

**LOVE LESSONS –
CELEBRATION OF IDEALISTIC ROMANTIC LOVE**

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF SONG OF SOLOMON

**ROMANTIC LOVE FINDS ITS ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION IN
UNBRIDLED AND SATISFYING SEXUAL UNION AT THE
APPROPRIATE TIME**

Paul Apple (February 2022)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

2:16 “My beloved is mine; and I am his;”

6:3 “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine,”

7:10 “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.”

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TEXT: Song of Solomon 1:1-4

TITLE: *THE ECSTASY OF ROMANTIC LOVE*

BIG IDEA:

THE INCOMPARABLE ECSTASY OF ROMANTIC LOVE MAKES IT DESIRABLE

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hess: vv. 2–4 hold together structurally. They form ten lines, where each of the first nine contains three words and the tenth has two. This is not followed in vv. 5–7. Thus these verses serve as an **introductory unit**.

The sense created is the (paratactic) piling on of one descriptive phrase after another. Indeed, the one theme that does run through vv. 2–4 is the appeal to every one of the senses in describing the love envisioned by the female and shared by the couple.

Iain Duguid: In this way, the poet begins by showing us vividly what he will later declare to us explicitly: the ferocious power of love (see 8:6–7). There are many connections between the opening and closing chapters of the Song, which create an *inclusio*. Yet the end is not merely a return to the beginning, as if love were part of an eternal round (so **LaCocque** 1998: 190); the similarities also highlight the differences and encourage us to observe the **progression** that has taken place in the experience of love through the Song, from entirely unsatisfied longing to desire that is partially fulfilled.

David Guzik: **Charles Spurgeon** preached 59 sermons on this book (in Victorian England) and **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) preached 86 sermons on chapters one and two alone.

Daniel Akin:

I. Being Passionate for Your Mate Is a Good Thing (1:1-3).

II. Desiring Intimacy with Your Mate Is a Good Thing (1:4).

Iain Provan: [Don't] assume too quickly that a “real” change of speaker in the text is being indicated—a particular mistake of some commentators on Song of Songs. It is entirely likely, in fact, that all of **verses 2–4** is spoken by this same female individual, the plurals of two of the lines in **verse 4** notwithstanding.

(1:1) TITLE

“*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*”

Iain Duguid: The title verse stands alone, separated not merely by its content but by linguistic style: it is prose, while the rest of the Song is poetry. . .

The singular form, ‘*song*’ (*šîr*), suggests that this book comprises a single song, rather than being a diverse collection of disparate materials in the way that the book of Proverbs is a collection of proverbs. . .

The poem’s unity is primarily a lyric or poetic unity rather than that of a strict, chronological narrative. . .

The title also tells us that what follows is a **song** rather than some other genre of writing, such as a proverb, a prophetic vision or a historical narrative. It is lyric poetry, which means that what **C. S. Lewis** said about the Psalms (1958: 3) applies equally to the Song of Songs:

“What must be said ... is that the Psalms are poems, and poems **intended to be sung**: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons ... Most emphatically, the Psalms must be read as poems: as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the **emotional rather than logical connections**, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; no less than French must be read as French or English as English. Otherwise, we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.” . . .

Since the glorious and idealized events described in Song of Songs are difficult to connect with the harsh realities of Solomon’s love life as described in the book of Kings, it seems best to see the man in the poem as an **idealized figure**, a poetic persona rather than an historical individual. The focus of the Song is, in any event, not on the specific identity of the lovers so much as it is on the nature of their love (**Walsh** 2000: 7). . .

Solomon points us on to **Christ**, the true Son of David and perfect Lover, in whom true blessing may be received by those who (like David and Solomon) have deeply blemished personal sexual histories. In Christ, we may all find a husband who is both **true King** and **true Shepherd**, the physical embodiment in flesh of the God who is himself **Love**.

Tremper Longman: The Song of Songs is a single poem composed of many poems, literally then, a **song of songs**.

Edwin Good: The Hebrew is remarkably alliterative and musical

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In contrast to many of the psalm superscripts, however, the Song of Songs lacks both musical directions and reference to any historical incident. . . It would appear that the framers of the canon included historical notations in the superscripts if they felt they had reliable information regarding their historical provenance. One might suggest, therefore, that they had no information linking the Song to any actual episode or simply did not consider the Song to be a presentation of

historical events. This is not, of itself, a decisive argument for abandoning the historical/dramatic interpretation of the Song, but at the least it tells us that one does not find evidence for such an interpretation where one might expect it to be found. . .

The phrase functions as a superlative and could legitimately be translated, “*The finest of the songs that belong to Solomon.*” At the same time, it can be read more literally as “*the song of songs,*” a single musical production that is a collection of smaller songs, analogous to the oratorio tradition in Western music.

Richard Hess: Who would define this song as the **best**? The answer lies in a careful study of the song and an understanding of the physical love praised here as sharing in the greater love of God, which he created for all those in his image to enjoy. . .

This association with Solomon provides an anchor for the Song in the biblical wisdom tradition and relates to this material in the canon. No longer separated from the Bible as a collection of love songs, the book takes on a unified significance that cannot be reduced to secular humanism. Nor can its imagery within the context of physical love be ignored and give way to purely allegorical interpretation. The connection to Solomon places the book within a historical wisdom tradition of literature recognized by the church as possessing divine inspiration. . .

Here Solomon, as the king and symbol of wisdom and love, becomes an image for the male lover in the poem. Thus the female speaker, who dominates the poem, dedicates it to her Solomon, a figure who embodies her greatest desires for the fulfillment of love.

Tom Gledhill: King Solomon was famous for his skill as a composer of songs. In **1 Kings 4:32** we read, ‘*He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.*’ So it is quite natural to presume that here, in the title, Solomon is being taken as the **author** of the Song. . .

One indication that the title in **1:1** is a late editorial attribution, from a different hand from that of the main body of the poem, is the fact that the Hebrew word for the relative particle ‘*which*’ (‘*ašer*’) is only used here. In the poems themselves, another form of the word (‘*še*’) is used throughout. . .

The phrase, the Song of Songs, is generally recognized as a **superlative of quality**. The meaning, thus, is something like the most beautiful of songs, the most musical of songs, the number one, the top of the charts.

I. (:2) THE LONGING FOR ROMANTIC LOVE [Female]

Richard Hess: In **v. 2** the **female** speaks first, and her speech dominates throughout the Song. Whether or not the author was a female, this text is unusual in the OT (though not unique; cf. Ruth and Esther) in the **prominence that it gives to the female voice**. She begins by referring to her lover in the third person (*he*). This gives prominence to her

prayer and the expression of desire for her lover. However, the second half of the verse switches to the second person (*you*) to dramatize the direct address to her lover. The **intimacy** in the address and the declarations of love will continue for several verses and recur throughout the Song.

Tremper Longman: The Song proper begins with an explosion of words. **Bernard of Clairvaux** noted that the woman's speech presupposes a conversation and relationship that has already begun, and he calls this line a "beginning without a beginning." It sets a **dynamic tone** that never ends throughout the book. Indeed, the last poem, as we will see, does not impart a distinct sense of closure.

A. The Passion of Romantic Love

"May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"

Iain Duguid: It is thus a particular kind of 'love' that she desires – sexual love – yet at the same time, the word also connotes a particular kind of sex – passionate sex, not simply an act of procreation. She wants the man for himself (and for herself), not just so that she can bear his children.

Tom Gledhill: What matters is that the girl is giving vent to her deepest feelings. She wants to be kissed by her lover, and not just a formal peck on the cheek from cold, passionless lips. She wants to feel his mouth's deep kiss inside her own, and to know his fond embrace. '*O, that he would kiss me . . .*' gives the depth of her longing. She is very tactile. She wants to be touched and to be held; not just as an object of his desire, but because she wants to be stirred to give herself to the one whom she loves. . .

In the Hebrew, the words for kiss and kissing may be onomatopoeic; that is, they portray the sound of what they describe. 'O that he'd give me some of his smacking kisses' that take her breath away.

Edwin Good: we belong to a culture that has its own ideas about kissing, just as the ancient Hebrews had their own ideas about it. Our problem is that we don't really know what their ideas were, though we do know what ours are. We have several well-known words that suggest several different kinds of "mouth-kisses," such as "peck," "smooch," and "tongue" kissing. I have seen nothing corresponding to such different kinds of kissing in the Hebrew Bible. So we can only guess at what the Hebrew culture thought about kissing. My guess in this poem is that the female speaker of the poem really liked her fellow's kissing, and that is why I have substituted "*delicious*" for the words "*of his mouth*." The latter phrase seems to me, in fact, rather boringly obvious.

Iain Provan: It is possible that in **verse 2** we are supposed to understand the first line as an unexpressed private thought and the second line as the beginning of the woman's speech to her beloved (note the similar transition from thought to speech in **vv. 12–17**).

B. The Intoxication of Romantic Love

"For your love is better than wine."

Richard Hess: As a picture of love here, its properties of **delight** and **intoxication** certainly would have come to mind.

Iain Duguid: This desire is clearer still when the woman compares his caresses to wine, a symbol often connected with the **good life** and **rich feasting** in the Bible. Good wine is **tasty** and **intoxicating**, leaving the drinker with a **desire for more**. So too are the kind of intoxicating embraces that the young woman desires from the man (**Barbiero** 2011: 55). The image is particularly fitting as a description of the sweetness of kisses, and the link between kissing and wine recurs later in the Song (**7:9; 8:1–2**).

Tom Gledhill: Also wine is savoured, its memory lingers long (**1:4d**).

II. (:3) THE ATTRACTION OF ROMANTIC LOVE [Female]

A. Attraction Based on the Senses

“Your oils have a pleasing fragrance,”

B. Attraction Based on Reputation and Character

“Your name is like purified oil;”

Richard Hess: Verse 3 hinges on the reference to “*your name*” (*šmekā*), located in its center as the sixth of ten words. . .

The verse focuses on the senses of **smell** and **hearing**. The first line emphasizes the fragrance that the male lover wears, a cologne that is memorable in the senses of the speaker. The cologne is made with the best of oils, and this moves attention to the name of the beloved. More than a means of identity or a symbol of him, the name evokes the **presence** of the male lover despite his absence. And when he is present, the sound of the name makes him all the more vivid. Indeed, both the address of the female to her lover and the evocation of fragrance that can be sensed only when physically close suggest that the saying of the name, like the aroma of the cologne, provides one more sensual bond between the two. Hence the image is that of the **name poured out**. Note that there is no preposition or other grammatical indication of a simile here. The name itself is not merely stated; it is “*poured out*.” In a manner similar to the fragrance, its pouring overwhelms the lover as she repeats it and hears it again and again.

Iain Duguid: The woman’s desire for her beloved is not purely physical, even though she begins with desiring his kisses and longing for his scent. She also finds his character (*šēm* ; literally, name) as enticing as flowing perfume (ESV: oil poured out ; the Hebrew plays on an alliteration between *šemen* [oil] and *šēm* [name]). It is the **whole person** with whom she wishes to be united, body and soul. She is intoxicated by everything about him, not just his physical appearance.

C. Attraction Based on the Desires and Judgments of Others

“Therefore the maidens love you.”

Richard Hess: The verb for “love” (‘āhâ) occurs seven times in the Song (1:3, 4, 7; 3:1, 2, 3, 4), always translated in the LXX by the same verb (*agapaō*, which appears in the Song only in these seven verses). Other than here and in the following verse, where it is used of the chorus of maidens who love the male, it occurs elsewhere always with reference to the feelings of the female lover for her partner (1:7; 3:1, 2, 3, 4). His cologne and name excite her. Perhaps her descriptions and songs, or perhaps a direct encounter with the male, lead her friends to express love for him. Although the emphasis of this love now extends beyond the couple, its purpose at this stage is to **increase the arousal toward passionate love**. However, it suggests that the male is the desired object of many eligible women, not only the female speaker. He is a valued commodity for whom other females will compete. Thus she loves him all the more, as her prize above all others who desire him. This **love of dedication and commitment**, this same Greek word (in noun form, *agapē*), is picked up by the apostle Paul as the distinctive type of love he wishes to emphasize in all relations with others and as the greatest of all God’s gifts (1 Cor. 13). No longer physical or sexual desire, its intensity and solidarity make it an appropriate term for the apostle to apply to Christian love.

Iain Duguid: The ‘*ālāmôt* are specifically those young women who have recently reached the age of sexual maturity and are thus ready for marriage. . .

This class of young women tend to be the arbiters of what constitutes male desirability in every culture. The woman in the Song can record the positive opinion of the ‘*ālāmôt* about the attractiveness of her man without fear or jealousy, because she is **secure** in the fact that her beloved has chosen her above all others. As a result, the other young women form an audience before whom she can boast of the attractiveness of her lover, rather than rivals for his affections who are to be feared. They all love (‘*āhab*) him, but she alone will receive his caresses (*dôdîm*).

III. (:4a) THE SATISFACTION OF ROMANTIC LOVE [Female]

A. Satisfaction from Being Pursued and United

“Draw me after you and let us run together!”

Iain Duguid: Desire seeks satisfaction. So she asks her beloved to carry her off with him – and swiftly! The verb *māšak* is forceful, though not necessarily violent. It is used for pulling someone out of a pit (Gen. 37:28) or for carrying a heavy load of seed (Ps. 126:6), as well as for subduing Leviathan (Job 41:1 [Heb. 40:25]). She wants to be **swept off her feet**, we might say.

Richard Hess: The female lover can no longer bear the wait and invokes a command for her partner to come and take her. Yet this is not enough, for she adds at the end of this desire, “*Let us run,*” expressing a need to end the longing at this instant.

B. Satisfaction from the Anticipation of Love in Intimacy and Privacy

“The king has brought me into his chambers.”

Iain Duguid: I take this to be a metaphorical reference to her beloved's status in her eyes, rather than a literal reference to an actual king. What is not in doubt is the woman's longing to have her desire for physical intimacy completely satisfied, which can only take place in the **privacy of the inner chamber**.

Trevor Longman: It is best to take the reference neither historically nor ritually, but rather as a poetic device. It is **love language**. She refers to him as **king**, but this must not be taken literally. In her eyes, he is a king, the best and most powerful male in her life, worthy of the highest honor. Elsewhere, she calls him a **shepherd (1:7)**, but again that is not literal either. These are **terms of endearment**. The Song is best understood as creating a poetic world, not as describing actual events.

Tom Gledhill: But the Song, as it were, draws down the curtain here, as elsewhere in the poem, leaving the lovers in their secluded intimacy, and leaving the reader to speculate as to what they get up to. This is part of the literary artistry of the Song; it keeps us in suspense, and sets us imagining, and usually draws a veil over the most intimate scenes.

Iain Provan: In **verse 4** the woman seems in part to identify herself with this wider group of female admirers, while in part distinguishing herself from them. Only thus is it possible to understand the strange mixture of first-person singulars and plurals in the verse, which the NIV partially disguises by choosing to ignore the Masoretic accentuation in the first line of the verse. This accentuation indicates the translation: *"Draw me, let us hurry after you."* All maidens love (*'hb*, v. 3) this man, and they are right to love him (*'hb*, v. 4; NIV *"adore"*) and pursue him. Our speaker speaks as one of this wider group, who are all thought of as rejoicing and delighting in the man and are said to join her in praising his lovemaking more highly than wine (cf. v. 2).

IV. (:4b) THE REJOICING IN ROMANTIC LOVE [Female]

A. Inward Rejoicing

"We will rejoice in you and be glad;"

Tom Gledhill: A number of commentators, on the basis of the plural 'we', assign this verse to a group of bystanders (the daughters of Jerusalem of **verse 5?**). But as **Pope** says, 'Virtually any difficulty, real or supposed, may be obviated by invoking additional characters to whom the troublesome words may be assigned.' So the shepherd hypothesis here puts these words on the lips of the harem, addressing the absent lover in the presence of King Solomon. We need not resort to such an unsatisfactory expedient. It is enough for the girl to continue speaking in praise of her lover, including in the 'we', herself and all the nubile maidens who admire him. She wants her lover to absorb the greatest amount of praise possible, and she can only contribute her own portion to that. Again, if it seems too improbable that the love-intoxicated girl wants all the world to praise his love-making capacities, we must remember once again that this is a literary device, not anchored concretely in the real world, only in the mind of the author.

Richard Hess: Both verbs, “to rejoice” and “to be happy” (*smh*), occur only here in the Song. Their associations elsewhere with the salvific work of God suggest, not that this scene has suddenly shifted to a predominantly spiritual reality, but that the strongest possible language of joy occupies the mind of the female lover as she anticipates physical love with her partner. If the king here is understood as the male lover rather than a third member of a love triangle, then in this single phrase the male is both a participant with the female in joy and celebration and also the object of that joy (“for you”). As the female speaks concerning the joy, so the male is the natural object of her rejoicing and love.

B. Outward Boasting

“We will extol your love more than wine.”

C. Security of Evaluation

“Rightly do they love you.”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How many sermons have you heard from the Song of Solomon? Why the neglect of this book despite its inclusion in the canon of Scripture?
- 2) How does this text counter some of the false views of sexuality promoted by our culture today?
- 3) What can you learn from this passage that would improve your marriage relationship?
- 4) How does this passage point to the excellencies of the love of Jesus for His bride?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Iain Duguid: Chiastic structure of vv. 2-14

A: Desire (1:2-4)

B: Difficulty (1:5-7)

1) Attractiveness (5-6)

2) Access (7)

B': Difficulty resolved (1:8-11)

2) Directions for access (8)

1) Attractiveness affirmed (9-11)

A': Desire renewed (1:12-14)

At the outset, the Song sketches a paradigm for male-female relationships that is neither traditionalist nor radical. The woman is no feminist, eager to assert her independent equality with her man. She does not dream of grabbing him and planting a kiss on his lips before pulling him behind her into her bedroom. She wants him to take the lead in the relationship. Yet neither is the girl an emotionally dependent creature who will pine away in silence waiting forever for the man to make the first move. She expects and longs for the man to provide leadership in their relationship, yet she is not shy about declaring her own hopes and desires for their future together.

Equally, the vision of sexuality presented here is a long way from the glorification of celibacy in the early church. Nor does she describe a traditional macho model of male-female relationships in which the only sexual desires are his, and her role in the relationship is simply to be his passive helper. In the Song, the woman is not a land to be conquered by the man or a field to be planted with his seed; she is a vineyard to be cultivated by him so that together they can enjoy the sweet wine of their relationship.

Daniel Akin: I think it more likely that Solomon penned Song of Songs (probably later in life) as the ideal, as a poetic picture of what God intended marriage to be. It could even be a song of confession and repentance for his sins of adultery and polygamy. If this is true, then the song looks back to **Genesis 1–2** and the beautiful love, harmony, and joy Adam and Eve experienced before sin entered the world and messed up everything (cf. **Gen 3**). It also anticipates the redeemed marriage relationship depicted in **Ephesians 5:21-33**. **Douglas O'Donnell** sums up well what I think is going on:

“The Song is a song that Adam could have sung in the garden when Eve arose miraculously from his side; and it remains a song that we can and should sing in the bedroom, the church and the marketplace of ideas.” (*Song*, 20)

This understanding of the Song, I believe, helps us answer the first question: How should we interpret the Song? This clarity comes from understanding that Song of Songs is not a random collection of Syrian, Egyptian, or Canaanite cultic liturgies. It is not a drama with various acts or scenes, attractive as this view is. Nor is it an anthology of disconnected songs praising the bliss of human sexual love between a man and woman. There is **unity** and even **progression** in the Song too obvious to ignore. No, it is best understood as a theological and lyrical masterpiece that **shows what marriage ought to be**. However, and this is important, we must not stop with the natural reading of the text. We should complete the interpretive process and recognize that, as poetry, the Song was intended to evoke multiple emotions, feelings, and understandings. By way of **analogy**, it is easy to see how the bride and bridegroom in this Song portray to us God and Israel, Christ and His church, the Savior and His people. **Jim Hamilton** points us in a good direction when he says, “The Song is about Israel’s shepherd King, a descendant of David, who is treated as an ideal Israelite enjoying an ideal bride in a lush garden where the effects of the fall are reversed” (*Messianic*, 331). . .

Quoting **O'Donnell**: The Song of Songs is a book for girls. And its message to girls is, "patience then passion" or "uncompromised purity now; unquenchable passion then." I'll put it this way: In Proverbs the young lad is told to take a cold shower. In the Song of Songs the young lassie is told to take a cold shower. (*Song*, 24) . . .

How do we get to this place in courting? In marriage? While there are a number of ways to get at this question I found the following list especially helpful:

- Take one another seriously (but not too seriously).
- Nurture one another (Eph 5:29-30).
- Set up a problem-solving strategy.
- Be respectful and courteous at all times.
- Treat your mate like a good friend.
- Spend time with your spouse (both quality and quantity).
- Make room for intimacy and affection without pushing always for sex.
- Treat one another as equals, because you are.
- Be honest with one another; always speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).
- Give your spouse practical and relational priority in all aspects of your life.
- Be slow to anger, slow to speak, and quick to listen (Jas 1:19).
- Do not let the sun go down on your anger (Eph 4:26).
- Never stop caring about pleasing your spouse (Phil 2:3-4).
- Seek unity and do not feel threatened by disagreement (Phil 2:2).
- Honor one another's rights and needs.
- Do not impose your will on the other.
- Be peaceful and kind and use persuasion, not coercion.
- Seek to be one another's best friend.
- Try to deal with facts rather than feelings.
- Minister to rather than manipulate one another.
- Put your spouse before all others, including the children, except for Christ.
- Honor God's structure for marriage (Eph 5:21-33).
- Be approachable, teachable, and correctable (even and especially by your spouse).
- Do not try to control everything; give room for your mate to honestly express his or her feelings.
- Confront one another with tenderness, compassion, and loving concern, working hard not to frustrate your mate.
- Be willing to sacrifice for your loved ones.
- Do not neglect your responsibility to provide for your mate.
- Again, be willing to communicate and to listen!
- Despise divorce and determine it will never be an option.
- Eat as many meals with one another as possible.
- Whenever possible, postpone doing things you want to do for yourself to the times when your spouse is busy with other things.
- Do not stop trying to make time for your spouse just because it seems impossible to do so.

Duane Garrett and Paul House: [takes the view that a **choral group** speaks here]

