

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Poetry

December 7: Song of Solomon 1-2 (Kevin Crittenden)

SONG OF SOLOMON

Week 49

Poetry Reading for 12/07/17

Song of Solomon 1-2. Alternative reading, Song of Songs 1-2.

INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to the reading of Song of Solomon! So please turn to page 358 in the grey songbook.

In my vast experience, (and by “vast”, I mean from here to my front door), this book isn’t taught very often in church. Is this because there isn’t much to be gleaned from it? Let’s see.

For my comments, I am leaning on the wisdom in the book by Douglas Sean O’Donnell, entitled “The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy.”

Genesis chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve, as well as the planting of the garden in the east, in Eden. Certainly, there is an account of the trees of the garden, good to eat (except one!), and the wild animals and birds. All these things were good. We will see that Songs also has a wealth of imagery related to gardens and animals. Thus, we might say that Songs is a poetic reimagining of Genesis chapter 2.

Our reading seems to have two names, either “Song of Solomon” or “Song of Songs.” The very first verse says something about this:

Song 1:1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

Solomon wrote this, (although some would argue that this is not certain, nor is the earth round), and, just as the Holy of Holies describes the Most Holy Place, then the Song of Songs is the best of all songs.

This book, on the face of it, is a paean to human sexual love. So why was it included in the biblical canon?

The characters are a man, a woman, and a group of women friends, referred to as the daughters of Jerusalem, probably the bridesmaids. The Song doesn’t explicitly say whether this is a married couple or if they are just about to be married. However, it should never be thought that this is a license for premarital sex, which is proscribed as sin by the Bible.

1 Cor 7:1-2 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own WIFE and each woman her own HUSBAND.

How do we know that this couple hasn't been married for 30 years? Yeah, right.

The topic of human sexuality is rarely broached in polite conversation at dinner parties in our culture:

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Vanderbilt, is that a new sachet of myrrh cradled between your fawnlike breasts?"

No, we tend to avoid the subject altogether, even to the point of finding it difficult to explain the facts of life to our children.

I'll share that my mother never had this talk with me. As it must to all men, puberty came and I experienced that change with bafflement, bewilderment and fear. Nor was there ever any conversation about the morality of sexuality. So, since sex was treated as a taboo subject in my family, I took on the assumption that it must be a shameful activity; after all, it IS what caused my father to discard us.

Anyway, if sexuality is an uncomfortable topic for you, as it is for many, then please remember that it is a God-given blessing to be enjoyed WITHIN the covenant of marriage. God isn't uncomfortable with sex so let's be cognizant of the reasons that we seem to be.

Acts 8:30 "... Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?"

This was Philip's question to the Ethiopian eunuch. The man replied "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

This book, Song of Songs, like Isaiah, can also be difficult to interpret. The ninth-century Jewish rabbi, Saadia, likened it to "a lock for which the key had been lost." The nineteenth-century German Lutheran Hebraist Franz Delitzsch wrote, "The Song is the most obscure book of the Old Testament. Whatever principle of interpretation one may adopt, there always remains a number of inexplicable passages."

Fortunately, you have me, a retired aerospace engineer and card-carrying introvert, to unlock its ancient secrets.

We will proceed by using four guideposts:

- 1 – This is a song
- 2 – This is a song about human love set in the context of marriage
- 3 – This song is found in the Bible
- 4 – This song was written to give us wisdom.

Guidepost 1 – This is a song

Verse 1 identifies this as the Song of Solomon, which differentiates it from epistles, prophecies, laws, revelations or dunning notices from my many creditors. Thus it is like a hymn at church, written to be sung, perhaps during the seven-days-long marriage festival by professional singers. So we are talking here about celebration – most likely public – of the wedding union.

How do we know the marriage celebration lasted seven days?

Gen 29:26-27 Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the WEEK of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." -The celebration took 7 days.

Judges 14:12 And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the SEVEN days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.

Since this is a song, it wasn't really meant to be subject to Biblical exegesis for the purposes of classroom teaching any more than the song "Rock of Ages". It was meant to be sung. Joyfully! At weddings! (By the way, this is called an epithalamium)

This is poetry set to music and yet our purpose is doggedly to extract and scrutinize every last pericope from this Book. Of course, we won't be doing that but maybe we can hit some highlights.

As I tell my ESL students, an enhanced vocabulary enables one to write expressively – much as having a multitude of colors at one's disposal allows one to paint expressively.

Poetry is word-play, often using alliteration to add dimension to its purpose.

We remember Dumaine's remark in Act IV:Scene 3 of Shakespeare's play Love's Labour's Lost:

On a day, alack the day!
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air:

How much more richness and sensual pleasure is in those words and the image they conjure up as opposed to something mundane and prosaic such as:

I saw some girl playing outside. She was ok looking, I guess.

Song of Songs asks us to indulge our senses – all of them. When you read it . . . or rather, when you partake of it . . . go slowly, . . . as you would to seduce a lover. Take time to smell the sweet fragrance of exotic perfumes wafting through the air, feel the yielding, verdant and luxurious bed in the richly appointed chambers of the king, sample the sparkling wine, noting the confluence of flavor notes blending into a harmonious and sapid symphony in the crystal goblets, let the rose-red apples and raisins bursting with sun-ripened flavor kiss your taste buds, hear the pleasant cooing of the pure white doves in their courtship dance, see the strength and virility of the graceful gazelles bounding over the hills, lose yourself in the refulgence of her eyes . . . The verbiage in the Song of Songs is saturated in bodily sensuality, which, of course, is a staple of good marital intimacy.

Guidepost 2 – This is a song about human love set in the context of marriage

On the back cover of a commentary on the Song of Songs by Tom Gledhill, we read:
"At first reading, the Song of Songs appears to be an unabashed celebration of the deeply rooted urges of physical attraction, mutual love and sexual consummation between a man and a woman.

Tom Gledhill maintains that the Song of Songs is in fact just that--a literary, poetic exploration of human love that strongly affirms loyalty, beauty and sexuality in all their variety."

But is that all there is? If so, why is it included in the Bible?

A skim through this book might leave you with the impression that this is erotic poetry set within the ethical limits of the marriage bed. But the consensus over the last 1600 years of both Jewish and Christian interpreters is that this is really about divine love. It sings of God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the Church.

The reason for this consensus is that it was presupposed that human sexual love was an inappropriate topic for Scripture. So writers and commentators from Origen of Alexandria to Charles Spurgeon of London, medieval mystics to American Puritans have heavily allegorized the Song to avoid a carnal interpretation.

For instance, it was supposed that the sachet of myrrh that lies between the bride's breasts in Song 1:13 symbolized "Christ in the soul of the believer, who lies between the great commands to love God and one's neighbor." (See *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. and ed. by Richard A. Norris, Jr.)

If we, like them, adopt the attitude that sexuality is the antithesis of spirituality, that praying is sacred and kissing is profane, we lose our witness to the world which then asks in horror, "You mean your religion has nothing good to say about sex, a basic human drive?" And we watch as the door slams shut behind them.

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then we also throw out John 1:1-14 where the Word became flesh.

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then we also throw out the tenet of a bodily resurrection (1 Cor 6:12-20; 15)

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then what are we to make of the promise of a new heaven and new earth (2 Peter 3:13)?

Gen 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Sexuality was a good gift from God for Adam and Eve. Before the Fall, they were encouraged to be fruitful and multiply, as had the living creatures before them. Yes, I believe that there was sex in Eden.

Gen 2:23-25 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Note that Adam and Eve were married in the sight of God. She is his WIFE. He is her HUSBAND. As an aside (aka rabbit hole), you may wonder if possibly there were children before Cain and Abel, children before the Fall. I'm assuming that the living creatures were busy multiplying before the Fall. But Gen 3:23 says that the LORD banished HIM from the garden. (And presumably his wife.) Also, no kids are mentioned before Cain, but things aren't always presented in chronological order.

Let us not be afraid of the sexuality expressed in the Song; rather, let it guide us to see that the earth is filled with the beauty of Heaven, that the union of man and woman is amazing:

Prov 30:18-19 Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:

19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.

Let the Song guide us to see that sex is not just a necessary duty for the purpose of having children but an affirmation of the beauty, chastity, and sacredness of human love.

Guidepost 3 – This song is found in the Bible

Now, lest we throw the baby out with the bath water, we need to understand that the Song DOES showcase God's love for us and our love for Him. This is Hebrew poetry and all Hebrew literature from that era was religious. The imagery in the Song has ties to the rest of the Old Testament. It is saturated with Hebrew names, places, poetic devices and was written by Solomon – a Hebrew. His identity sets the Song into a historical and theological context.

Thus, the Song – which is a song about human love set in the context of marriage that is found in the Bible – must be read in its canonical context. In reading the Song's positive examples of a godly marriage, we catch a glimpse of the alternative, the horror of Israel's unfaithfulness as outlined in the prophets.

Isa 62:5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The relationship is good at first; Israel was as white as snow, but over a short time she drifted into promiscuity and adultery. (Hosea, Ezekiel 16:7,8, Jeremiah 2:2, 19, 20, Isaiah 54:5-8)

And, of course, we need to read Songs with Jesus in mind, the one whom John the Baptist calls "the bridegroom" (John 3:29, Matthew 9:14,15) and whom Paul calls our "one husband" (2 Cor 11:2), the one whose kingdom and consummation is like a wedding feast (Matt 22:2; Rev 19:7)

Douglas O'Donnell gives a helpful illustration:

"If you were to read C. S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia" and did not know that Lewis was a Christian and uses Christian symbolism and parts of the plot of the Bible, then you might never see Aslan, who dies and rises and rules, as a Christ-figure. You might just think he is a lion who talks, a neat character in a nice children's tale. But those who know something about the author and his intentions see more of what he wanted his readers to see: the story beneath the story. The story of Jesus opens our eyes to the subtle details of those Narnian adventures. Similarly, knowing the story of Jesus opens our eyes to the story of the Song. The love celebrated here has as its source and ultimate illustration Jesus Christ; the loyalty, beauty, and intimacy of human love depicted in this Song points to 'that Love that undergirds all of reality and in whose Presence alone all longing can be satisfied.'"

Guidepost 4 – This song was written to give us wisdom

The Song of Songs is grouped with Wisdom Literature in the Bible, certainly because the writer is identified as Solomon, who brought us the wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Certainly it fits in, then, with those books as well as the Book of Job.

Solomon wrote rather extensively; 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that he wrote 1,005 songs.

At what age did Solomon write this? The medieval Jewish scholar thought that Solomon wrote this song in his old age as an act of contrition. He had, by then, a long history of ungodly behavior including idolatry and polygamy, which separated him from God. (1 King 1-11). He wrote the Song with an attitude of contrition, saying "I'm passing on to you my experience of failure. Don't do as I did but rather as this Song says."

I feel for him. Certainly, I've made mistakes in my life (hanging the toilet paper improperly) and it behooves me to pass those mistakes on to my kids so they can avoid the things that I did. Solomon was wise enough still to overcome his shame and write about his misdeeds in the interest of edifying his children and us.

There is also in the Song, a WISDOM ADMONITION that runs several times throughout, namely:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

And also a WISDOM ADMISSION: My beloved is mine, and I am his.

These two refrains are used by Solomon to pass on wisdom to the two groups of adults that form his audience: the married and the unmarried. The primary focus is on the unmarried – the “daughters of Jerusalem” who are of marriageable age, whose bodies are mature enough for sex, who are experiencing feelings of lust but are still unmarried.

And what is the wisdom offered to these unmarried daughters? They are admonished to Just Say No, wait, and remain virgins until marriage. Wait for marriage despite what their bodies are urging, wait for marriage despite what their boyfriends are hoping for, wait for marriage despite what our society allows or even encourages.

But we are more sophisticated now and we have ways of preventing pregnancy and we lived through the Free Love generation (Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll, All You Need is Love), and besides, everybody else is doing it. As a culture, we've outgrown the dour and joyless lessons of the musty old Bible with its emphasis on celibacy before marriage. I remember as a graduate student, walking along, inwardly cringing as I listened to the conversation of two guys behind me. They were expressing amazement and rather making fun of a friend of theirs (a guy) who was still a virgin at age 21.

Note that this admonition is not delivered to the young women by a stern rabbi or a worried parent. No, it is delivered by the newlywed – the bride, a former daughter of Jerusalem herself. This wisdom is delivered to the young women by one of their peers. This is part of Solomon's wisdom – he knew that in his time, as well as our time, that our young adultettes are more likely to heed the advice of one of their own.

So we begin to see that, while Proverbs was a book written for boys, admonishing them to choose wisely whom they marry, Song of Songs is a book written for girls with the message “uncompromised purity now; unquenchable passion then.”

Both genders, before they are married, need to go take a cold shower. But not together. Advice from Dr. Solomon.

The wisdom for married couples is rated at least PG. The second refrain “My beloved is mine, and I am his” is for them. The two become one in absolute intimacy. And not only when you are newlyweds. Maintaining intimacy and expressing passion throughout a marriage is another good discussion topic for a men's or women's group. Or a mixed group. Remember, God isn't saying that passion is only for the young or the good-looking.

Titus 2:3-4 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,

In Songs, however, the young bride is passing on wisdom to the older married women who have possibly forgotten how to love their husbands. It asks, Is your marriage bed cold?

In Songs is the wisdom of increased intimacy that reflects the intimacy of Christ's love for the church, that causes people to sit up and take notice of the gospel, to ask How can I be a part of this intimacy and What must I do to be saved?

If you think that this is just flowery, feel-good Christological verbiage, then let me explain that over the years, I've been a witness to the bonds between the congregants at several churches. I saw an intimacy, a closeness, a welcoming joy that awoke the feeling within me to want to be a part of that. How could I be a part of that? I had to ask the question, What must I do to be saved?

And finally, Dear Brethren, eight pages of notes later, we arrive at the beginning of the book:

CHAPTERS 1, 2

In verse 1:1, as we've mentioned, we are told the name of the book and given the identity of the author. So far, so good. We can happily read this Bible verse to our young children.

But then, without even bringing us flowers or buying us a nice dinner, Solomon plunges us into Eros and whisks us away to the bedchambers by verse 4. Typical man, all action and no talk.

We don't really study Song of Songs around the littles, do we? Verse 1:2 can be translated as "Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses." How do you explain the juxtaposition of alcohol and sex in the Bible to kids when you're doing everything as a parent to warn them against such things? "Someday, you'll understand but for right now, just do as I tell you." For further clarification, read the book "Parenting Without Guilt." That book hasn't been written yet, though. (Actually, I'm wrong. I just checked Amazon and there IS a book by that title. I certainly did not write it.)

Anyway, the plunge into Eros is so startling that first-century Jewish rabbis warned the young men of their congregations not to read the Song until they turned thirty.

We are not introduced to the characters in this love story. How did they meet, who are they, are they even married? And this omission is intentional because Solomon wants the TONE of their love to be the focus. We'll find out a bit more about the lovers as the Song unfolds.

The Song starts out with a woman talking; the character is merely identified as SHE. SHE is the main speaker throughout the Song. (Women talk more than men.) By leaving the identity of the couple vague, then they can represent every woman and man who have fallen in love, whether brown or black or white, they're all precious in His sight.

Her words say something about her character. SHE isn't timid or passive or shy. SHE looks forward eagerly to the passions of the wedding night. (As we will see, SHE knows what to expect because she has been instructed by her mother.)

SHE says (1:2), ". . .for your love is more delightful than wine." SHE uses wine to connote pleasure, not drunkenness, as is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Ps 104:15 and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.

We remember that Jesus turned water into the finest wine, showing the great joy that only He can bring into this life and we remember His great sacrifice by partaking of the unleavened loaf and the fruit of the vine.

In v 1:3, SHE approves of the perfumes HE is wearing. You have to remember that they lived in a hot climate, temperatures might be in the high 80s, and men often worked outside. With animals. A man, coming in from working in the fields, drenched in sweat and covered in dust and ragweed pollen, probably doesn't evoke thoughts of the bedroom in his wife in today's world and I'm sure it didn't back then either. So our ancient lover cleaned up as best he could and used perfume (they didn't have Axe back then) to mask his natural odor.

SHE is also attracted by the "perfume" of her lover's name. In that time, your name represented your character. This should be true in today's world as well. Very few parents name their kid Adolph today.

1 Sam 25:25 Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.

Ruth 4:14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!"

Matt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We also know from Acts 4 that there is no other name than Jesus under Heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.

Our young swain's physical persona, as well as his reputation, win the day and gain the maiden's love, so she implores him to take her away with him. Not to a restaurant or to the movies but to his bedchamber. This is their wedding day and she is ready for the denouement. But she doesn't drag him into the bedroom, she respects the gender roles and waits for him to take the lead.

Did you notice that in the beginning of verse 1:2, she talks of him in the third person but quickly switches to the second? This is a common device in Hebrew literature with the effect of enhancing the intimacy of the scene. She goes from "him" to "your" and then to "you." "Let us hurry." The two have come together to become an item – "us."

But, in the last part of v 1:4, she doesn't say "You take me . . ." she reverts back to 3rd person. "Let the king bring me . . ." She thinks of her lover as HER king and uses a phrase to show how greatly she thinks of him.

And now that the couple has disappeared into the honeymoon suite, where we will leave them alone, it's time for the choir to sing. And the daughters of Jerusalem do, voicing their approval of the timing for sexual intimacy – on the wedding night.

This is all very well and nice but how does peeking into the intimate lives of this ancient couple inform our own lives?

We see four applications.

Application 1/4 – Desire is not demonic

Sexual lust is not of the devil. Sure, it is a useful tool in his arsenal but sexual intimacy is God-given, natural and good when used as directed.

What did God think when he saw His Creation including human beings with their sexual drives?

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The sexual drive, itself, is NOT sinful. Without it, we could not be fruitful and multiply. But we live in a fallen world and so are subject to distortions and misapplications of our God-given gifts:

1 Cor 7:9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Cor 7:37 But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

Being still creatures bound by the flesh, we need to keep a wary eye out lest immorality creep into our lives as it has for so many. Paul knew how difficult it is when lust obscures reason and we can't think straight anymore. He warned against the works of the flesh.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

So just say NO to fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex after marriage with someone not your spouse), homosexuality (sex with a person of the same gender), bestiality (sex with an animal), pederasty (sex between a man and a boy) and whatever else is out there.

Glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:20) by following His rules and receive His gift of desire with thanksgiving.

1 Tim 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

Application 2/4 – Character and chemistry both matter when it comes to Love

So why does this woman love this guy? Because he's a bad boy? The captain of the football team? He's just so cool? His daddy has deep pockets? Because the other girls want him?

No. She loves him first because of his name, his character. He has a good reputation; his name is like a perfume to her and her friends respect him as well. They're not talking among themselves saying, "Oh, she could have done so much better!"

She loves him secondly because they have chemistry between them. He loves her and she delights in that. He's probably been whispering sweet georgics in her delicate, shell-like ears. This won't be the last time that we see this chemistry.

Ladies, don't be dazzled by wealth into marrying the wrong man. Don't overlook a shallow character by becoming obsessed with physical beauty. You are NOT going to be able to "fix" him; he won't change just to "please" you. Don't be misled by the popular slogan, "Love conquers all."

What you should do, then, is look instead for a man who is ALREADY of a godly character: a man who is “understanding” (1 Pet 3:7), “not . . . harsh” (Col 3:19), sacrificially loving like Christ (Eph 5:25, 28) and able to lead and nourish you in your faith (Eph 5:23, 26-29).

Hmm. Where should you look for such a man? It’s not like they’re on Aisle 12 at Wal-Mart.

Meanwhile, young men should stop loitering around Aisle 12 and look for a woman who ALREADY has a godly character: a woman who has a submissive spirit (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22, 24, 1 Pet 3:1, 6), is pure in conduct (1 Pet 3:2) and values the internal “unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” more than external beauty (1 Pet 3:3,4).

My wife took a huge risk in marrying me; I’ve got more issues than National Geographic, yet God has seen fit to bless our marriage and for that I am truly thankful.

Application 3/4 – That first flame need not fizzle out

Do you remember your wedding night? The tears, the locked bathroom door, the pleading, cajoling and patient coaxing until you finally unlocked the door and came out trembling into your new wife’s arms? You probably didn’t spend the evening watching TV, reading books or posting on social media. You remember what you were doing and it was new, exciting, thrilling! Even on the second night!

But the years begin to fly by, the children come and the energy goes, the schedules become hectic, couples begin to take each other for granted, and, of course, our bodies relentlessly age. A sense of bodily shame creeps into our intimate relationships; we become self-conscious and shut down sexually. The white-hot flame of new erotic passion morphs into sporadic hum-drumness. Some people miss that spark of excitement, so seek out new partners. They have affairs. They view pornography. Some men, achieving the dazzling heights of social success, feel entitled to a new, hot trophy wife, not much older than their children. One man I heard about reasoned that God wanted him to be happy so would condone him having an affair. Utter folly.

Douglas O’Donnell meets one-on-one with the men in his church. He will ask the married men:

Do you love your wife? He has yet to have a man fold his arms and say “No.” They all say “yes”, the “yes” of commitment, the “yes” that means he doesn’t want to divorce her and that he wants to remain faithful to her. So far so good.

Then he asks:

Do you like your wife? Those with healthy marriages will often laugh and say “Of course I like my wife very much.” Those men who are struggling in the marriage will tend to open up and share. “Recently, things haven’t been going so well” and go on from there.

And, thinking about what we are reading in Songs, a third question would be:

Do you desire your wife? How many wives would want to be a fly on the wall and see how their husbands answer THIS question?

What can you do if your answer is no?

First, PRAY. Ask God to soften your hearts.

Here is a poem by Steve Scafidi called “Prayer for a Marriage” in which he talks about he and his wife kissing on their wedding day and prays that desire will not fade.

When we are old one night and the moon
arcs over the house like an antique
China saucer and the teacup sun
follows somewhere far behind
I hope the stars deepen to a shine
so bright you could read by it
if you liked and the sadness
we will have known go away
for awhile – in this hour or two
before sleep – and that we kiss
standing in the kitchen not fighting
gravity so much as embodying
its sweet force, and I hope we kiss
like we do today knowing so much
good is said in this primitive tongue
from the wild first surprising ones
to the lower dizzy ten thousand
infinitely slower ones—and I hope
while we stand there in the kitchen
making tea and kissing, the whistle
of the teapot wakes the neighbors.

Secondly, REMEMBER. Remember what kindled that flame to begin with. Share these memories together. Laugh about them while cuddling. Feel the joy of being near to each other. Let it be time to arouse and awaken love.

Remember when you felt this way: “You are the finest, loveliest, tenderest, and most beautiful person I have ever known—and even that is an understatement.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald

Thirdly, UNDERSTAND. Understand that desire follows love. This is what we see in Songs. SHE wants to be kissed because HE loves her. Men and women are different. Foreplay for a man is having the woman show up. We’re simple creatures that way. Foreplay for a woman (as many women haven’t told me) probably involves having the man show his love for her by sacrificing for her – helping with the kids, the housework, being willing to share the load of daily living. Once she knows he loves her, desire follows.

In his book “Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God”, C. J. Mahaney advises us men: “Before you touch her body, touch her heart and mind.” Let’s spend some time getting to know our wives again as we did when we were courting them.

Application 4/4 – Desiring Christ

Just as our desire for our spouses is an indicator of marital health, so too our desire for Christ is an indicator of our spiritual health. There is a connection between the relationship of a man and his wife and Christ and the Church. Paul uses that connection in Ephesians 5. We see this connection again in Hebrews 1:8,9 where the author quotes Psalm 45:6,7 which is a wedding song. In Scripture, when marriage is mentioned, think of Christ.

Paul desired to be with Christ:

Phil 1:23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

And Bernard of Clairvaux expressed himself thusly: “Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast; but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest.”

Now, if you're like the man who doesn't desire his wife except you're struggling to desire the Bridegroom, then you can follow the three same steps in reverse order.

UNDERSTAND that desire follows love. As His bride, we lose our desire for Christ and we are to blame. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend and Jesus laid down His life for friends and enemies alike. The barrier here to intimacy is sin.

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

But what do we do? Keep His commandments? Obey His will? Or do we have a dalliance with every sinful desire that beckons from the alleyway?

REMEMBER, which is what we do when we partake of the Lord's Supper. We remember His sacrifice for us. If you wish to desire Christ more, remember His person and His works.

Psalms 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

PRAY because only God can create desire for God. John Piper starts out his book "When I Don't Desire God" with these words: "I hope you will not be offended if I open this book by praying for you. There is a reason. When all is said and done, only God can create joy in God."

If you've wandered away from your love, then pray for its return.

Rev 2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Pray 1 Pet 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

Pray Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Pray one of the great hymns of faith or perhaps this Keith Green chorus:

My eyes are dry
My faith is old
My heart is hard
My prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to you and dead to me

But what can be done
For an old heart like mine
Soften it up
With oil and wine

The oil is you
Your spirit of love
Please wash me anew
With the wine of your blood.

Getting back to the text of Songs, (you may remember that we are looking at Song of Songs), and have gotten all the way to verse 5 of Chapter 1, where SHE describes herself. I could call her Lola, but Songs doesn't give her a name so I won't either.

Most of us have a self-perception that is less than ideal (unless you are a movie star) and SHE describes herself as very dark. Later (v 2:1) she describes herself as a Rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. What does she mean by these descriptions?

Normally, brothers are protective of their sister but these half-brothers (her “mother’s sons”) evidently are angry at her and make her work outside in the hot sun tending their vineyards. Isaiah 5:2 details some of the work she probably had to do. So she is darker than usual. Oh, and Songs 8:8-9 tell us that the brothers did protect her virtue so at least they were of some use.

Anyway, she says she is as dark as the tents of Kedar – made of tanned Bedouin hides. Perhaps she would fit right in on the California beaches. (The West coast has the sunshine And the girls all get so tanned). Not a bad thing, right? But in that time and culture, darker skin meant working class and lighter skin meant upper crust. So she’s a girl from the wrong side of the tracks.

And she says “my own vineyard I have not kept”, which is a reference to her own body. She hasn’t had the time or wherewithal to use mascara, eyeliner, lipstick, blush, blenders, hair extensions, highlights, glitter and whatever other Myst’ries that men don’t know about. Her fingernails and toenails probably weren’t even manicured and painted! How could any man love that?

Contrast this to Esther who probably didn’t have to do pick and shovel work in the broiling sun. Esther 2:12 Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—

SHE then compares herself to a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. She calls herself “lovely” so she knows she would clean up nicely but lilies are pretty common wildflowers in the countryside so she doesn’t see herself as anything special to write home about. She’s just more or less common.

This is how SHE sees herself.

Now, how does HE see her? To her usage of the common lily metaphor, he retorts with one of his own in v 2:2 “Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women.” He says, “Yup. Line up the winsome young ladies as you will, you are the best-looking of the bunch.” This is the point at which she demurely lowers her gaze and lets drop her hankie embroidered with her phone number on the ground in front of him. He’s doing well, but in v 1:9, overcome with the passion of his unrequited love, he declares “I liken you, my darling, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariot horses.”

Crash go the chariots?

He might have done better to compare her to a summer’s day than to something that you can scratch along the withers. Even Amos didn’t make that mistake; using, instead, such similes to make a different point:

Amos 4:1 Listen to this, you fat cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria. You make it hard for the poor.

“I liken you, my darling, to a fat cow of Bashan”????? No.

But HE and SHE like the description. The horse is a beautiful animal and it is HER beauty that is being compared. It should be noted that placing a mare in front of stallions pulling chariots would cause chaos, so this was a well-known battle tactic.

HE goes on to describe the beauty of her jewelry, being sure to keep his observations above the neck. HE is captivated by her natural beauty, enhanced by her earrings and necklaces.

Duane Garrett says “The only actual visual similarity between the bride and the horse is that they both are ‘adorned in splendid ornamentation.’”

The mares for Pharaoh’s royal chariot, as depicted in Egyptian art, wore elaborate headdresses lined with jewelry. SHE is probably dressed for her wedding and so wears elaborate jewelry. SHE is his black beauty and he’s doing well to even be able to speak coherently in her presence.

HE has given her three compliments:

SHE is a lily among thorns.

SHE is a black beauty, magnificent in her loveliness.

SHE has those eyes, which HE compares to doves in v 1:15.

Eyes are very special and they are an important part of a woman’s beauty. By gazing into a person’s eyes, you can get an impression of the person as a whole.

Matt 6:22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,

By comparing her eyes to doves, HE is showcasing her innocence. Jesus also connects innocence with doves:

Matt 10:16 Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

In v 1:7, SHE asks “Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?” This question shows her attitude of innocence; she’s not going to be seen, even in broad daylight, going out to him and be thought of as some kind of prostitute, a veiled woman.

Gen 38:14 she took off her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.

Even though she is urgently wanting to be by his side – v 1:7a “Tell me, you whom I love”, v 2:5b “for I am faint with love”, - she maintains her honor by her behavior. So no, she’s not going to chase after him while he’s tending the flocks or hound him at the office with incessant phone calls or texts.

Her behavior is impeccable with no hint of impropriety. Her actions in v 1:7 are voiced in v 2:7 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

I suppose we could go off on a tangent about the way many young women dress these days which certainly DOES stir up and arouse “love.” But the wielding and misuse of sexual power is a topic for a different day. And I’m assuming that the way some young men dress these

days may stir something up but what that is I have no idea. Pity? Ridicule? Whatever it is, it isn't as grotesque as old, fat guys in Speedos on the beach.

So what can we learn?

Men, compliment your wives. Let her know that you appreciate her hard work and also, wouldn't it be nice to let her know that you find her beautiful? She needs to know that you would choose and marry her all over again. Think about it. What DO you still find beautiful about her? Spouses often begin to take each other for granted and we stop looking. When you were first dating, I'll bet you were looking quite a bit at your future wife. Go back and do that.

If you're a man whose grown cold towards your wife and can't find anything praiseworthy about her, then you've already grown accustomed to the icy chill of the marriage bed. Make an effort to turn this around – it's not too late – and begin to thaw the ice between you. Praise will get you back to the “banquet hall” (v 2:4) where love dwells, where there are a multitude of intoxicating kisses of the mouth. (v 1:2). If you are feeling body shame and fears about the loss of performance, then, for the love of Christ, share this with your soulmate; go together to seek medical help.

Wives, what can you learn? Men need to be complimented and appreciated too. SHE calls her beloved a king (1:4, 12), a sachet of myrrh (1:13), a cluster of henna blossoms (1:14), and an apple tree (v 2:3) among the trees of the forest. SHE and HE do a kind of call and response. HE says “You are beautiful” (1:8, 15a, 15b) and SHE says back, “You are beautiful” (1:16). HE says “Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women” and SHE echoes back “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men.” Note: just because she likens him to an apple does not mean it is wise to compliment your husband by calling him a “Fruitcake.”

In v 2:3-6, SHE is describing intimacy but done in a modest way, focusing on the emotional side rather than on the physical side. She feels safe and protected in his arms, lying on OUR bed (1:16), and delighted to be in the comfort of his shadow (2:3). Her angry brothers made her work in the sun without shade but this man provides what she needs and what she longs for.

If you're a woman who no longer feels protected or loved by your husband; a man who no longer satisfies what you need or long for, then what can you do? Seek comfort in the arms of another man? Divorce? Live in cold isolation with, essentially, a roommate that you don't much care for? Same advice as for the men. Begin to thaw that ice.

Mutual respect and admiration is necessary to stoke that furnace of passion. We are to speak the truth in love, not only in the church but also in our marriage.

Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

What we are NOT to do, is speak in a manner that tears others down.

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Rather, we are to heed the advice in Eph 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

How do you speak to your spouse?

Do you say to your wife, "Honey, you need to lose a few pounds," as if it would be some kind of miraculous revelation to her; as if she didn't already know that she is not as lithe as she once was? As if you had the same body yourself as when you got married?

Do you say to your husband, "I get so tired of talking to you when you never listen!" How is he supposed to respond to that? "Oh, I had no idea. I'll give you my undivided attention right now."

Go from judgmental and critical statements to expressions of shared needs and encouragements.

What could the husband say instead of "Honey, you need to lose a few pounds?" Perhaps he could just keep his mouth shut and learn to appreciate that change happens over the years; that the woman he fell in love with is right in front of him still; that the nature of intimacy changes from daily performances of the horizontal tango to simple hand-holding and walks together. She already feels critical of herself so a better approach is to praise her for those things that endear her to him, that make her feel loved unconditionally.

What could the wife say to her husband instead of "I get so tired of talking to you when you never listen!" Perhaps he has learned that whenever she talks to him, it is always in a critical manner. Would the wife want to hear criticism over and over again? Perhaps, if she offers up random affirmational messages, he might begin to trust that his wife isn't ALWAYS critical. Or say "There is something that is important to me to talk about. When would a good time be for us to have a short conversation?" This approach gives him some control of the situation and probably she will find that right now is just a fine time to talk. If the husband says "How about after this game is over?," then the wife should accept that without feelings of resentment and anger. Those feelings stem from a loss of control and no person needs to be in control 100% of the time.

Now if we look at Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

we see a parallel in that God selected Israel from all the nations to love although she was certainly no vision of loveliness. She responded to God's love with apostasy and adultery, yet God continued to extend His love and His mercy towards her. Remember how the book of Hosea ends:

Hosea 14:4-8 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely,

5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;

6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

We know that just as God set His love on Israel, so too Christ has set His love on the Church.

Matthew Henry wrote, "True believers are black in themselves, but comely in Christ."

And Samuel J. Stone wrote this hymn of faith:

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

There are, of course, verses in the New Testament that speak of Jesus' love:
Rom 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . [No one; nothing shall] separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

But how often do you narrow your focus to concentrate on God's love for you personally?

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Charles Wesley, in 1738, wrote a hymn on this theme:
And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Why should we speak lovingly to our spouses and how should we do that? The answer is in the gospel: God in Christ forgave us.

As we saw in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything. Winter has passed and so HE comes bounding over the hills, like you and I used to do in our salad days, and in Song 2:10 tells his beloved to get a move on.

In his poem, "Locksley Hall," Alfred Lord Tennyson limns the immortal words "in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." From my experience, young men stand around mooning over girls in the fall, winter, spring and summer with a few days off sprinkled here and there when they moon over the latest video games.

Anyway, HE eagerly bounds in and informs her in Songs 2:12 that the flowers are blooming (evidently, she hasn't noticed, being caught up in her jewelry and all) and that the time of singing has come. This is the time of singing by the bride and bridegroom, the time spoken of by Jeremiah.

Jer 33:11 the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord:

“Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord.

And here we have the theme of time in Songs – the timing of intimacy within marriage and before marriage.

V 2:8-17 reflect God's timing for intimacy within marriage.

V 2:7 reflects God's timing for intimacy before marriage.

HE issues the same invitation for sexual intimacy twice, once in v 10 and again in v 13. HE will issue the same invitation for intimacy again in v 4:8

We will go ahead and unpack some of these verses.

HE and SHE continue to use animal similes to describe each other. Nice animals, though. Animals with admiral qualities.

So in v 2:14, HE calls her a dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside.

Why is she being inaccessible to him? Perhaps she is shy or is afraid of what will happen next. We don't know but HE must woo her and HE does that in v 2:14.

SHE calls him a gazelle (v 2:9) – swift, and gracious. Not a dangerous predator, like a roaring lion or a grizzly bear. Gazelles are strong but not vicious.

And HE is standing there behind their wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. Is HE some kind of voyeur, peeping through women's windows?

Nah, HE's just eager to get on with things and we see in v 2:16-17 that he has been successful! In v 17 SHE wants him to “be like a gazelle or like a young stag.”

What about those foxes in v 2:15? HE says; “Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.” Maybe they wanted to sell the foxes to Samson; make a few bucks.

Douglas O'Donnell thinks of it this way: Before marriage, SHE had the job of working in the family's vineyard and part of that job was to keep foxes (jackals) out when the grapes were ripe. So the metaphor is that HE is telling her “Get rid of anything that spoils our feasting on fruit together” i.e. put aside your inhibitions about lovemaking. “Our vineyards that are in bloom” – Our bodies are ripe and ready for lovemaking – it is the right time and the right season for love. Let's refresh each other with fresh fruit (v 2:5) and eat our “choicest fruits” (v. 4:16) and be drunk with love (v 5:1).

As an aside, Jesus called Herod a fox; perhaps partly because Herod was ruining the harvest. Luke 13:32 And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.

Note that throughout the Song, eating fruit equates to intimacy.

We remember from Ecclesiastes that everything has a season, including embracing (sex).
Ecc 3:5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

Ecc 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

God has made intimacy a beautiful gift for married people. There is a time for intimacy and it is beautiful. Catch your own foxes by sharing with your spouse and banishing them from your marriage bed.

There is also a time to refrain from embracing. Intimacy isn't always about sexual intimacy. Caring for a sick spouse is a form of intimacy. Refraining from sex during long periods of separation (deployment during military service, like Uriah who wouldn't sleep with Bathsheba during wartime). Or perhaps refraining from sex for a time in order to give devotion to prayer as Paul recommended.

We also need to trust God's timing for intimacy BEFORE marriage, as seen in v 2:7.
"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

The intended audience here, daughters of Jerusalem, are the young, unmarried, women who are very much interested in handsome young men. SHE counsels these eager young ladies to rein in their sexual urges until they can be fulfilled with the right person and at the right time. The right person, of course, would be their future husband and the right time is after the God-sanctioned, sacred covenantal rite of marriage. And SHE is serious about all this. SHE adjures them. SHE doesn't say "You might want to hold off on that . . ." or "I think is best if . . ."

Why wait for marriage?

In the U.S. right now, more than 50% of couples cohabit before marriage and 50% of those never get around to getting married. They just continue to live together with a higher risk of separation than married couples. Certainly, birth control is easily available and pretty reliable (or so I'm told by the old woman who lived in a shoe.)

Social consequences involve the chaos of multiple partners, angry confrontations, lack of commitment, single parenting, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases . . . Sounds awful but the newspapers are rife with this stuff.

Other Scriptures tell us that there are serious consequences if we don't wait. Spiritual consequences. A seared conscience (Rom 1:18-32), the coming Judgment (1 Cor 6:9,10, Gal 5:19-21)

Songs answers the question in a different way. There is no divine finger wagging or descriptions of negative and dire social consequences. You wait for marriage because marriage is worth waiting for. This is the motive of delayed gratification. Marriage has serious blessings. It is worth the wait.

Did you ever, as a kid, sneak open one of your Christmas presents early because you just had to know what it was? And then, on Christmas, when you "officially" got the present, you

weren't really excited at all? You not only cheated yourself out of a special experience but in its place, you had a niggling sense of guilt. Your wedding night should not be like this.

Delayed gratification isn't just about waiting for marriage. For the Christian, it means holding out for the promises of God. It means being like the five wise virgins, keeping your lamps burning, ready for the call to come to the marriage feast (Matt 25:1-12). It means waiting for the crown of righteousness to be awarded on the day of judgment (2 Tim 4:8). Delayed gratification is foundational to the Christian ethos.

So okay. All the foregoing is fine and all but let's say that ship has sailed. You gave in and didn't wait. Or maybe you didn't have a choice. You will find people that will judge you. You will find people that will commiserate with you. Some people will remember their own struggles at that time in their life and perhaps would have made the same choices. But what about God? We already know that He didn't approve. What now?

Fortunately for all of us, the Bible makes the point that we CAN trust God's forgiveness through Christ.

Gal 4:3-4 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

What are the elementary principles of the world? Just do it! Success at all costs! You deserve pleasure. You're worth it. Competition. Keeping up with the Joneses. Lavish lifestyle. Worry about it later (good for building credit card debt)

Focusing on the sexual "elementary principles of the world," virginity is mocked in our movies and in our society. Pornography is in our movies and elsewhere rampant. Marriage ceremonies sometimes don't even mention God; I doubt He even gets an invitation. Divorce is no big deal. And so forth.

Are we unfazed by these "elementary principles?" Can you live in a pigsty and not get muddy?

Thankfully, knowing that we are prone to be sexually sinful, God has sent His Son to heal the sick, free the slaves and forgive the debtors.

So what about the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7:36-48,50? The one who washed Jesus' feet with her tears? The Pharisee, Simon, thought that if Jesus were really a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this was. But Jesus didn't say "Ew, Simon, you're right! She's probably got some loathsome disease. Get thee behind me, you skank!"

Jesus didn't, of course, say that. He DID say to Simon that her sins, which were many, were forgiven because she loved much. Then He tells the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

So if you are a man or woman who didn't wait for marriage to engage in some gland-to-gland combat, then trust in God's forgiveness. Jesus didn't come to save perfect people, He came to save sinners and that includes you and me and also all those who might judge you harshly.

1 Cor 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

If you are in Christ, then you are experiencing the wondrous love that surpasses all understanding, the love of Christ the Bridegroom who has come in that love to offer forgiveness and eternal life to all who claim in faith "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

Have a great week!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

I'm embarrassed to admit that I rushed home from church to read this first installment. Now I need to actually go read the chapters. 😬 That was "altogether lovely"!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen brother! Marvelously well spoken!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! What a wonderful read!!!

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:

I am like Marc, I got so absorbed in your synopsis, I haven't read the chapters yet. I feel like I ate the sumptuous dessert before the main course. Thanks for sharing your insights and your gift with words.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you all!

Eph 3:20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Comment:

Shelia Welte:

My husband of almost 22 years (I know, mere babes in this crowd, right?) spent a wonderful season a few years back wooing me with a devotion book for couples called "Songs in the Key of Solomon". It was fun and I LOVED looking forward to what was next...it incorporated date nights and adventures mixed with purposful conversation. ❤️ Thank you, sincerely, for this introduction. Looking forward to reading through Song of Solomon...I am sure the 3rd time will be just as FUN as the first two! 😄

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I'll have to check out that book! My bride and I will shortly (Dec 13) be celebrating 42 years!

Shelia Welte:

Ours will be 23 years on the 21st of December! December is a good month to keep each other warm! 😊

December 14: Song of Solomon 3-4 (K. Crittenden)

Week 50

Poetry Reading for 12/14/17

Song of Solomon 3-4

Good morning, Lovebirds!

In this week's episode of HE and SHE, (Chpt 3), the blushing bride awakes to find her husband gone! And so she goes off in search of him. But without the rolling pin. When MY blushing bride awakes to find her husband gone, she rolls over and goes back to sleep. I'm sure it secretly grieves her, though.

Our concept of a demure and proper wife might be found in the poem "The Betrothal," by Edna St. Vincent Millay:

Oh, bring me gifts or beg me gifts,
And wed me if you will.
I'd make a man a good wife,
Sensible and still.

We've seen that wife in Proverbs 31. But Songs brings out another characteristic of a good wife that Proverbs didn't mention. SHE isn't going to be still; she gets out of bed dressed in her nightie and goes looking for her husband, "the one my heart loves." That phraseology reminds me of John referring to himself as the disciple that Jesus loved.

SHE also isn't going to be sensible, because she is out at night roaming the dangerous streets looking for him. Fortunately, watchmen were out patrolling the streets (remember, there weren't any of the streetlights in those days which nowadays make our modern streets safe places for a woman to wander alone in her nightie at night.)

Anyway, back then, the streets weren't safe. (Gen 19:1-11, Judges 19:15-30). But SHE throws caution to the wind and goes out anyway.

Why?

Because she wants him again. She goes from the intimate private setting of their bed, out into a public space, finds "the one my heart loves", grabs hold of him, and doesn't turn him loose until they are back into another intimate setting for making love.

In Songs, note that the admonitions to the daughters of Jerusalem to abstain from love until the proper time, is juxtaposed right after verses describing heightened sexual activity. (2:7, 3:5, 8:4)

Songs seems to be addressed to those who are married and the young women who are soon to be married. But isn't it forgetting something? What about those who, for whatever reason, never marry? I think more and more people fall into this last category – they want to pursue their careers, Mr. or Miss Right never comes over the horizon, their parents lock them in the basement. . . Does the Bible address this situation? I think the Bible tells us that sex is a gift reserved for the covenantal relationship of marriage between one woman and one man. Period. What do YOU think?

So what do we know about sex?

God made both men and women; sex is a part of God's good Creation.

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God wants people to have sex.

Gen 1:28a And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth . . .

God wants people to have sex within marriage; not outside of it. This involves 2 people, not more. No sister wives, no concubines, no threesomes, no orgies.

1 Cor 7:2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

God wants us to glorify Him with our bodies. This precludes any whiff of sexual immorality.
1 Cor 6:20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

And what does Songs bring to the table (or bed)?

Just this: A godly woman can be sexually aggressive. That's right, the Proverbs 31 wife can be sexually aggressive.

The Bible isn't saying explicitly in Songs, "Wives, be like THIS wife". However, in other places, we read the stories of Sarah, Hannah, Esther, and Ruth. Also in Proverbs 31. The Bible doesn't explicitly say "Wives, be like this woman" there either. But the stories are instructional.

It is not always necessary, men, to be the initiator.

SHE is not sitting in the Victorian parlour in shape-hiding, barbed-wire flannel, closing her eyes tightly, gritting her teeth, clenching her fists and thinking of England when it is time to do her wifely duty. Rather, SHE is aggressive and eager for the fray. And she goes out, quite vulnerable to danger, to claim the reward of love.

Now, if you are a person who has been sexually abused in the past (or was an abuser) and therefore cannot now fully enjoy lovemaking with your spouse without reliving the horrors of the past, then I urge you to follow the advice in Songs 2:15, catch that nasty fox that ruins the vineyard by covering your violation with shame and guilt; root it out through appropriate methods such as therapy, openness with your spouse and prayer. The gifts of God are to be enjoyed by both men and women and you are deserving of His healing.

After the injunction to the daughters of Jerusalem in v. 3:5, we suddenly have a visitor arriving in v6! Oh no! My hair must look a mess! Solomon himself is coming to town! The richest ruler anywhere! Just look at his royal accouterments! He's got sixty warriors, fierce fighting men, the best in Israel who protect Solomon. Even his father, David, had only thirty men. (2 Sam 23:13-39).

How *dégagé* he sits in his carriage, which is tricked out in the best materials money can buy; the same materials that were used in the building of the tabernacle (Ex 35) and the temple (1 Kings 5,6). No doubt it featured oversized chrome spinner rims and a hydraulic suspension as well to wow the homies.

The king rides into town in all his glory! (Psalm 45)

This is nice and all, but how does it relate to vv 3:1-5?

Note the contrast between the wife who goes out at night into the streets unprotected and vulnerable, and the image of Solomon, riding along in broad daylight, protected by his impregnable carriage and his small army of mercenaries.

Note also the contrast between the fabulous wealth of King Croesus . . . I mean Solomon . . . with the simple and unassuming means of our husband, the herdsman, the guy who grazes flocks (Song 1:7), "him whom my soul loves."

And again the contrast between the joy of Solomon's wedding day (don't ask me which one) when his heart rejoiced (he doesn't have to wait anymore), and verse 3:5 where the daughters are told to wait for their own wedding day.

Later on, in Song 8:11-14, another contrast is made between Solomon with all these vineyards (lots of women), and our heroine's lone vineyard which is hers to give.

Solomon is not the focus of Songs; rather, he is brought in to be used as a foil, something to be used to compare against for the purposes of edification. With all his pomp and circumstance, pageantry and ostentation, his marital life with all of his wives and odalisques led to disaster whereas the simple love between our simple bride and groom lead to the conclusion that their love was greater than Solomon's in all his glory.

So what do we have now? We have the bride, who seeks her husband, finds her husband and brings him home, joined together with something greater than Solomon.

Douglas O'Donnell finds a connection to this with Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Zacchaeus climbed a tree because he was seeking Jesus. He found Jesus and took him home, from a public setting to a private setting. Zacchaeus accepted Jesus into his heart; so Jesus said (Luke 19:9-10) "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Of course, Jesus is the one who came to seek the lost, including Zacchaeus. We all were roaming the city at night, vulnerable and lost, subject to the snares of sin which lay crouching at every doorstep. For us, Jesus is a Godsend; we can find Him easily and bring Him home to dwell in the privacy of our own hearts.

There is another thought about Songs. Suppose, say, you were new to the idea of Christianity; someone gives you a Bible and tells you to start reading 1 Chronicles. How far would you read? Yeah, me neither. But suppose you started with Songs? Now THAT would hold your attention. Songs then acts as an entryway to the more complete love story that is the entire Bible. God's love for us.

Paul tells us that the entire Old Testament was written to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. 2 Tim 3:15 "and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

The Wisdom literature is there to bring people in to Christ. All of us are interested in the difficult questions with which the Wisdom books grapple. Why bad things happen to good people. What the meaning of life is. Whom I should marry. What is morality?

Songs is certainly a celebration of passion but it also functions as an interdiction to sexual immorality. And it serves to point us to the Beloved, Jesus, who is greater by far than Solomon.

I know that some of you like hearing conversion stories so here is one about David Suchet, the actor who portrayed the Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, as recounted in a sermon by Sinclair Ferguson.

“One night, Suchet was in a Manhattan hotel room when, for the first time in his life, he had the overwhelming desire to read the Bible. He knew the Gideons leave Bibles in every hotel room, so he searched the room, but he couldn’t find one. Determined, he went out and searched the city streets and squares looking for an open bookstore. He finally found one, bought a Bible, brought it to his room, and opened it randomly to Romans 8.

Rom 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Upon reading this, he was converted.”

He sought. He found. He brought home.

And, after much seeking ourselves, we finally find: Chapter 4

Without further ado, HE and SHE stop looking at Solomon’s procession and close the curtains. As powerful and rich as Solomon is, I doubt if he could have attained the deep intimacy of our simple couple.

So we’re back to the cuddling and cooing, lowing and mooing, gazing into each other’s eyes and whispering sweet nothings, which again are mostly comparisons to various beasts, fruits and the kinds of pleasing scents that fill the shelves at Lush to such redolence.

Essentially, chapter 4 is this:

HE: Wanna?

SHE: Woo-hoo!

Note: Marc just called. He said, (rather curtly), “Lissen up, Petal! Me an’ da’ boys thinks youse kin do a better job wit’ Chapter 4! Capisce?”

So OK. Let’s try again.

Jesus said, (not curtly at all), “You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you . . .” quite a few times in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-48). He was contrasting one thing to another in each instance. We can use this teaching tool.

Songs, chapter 4, shows us that there is nothing so beautiful, so rewarding, so refreshing, so ecstatic as love and lovemaking under God’s guidance. And we can contrast that to sex under the guidelines (or lack thereof) of the world today.

You have heard the world say “Show everything; tell everything,” but the Word says “Show him; tell her.”

In today’s world, pornography is easily available everywhere because there are people who DO choose to show everything. You may think that girls are forced into this but that is not always

the case. It's a way of escape from their mundane lives; a ticket out of Hicksville to the Big City. There is a lack of shame in nudity; not only that but bodies are no longer considered holy. The sacredness is gone. Overtly, you can see whatever body part you want. A little more covertly, the bare midriff, the short-shorts and the painted-on clothing are an invitation by schoolgirls for intimacy. They may not think so but I don't think boys have changed that much since I was one. HE also thought very highly and erotically about his bride's navel (v 7:2). I doubt that she flashed it to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the village.

Young girls (and young men!) of course don't want to hear this. They want to be empowered as women, free to express their physical beauty however they want. Deep down, they know they are not going to be this physically attractive forever. They are fully aware (or should be) that youth and physical beauty is fleeting at best and they want to capitalize on the power that their sexuality affords them while they can. God's rules, then, are dusty and antiquated, set in place by dour, sexless old men and hopelessly outdated. The world says "Strut your stuff!" The Word says "Keep it for your husband." A possible teen discussion topic?

The world also encourages a Kiss-And-Tell attitude. Our TV programs, like Desperate Housewives, feature married women sharing their love lives and gossiping about their friends' lovers. And what don't we know about the affairs of Bill Clinton or Bill Cosby or the sexting of Anthony Weiner or the many liaisons of JFK? This stuff fills our airwaves and fills our brains. It is becoming the new normal of society; the societal standard. "It's just sex. Everybody does it." Girls who don't "put out" are deemed cold and prudish. Boys who remain virgins are probably deeply flawed in some respect.

Songs 4:1-7 maintains "Show him and tell her." Show your husband, and him only, your woman's body and in turn, husbands, pick your jaw off the floor, find your brain and tell her how beautiful she is. Then show her.

We read that SHE is dressed in a veil (4:1), a necklace (v 4:9) and all that long, lustrous dark hair (4:1). Nothing else is mentioned and the little that she has on adds greatly to her sexuality. My, but it's warm in here! I remember in the TV show M.A.S.H., Hawkeye Pierce singing "I dream of Jeannie in a cellophane bikini." That's a song that guys can relate to.

Before this man, the love of her life, that SHE trusts wholeheartedly and unabashedly, she is not ashamed to be naked. In fact, she enjoys it.

Gen 2:25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

And the husband appreciates his wife . Songs 4:7 "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you."

What a wonderful thing to hear! I love it when my wife says this to me.

Is SHE perfect? She knows she isn't. She calls herself a "rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys" (2:1). But love is blind and HE isn't fazed by any imperfection. So he starts his visual (and tactile?) journey down her body, praising her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck and breasts, arriving at Songs 4:7.

HE has paused in his journey at her breasts and then says 4:6 "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

One might be reminded, by the blind love shown by this simple husband, of God's blind love for us in Christ. This is called the doctrine of forensic justification. We are made beautiful by Christ's atoning death on the Cross.

Also, Ephesians 5:25-30, where, by Christ's sacrifice, He presents the Church to himself "holy and without blemish."

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body."

For more information on the doctrine of forensic justification, so you can talk about it with folks you meet in the grocery checkout line, see:

<http://www.gracesermons.com/robbeeee/imputed.html>

You have heard the world say: "Sex means nothing." But the Word says, "Sex means unity."

Sexual intimacy means spiritual union.

So where does the idea that "sex means nothing" come from? In a talk entitled "King of the Bed: Should Faith Meddle with Our Sexuality?", Dr. Stanton Jones made the following points: First, evolutionary materialism says that material reality is all there is. Thus, life is just a blind, ruthless struggle to propagate our genes. You may have heard of (or read) the 1976 book "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins, which presents a gene-centered view of evolution. So genes are driving our particular bus and, (secondly), when you mix in the attitudes of the sexual revolution and the freedom from consequences offered by advances in birth control, why then you get the idea that sex means nothing. Sex is a biological act; ethically neutral. This is our society's viewpoint today. If you are hungry, eat something. If you are horny, hook up.

But we know that in God's plan, sex means unity – deep, personal, emotional, and spiritual union. This unity is what is expressed by verses 4:8 – 5:1

Matt 19:6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Songs 2:16 My beloved is mine and I am his . . ."

You have heard the world say, "Sex is a god." But the Word says, "Sex is not a god, but rather a blessing from and a bridge to God."

Well, sex certainly has figured into pagan worship all along (temple prostitutes, asherah poles (Asherah was a fertility goddess)) and in today's society, sex has its very own temples of worship (strip clubs, brothels, adult book stores . . .) and you can worship her on your computer at numberless adult sites. Sex is the darling deity of consumerism, and is trotted out by marketers to inflame our lust and then morph that lust into desire for some product. As seen on TV. The high priests and priestesses of Sex are our entertainment figures, such as Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke who introduced the concept of twerking. And what a fine addition to our culture THAT is.

My dad worshiped at that temple and left his wife and kids. He got it mixed up. He thought "Love is god," not "God is love."

C. S. Lewis said "Love, having become a god, becomes a demon."

But God does not suffer fools or idols gladly.

Deut 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

God first!

Sex is a blessing from God. But, as pleasurable as it is, it acts as a bridge to God because sex alone cannot satisfy us. Sex acts as a pointer to something even more beautiful, pleasurable and satisfying – God!

Dan Allender and Tremper Longman write, “God gave us sex to arouse and satisfy a hunger for intimacy. Sexuality arouses a desire for union. Sexual consummation satisfies the desire, but it also mysteriously creates a hunger for more – not only for more sex, but also for a taste of ultimate union, the final reconciliation with God.”

The garden imagery in Songs is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, where man lived in union with God. The bride and groom in Songs find a way to be in the presence of God through their love and lovemaking. Those who accept Christ by faith are invited to the wedding feast held in the city of God where they will see His face (Rev 22:4)

Augustine called this reality “totus Christus”, the whole Christ. Christ, along with His church will enjoy God in the consummation. Our experience of physical sex in this life is but a pointer to something beyond.

C. S. Lewis said it is “only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune which we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.” Lewis was talking of the beauty to be found in books, music, art but it applies to sex as well.

Is there sex in Heaven?

Matt 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Sex is not needed or even desired in Heaven because to know God is to need nothing.

Have a good week!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Kevin. You have such thought-provoking posts. The marriage-covenant between Christ and His church really helps us to understand our own relationships to our spouse. "I have betrothed thee unto me for ever; and, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." He is not ashamed to own the loving covenant, becomes a kind and tender husband, speaks affectionately to her, calls her his spouse, gives her grace. All which strongly engages her to be faithful to him. (A Proverbs 31 wife actively seeking Him.) I love this song which is applicable for today's lesson. "How beautiful the radiant Bride who waits for her Groom with His light in her eyes." — The wife is radiant because her husband's rays are in her eyes. Light symbolizes holiness & faithfulness. She is espoused to Him and that faithful, holy union is what makes her beautiful. "All the beauty of the saints is derived from Him, and they shine by reflecting His light; it is the beauty of the Lord our God that is upon us," Ps. 90:17

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjo78EsQy3M>

“How Beautiful”

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! Great thoughts and analogies!

December 21: Song of Solomon 5-6 (K. Crittenden)

Week 51

Poetry Reading for 12/21/17

Song of Solomon 5-6

Good morning! Shall we take another stroll in the garden?

By the way, the reason I post on Wednesdays instead of staying in my own lane and posting on Thursdays is because I’m on the West Coast. By the time the first tendrils of sunlight are coaxing the birds from their slumber, most of you are off to work or having lunch. And I know that many of you (well, one of you) likes to do your reading in the morning while I’m either still asleep or sitting like a zombie with a cup of coffee, staring out the window into the darkness.

Before we get back into the volatile subject of horticulture with our two experts, let’s take up the question of divorce. Remember, Songs has practical applications for us; it’s not just another steamy, bodice-ripper of a book.

Matt 19:9-10 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

10 The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

The disciples’ reaction is realistic; they can’t just marry “for as long as love shall last”, or until somebody better comes along, or until their spouse doesn’t make them happy anymore or until the mother-in-law becomes a pain in the tuchus, or if the spouse is cold in bed or abusive or develops a serious illness, or has kids, or gains weight or becomes lazy or develops a beer belly or doesn’t cook like Mother

Beginning in Songs 5:2, we begin to see the realism of marriage creeping in, the husband’s insensitivity (5:2), the wife’s sleepy selfishness (5:3), the violence of men (5:7) and the disdain of women (5:9).

“Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;” – Shakespeare

So. What’s happening here in Songs? HE has gone out with the lads and is out pretty late. SHE got tired of waiting for him so she locked the door and went to bed. HE forgot his key so knocks on her door. And yes, this is a double-entendre. They had planned an intimate evening but HE just popped out for a quick one with the boys. And stayed out too late. Meanwhile, SHE had prepared herself, washing, primping, donning her slinky negligee from Victoria’s Secret, . . . and then waiting. And waiting. Her good mood is dissipating quickly. No sweeties for him tonight.

HE gets home and, typical male, is ready to enter the lists of love. But the door is locked. Hmm. With the small portion of his brain that is still receiving blood flow, it finally dawns on him that she is upset for some reason. You know how women get. He decides to sweet-talk her into opening the door. (Song 5:2) "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." He appeals to her maternal instincts by telling her how cold it is outside; he's standing outside the door cold and shivering.

She remains unsympathetic.

SHE: "Do you know what time it is?! Why didn't you call?"

HE: "Time? Call? I left my Rolex Datona in my Sunday pants and telephones won't be invented until 1876! And I don't have a dime anyway. Did I mention that it's cold out here?"

SHE: "Listen Buster! I'm comfortable right where I am. I don't want to put my robe on again and get my feet dirty. Go sleep it off somewhere else!"

Being the silver-tongued rogue that he is, HE finally manages somehow to get her to change her mind, so she relents and gets herself ready for lovemaking again. SHE opens the door but now HE has disappeared again! So now she has to go out and find him. Again!

She wanders around, looking for him in the city streets and finds the watchmen, just as before. This is a different crew, though, and they treat her badly.

SHE is possibly wondering if she married the right guy. Maybe she should have listened to her mother.

The daughters of Jerusalem suddenly pop up like the fairy godmother in a Disney movie, out of nowhere. SHE asks them to help her search for her husband and tell him that his wife is sick with love. They, in return, ask, "What's so special about THIS guy? Men. Meh. They're all the same."

Well, THAT'S cold. First SHE gets injustice from the very men who are supposed to ensure justice and now the women, her wedding party, are sniping at her. SHE needs a pint of Häagen-Dazs and a sizeable box of tissues.

But instead of that, she chooses to defend her man with a spate of sententious similes that amount to an almost ethereal apotheosis of her husband. Wow!

The writer of Songs was a clever man. But we already knew that, the author being Solomon and all. Plus, being inspired by You-Know-Who.

Verses 8-16 comprise a poem within a poem, which is evident by its use of chiasmi.

The dictionary tells us that a chiasmus is "a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form; e.g. 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.'"

You see what they did there? Best and happiest ---→ happiest and best

Another example: "Each throat was parched, and glazed each eye." Which is how I'm feeling about now. I'm gonna have a nap. See you in a bit.

Later that same afternoon . . .

Ok, where were we? Oh yes, we seem to have fallen into a chiasmus. Anyway, a chiasmus is a common literary device in Hebrew poetry, used to make a point. The center of the poem (vv 11b-15a) describes the man's body parts. This description is enveloped by the same or similar words that parallel each other.

Othmar Keel divides it as follows:

- a. v. 8b O daughters of Jerusalem ... tell him ...
- b. v. 9ac How is your beloved better than . . .
- c. v. 10b outstanding among ...
- d. v. 11a His head is purest gold
- d'. v. 15b [his feet are] gold
- c'. v. 15d choice as . . .
- b'. v. 8b This is my beloved
- a'. v. 16d O daughters of Jerusalem

And what is at the center? Gold. SHE is saying that from the top of his golden head to his golden tippy-toes, HE is magnificent, pure, precious, rare, valued and, like gold, HE is superior to all others. HE is a keeper, worth going after even in the face of danger.

Note that SHE tells the daughters of Jerusalem in v 16b that HE is not just her beloved. HE is her friend. Would your wife say that about you?

What a friend we have in Jesus.

Okay, her answer satisfies the ladies but they have another question (6:1): "Where is he?" They want to help her look for him. Well, guess what? HE seems to be right here now. A real will-o'-the-wisp, this guy.

Anyway, all seems to be forgiven and love is in the air and so we're back to spooning and mooning. This couple has returned to their Edenic Garden and its pure God-given joy.

Good for them. What about us? What lessons are here for us?

Get real. I think that all prospective marriage partners need to get a sense of the realities of marriage. This would ideally be done through pre-marital counseling by a long-term, married person. Don't rely only on your unmarried or newly-married friends or take what you see in movies as gospel.

A woman I know was giving a speech at a club meeting when her husband of 50 years walked in and presented her with a large bouquet of red roses. She noticed that there were only 37 roses and queried him about it, saying, "Why only 37? We've been married for 50 years." He answered, "Well, they haven't ALL been good years."

Marriage presents difficulties and challenges to be met. That is the reality of marriage. It's out of the scope of this study to launch into the subject of marriage counseling; a study for a different time. But expect difficulties when two sinners come together in a fallen world. The ideal of a perfect marriage is no better an idol than sex is. Only God is God. And marriage is part of His plan for us. By working together through the challenges of marriage, letting

marriage stretch and refine us without breaking the covenantal bond, we become sanctified. That is the reality of marriage.

A recommended book for those in a serious dating situation is: "Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married," by marriage counselor Gary Chapman (2010, Northfield Publishing).

A second lesson for us is the denial of self. No sane person walks down the aisle into marriage thinking that they won't have to sacrifice some things; namely and foremost any feeling of entitlement, or superiority, to their spouse. And no sane person marries an egocentric . . . person (← euphemism), which is why pre-marital counseling is good. See previous notes.

Sure, couples can argue about money, about having kids, about long visits by their in-laws, about household chores and Why Can't You Pick Up After Yourself?! But we live in a culture of entitlement and the difficulty in learning to humble ourselves into a submissive attitude leads to problems with intimacy. Selfishness is not unique to our culture or time, however. We catch a glimpse of it here in Songs. HE is selfish, wanting things to go his way, as if HE wasn't the one who ruined their plans by staying out too late. HE is the husband and SHE needs to get used to it.

SHE also exhibits selfishness by her unwillingness to inconvenience herself to let him in the door. She uses the word "I" several times. So they are both selfish to some extent.

But they both move beyond their selfish attitudes in 5:4 to the extent that love is aroused, enough so that when HE goes missing, SHE is ready and willing to really inconvenience herself by going out looking for him. SHE has stopped focusing on herself, her comfort and her convenience, and is completely focused on her husband.

6:3a "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine"

Such a change in attitude between 5:3 and 6:3. And this is a lesson for us all.

So we have the lessons of getting real and denying self. Going further, we have three steps towards intimacy: open eyes, open mouth, and open door.

Open eyes: Do you remember how you saw the person that is now your spouse when you first met? Look at your spouse that way now. Rekindle that arousal and passion.

Daniel Estes writes: "In marriage, it is easy to lose sight of how special one's spouse is. The inexorable duties of life can dilute the delight of intimacy, so that what used to provoke excitement now evokes only a yawn. Indifference is a lethal blow to intimacy, because it communicates that the relationship is not as valued as it should be."

Open mouth: Not to insert foot but to praise your spouse. Songs teaches us HOW to speak to each other. They praise each other. Not that we need to do that exclusively but have we stopped praising each other at all? That behavior is not only for courtship; it keeps a relationship in good health.

Open door: Let's review what 1 Corinthians says about marriage.

1 Cor 7:1-5 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not

have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul quickly adds that this is a concession, not a command.
1 Cor 7:6 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this

The “open door” policy is a way of opening the door for your spouse to take pleasure in your body EVEN if you aren’t necessarily in the mood. It’s a way of saying “My spouse’s needs and desires become mine.” It’s an attitude of selflessness.

Douglas O’Donnell (whose commentary I am using as a guide), tells us that Matthew Henry introduced his commentary on the Song of Songs by writing: “When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, put off our shoe from off our foot [we are on holy ground, but we must also] . . .forget that we have bodies.”

Songs is all about body parts; why must we forget that we have bodies? Why must we interpret Songs only spiritually and not literally? Why, when I read about breasts in Songs, must I interpret that, as Matthew Henry does, as the Church’s “pious affections towards [Christ]”?

We will take this up next week! See you then.

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

Thanks, Kevin. I appreciate your posting early because I'm one of the early readers. I've appreciated all your posts and want to thank you for all your efforts and input to this study. God bless you and yours

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Beverly! I had you in mind specifically for posting early. A little birdie told me that you liked to read in the early morning. :-)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother Kevin! Superb presentation as usual! And you know I like "them thurh big words!"

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Hah! You use more 50-cent words than I do!

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!!!!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome, Butch! And thank YOU for your faithful efforts!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
5:11 "His hair is wavy." --Rats!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
My hair was wavy once. It waved goodbye to me. ;-)

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
6:5 " His hair descended!" --YES! Back in the game!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Still smells of goats, though. Jus' sayin'. That's why there's balm in Gilead.

December 28: Song of Solomon 7-8 (K. Crittenden)

Week 52
Poetry Reading for 12/28/17
Song of Solomon 7-8

Good Morning, and welcome to the last study for the Poetry section of the 7 Bible Studies effort!

But first, a word to our sponsors:

Thank you, Marc et al, for stepping out in faith to offer a complete unknown this opportunity to be a reader leader. My knowledge of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon has been greatly, greatly expanded. Your stated purpose was to have us spend more time in the Word. I can tell you that I spent a LOT of time there. I also want to single out your wife, Ginger, who has been such an encourager and cheerleader for us all. I hope someday to know half as much about the Bible as she does.

My thanks also go to the other reader leaders who have faithfully guided us all, for 52 weeks, through some complex material and made it accessible. I'm sure we have all benefitted immensely through these efforts.

Everyone who commented on these studies with questions or answers has edified us all, so big thanks go out to you too!

And, of course, I thank God, in whose vineyards we continue to labor, for not only supporting us all thus enabling us to persevere in our efforts but for keeping us mindful of the appropriate words to express His will for our lives. May we always find ways to be in tune with His word.

And now, back to the show:

Last week, we raised the question:

Songs is all about body parts; why must we forget that we have bodies? Why must we interpret Songs only spiritually and not literally? Why, when I read about breasts in Songs, must I interpret that, as Matthew Henry does, as the Church's "pious affections towards [Christ]"?

So, I've thought about breasts all this past week (purely for the purpose of edifying you all) and the answer to the question lies in Neo-Platonic dualism. It was taught by Orpheus that the body is "the tomb of the soul," and labeled by St. Francis as "Brother Ass." The body, then, is a necessary evil. Soul good, body bad. In fact, one of the early and influential commentators on the Song of Songs was Origen of Alexandria who wrote, "I advise everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passions of this bodily nature, to refrain from reading the book and the things that will be said about it." In other words, Don't Read This Book if you are still breathing.

So, essentially, THAT part of God's Word is, what, not good for us?

So many Christians held (and perhaps still hold) the view that sexual pleasures, both without AND within marriage, were sinful desires, that Bertrand Russell was moved to criticize Christianity's attitude toward sex as "morbid and unnatural."

In fact, here's a tidbit of information that you can casually toss out at your next black-tie soirée. On the table for discussion and vote at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) was the proposal that all clergy give up not only having relations with their wives but even living with their wives. That perspective took hold and celibacy became the supreme symbol of piety whereas marital relations were seen as inherently sinful. Which rather flies in the face of what Paul was talking about in 1 Cor 7. But, it is a truism that a camel is a horse created by a committee.

Later on, Augustine softened that stance somewhat by munificently saying that sex was only to be engaged in for the purpose of having children. I'm guessing that some people began having a lot of children.

But we find no devaluing of the human body within Scripture. I mean, really!
We have the incarnation.
We have the bodily resurrection.
We have the approval of sensual delights, such as Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

There is no dichotomy between body and spirit, between honoring God through heartfelt prayer and honoring God through your heartfelt relationship with your spouse.

And this is the message brought to us by the Song of Songs. That the human body is good, just as God pronounced it at Creation.

"Both bodily beauty and pure passion are good." - Written on one of God's Post-It notes.

These two themes, bodily beauty and pure passion, are themes running through the Song. We start by looking at bodily beauty.

Douglas O'Donnell says "My core idea for that theme is this: all of creation, especially the beauty of the human body, points to the beauty of the Lord, our Creator. So by saying 'bodily beauty' I ultimately have God in mind. I want to arouse your affections toward him by looking at her, the beautiful bride of Solomon's Song."

We are warned about the dangers of beauty:

Prov 31:30a Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,

Prov 6:25 Do not desire her [the adulteress] beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;

We are also counseled to notice and value the abundant beauty around us.

Gen 12:11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,

Women are described as "beautiful" in the Bible. Sarah (Gen 12:14), Rebekah (Gen 24:16), Rachel (Gen 29:17), Abigail (1 Sam 25:3), Tamar (2 Sam 13:1), Esther (1:11, 2:7), and the daughters of Job (Job 42:15).

We must not be hostile or dismissive of beauty in all its forms, especially as extolled in the Song of Songs.

Leland Ryken notes, "beauty is everywhere – in the exalted poetry, in the pictures of nature, [and even] in the attractiveness the lovers find in each [other's bodies]"

HE sums her up in verses 6:8-9 – SHE, this Shulammitte, is unique and awesome.

And in verse 10, HE anticipates the famous lines from Romeo and Juliet:
But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Song 8:10 "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

Is there a theological connection? Sure.

Giovanni Leone said (and I'm not sure how old he was when he said this): "The strongest evidence to prove that God exists is a beautiful woman." Probably, as a freshman in college, he had just walked across campus and fallen in love three times.

Such ethereal beauty, in fact all the beauty of Creation, points to the surpassing Beauty and Glory of our Creator.

What can be known about God is as plain as day to us if we just look at the world around us, as Paul explains:

Rom 1:18-25 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,
25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

We look in gratitude beyond the beauty of this world to the One who made it and acknowledge His works. Similarly, we look beyond the beauty of the human body, the body made in God's own image, to God Himself.

Let's now take a look at pure passion.

At the end of chapter 6, the friends beseech her to come back so they can admire her beauty. HE then asks them a question, And WHY might you want to do that?

Song 6:13

Friends

Come back, come back, O Shulammitte; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!

He

Why would you gaze on the Shulammitte as on the dance of Mahanaim?

Mahanaim is a war camp east of the Jordan River (Gen 32:2)

HE then goes on to describe her various assets, going this time from the feet to the head. V 7:6 How beautiful you are and how pleasing, my love, with your delights!
He's describing ALL her delights. And vv 7:7-9 describe his passion for her.

And this passion is shared by the bride as well. See vv. 6:11,12. Pomegranates, with their many seeds, were seen as symbols of fertility. SHE wants to see if now is the time to rouse and awaken desire. The answer, in vv 7:9b-8:4 is yes. For us but not for you, O daughters of Jerusalem. (8:4)

Pure passion is patient. V 8:4 (and 2:7 and 3:5) tell us that pure passion waits for the proper time as well as the proper person. The time is after entering the covenantal bond of marriage and the person is one's spouse.

Within those strictures, pure passion can be pleasurable.

In v 8:1, she wishes that she could kiss her husband in public as brothers and sisters could without public censure. And in v8:2, she voices her desire to bring him to her mother's house and wear him out.

Note the contrast between Lady Folly, she of Proverbs, and our Lady Wisdom.

Prov 9:13 Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing.

And Folly says, "Let's keep our passion secret, because we know it's wrong."

Prov 9:17 "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!"

SHE, on the other hand, without a trace of blushing, says, "I'm proud of our love and I want everybody to know about the depths of our intimacy."

Song 8:2 I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house— she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates.

So we have that:

1. Pure passion is patient. It waits for the covenant of marriage and the one and only spouse.
2. Pure passion within marriage is filled with God-given pleasure untainted with guilt.

And now –

3. Pure passion (love) PROTECTS against sinful passion (lust).

The Bible often juxtaposes love and lust to show us that we have a choice and an antidote.

We see this in Paul's writings where he first talks about love and then admonishes us to avoid lust.

Rom 13:8-14 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.[c]

And we also remember this from Proverbs:

Prov 5:15-20 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.
16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?
17 Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.
18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
19 A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.
20 Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

As Paul House says, "Satisfaction with one's long-term love will negate succumbing to short-term surrender to temptation."

And Barry Webb says, "To rejoice in the wife of one's youth, to be satisfied by her breasts and captivated by her love is to walk in the path of the wisdom that is grounded in the fear of Yahweh."

Now, more than ever, we need to be grounded in the lessons of godly marriage found in Songs. We are bombarded by Folly with enticements for impure passion on every side, from romance novels that feature illicit entanglements to magazine covers in the supermarket to blatant images on websites.

A Harvard study in the 1980s found that 70% of all allusions to intercourse on television involved unmarried couples or prostitutes. [See the 2016 book by Steve Gallagher “At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry”, \$15.99 at better Amazons everywhere.]

And that was in the ‘80s. Godly sex must be profoundly boring for TV producers and filmmakers, or perhaps they are not familiar with the concept. I think that many people today are innately aware of it, but are not conscious of it. I, for one, would welcome a TV series that showcases the choices between love and lust and showing the protagonists wrestling between the two, then finally making the right choice based on the guidance of Jesus. We all have that struggle in our lives.

Woody Allen, whom you all know to be a prominent filmmaker, said this about his sexual relationship with his wife’s adopted daughter, “The heart wants what it wants.” Such statements by prominent people go a long way towards normalizing this kind of situation.

So we have:

1. Pure passion is patient
2. Pure passion is pleasurable
3. Pure passion is a protection against impure passion
and
4. Pure passion is a promotion of the Passion.

All of us Christians found the beauty of Jesus – His personality, character, claims, teachings, and miracles – to be captivating. Augustine said Jesus is “the beauty of all things beautiful.” We dropped what we were doing to follow Him. We made sacrifices to follow Him. We endure the derision of the world to follow Him. Where He leads I’ll follow. Follow all the way. Follow Jesus ev’ry day.

People often express surprise when I mention that Kathleen and I have been married over 40 years. As if it were so very rare. But the world takes notice and says “Huh. It IS possible for love to last.”

