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

Shulamite: 3:9 King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

Solomon: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 4:1** Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. ² Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young. ³ Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. ⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. ⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies. ⁶ Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. ⁷ You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you. ⁸ Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. ⁹ You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

The Fulfilment of Love II

Beloved	Lover	Friends
	4:10-15	
4:16		
	5:1a	
		5:1b

Solomon: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 4:10** How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! ¹¹ Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. ¹² A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed. ¹³ Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard, ¹⁴ nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices--¹⁵ a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Shulamite: 4:16 Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

Solomon: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 5:1** I came to my garden, my sister, my bride, I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey, I drank my wine with my milk.

Friends: 5:1c Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!

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Please note: The NIV calls the Shulamite the *beloved* and Solomon the *lover*. However, here the ESV speaks of Solomon as the *beloved*. Unfortunately, for the limits imposed by copyright, the text had to be taken from two different versions.

The Frustration of Love

Beloved	Lover	Women
5:2		
	5:2b	
5:3-8		
		5:9
5:10-16		
		6:1
6:2-3		

Shulamite: ^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 5:2a** I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking:

Solomon: 5:2b "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."

Shulamite: 5:3 I have taken off my robe--must I put it on again? I have washed my feet--must I soil them again? ⁴ My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. ⁵ I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock. ⁶ I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. ⁷ The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls!

Shulamite: 5:8 O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you--if you find my lover, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love.

Women: 5:9 How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you charge us so?

Shulamite: 5:10 My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. ¹¹ His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. ¹² His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. ¹³ His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. ¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires.

5:15 His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars.

¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Women: ^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 6:1** Where has your lover gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn, that we may look for him with you?

Shulamite: 6:2 My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies. ³ I am my lover's and my lover is mine; he browses among the lilies.

The Faithfulness of Love I

Beloved	Lover	Friends
	6:4-9	
		6:10
6:11-12		
		6:13
	7:1-9	

Solomon: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 6:4** You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners. ⁵ Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me-- Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead. ⁶ Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins; not one among them has lost its young. ⁷ Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. ⁸ There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. ⁹ My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

Friends: 6:10 "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

Shulamite: 6:11 I went down to the nut orchard to look at the blossoms of the valley, to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom. ¹² Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.

Friends: 6:13 Return, return, O Shulammite, return, return, that we may look upon you. Why should you look upon the Shulammite, as upon a dance before two armies?

Solomon: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 7:1** How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. ² Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. ³ Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. ⁴ Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus.

7:5 Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.⁶ How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights!⁷ Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters.⁸ I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples,⁹ and your mouth like the best wine. It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth.

Please note: The NIV calls the Shulamite the *beloved* and Solomon the *lover*. However, here the ESV speaks of Solomon as the *beloved*.

The Faithfulness of Love II

Beloved	Lover	Friends
7:10-8:4		

Shulamite: ^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 10** I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. ¹¹ Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; ¹² let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. ¹³ The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

^{ESV}**Song of Solomon 8:1** Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me. ² I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother-- she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the juice of my pomegranate. ³ His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!

⁴ **I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.**

Please note: The NIV calls the Shulamite the *beloved* and Solomon the *lover*. However, here the ESV speaks of Solomon as the *beloved*.

True Love as God Intended

Beloved	Lover	Chorus	Brothers
		8:5a	
	8:5b		
8:6-7			
			8:8-9
8:10-12			
	8:13		
8:14			

Chorus: ^{NIV}**Song of Solomon 8:5** Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?

Solomon: 8:5b Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labour gave you birth.

Shulamite: 8:6 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. (Sheol) It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. (like the very flame of the LORD) ⁷ Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.

Brothers: 8:8 We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for? ⁹ If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.

Shulamite: 8:10 I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.

Shulamite: 8:11 Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. ¹² But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, O Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit.

Solomon: 8:13 You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!

Shulamite: 8:14 Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains.