

***Song of Songs***

**The Song of Solomon**

**Loving God’s Way**

***The Biblical revelation of two human beings' love for each other exclusively.***

***Understanding the nature of love.***

*Human* life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of a man and a woman. *Spiritual* life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of a human being and God.

Matthew 22:37-39 I John 4:19

**Song of Solomon**

Song of Solomon begins in Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18, 21-25. God created Adam (man) and Eve (woman) to love one another and to be intimate. Scripture is the handbook of life and the Song of Solomon was written, superintended by God Himself through the Holy Spirit, to address human love, physically and emotionally within marriage. The Song of Solomon gives a balanced presentation of physical, intimate love within God’s framework of marriage; it is a gift from God. The Song of Solomon presents God’s perspective on the facets of human love. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture and He superintended the whole process so that what is written was exactly what God wanted to communicate (cf. II Peter 1:21).

There are 2 primary values of the Song of Solomon.

**First**; the Song of Solomon is a revelation of the true nature of human love. It reveals four things about proper human love:

1. It reveals the *foundation* of love. The foundation of love is mutual satisfaction. The man and the woman in the Song of Solomon find perfect rest in each other. They satisfy one another in every way. Affection relates directly to this ability. We have affection for people who satisfy some need or desire in us. We have supreme affection for one who satisfies us ultimately. God intended that supreme affection that satisfies is the basis for marriage. The Song of Solomon also reveals that affection and satisfaction are not only complementary, they are exclusive. The man and the woman in the Song of Solomon see each other as the only one for themselves (2:2-3). For satisfaction to be complete, there must be a commitment to exclusivity. When love is not exclusive, it is diluted (cf. Genesis 2:24; 1 Timothy 3:2). The foundation of love, then, is mutual satisfaction—not attraction—that is both complementary and exclusive.
2. It reveals the *strength* of love. It is the strongest force in life (8:6-7). People will do for love what they will not do for any other reason. However, when mutual satisfaction breaks down, the strength of love grows weaker. People who want strong love in their marriage should commit themselves to satisfying each other more than themselves.
3. It reveals *how* to love. It shows Solomon taking the initiative in reaching out to his loved one with intensity, and protecting her. It also shows the Shulammite responding to her beloved by yielding to him and trusting in him. These are the usual actions and reactions of the male and the female in love. God intended these methods of expressing love to be instructive for us. They are applicable in both our love for our spouse and in our love for God.
4. It reveals the *fruits* of love. There are three fruits of love. In true love there is:
	1. Rest / Contentment / Peace. There is a perfect contentment that turmoil outside or within a relationship cannot destroy. Where genuine love resides, it provides a haven from the storms of life.
	2. Joy. No matter what other conditions may exist (poverty, misery, etc.), real love fills the heart with song and brightens the darkest day.
	3. Courage / Reconciliation. Both individuals gain strength from their love to face circumstances boldly together; and to recover from their failures, reconcile quickly and go on.

**Second**; the Song of Solomon reveals spiritual experience at its highest level, God’s love for His Own and His Own’s love for Him. Every book of the Bible teaches us about God, and so does the Song of Solomon. Loving God is the ultimate intention of the Song of Solomon. Scripture uses the example of a bride and groom, husband and wife, to describe God's relationship with His people in both Testaments (in Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Ephesians). It is therefore important that we take these revelations concerning the nature of love and apply them to our relationship with God, and not only to our relationship with our spouse.

Do not confuse interpretation with application. On the interpretation level, the book was intended to teach us about human love. But, the application of the Song of Solomon is our love relationship with God.

1. The *foundation* of our love for God and His love for us is also mutual satisfaction. He satisfies our every need and our every want. Nevertheless, He also finds satisfaction in us (Zephaniah 3:17).
2. We see the *strength* of God's love for us when we look at Calvary. The strength of our love for God is the extent to which we respond to Him in obedience (1 John 2:3-6).
3. We see *how* to love as we observe God initiating love for us, reaching out intensely and protectively (John 3:16; cf. I John 4:19). We express our love for Him by yielding to Him and trusting in Him.
4. The *fruit* of love is the same in our relationship with God as in our relationship with another human being: We enjoy rest, joy, courage and reconciliation. God does too (Jeremiah 31:3). He experiences courage in the sense of encouragement (Romans 15:5).

The message of the Song of Solomon is as follows: Human life and spiritual life find their greatest fulfillment in the experience of mutual love. Love is the greatest experience in all human relationships and in our spiritual relationship with God. Consequently, God commands us to love Him and to love one another wholeheartedly (Matthew 22:37-39). We must give attention to loving. Love and loving require continuing commitment (fidelity) and cultivation (affection). Commitment and affection should be alive and well in a loving relationship.

The Song of Solomon instructs us on how to view human love in the light of God's love for us, and our love for Him. A person who has experienced the love of God can know best how to express and receive love on the human level. Human love is the child of divine love. Christians should be the world's best lovers.

The opposite is also true. We can find help in loving God by learning from our human love. Our commitment (fidelity) and affection (passion) to our mate on the human level should help us practice these things in our relationship with God. God created the male/female relationship to help us understand our relationship with Himself. When we learn how to respond to one another, we learn how to respond to God, and vice versa.

**Song of Solomon**

**Introduction (1:1)**

**1:1** – “Song of songs" means that this is a superlative song (cf. the terms "holy of holies," "absurdity of absurdities," or "King of kings"). This book as a superlative song, the best song, and as one song that contains several other songs. The writer is Solomon. The Song of Solomon belongs to the Solomonic collection of written works; and this Song is regarded as the best example of a lyrical, musical work from Solomon's collection.

**Courtship – Beginning of Love (1:2- 3:5)**

As the Song of Solomon begins, the young woman and young man have already met and "fallen in love." In verses 1:2-4a, the young woman voices her desire for her boyfriend's physical affection. She is not shy and views herself as of equal stature with the male. She expresses her love to him and she wants him to reciprocate.

It is not known who this young woman is at this time. She is later called a "Shulammite" (cf. 6:13). The use of both the third and second person by the young woman ("he" and "your" and "you") is a somewhat confusing. Is she speaking about him or to him? This feature of ancient oriental poetry has been discovered by archaeologists to be common in other Near Eastern love poems. It was a device that ancient writers employed to strengthen the emotional impact of what they were writing.

**Longing (1:2-4)**

**1:2** - The young woman is alone and she expresses her inner thoughts. She desired to be close to her boyfriend and his companionship. The "kiss" is used here to describe the fundamental physical act of affection. The Hebrew word for "love" (*dodim*) in this verse refers to physical expressions of love. The young woman found her boyfriend's legitimate physical affection very pleasant and stimulating emotionally.

**1:3** – The young woman appreciated her boyfriend’s care of himself and his reputation. The "oils" were the lotions that he wore (cf. 3:6). Her mention of his name as “ointment” is a reference to his character. She found that his character was also as pleasing as “oil” to her and to other people. Her attraction was not due to physical factors alone.

**1:4a** – The young woman expresses her desire for intimacy. The Hebrew can be interpreted either as “The king has brought me into his chambers," are "May the king bring me into his chambers." This desire for intimacy is normal and healthy (cf. Proverbs 5:18-19).

**1:4b** - The last three lines of verse 4 were the words of the "daughters of Jerusalem," which are mentioned throughout the Song of Solomon (v. 5; cf. 2:7; 3:5, 10, 17; 5:8, 11, 16; 8:4). These “daughters” may be friends of the woman or the young women who inhabited Jerusalem. Their words, as recorded here, show that they approved of the romance.

**Proper love is demonstrated through physical attraction and the foundation of love is good character.**

**Insecurity (1:5-8)**

**1:5-6** - The young woman expresses embarrassment because she had very dark skin as a result of having to tend her family's grapevines. Her skin was dark because of the sun's rays, not primarily because of her race. The text ascribes her darkness to her exposure to the sun, not to her racial heritage. Female courtiers did not work outdoors, so their skin was lighter than that of women who labored in the fields. (Note: The Kedarites were nomads who lived in northern Arabia southeast of Damascus and the tents of Kedar" were apparently black.)

Her words express humility and inferiority, as noted by her reference to her personal appearance. She could not take care of her "own vineyard" because of her work in her family’s vineyard. She had no luxurious baths and toiletries or fashionable clothing of the court available to her. She had no opportunity for her to take care of her hair, skin, or hands as was available in the court.

**1:7** – The young woman asks her boyfriend a question – ‘where do you do you take your flock to rest at noon to feed?’ Her question indicated that she wanted to be with him. If she could not, she would be very sad, like a woman who veiled her face in mourning. The words of verse 7 also indicate that she does not want to be mistaken for a cult prostitute (cf. Genesis 38:13-15). In that day, prostitutes would proposition men out in the fields and along the roads. She wanted their relationship to be pure and untainted. She wanted to build a relationship, not contaminate it.

**1:8** – In context, her boyfriend replies to her question, but it is possible to interpret this verse as her friends replying to her question. Her boyfriend replies to her that they have a common, legitimate point of contact. Her experience working outdoors complemented his interest – and he encourages her to feed her flock of goats by his flock of sheep. Their common interest provided an attraction to one another. Also, her boyfriend tells her that she was a very attractive woman and she had no reason to feel he would disdain her. There was no reason that her dark skin and hard work was a barrier to their relationship (when in fact it was an enhancement to their relationship).

**Proper love builds on legitimate common ground.**

**Praise (1:9-2:6)**

**1:9-10** – The boyfriend assures the young woman of his love by addressing her as “my love.” The young woman was insecure as she measured herself to other women in the court. Her boyfriend reassures her in her area of fear by complimenting her beauty. He nurtures her with praise. Here, he assures her by comparing her to a horse. No doubt strange to us, but in that day Egyptian horses were the best and stallions, not mares, pulled chariots. A mare among the best of Pharaoh's stallions would have been desirable to every one of them. What is meant by this comparison is that his love was a woman whom all the best men of his court would have pursued. This was an indication that her beauty was greater than any women in the court. She was very desirable to look upon and had great value in his eyes.

His praise was to build her confidence that he loved her. This encouragement is often necessary and is always appropriate in such a relationship. He continued by mentioned her lovely checks and neck that were adorned with jewelry.

**1:11** - The young woman’s friends volunteered to make more ornaments for her so that she would be even more attractive.

**1:12-14** - The young woman describes the effect that seeing her boyfriend had on her as he reclined at his banquet table. She states that he was as sweet to her as the fragrant "myrrh" sachet that hung around her neck. Hebrew women often wore small bags of myrrh between their breasts as "perfume." She states that he was as attractive as "henna" at the En Gedi oasis that lay on the west coast of the Dead Sea. Henna plants bore white blossoms, but their leaves produced a reddish-orange cosmetic dye. The parallel images used in these verses indicate that their love was a refreshment to her all day and all night. This is not a reference to a physical, intimate relationship, but rather to the pleasant, pleasing, refreshment of their relationship.

**1:15** – The boyfriend returns her praise by commending her beauty and tranquil character. "Doves" were examples of tranquility in biblical times; they were also symbols of sexuality. According to Rabbinic teaching, a young woman who has beautiful eyes possesses a beautiful character; her eyes are an index to her character.

**1:16-17** - The young woman responds by praising his physical attractiveness (“handsome’) and his personality (“delightful). She moves forward with her praise by focusing on things they share as a couple. The references to "bed," "beams," "house," and "rafters" can allude to a place in the countryside where they liked to meet and talk. However, it is better understood that she is referring to intimacy that transcends individuality. Her love is genuine that goes beyond the linking of two lives together, it is the merger of two lives into one.

**2:1** - The young woman moves forward to describe herself as a common, albeit attractive person. She sees herself as a flower in a rural setting, an improved self-image because of her boyfriend’s praise. The "rose of Sharon" refers to the crocuses that grew on the plain of Sharon that bordered the Mediterranean Sea, south of the Carmel Mountain range. Lilies (or lotuses) grew, and still grow, easily in the valleys of Israel. She remains modest about her appearance, but she understands that she is a pretty woman.

**2:2** – Her boyfriend responds that in comparison with the other single women, she was not common but a rare beauty. By comparing her to a lily surrounded by thorns, her boyfriend turns her area of concern into a compliment.

**2:3** – The young woman responds to his compliment by saying that he was a rare find. He was as rare as an apple tree in a forest of other trees: sweet, attractive, and capable of bearing fruit. The terms “s*hade*,' '*fruit*,' '*apple tree*' are terms that imply physical intimacy. There are various interpretations of the exact meaning of these words in the context of this passage. It is understood that physical intimacy is inferred but in the form her desire and not actual experience. The images presented is that under her boyfriend’s nurturing love, she finds rest, shade and delight.

**2:4-6** – Her boyfriend publicly proclaims his love for her by taking her into his banquet hall. His love for her was now demonstrated not only private but pubic. Her boyfriend’s actions had satisfied three needs of the young woman: protection, intimate friendship, and public identification as being loved. The word "banner" in "his banner over me" may indicate a location and position, as this phrase is used in military settings. It may also mean "desire" or "intent." If so, the clause may mean "his intent toward the young woman was lovemaking." In the context of the passage, the young woman’s growing love is creating within her the desire for physical intimacy. The structure of verse 6 indicates a wish or desire, rather than a statement of fact. She wanted to be intimate with the man she loved. "Lovesick" means faint from love (cf. 5:8). The young woman needed strengthening because she felt exhausted from her love for her loved one.

**Proper love nurtures by praise and is cultivated by cheerful attitude and a contented spirit. Compliments and admiration foster love, criticism destroys it. Love flourishes with praise and it will wither when praise is withheld. Positive, gracious, encouraging words builds love and strong relationships. Proper love delights in verbal admiration with a commitment to sexual purity.**

**Refrain (Charge) (2:7)**

**2:7** - This charge, as written, occurs again later (3:5; 8:4) and serves as an indicator that one section of poetry / lyric has ended. The point of this charge is that others desiring the loving relationship should be patient and committed to a chaste life before and during marriage. The gazelle is a member of the antelope family, and the hind is a female deer. Both animals are skittish, and anyone who wants to get close to them must wait patiently and not approach them aggressively. Similarly, love and physical intimacy are not to be approached aggressively but patiently.

**The foundation for proper love and a strong marriage relationship is sexual purity prior to marriage.**

**Longing and Commitment (2:8-17)**

The setting of the song changes and it now shifts to the young woman’s home that was evidently in Lebanon (cf. 4:8, 15).

**2:8-9** - The young woman describes her boyfriend coming for a visit in these verses; and it appears that he is eager to see her.

*Note: There is an interpretation of verses 10-14 as the boyfriend’s marriage proposal to the young woman. This may be the case, but the primary interpretation of verses 10-14 are the young woman’s description of her boyfriend’s invitation (vv. 10-13) and response (v. 14).*

**2:10-13** – The young woman relates her boyfriend’s invitation to take a walk in the countryside. His invitation, "Arise … come along," (vv. 10, 13) brackets a beautiful description of spring that was as much a feeling in the young man’s heart as it is a season of the year. The description of ‘winter past,’ ‘rains over,’ ‘flowers appearing,’ and ‘vines blooming’ use springtime as a picture of growing love for one-another. It has been stated that “whenever any couple falls in love, it is spring for them because their lives are fresh; everything in life has a new perspective; what was black and white is now in color; what was dark is light” (Craig Glickman – *Solomon’s Song of Love*).

**2:14** - The young woman relates her boyfriend’s request that accompanied the invitation, which is a request to be alone with her. This desire is both natural and legitimate.

**2:15** – It is not clearly understood who is speaking here, the young woman or the boyfriend. Whomever is speaking, they are urging the other to remove those things in their life that would spoil or interfere with their relationship. It is better to deal with challenging or negative issues early in a relationship than to allow them to grow and become major problems later on. "Foxes" refer to challenging issues that could spoil their love for one another. Reality tells us that all couples encounter some potentially destructive situations in their relationships that need dealing with occasionally. It is best to deal with them early so the relationship is preserved so it can grow. When issues are identified in a relationship, deal with the promptly. Do not allow them to linger or fester; they do not go away when they are ignored.

**2:16-17** - Even though they have problems in their relationship, the young woman is rejoicing in the security of her boyfriend’s love and in the assurance that he would take care of his responsibilities to her. Her security is based on their mutual love being monogamous. These verses imply devotion to the other but also implies that one has the right to expect fidelity from the other.

Verse 17 looks forward to their wedding and to its physical consummation. "Bether" is a transliteration rather than a translation. Since no “Bether” mountains exists in this part of the Middle East, it is best to translate the Hebrew word (*bater*) as "cleavage" or "separation." The ‘mountains of cleavage’ then may be an allusion to the young woman’s breasts. This is not a portrayal of sex as the great and final goal to experience true joy. Nor does it suggest that mutual admiration of the young woman and boyfriend’s physical bodies and the associated sensuality is the source of joy. Rather, the scripture of the Song of Solomon directly associates the joy of the heart with the final commitment of marriage. This passage is stating that it is only within the commitment to fidelity that the joys of the female / male love relationship are fulfilled. It is only in the monogamous relationship that man and woman, as lovers, can realize the freedom to express the joys of intimate relationship without restraint, knowing that the marriage bond seals their love in a lifetime commitment to each other.

**Proper love keeps passion and purity in proper perspective. Proper love is not hasty and is not selfish but is patient. Proper love respects each person and is not overcome by disruptive factors or behaviors that damage a relationship. Proper love is mutual and does not yield to feelings or factors that damage or defile the love relationship.**

**Pain of Separation (3:1-4)**

**3:1-4** – This passage is a (challenging) dream (nightmare) that the young woman experiences as the wedding day approaches. She narrates the dream she has, which may have occurred because of her growing anticipation and expectation of the wedding. In her dream she is worries that she could not find her boyfriend, even though she searched everywhere for him. The use and frequency of the phrase, “the one I love,” expresses the exclusiveness and strength of her love for her boyfriend. She leaves the security of her house to search for him. During her search the “watchmen" of the city find her boyfriend; and when he is found she takes hold of him and does not let him go. She takes him to her mother’s house, the house where she lives – to the room of her mother to keep him safely with her. Her mother’s room was the most secure and intimate place she knew*. [Note: this is a dream, so it is not a declaration that she intended to have sex before marriage, but it can be understood as she was looking forward to sexual relations after marriage.]* Such fears are common during the courtship. Will the marriage finally take place? Will the groom be there for the marriage? The young woman is dreaming about her upcoming marriage and her desire to consummate her marriage with her boyfriend at the proper time.

**Proper love disciplines itself for greater love. Passion is to be bound by purity.**

**Refrain (Charge) (3:5)**

**3:5** - This charge, as written, is similar to the first charge and serves as an indicator that one section of poetry / lyric has ended. She then invites the daughters of Jerusalem to keep her accountable regarding her sexual purity The young woman and the boyfriend are on the verge of living out their desired passion in marriage. Their marriage is now at hand and she is asking for help in guarding against premarital sex. The point of this charge is that a loving relationship should be patient and committed to a chaste life before marriage.

**The foundation for proper love and a strong marriage relationship is sexual purity prior to marriage.**

**The Wedding – Consummation of Love (3:6-5:1)**

Weddings in Israel took place in front of the local town elders, not the priests (e.g., Ruth 4:10-11). They transpired in homes, not in the tabernacle or temple (or synagogue later). They were civil rather than religious ceremonies.

There were three parts to a Jewish wedding in Israel:

First, the groom's parents selected a bride for their son. This involved securing the permission of the bride's parents and the approval of both the bride and the groom themselves. Though the parents of the young people arranged the marriage, they usually obtained the consent of both the bride and the groom.

Second, on the wedding day the groom proceeded to the bride's house accompanied by a group of his friends. He then escorted her to the site of the wedding ceremony, and finally took her to their new residence accompanied by their friends. Physical union consummated the marriage the night after the wedding ceremony took place.

Third, the couple feasted with their friends—usually for seven days following the wedding ceremony.

We now find out who the boyfriend of the young woman is; it is Solomon, King of Israel. We will look at the second part of the wedding in this section; 1) the wedding procession and wedding (3:6-11) and 2) the consummation (4:1—5:1).

**3:6** - The marriage procession of King Solomon was unusually splendid, as this description portrays. He was riding in the opulent palanquin (cf. 3:9 - a covered litter carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers). The pomp and beauty of this procession was appropriate in light of the event's significance - marriage. The Scriptures teach that marriage is one of the most important events in a person's life. Also, it is important to note that he used myrrh and frankincense as fragrance for himself, as his bride had expressed her pleasure in his fragrances (cf. 1:3).

**3:7-8** - The groom's friends accompanied him in the procession to the house of his prospective wife. The "60 valiant men” were Solomon's chosen warrior friends, very likely members of Solomon's bodyguard. Solomon's provision of “60 valiant men” is an example of a groom providing protection for his bride; an example every new husband should follow – providing tangible security for his wife.

**3:9-11** - Solomon provided the best that he could afford. Solomon's crown was a special one that his mother Bathsheba had given him for this occasion. *[Note: This crown may have been a crown that preceded Solomon's coronation as king, since the high priest crowned him (cf. 1 Kings 1:32-48; 2 Kings 11:11-20)**.]* Crowns, usually wreaths of flowers rather than royal crowns, were frequently worn by the couple in Israel weddings.

This represents a groom’s self-sacrificing attitude, which shows his genuine love for his bride. It is fitting that the marriage of a couple is commemorated in a special way. The current practice of couples casually living together apart from the bonds of marriage demonstrates how unfashionable genuine commitment to another person has become today.

**Proper love gives its very best to the other. Proper love is expressed through generosity and thoughtfulness to one another.**

**The bride's beauty (4:1-7)**

Solomon was taken by his bride's beauty, which he praises and describes in this passage.

**4:1** – In Solomon’s day, women would put on a veil before their wedding and they did not take it off for some time after that (cf. Gen. 24:65; 29:19-25). Here, after the wedding ceremony, Solomon’s bride took off her veil and Solomon describes and praises what he sees. He describes her eyes, as noted before (cf. 1:15), as being like dove’s eyes. He uses imagery to describe her hair, which was black, as being like a herd of black goats descending from the mountains at dusk, meaning it was very attractive and long as her hair was ‘rippling and tumbling’ freely down to her shoulders.

**4:2-3** – Solomon describes her teeth as being white, evenly matched and without flaw. Her mouth had a beautiful color and shape. Her temples, the sides of her face, were rosy with robust health, like the outside of a pomegranate.

**4:4** - Solomon describes her neck as being long. A long neck, which gives a stately appearance, was a mark of beauty in the ancient world; it was a figurative description that was designed to be a compliment. What "tower of David" this was, we do not know. It was customary for soldiers to hang their shields on the towers belonging to the lords to whom they pledged allegiance (cf. Ezek. 27:11). Which leads us to understand that she was strong physically and her neck would hold much of the jewelry that a woman might wear. Such jewelry was often layered, where strands of jewelry were placed one on top of the other. This formed a layered appearance that could ascend from the shoulder and reach as far as the top of the neck.

**4:5-6** – Solomon describes her breasts as being "fawns,” which is an indication of being soft and lovable; and “twins of a gazelle,” which is an indication of their appearance. He goes on to describe his pleasure with her breasts as the "mountain" and "hill" are metaphors for her breasts. "Myrrh" and "frankincense" were expensive perfumes, meaning that his wife's breasts were precious to him as well as attractive.

**4:7** – Solomon summarizes his praise of her beauty by stating that she was perfect in every way to him.

Why would God include such personal and intimate descriptions in His Word? Because that is how He created man and woman, to be attracted to one another in a physical intimate way. Here, in this passage, Solomon is describing and complementing his bride on her beauty.

**Proper love compliments, praises and is satisfied with one another.**

**The groom's request (4:8)**

**4:8** - Solomon appeals to his bride to put all thoughts of her former life away. These included both the pleasant thoughts, such as those of the beautiful mountain ranges in Lebanon, from which she had come; and fearful thoughts, such as those of the wild animals there. This also may figuratively speak to her to tell her that it is now ‘ok’ for them to pursue sexual intimacy. With this understanding, he is urging her to give him her attention on this their wedding night.

**The bride's love (4:9-11)**

In these verses, Solomon praises his bride for giving herself wholly to him as he had asked, as he describes her physical love for him.

**4:9** - "Sister" was an affectionate term for wife; a term of endearment by a husband for his wife. The use of the term “sister” expresses closeness and permanence of their relationship, implying that they have become one family.

**4:10** - The word translated "love" means physical expressions of love (cf. 1:2), which were better than wine. The physical expressions of love experienced by Solomon were heightened by the scent of her perfumes.

**4:11** – The physical expression of love is primarily expressed through kissing. Solomon describes her kisses as "honey" and "milk," which describe the sweetness of a passionate kiss. “Honey’ and “milk” also describe the blessings of God (cf. Exod. 3:8). Also, the passionate kiss was likened to the fragrance of Lebanon, which was fragrant because of the many cedar trees that covered its hills.

**The bride's purity (4:12-15)**

**4:12** - Solomon praises his bride's virginity. She had kept herself a virgin for the man she would marry.

**4:13-15** – Solomon describes her physical openness in coming to him as his wife. Though she had kept her most intimate parts from others in the past, all of her being is now open to Solomon. She was like a garden full of beautiful and pleasing plants that was now open. All of the spices, fruits, and flowers represent her whole person, and she was wholly his. Solomon experienced full satisfaction with her as his lover.

**The bride's surrender (4:16—5:1)**

**4:16** – Solomon’s bride invites Solomon to take her completely. She declares herself to be an open “garden.” She describes herself as “his garden,” signifying her voluntary surrender of herself to him in physical intimacy. Her calling out to the “wind” to carry the scents, to which Solomon had referred to earlier, is an indication of her desire that he would find full satisfaction in her (cf. vv. 13-14).

**5:1** - Solomon exults in the joy of their physical union and he commends that joy to others. The imagery used by Solomon expresses the fully satisfying nature of his sexual intimacy with his bride. When a lover gives oneself to another, as Solomon and his bride have done, the relationship of each has changed to all the rest of the human race. The two have become one.

There are two speakers in this verse. In 5:1a, Solomon is speaking and he is expressing the celebration of his wedding to his friends. In 5:1b, God is speaking and He is declaring to all that the sexual love between a husband and wife is holy and beautiful.

This verse is a public announcement of marriage of the man and woman. This public announcement changes all other personal relationships they have in society. When marriage occurs between and a man and a woman, the woman now belongs to the man and the man to the woman. The marriage of a man and women is a public matter. That is why there are witnesses to marriage and there is an announcement to those who were witnesses to their marriage. It is a matter of concern to everyone in society; and witnesses at a marriage ceremony represent the larger society that the man and women engage in. Marriage is a legal relationship that society must know about; and it is a commitment and covenant made between a man and a woman before God (cf. Mark 10:6-9).

"These bold but tender scenes from Song of Solomon point up a major difference between the world's concept of love to what was created and endorsed by God. In the former case the focus is on self-gratification. In the latter the emphasis is on the well-being of the loved one and the extolling of his or her virtues. No wonder Jewish and Christian interpreters alike have seen this kind of love as a type of God's great love for His own dear ones." *Eugene Merrill*

Physical intimacy is what is in view here but intimacy in marriage is not only physical but is emotional and spiritual as well. Intimacy – closeness, privacy, trust, freedom, openness - in all 3 of these areas are needed for a successful marriage relationship.

**Proper love is fulfilled with sexual intimacy within the bounds of marriage; and God Himself places divine approval on physical love within the bounds of marriage. Proper love also understands the roll of physical intimacy along with emotional and spiritual intimacy in the marriage relationship.**

**Marriage – Maturing of Love (5:2-8:4)**

In this last major section of the book, the married love of Solomon and his wife is in view. This stage of love is not without its share of problems. They have their first argument (5:2–6:3) and their reconciliation (6:4-8:14). Solomon and his wife work through their argument and these chapters provide insight into dealing effectively with basic marriage difficulties. The story that is told in 5:2-8 has been interpreted literally and symbolically. The interpretation provided is a literal interpretation, although there is strength in interpreting this sequence of scripture symbolically as if she was having a dream.

**The problem (5:2-6:13)**

Sometime after the wedding, Solomon’s wife fails to respond encouragingly to Solomon's demonstration of affection. The indifference shown by Solomon’s wife is based on insensitivity to the other’s need. Her demonstrated insensitivity led him to withdraw from her. Shortly after that, she realized that a gap had opened up between them; they were no longer as intimate as they had been.

**Indifference and withdrawal (5:2-7)**

**5:2** – The young lady is alone in bed, but she is awake. Her day has ended and she has prepared herself for sleep. As she is there in bed, Solomon comes to her room with the desire to be with her intimately. It appears that Solomon has been out and about, and he returns with his mind set on making love. His knocking on her door may be literal, but it is probably symbolic of his urgent desire to make love; and he is pleading with her to be intimate with him. The writing here suggests that his sexual stimulation is so strong at this point that further delay is unbearable for him. The language used in the latter half of this verse is highly suggestive of the intensity of his physical condition, and his intense emotional state of seeking sexual intimacy with his wife.

**5:3-4** – However, Solomon’s wife has lost interest in providing sexual intimacy on demand. She gives Solomon an excuse for not responding to his demand: she had already gotten ready for bed (and may have had a headache!). When he tried to open her door but found it locked, he gave up and went away. The lock / latch referred to were placed on the *inside* of the doors; and to unlock them, a *hole* is cut in the door, through which one would insert their hand with a key to unlock the door. At this point in time, she has a change of mind and goes to open the door for him.

**5:5-7** – She goes to the door to open it but finds that he has left. He is gone. He had come, ready to make love and she did not respond in kind. But she had reconsidered her initial response and came to the door ready and physically anticipating to make love to her husband, but now he was gone.

It appears that the interest Solomon had in arousing his wife out of bed was self-serving. His sudden ‘loss of interest’ (his leaving from the door of her bedroom) came because his passion and desire was denied. So, he ‘moved along’ (Hebrew – ‘br’) in the sense of behaving as though he were finished with lovemaking and had moved on to something else.

She now opens the door and goes out from her room into the city with only her ‘veil’ (‘*redid’-* a shawl that was a loose cloak) on for clothing. She was not familiar with this area of the city as she is still a new bride living in a new home. In this state, she encountered the watchmen as they went their rounds at night. Because of her dress and not being known, they attacked her and removed her ‘veil,’ leaving her is a state of semi-nakedness. She was humiliated by the treatment she had received and her state of undress. She experienced physical and emotional pain in this unfortunate series of events caused by her reaction to her husband’s advance, which was indifference or indecision.

**Proper love is sensitive to the needs of the other. Proper love is not demanding and abrupt. Proper love is reaching out and responding with care to one another; it is not selfish focusing only on oneself.**

**Inquiry and response (5:8-9)**

**5:8** – She now reflects on what has happened to her and tells her friends to tell her husband, if they saw him, that she wanted his love again. At this moment of her trauma, she seeks the comfort and companionship of her friends as she deals with this emotional trial. ‘*Lovesick*' here seems to describe her emotional state due to her response to her husband’s request for sexual intimacy, which resulted in no sexual intimacy with the one she loved.

**5:9** – Her friends respond to her inquiry by twice asking her a question “what is your beloved more than another beloved”? Their response indicated an attitude: “What is so great about him? Surely you could find someone who would treat you better than he does!" Their response to her inquiry prompts her to recall what she loves about her husband.

**Renewed affection (5:10-16)**

Her recollection contains the most extensive physical description of any character in the Old Testament. Her recollection is written in poetic Hebrew and is not a completely literal description.

**5:10-16** – Her recollection is based on her love for him. She loved Solomon very much, as is clear from her description of him. Her response that he is ‘chief among ten thousand’ is her way to say that ‘he is the best of the best.’ She moves on to describe how she views the one she loves. The comparisons she uses illustrate his value and attractiveness to her, which is more than just giving us a picture of his actual physical appearance. For example, his hand (v. 11) was not the color of gold, but his dealings with her, as symbolized by a golden hand, had been of the highest quality. Other features in her description may be purely physical, such as his black hair (v. 11). His eyes were apparently moist and sparkling, rather than dry and dull (v. 12). These verses show that a woman has the right to enjoy her husband's body (cf. 1 Cor. 7:4), which is only meaningful if there is trust and commitment between the two of them. Her verbal recollection was a source of healing for her emotionally from her traumatic event.

**Steps toward reconciliation (6:1-3)**

**6:1** – Her recollection of him clearly expressed her love for Solomon; and this convinced her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem, that her love for her husband was deep and genuine. They understood ‘why’ she was looking for him and agreed to search for Solomon with her.

**6:2-3** - Having expressed her love for her husband, she now knew where to find him. Solomon loved his gardens (Eccles. 2:5) and this was a place where he would have gone after her rejection of his advances. It is this reaction by Solomon to go to the gardens that affirmed to his bride that his love was exclusive to her – he did not go elsewhere to seek fulfillment of his sexual passion. She had created the separation by her response to him, now she is taking the initiative to restore their relationship.

 **Restoration of relationship and intimacy (6:4-13)**

**6:4-10** – Solomon sees her come to the garden and he meets her. His first words to her were praises, not criticism or condemnation. Solomon praises her beauty and in so doing, assures her of his love for her. ‘Tirzah’ was a site known for its beauty and gardens, located in Samaria. Jerusalem was Israel’s capital was known for its beauty (cf. Psa. 48:1-2; Lam. 2:15). Solomon was overwhelmed by her beauty, just like he was overwhelmed by the pride he had in his army.

He was taken by her eyes, her hair, her smile and her face. He used the same flattering comparisons that he had used on their wedding night (vv. 5-7). He assured her that his love for her had not diminished since then. The other women he mentioned (vv. 8-9) were women who frequented his court and/or were attendants in his court. (Most commentators do not believe they were members of Solomon's harem.) Solomon used these women for comparison to show how highly not only he but many other people regarded her. Her beauty had grown and was still increasing in his eyes (v. 10), to him she was the most beautiful of all creation – she was awe-inspiring. To him, she is as awesome as ever, if not more so. His love for her has matured from urgent passion to profound devotion.

In our day, when sex is so often separated from love, the result of having sex is not a deepening affection, as Solomon demonstrated. It is, instead, often a feeling of emptiness and shame.

*Note: 6:11-13 represents the most difficult portion of the Song of Solomon to interpret. It is not clear as to who is speaking to whom, and what some of the phrases mean. Following is an interpretation that follows the context of 6:1-10.*

**6:11-12** – She responds to Solomon’s praise. She had gone down to Solomon's garden to find him; she had found him and he praised her and did not condemn her. Her words indicate that she wanted to find out if his love for her was still in ‘bloom;’ she did not go to the garden to examine natural foliage (v. 11). Because of his affirmation of his love (vv. 4-10), she immediately felt elevated in her spirit, as though she were chief over all the 1,400 chariots in Solomon's great army (1 Kings 10:26).

**6:13** – Reconciliation is in view here. It appears that the daughters of Jerusalem and Solomon are speaking to her – calling her by name, “Shulamite.” This is where we learn her name – and now she is personalized by the use of her name. First, we find the daughters of Jerusalem asking her if they can return with her to Solomon’s home. As she is returning, they were asking her to let them observe her beauty longer (v. 13a) and observe her in her time of joyful reunion with Solomon. Second, we find Solomon answering them by asking, "Why should you look at the Shulammite, as at the dance of the two armies?" "The two armies" translates the Hebrew word *mahanaim*, which was also the name of a town in Israel. This phrase is not easily understood and interpreted. Perhaps Solomon was referring to a celebration held at that Transjordanian town that drew an especially large crowd of onlookers. Or it could be a reference to a dance may have celebrated Jacob's reconciliation with Esau at Mahanaim (cf. Gen. 33:1-20). Solomon’s response was a reproving of the daughters of Jerusalem because this was not a time for them to become involved in their intimate reunion; it was time for Solomon and Shulamith to have some privacy.

**Proper love seeks to reconcile when events and actions have created a division in the relationship. The reconciliation involves recognition of the cause of the problem, then initiating the reconciliation; and when one reaches out to reconcile the other does not condemn or criticize but forgives and praises. Reconciliation involves remembering why she/he is special and the relationship is special. Proper love is sensitive to the needs of the other and embraces forgiveness.**

**Communicating Love and Affection (7:1-10)**

This section, which provides a window into the intimate relationship of Solomon and his wife, shows how their love had matured since their wedding (cf. 4:1-11). Solomon expresses his admiration for his wife’s body, moving from her feet up to her head (vv. 1-5). She is God’s creation and an exquisite beauty in his eyes. I believe that what is written here by Solomon is a reflection of what Adam thought as he viewed Eve (cf. Gen. 3:21-25); God’s perfect creation for him.

**Solomon’s praise (7:1-5)**

**7:1-2** – Solomon was pleased with his wife seeking him and reaching out to him; and he praises her by complementing her beauty. These verses contain both physical and metaphorical compliments. She now appears, by her dress and beauty, to be of royal lineage instead of being a worker in the vineyard (cf. 1:5-6). These verses convey the idea that she was Solomon's ‘drink and food’ because her physical beauty and expressions of love toward him nourished and satisfied him – emotionally and physically.

**7:3-4** – Solomon continues with his praise of her beauty by using descriptive language describing his vision of her. He mentions her breasts and neck using the same language as before (cf. 4:1-5); and adds descriptions of her eyes and nose. Heshbon was a Moabite city famous for its refreshing ponds. Her eyes reflected the peace and beauty of the Heshbon pools; meaning they were reflective, clear and easy to view. The meaning of “Bath-rabbim" is unknown for certain today, though some claim it was a gate of Heshbon. It is believed that "the tower of Lebanon" was a beautiful tower or the white top of a mountain that faced the city of Damascus; meaning her nose attractively represented her beauty. It should be noted that “towers” suggested "dignity and strength” in the Hebrew language’ so her nose added symmetry and beauty to her face.

**7:5** – Solomon closes his praise of her beauty by describing her head. Mt. "Carmel" was a mountain that was considered majestic (cf. Isa. 35:2; Jer. 46:18), which she was. This indicates that her head and hair complete the beauty of her body just as Carmel gives special beauty to the landscape in which it sits. Her hair is described to be “like purple;” meaning that her hair was beautiful, precious, and regal. Solomon was held captive by her beautiful hair. It is important to note that Solomon’s praise for his wife is much deeper and greater now than it was on their wedding night (cf. 4:1-6).

**Solomon’s desire (7:6-9a)**

**7:6-9a** – Solomon now states his desire to be sexually intimate with his wife. His desire is natural, because in marriage there is freedom to enjoy his wife's body (cf. 5:10-16; cf. 1 Cor. 7:3-5; Heb. 13:4). The description given by Solomon as its basis in the pollination of palm trees. To fertilize a female palm tree, the gardener climbs the male tree and takes some of its flowers. Then he climbs the female tree and ties the pollen-bearing flowers among its branches. Solomon’s desire is pleasant and caring, not abusive or demanding.

**Shulamite’s response (7:9b-10)**

**7:9b-10** – Solomon’s wife, the Shulamite, responds to his praises and advances. Verse 9b and 10 voices her eager response to him. She expresses her love for him by yielding herself to him, which occurs because of his praise for her and her security in his love for her; she was totally convinced of his love and commitment exclusively to her. She exults in her complete abandonment and commitment to her husband and in his ‘desire’ to her; meaning his ‘return to her,’ or his ‘repeated returning to her,’ or his ‘control of her.’

To better understand ‘desire’ as it is used here, it is necessary to review the use of the word ‘desire’ in scripture. The Hebrew word ‘*teshuqah*’, translated ‘desire,’ used here is the same word used in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7. This Hebrew word is only used 3 times in Scripture and its interpretation is challenging and not definitive. Adam and Eve had disobeyed God (cf. Gen. 3:1-7). God judged that sin and pronounced the curse on Adam and Eve as a result of their sin (cf. Gen. 3:16-19). God stated that Eve’s ‘desire (‘*teshuqah*’) shall be for your husband.’ The best interpretation of this curse is that Eve will: 1) desire to lead or have authority over her husband but he would rule over her, or 2) always have to answer to her husband has he will rule over her, or 3) turn/return to her husband and he will rule over you. Yet in verse 10, the interpretation of ‘*teshuqah*’ is challenging given the context of the passage. In both cases (i.e., Gen. 3:16; Song of Solomon 7:10) there has been an event that caused a separation: for Adam and Eve it was disobedience to a command of God; for Solomon and the Shulamite it was selfishness and indifference. In both cases relationships were damaged, with God and with each other. In the context of reconciliation, it appears that the best understanding of verse 10 is the Shulamite giving of herself completely to and/or her willing surrender to Solomon, “I am my beloved’s;” and Solomon’s returning to her as her husband/ruler/authority, “his desire is for me.”

Verse 10 implies that marriage can only flourish when selfish individualism is surrendered out of love for the spouse. The Shulamite gave herself completely to Solomon and Solomon returns to her to love and lead her – a reconciliation. The marriage relationship demands the same kind of yieldedness and surrender that God requires in our relationship with Him.

These verses (vv. 6-10) reflect the increased freedom in sexual intimacy that is a normal part of the maturation of marital love; and in the complete security and commitment of their love for one another. These joys increase through the years of a healthy marriage.

**Shulamite’s invitation and initiative (7:11-13)**

**7:11-13** - Secure in her love, the Shulammite now feels free to initiate sex with Solomon directly. Solomon’s praise for her beauty, coupled with his demonstrated commitment to her (cf. 6:2-3), provided her with the confidence and security to initiate sexual intimacy. The references to the spring season suggest the freshness and vigor of love. "Mandrakes" were fruits that resembled small apples and the unusual shape of their large forked roots resembles the human body with extended arms and legs. This similarity gave rise to the traditional belief that the mandrake was an aphrodisiac that stimulated sexual desire that could induce conception (cf. Gen. 30:9-16).

**Increasing love (8:1-4)**

The Shulamite's desire for her husband's love continued to increase throughout their marriage (vv. 1-3).

**8:1** – In the time of Solomon, culture frowned on public displays of intimate affection unless closest blood relatives exchanged them. This is the reason that she wished that her husband was her brother because she could have publicly bestowed her affection on him in public without embarrassment or public criticism.

**8:2-3** - Here she envisions a time where they were courting (cf. 2:6-7). She pictures herself playfully leading her husband as an older sister or mother would lead a younger brother or son in her home. This time the restraint involves waiting for lovemaking until they are in private circumstances; as compared to earlier when the restraint involved waiting until marriage to have sexual relations. This indicates that Solomon and the Shulammite were close friends as well as lovers (cf. 5:1,16); and, as his wife, she desires his attention and caresses (v. 3).

**Refrain (Charge) (8:4)**

**8:4** - This charge, as written, occurs again as it does previously (cf. 2:6-7; 3:5). The point of this charge is to let love take its natural course. They are now married and physical intimacy is not to be approached aggressively but patiently; and that love and physical intimacy should not artificial but natural. Their love was now fully alive and needs no special stimulation.

This section (5:2—8:4) that began with estrangement ends with reconciliation, as their love for one another has grown and matured. Their love over time has achieved oneness physically, emotionally and spiritually. They had built a love that lasts.

**Proper love seeks reconciliation when disruption and division occur. Proper love grows with time and matures. Proper love recognizes each person in the relationship as important and special. Proper love expresses affection in physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy, which sustains security, trust and comfort in one another.**

**Affirmation of love (8:5-7)**

**8:5a** – A new person is talking here. It appears that these are the words of the daughters of Jerusalem or of a relative to the couple. The couple is seen coming up out of the wilderness, leaning on each other. The couple had emerged from their “wilderness” (i.e., trials) successfully (i.e., insecurity, 1:5-6; the "foxes," 2:15; and selfishness and indifference, 5:2-7). The "wilderness" connoted Israel's 40 years of trials to the Jewish mind; and it also symbolized God's punishment (cf. Jer. 22:6; Joel 2:3). The couple had overcome the trial of selfishness and indifference by their reconciliation to one another, which was evidence of their love for one another.

**8:5b** - The Shulammite reminds her husband (masculine "you" in Hebrew) of the beginning of their love. The "apple tree" was a symbol of love in ancient poetry because of its beauty, fragrance, and sweet fruit. The Shulammite had given her husband a type of new birth by awakening him to love. This may refer to their first meeting, which may have been under an apple tree. She also reflected on the role of Solomon’s mother bringing him into the world, which indicates a proper relationship with her mother-in-law. This implies that both were indebted to their parents who had given them life and taught them about proper love.

**8:6-7** – Now the Shulamite asks Solomon to ‘seal’ her upon his heart. The word 'seal' (*hotam*) refers to an engraved stone used for authenticating a document or other possession. This could be suspended by a cord around the neck (over the heart) as in Genesis 38:18. The word *hotam* can also refer to a 'seal ring' worn on the hand. A seal was important because it established possession and integrity. The *hotam* was something highly precious to the owner. The Shulamite was asking Solomon that he treasure her and regard her as a prized seal; she was the seal and Solomon would do the ‘sealing.’ Love is like a seal: it is public; it has integrity; it marks possession; and it has value. For the Shulamite, Solomon’s seal represents a publicly declared mutual love for one another.

She next describes the love they shared. Their love was as strong and powerful as death, as controlling as the grave, as passionate as fire, as irresistible as a river, and priceless. There are only two relationships described in the Bible where jealousy is a potentially appropriate reaction: the divine-human relationship and the marriage relationship. These are the only two relationships that are considered exclusive. The Shulammite asked Solomon to recognize and treat her as his most valued possession; she wanted him to be jealous over her in the proper sense (cf. Prov. 6:34). She closes her thoughts with a strong statement, ‘no one can purchase love.’ It is only available as a gift.

Verses 6 and 7 reflect on the nature and quality of love itself. One: Love is unyielding in marriage, just as death is to life; it is irreversible and persistent. Two: Love is intense like a flame; it is bright, all can see it and it never goes out. Three: Love is strong based on a solid foundation that difficulties will not damage or destroy; it will be tested but it will not be destroyed, it will triumph. Four: Love is priceless, it cannot be bought but can only be freely given away and freely received.

**Proper love is permanent and stable. Proper love does not diminish through trials. Proper love is strong and priceless. Proper love is always giving to the other.**

**Epilogue (8:8-14)**

Verses 8-12 flash back to the Shulamite's life before meeting Solomon and their first encounter. Verses 13-14 reveal their final mature love.

**Past – Preparing for love (8:8-12)**

**8:8-9** - These words by the Shulamite's older brothers reveal their actions in protecting their sister’s purity before marriage. They desired a proper marriage for her and they took on the responsibility of helping her guard her purity. If she stood as a "wall," meaning she used self-restraint and excludes all unwarranted advances against her, they would honor her. They would honor her by providing her with silver adornments, i.e., jewelry or fine dress. However, if she did not use self-restraint and invited sexual advances or encounters, as an open "door," they would actively guard her purity for her by keeping undesirable individuals from her. From the record within the Song of Solomon, they were successful in helping her keep and maintain her purity prior to marriage.

**8:10** – The Shulamite responds to her brother’s words. She was like a “wall,” not like a door. She had grown up to be a beautiful woman and had become a great delight to Solomon. She had kept herself pure prior to marriage, which was the foundation of contentment and peace for her and Solomon.

**8:11-12** – Solomon owned vineyards, and one was located at a site known as "Baal-hamon." It appears, within the context of this passage, that Solomon leased part or all of his vineyard to the Shulamite's brothers. It was this vineyard where the Shulamite’s mother and brothers put her to work in it (1:6). Solomon leased this vineyard for 1,000 pieces of silver / silver coins. It was in or near this vineyard where she met Solomon (1:6-8).

She uses this arrangement to illustrate and describe her commitment to Solomon. She was her own vineyard; referring to her own person, her own life (cf. 1:6). As her own vineyard, her own person, she was not obligated to give her love to Solomon; and Solomon could not purchase her love. Here she is promising to give all of herself (‘my own vineyard’) to Solomon joyfully and freely, whereas he needed to pay wages to those who worked in his literal vineyard.

**Present – Maturing love (8:13-15)**

These verses reflect the desire and love that Solomon and the Shulammite still felt for each other.

**8:13-15** - Solomon speaks in verse 13 and the Shulammite speaks in verse 14.

Solomon calls for his love to respond to him – ‘let me hear it!’ He encourages others, i.e., the daughters of Jerusalem or her family, to listen for her response. She responds by her calling for him to come quickly to her. They had learned to love each other deeply and tenderly; and they welcomed others to observe their love for one another. They had come to experience the reality that physical intimacy in marriage was a good and sacred gift from God.

**Proper love is stable, deep, tender as it matures. Proper love is clearly seen and observed by others.**

**Conclusion**

The primary purpose of the Song of Solomon is to present an example of the proper pre-marital, marital, and post-marital relationship of a man and a woman as God designed. The Song of Solomon is God’s revelation on proper sexual relationships, which should be reserved for marriage (2:7; 3:5), and with only with your marriage partner (6:3; 7:10; 8:12; cf. Gen. 2:24). The Song of Solomon also provides instruction on solutions to common problems that couples face in the various phases of their relationship as their relationship matures.

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