The world also takes notice of the person (NOT JUST WOMEN!) who remains a virgin until marriage. That person promotes the gospel. God isn’t going to say “Well, boys will be boys.”

Pure passion – held in check until marriage and rightly expressed within marriage – is a promotion of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Do you recall the interlude in Job, namely Job 28? The question is raised (Job 28:20) Where does Wisdom come from, then answered in Job 28:23, It will only be found with God, so that the conclusion is Job 28:28, The fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom.

Songs 8:5-7 is similar; some scholars call it the climax of the Song of Songs. The question is raised, What is Love? And three aspects of love are provided which teach us about God’s universal truths about marital love.

Songs 8:5 Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?

Love is . . . Leaning on your husband. The first five words are the same as v 3:6 which refers to the arrival of King Solomon. It implies grandeur, royalty. “Up from the wilderness” is reminiscent of coming up from Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan. A land overflowing with milk, honey, mandrakes, pomegranates, grapes and apples. Who sees this? The daughters of Jerusalem. They see this lovely couple coming home. Is this a picture of an elderly couple returning home and reminiscing about good times in the past? Is this a picture

of a young couple just returning from their honeymoon? Could be either one. But here, she is leaning on her husband. The mood is not eroticism but affection. Leaning is also indicative of dependency. Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms, leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

John 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Truly a sign of affection and dependence.

We, as Christians, lean on Jesus as a wife leans on her husband, not for every little thing but for loving headship, affection, protection and provision. We men need to ask ourselves if we follow the example of Christ in being leanable. Do we provide loving headship to our families? Are there strong bonds of affection? Does our family feel safe? Are their needs met? And do we accept the headship of Christ? Do we fight the need to be dependent on Him? I know I do sometimes.

Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

“the husband IS the head,” not “it would be good if the husband WERE the head.” Husbands – we are in a position of inescapable leadership. We can lead poorly by not serving or sacrificing or protecting or providing or we can lead in a Christ-like manner by doing these things well. We can't sit on the sidelines waiting for a more convenient time. Whatever actions we are taking, we are LEADING. This may be an indicator of a man's suitability for marriage; something that pre-marital counseling might touch upon. Have you noticed that I'm a big fan of pre-marital counseling?

The image here is not the hot, steamy bedroom scenes that have marked Songs so far. This is a picture of mature intimacy, which understands that the climax of love is not, . . .well. . . climaxes, but relationship.

Songs 5:16b This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem.

This is a great comfort to those of us who, for some reason, don't have our 25-years old bodies anymore. Over time, (so I hear), things don't function as well as they used to. The person I see in the mirror looks old and wrinkled, with chicken wings, age spots, cellulite, general flabbiness, an alarming increase in mass, frown lines, wrinkles and puppet mouth. Obviously, the mirror is showing my grandfather.

We need our cup of coffee, a nap and a handful of pills before we go grazing for lilies.

But no matter how old our bodies get, our true intimacy, our relationship, grows stronger than ever. And praise God for that.

Love is . . . Bigger than us two.

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

Here, Mother comes into the picture. The place where they first felt the sparks of desire is the place they have come back to live; their home which is his mother's house, the place he was born. Mom figures prominently in matters of love; the bride's mother is mentioned in 3:4, 6:9, 8:2 and we see that in 8:2, the mother is “she who has taught me.”

Taught her what?

Well, probably the stuff mentioned in 2 Tim 1:5 “ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

But also, as we remember from Proverbs 30:19b, “. . . the way of a man with a young woman.”

Not to put too fine a point on it, the mother teaches her daughter about sex. And who better to teach the art of lovemaking than an experienced woman filled with wisdom. Certainly better than learning about sex from your equally inexperienced young friends on Facebook or from movies. Or porn. Yes, some women DO watch porn.

Here’s a quote from the NY Times:

“Girls just wanna watch porn. At least, that is the conclusion from a new study by Marie Claire, which surveyed more than 3000 women about their relationship with porn. The research is part of a documentary project by photographer Marie De Cadenet, who says she embarked on the project because “porn is here to stay” and women’s relationship to the subject has been largely underreported.”

And I think one reason for young women watching this stuff is because they are in a vacuum of information about sex and are confused about their roles in a relationship.

So the Wisdom in Songs tells mothers today: Talk to your daughter about sexual issues; address the fear surrounding the wedding night, teach her how to not only please her husband but also to express her own needs, the experience of being pregnant, of giving birth, of caring for a baby. If you, as a mother, feel shame about any of these topics, then you are probably not alone. But that shame will come out in your talks with your daughter. Please think about where that shame comes from; maybe it was passed on to you by your own mother. But it does not come from God.

Remember, your talk should be the kind of talk that you needed when you were young. A talk that isn’t just about the mechanics of sex but a talk that mirrors the feelings of Songs – alive with joy, purpose, and holiness.

It would seem that society today sees love as being limited to two only. Sex is a private matter; nobody else’s business, especially your parents. Sex is experienced on a trial basis, “Let’s move in together and see how it goes.” Such an attitude – cohabitation – does not receive the blessing of the family, nor of the community, nor of the church.

We see today that 50% of marriages crumble and many of the rest are tottering; presumably because they forget or have never learned that Love is bigger than the two.

You might have noticed that in scenes of intimacy in the Songs, the Daughters of Jerusalem seem to be right there as well. What are they? Voyeurs? Peeping Thomasinas? No. They are there for a couple of reasons, one, as students to learn about love and two, as witnesses to witness true love.

The Daughters of Jerusalem represent their society, which approves of this marriage. They are there to witness the bond of love and can remind this couple of that love later on in life when, and if, troubles come. They will say, “Work through this issue because you are in a covenantal relationship and there is no walking away. And we are here for you as a couple because we remember your love for each other.”

“A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words.”

The bride and groom do not stand alone. Neither should you.

The “apple tree” in v. 5 might be considered the family tree, the tree where the bride and groom add their names to the genealogy and look forward to carving their children’s names someday as well. And the grandkids’ names. Life goes on.

When I was going to college, I remember being told that Physics could be a springboard into many other disciplines. But here’s a guy named Tom Gledhill who started as a Physicist, turned from that to become an Old Testament professor, and then became a part-time Poet. THAT’S a long springboard!

Anyway, he describes these verses in poetic form as:

Underneath the fruit tree’s bowers,
Heavy, ripe with golden showers,
‘neath the shades of family tree,
branches of maternal pedigree,
there I stirred your sleeping form,
where your mother brought new birth
in agony of ecstasy writhing.

Love is . . . Wearing Your Wedding Ring Always.

Many of my ESL students from Asian countries do not wear their wedding rings, preferring to keep them at home, protected from the wear and tear of daily life. Wearing jewelry while scrubbing the toilets seems weird. And I get that.

But in our culture, we wear our wedding rings with joy and pride because we wish to announce to the world that we have found our beloved and are expressing the joy of our covenantal relationship with them. On a personal note, the ostentatious display of my wedding ring has saved me from countless onslaughts of beautiful young women looking for love. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

Anyway, the wearing of the wedding ring is a declaration of happy permanence.

Lately, there has been a third ring added to the mix besides engagement ring and wedding ring. This is a “promise ring.” I was confused about the difference between a “promise” ring and an “engagement” ring. So I looked it up and I’ll share with you in case you are also wondering:

“What the promise ring symbolizes between couples is highly individual, but most often it represents love and commitment. That could be a promise to someday become engaged at an unspecified time, perhaps after graduation, the end of a stint overseas or when it’s easier financially.

Promise rings are gaining popularity among couples that may not feel the need to put a label on their relationship or stick to a timetable. For them, a ring is an outside symbol to people who move in together and have no immediate plans for marriage but are clearly in a committed relationship. If an engagement ring comes along in the future, the promise ring often moves over to the opposite hand.”

So I'm guessing that a promise ring is an announcement to the world that you are "clearly in a committed relationship" without being clearly committed, which is what an engagement ring is for. An announcement to the world that you are shacking up with somebody. Obviously, I'm too old to understand or appreciate young love.

SHE now says: Songs 8:6a Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm;

Back in THOSE ancient days, even before the 1-room schoolhouse, a person's seal was the guarantee of their identity. I don't know if women had seals or not. It acted much as our driver's license or passport does today. The seals were often made of precious metals with ornate inscriptions and were sometimes called signet rings. (Haggai 2:23, Gen 41:42, Jer 22:24).

My seal would say something like "This is the property of Kevin Crittenden, son of Herbert Crittenden, Jr., who has a Class A license allowing him to drive an 18-wheel ox-cart."

So: "Place me like a seal over your heart" – A request for mutual, lasting possession, deeply and privately;

"like a seal on your arm." – Externally and publicly – the wedding ring.

And the reasons are given in vv. 6b, 7a.

"For love is as strong as death" – permanence
"The very flame of the Lord" – permanence as well.

This is an example of a Hebrew poetic device known as synonymous parallelism; the second word makes the first word more prominent. Love and jealousy are parallel as are death and the grave.

. . . love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.

6b It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.

7a Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

We have water vs. fire. Usually, enough water will quench any fire. But this is no ordinary fire. This is the very "flame of the Lord," the fire of divine Love. Unquenchable.

Love is like death and the flame of the Lord. It is permanent. Why?

Songs 8:7b If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.

Beatles 19:64 Money can't buy me love.

Songs is saying that it is foolish to try to put a price on love. Love is not for sale (except in certain parts of town where Lady Folly lives) and how much comfort can you get, snuggled up in bed, to bars of gold and sacks of silver? None of that stuff is permanent, anyway. You can't take your wealth with you. Again, there are no U-Hauls attached to hearses.

Matt 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Prov 16:16 How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!

Solomon is actually making fun of himself here. (See Eccl 2:1-10; Song 8:11,12) All his treasures, his wealth, his silver and his gold.

This is also a jab at our culture where everything has its price, as typified by the movie "Indecent Proposal," in which a billionaire offers \$1,000,000 to a young married couple for one night with the wife. I haven't seen the movie but I do see that it lasts for 2 hours instead of 2 minutes. So I guess the couple was tempted. Very reminiscent of Mephistopheles, that billionaire.

How might YOU be tempted by the offer of \$1,000,000? (Tax-free).

You recall that Paul wrote those stirring words about love in 1 Cor 13:4-7. He wasn't saying to himself, "I should write something that people will use in wedding ceremonies 2,000 years from now." Rather, his letter was one of correction to the Corinthians who, as Paul had been informed by Chloe's household, were divided and compromising with the pagan world around them. The church lacked love and so Paul spelled it out for them.

1 Cor 13:8a Love never fails

Love is permanent. Married love is marked by exclusivity and lifelong commitment. It is a seal placed upon the heart and upon the arm.

Similarly, there is a permanence to our covenantal relationship with Christ. 'Til death do us part. And beyond death! 1 Cor 15:55 Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?

Our hope is in the resurrection – both Jesus' and ours.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

We are "sealed" by the Spirit for the day of redemption.

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

God's love for us is permanent and unquenchable!

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

God's love for us is impermeable, His mighty shield protects us.

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's love for us does not need a promise ring.

G. K. Chesterton, writing to Frances, who would one day be his wife, said "You say you want to talk to me about death: my views about death are bright, brisk and entertaining. . . The transformation called Death may be something as beautiful and dazzling as the transformation called Love." In Jesus, love has conquered death; therefore, death is merely the doorway to eternal life and eternal love; that unquenchable flame of the Lord, freed from sin, freed from sickness, freed from temptations and freed from trials.

“One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, death, thou shalt die.” – John Donne, “Holy Sonnet X”

We now come to the end of the Song of Solomon, vv. 8:8-14, which begins by teaching us not only WHY one should remain a virgin until marriage but also HOW to go about doing so. Short of being a castaway on a deserted island, in this culture of Anything Goes, remaining chaste is rather difficult nor is it respected. A man who remains a virgin has his masculinity questioned and a woman who remains chaste is dumped unceremoniously into the category of ice queen.

Songs 8:8-9 We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown.
What shall we do for our sister on 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.

The text doesn't say, but this is probably the brothers speaking which would fit the chiasmic structure of Songs. Or it could be the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Anyway, they are saying that SHE is just entering puberty; her chest isn't developed yet, and so they are asking what they should do for her on the day SHE is spoken for.

Ezek 16:67 I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.

The brothers vow to protect their sister's purity.

If she is a wall, then she is firmly deciding to stay a virgin. A wall is a barrier, impenetrable and impregnable. Their method of birth control was abstinence. Period.

If she is a door, it implies easy access – the loss of virginity and possibly promiscuity. “Can't You Hear Me Knocking?” – Rolling Stones. Do you have any doubt about what that song is about?

So . . . if the friends (older siblings) see her vacillating on the issue and beginning to act like a revolving door, open 24/7, they will circle the wagons before it's too late. They will enclose her with panels of cedar. They will act to protect her modesty.

And, if she has kept herself pure under their watch, they will build towers of silver on her – they will reward her virginity with their full blessing and support. She will be rewarded for her victory.

Would that we all had such caring friends.

But now the bride speaks in v 8:10. She says, “Hmmp! I'm not flat-chested! For your information, I developed early and abundantly; in fact, I have a balcony that you could do Shakespeare from. And, I'll have you know, when I enter a room, my breasts get there a full minute before I do!”

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

SHE is proud that she is a wall – SHE has kept herself pure for her husband, even though she was well-endowed early on and was no doubt pestered by the men. This woman gets street cred and bragging rights for holding out, and she is proud (and rightly so) of that fact.

This point, the importance of maintaining virginity until marriage, seems oddly placed here at the culmination of an erotic love song. But it fits with the primary purpose of the Song, along with the adjurations given in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4. Remember that the audience is young, single women, just as Proverbs was mostly advice for young, single men.

Since this is about waiting for the right time (marriage), then two questions are tackled here:

- 1 – How one waits
- 2 – Why one waits

It should be mentioned, before we proceed, that the Bible holds no double standard. It's not okay to think that a woman should be a virgin until marriage but men will be men and are almost expected to sow their wild seed willy-nilly. Nope. A man's virginity is just as valued as a woman's.

Psalm 119:9a How can a young man keep his way pure?

1 Tim 5:1-2 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

In all purity.

So EVERYONE is to remain a "wall" until the marriage bed when the "door" can be opened.

How one waits:

The answer is given in our text with the Bible-Backed Five-Point Protection Plan, namely:

1. Family
2. Peers
3. Community
4. Self
5. Knowledge

The first three are external societal protections. They come from without.

Vv. 8:8-9 discuss family protection. Older brothers protect their younger sisters. Dads protect their daughters, sometimes greeting the would-be swain with shotgun in hand. It's a not-so-subtle message: "Mess with my daughter and my friends, Smith and Wesson, will hurt you". This protection (although exaggerated somewhat) is a Biblical worldview, albeit not currently favored in our society, where young women are often without effective fathers and their brothers are busy chasing women of their own.

We catch a glimpse of peer protection in v. 10 with the bride's boast of her virginity. Also in the bride's refrain when she exhorts the virgins to stay virgins until the right time. The newlywed bride seeks to protect her peers.

The idea that love is bigger than us two touches upon the concept of community protection. These girls are governed by the laws given in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which laws frown upon sex before marriage. Such a loss of virginity was not tolerated.

What about now? If one of these supports is lacking in your life (maybe your family could care less if you shack up with somebody), then you can increase your protection through one of the other sources, perhaps your peers and your church family. Spend your time with like-minded people – people who share your values. We unconsciously tend to adapt ourselves to the

mindset of those we hang with, much as I would develop a Southern Drawl if I moved to Alabama. Y'all.

And if we hear the voice of reason coming from many sources, rather than just one, we will be more conducive to listening.

Point 4 is Self; Self-Resolve. You need to resolve to stay a wall because otherwise, you become the default, which is a swinging door in this culture. You can have concerned family, peers, and church family, all pulling for you but sin often befriends us in solitude and so we succumb if we don't consciously make a real effort to stay wary. Our bride is saying "Dear family and friends. Although I really appreciate your concern for me, I must tell you that I have taken a vow to be chaste. It may not always be easy to keep but I promised myself not to put myself in potentially compromising situations or relationships. I always plan for an escape route in case I am in the wrong place or with the wrong boy. But this guy, my beloved, is a special man to me. And we have both resolved to wait to consummate our love until marriage."

Point 5 is knowledge. Young women and men should know about sex and sexuality. They should be aware of what is about to happen to them as they enter puberty. Songs is a book of knowledge. It talks about the human body, the pleasures of intimacy and the purity that rightly belongs around such pleasures. It teaches us that the facts of sex (the birds and the bees and the storks and the cabbage patches) are all godly topics. Can you say the word "breasts" in the context of the church without feeling shame? God uses it. He designed them, bless His heart!

So, if you think about it, church and family are the proper places for children to learn about the godly approach to intimacy. Otherwise, they will learn about intimacy from the culture that we happen to live in, where Lady Folly holds sway.

I'm not saying that it should be easy to talk about sex with your children. My mother could not and did not. I learned from the culture, from peers who were just about as ignorant as I was, from the pages of Henry Miller, and from the Playboy magazines that my equally geeky friend in 7th grade had stashed in his closet. Yes, Hugh Hefner taught me about sex. Sex was a thing of shame, some secretive thing that people did but nobody talked about. So we all pretend that sex is something that only other people do and ignore the fact that God not only condones sex within marriage but considers it a wonderful gift, so why should we be ashamed of it? Is it our Puritanical heritage?

Puritan - a person with censorious moral beliefs, especially about pleasure and sex.

And, to be clear, I am not advocating at all that we should talk openly about this area of our lives. That is private between a husband and a wife. We just don't need to feel shame.

Anyway, the 5-Point Protection Plan is how one waits.

And now, Why one waits.

Ps 119:9-10 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

Our text shows us that peace and freedom come as blessings to those who wait. We see the blessing of peace in v10 again – "Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment." She is saying: "I kept myself pure. Then we got married and made love. And then my beloved saw that I found peace." Thoughtful girl, that.

The Hebrew word here is “shalôm” which means completeness, wholeness, total well-being or, in general, peace. And this word “peace” plays nicely as a foil to earlier images of walls, towers, battlements – the things of war.

Have you ever contrasted two wedding ceremonies – the first between two people who have been living together and finally decided to tie the knot and the second between two people who have made the choice to remain pure until marriage? Which event brings you, the witness, more peace and more joy? Which marriage do you think will be better able to withstand the trials of life?

Douglas O'Donnell says “Over the past two decades of Christian ministry, I have never had a young man or woman confess to me, ‘Pastor, I stayed a virgin. Then I got married and lost my virginity on my wedding night. And boy was I dumb. What was I thinking? Oh, I feel so guilty. I’m so not at peace about this foolish behavior of mine.’ I’ve never had that happen. But let me tell you, on a very serious note, that half the people I have counseled have confessed something like this: ‘I was so foolish. I feel so guilty. When it came to sex, I played by my own rules, and right now peace is far from my heart. What can I do to find peace?’”

Paul was forgiven for his sins – and he called himself the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) – but forgiveness does not bring forgetfulness. I doubt that he was ever completely at peace with his past.

So – try not to have a “past” that will erode your peace in the future.

Our equation is this: Purity (following God’s timeline) = Peace

We have peace and freedom as reasons to wait. Freedom is implied in vv 8:11-14.

Song 8:11-12 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.

12 My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.

The thousand pieces of silver is a small fortune and 200 pieces is still a handsome sum. Baal-hamon is a few miles south of Megiddo (several days journey north from Jerusalem.)

So we have a contrast between the vast wealth of Solomon, who rented out his vineyards to tenant farmers, and the bride’s vineyard. The reference might be to Solomon’s mighty harem – 700 wives and 300 concubines. That man must have shopped for Viagra by the truckload at Costco.

SHE speaks in these verses as if addressing Solomon himself. She says, “You may be a rich dude with your shiny striped pants, top-hat and cane, and all your fancy-shmancy wealth and wall-to-wall women - but I and my beloved know more about true love, the love between one woman and one man, than you do. Keep your wealth; I prefer love.”

And now we come to vv. 8:13-14 where Solomon exeunts stage left leaving the bride and groom to address each other.

HE

13 O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice; let me hear it.

SHE

14 Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

HE is inviting her to speak and she does, once again issuing an invitation to intimacy. And now, lest we become voyeurs, we will take our leave of them.

One man. One woman. One marriage. That's godly peace and freedom.

Are we done? Are we there yet? Was it good for you too?

Almost. But I see you wondering to yourself – “Sure, this is nice and all but what has it got to do with eschatology?”

The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek word eschatos, which means “last.” Eschatology is the study of the last days or the end times, death, resurrection, judgment.

We see in v14 that, as Duane Garrett phrases it, “She is calling on him to make love to her.”

That is the end of the book. Not the actual consummation - “And then he began rooting for truffles in my garden.” Not the declaration “And, finally, my beloved is mine and I am his.” Not even another adjuration to the Daughters of Jerusalem – “Put a lid on it, sisters!”

The book ends with her arms outstretched towards him. Thus, the book ends with the same kind of longing that we saw at the beginning in v1:2 “Let him kiss me.”

This longing leaves the reader longing for more. The Song is not done. Love is not done. God is not done. And so we have this eschatological angst – What will happen next? Well, next comes Isaiah and the prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles and then the Book of Revelation.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” –

The bride has prepared herself by remaining pure.

Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Bridegroom, Jesus, says “Surely I am coming soon.”
The Bride, the Church, says “Come.”

Note that the Bible ends in the same manner as the Song ends. With anticipation. With longing. With waiting until the right time, when the marriage has taken place.

We extend our arms out, waiting in eschatological angst, for the return of Jesus, at which time “the yearning for love [that] fills the cosmos” can finally be met.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 WAITING for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Soli Deo gloria!

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:

Thank you, Kevin, for your well-researched comments flavored with just the right amount of humor. I am sorry Tom is not with us to enjoy your writing, but on the other side of the veil, Lord willing, there will opportunity to rejoice together.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!!!!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Coming soon to our next two week meeting! "Thoughts on the Song of Solomon" by Kevin Crittenden. For spiritually Mature Audiences only!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

As far as Ginger goes, she has been my radiant bride and love of my life for over 25 years and as the joke has been spread around the church I usually introduce myself as "Ginger's husband"! I happily bask in her glow!

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

My love! Basking in my glow! 🥰 AKA: Just another romantic Thursday reading Kevin's post in the Song of Solomon!



Kevin Crittenden:

Ginger Hermon - This picture warms my heart! If we were doing a Bible study through pictures, this scene would exemplify the joyous and Godly relationship that improves and matures throughout a lifetime of marriage.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Kevin: first of all you are incredible at embellishments. Despite, thank you for the kind compliment. I'm embarrassed to admit this is the first I've read through the Bible (& I've been taught since infancy). I'm well versed in many books but have fallen short in my life to honor reading the Word. We've done a handful of 6 month NT readings as a family but this year has made a significant impact and been life-changing for me. I'm now fully committed to reading

daily. "Man shall not live by bread alone!" This study grew from you all helping me to stay accountable to now longing with great anticipation for more. Anyhow, I'm eternally grateful to you and everyone in this group. I can't thank you enough for the weekly vocabulary lessons, pain in my cheekbones (laughter), and incredible insight on the big picture and fine-tune details from each Thursday study. Truly I've been richly edified from your tireless efforts! Very thought-provoking! Thanks for sharing your life with us- your perspectives from not being raised by a spiritual leader during youth and for your honesty in reasons of accepting the plan of salvation later in life. We are so grateful for Kathleen winning you over to Christ through her love and example. 1 Peter 3:1. Grateful for your 42 years together! Enhanced and made noble your Song of Solomon posts! 💕 Once again thanks for Job, Proverbs, Ecc., & SofS! Keep teaching & writing - you have a gift!

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:
AMEN!!

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! And yes, as I think of it, Kathleen is indeed one of the most incredible women I've ever been married to.

The mark of a worthwhile study, for me, is IF it helps somebody to make a decision to examine their long-standing beliefs and/or change their lives if that is called for. This year-long study from everybody has had that effect on me so again, thank you!!

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

Thanks, Kevin. You certainly do have a talent for writing and an incredible vocabulary and knowledge. Looking forward to 2018. God bless you and your family.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

<"You are Beautiful" gif>

Replies:

Marc Hermon:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=iFZVXeJwTf4>

"I Stand in Awe of You"

Kevin Crittenden:

Marc, Charles - Back at 'ya!

Comment:

Lowell Hermon:

Impressive, Brother!

Comment:

Craig Hensley:

This is an interesting topic. The linked article has an interesting take on this book. It, of course, is not the only argument for allegorical interpretation, but it is well thought out in my opinion. Much like Kevin Crittenden's well thought out work above.

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/books-of-the-bible/intended-allegory-song-of-solomon.html>
“Is There Intended Allegory in the Song of Solomon?”

Replies:

Charles Fry:

Long ago I read Watchman Nee's little book on the Song of Songs as a prophetic parallel for Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22ff) or really Christ and the believer, and thought it quite good. Not perfect, but quite good.

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:

Thank you Kevin for all of your work. I have enjoyed reading your comments and looking up the definitions of words that I have never heard of and loved your humor. I do hope I meet you and your wife some day before this life ends, but if not I look forward to meeting you in heaven.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Yvonna. Are you also in the Midwest? It is not out of the realm of possibility that we come out that way sometime; I'm not much of a traveler but that's a topic for a different time. And, of course, if you've never been to California, then you will be in for a treat if you travel here. We attend the San Jose Church of Christ along with Butch. Charles visits us from time-to-time from his home congregation in Bakersfield; I think that Butch and I have almost persuaded him to try suspenders again. However, Charles isn't as interested in his personal sartorial splendor as he is in edifying our congregation and encouraging the brethren. I'm on to give my first sermon sometime in March on the topic of glossophobia in the Bible. :-)