α Account of the man's lovemaking **1A**

β Choral praise of the man's lovemaking **2A–C**

γ Affirmation of choral praise **3A**

δ Call to depart from woman to man **4A**

α' Account of the man's lovemaking **5A**

β' Choral praise of the man's lovemaking **6A–B**

γ' Affirmation of choral praise **7A**

This canto is therefore proleptic; that is, it tells the audience where the Song of Songs is going before it gets there. Several themes are suggested in these lines. The opening words focus on kissing and indicate that sexual play is a prominent theme in the Song of Songs. The comparison of the man and his love to perfume and wine suggests that metaphorical images of love taken from nature and from other (nonsexual) pleasures will figure predominantly in Song of Songs. That is, love and the beloved will frequently be described using language drawn from the beautiful and delightful flora, fauna, fragrances, and foods of ancient Israel. There are two indications of marriage in these lines. First, line 4A, "*Take me with you! let us run!*" suggests that the woman will escape the confines of her present status, seen to be the household of her brothers in **Song 1:6**. Second, line 5A, "*The king brings me to his chamber,*" suggests a wedding and wedding night. The "*king*" is a motif of the groom (developed, for example at **3:6–11**), and his taking her to his chamber suggests a wedding night. Again, however, this is proleptic; she does not begin the Song in a wedding chamber. The soprano's lines to the effect that the girls "*rightly*" love the man suggest that Song of Songs celebrates the love of man for woman as something good and glorious.

Constable: [Quoting **Hubbard**, pp. 273-74]

"God's name is absent from the entire setting. But who would deny that his presence is strongly felt? From whom come such purity and passion? Whose creative touch can ignite hearts and bodies with such a capacity to bring unsullied delight to another? Who kindled the senses that savor every sight, touch, scent, taste, and sound of a loved one? Whose very character is comprised of the love that is the central subject of the Song? None of this is to allegorize either the minute details or the main sense of the book. It is about human love at its best. But behind it, above it, and through it, the Song, as part of the divinely ordered repertoire of Scripture, is a paean of praise to the Lord of creation who makes possible such exquisite love and to the Lord of redemption who demonstrated love's fullness on a cross."

David Guzik: The best way to see this book is as a literal, powerful description of the romantic and sensual love between a man and a woman, observing both their courtship and their marriage. It does not give us a smooth chronological story, beginning with the introduction of the couple to one another and ending with their married life together. Instead, it is a collection of “snapshots” of their courting and married life, with the pictures not necessarily in order.

Yet, because God deliberately uses the marriage relationship as an illustration of the relationship that He has with His people, we find that this great song of songs illustrates the love, the intensity, and the beauty of relationship that should exist between God and the believer. This is clearly a secondary meaning, sublimated to the plain literal meaning, yet nevertheless valid and important.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 1:5-6

TITLE: SELF-CONSCIOUS INSECURITY – DARK-SKINNED BUT LOVELY

BIG IDEA:

WOMEN CAN STRUGGLE WITH INSECURITIES REGARDING PHYSICAL APPEARANCE – ESPECIALLY AS JUDGED BY OTHERS

INTRODUCTION:

David Guzik: The self-doubt the maiden had regarding her own appearance should not be overstated. She did feel, in some ways, unattractive and unworthy (*Do not look upon me, because I am dark*). Yet at the same time she could say she is lovely.

Iain Duguid: While the daughters of Jerusalem do not open their mouths, their disapproving eyes apparently speak volumes. There is a complex play on words in **verse 6**. The woman asks people not to gaze (*rā'â*) at her because the sun has looked (*šāzap*) upon her, causing her to become dark. Meanwhile, the word for the 'sun's glare' sounds like the Hebrew word *šādap*, which means 'to scorch'. Continuing the image of heat, the woman says, My mother's sons were angry [lit. 'hot'] with me, which provides the reason why they made her work in the vineyards, causing the situation of her distress. By naming these men 'my mother's sons' rather than 'my brothers', the woman emphasizes her emotional distance from them (**Provan** 2001: 268). There is no father present in the Song to protect and provide for her. These features lend a 'Cinderella' motif to the Song (**Gerleman** 1965: 99–101): she feels trapped and oppressed as a servant in her own home, waiting for her handsome prince to come and carry her away to a life of happiness, abundance and love.

Tremper Longman: The unit is set off from the preceding and the following poems by its content and the fact that the woman addresses the daughters of Jerusalem. The mood is also different from what comes before and after, being defensive rather than outgoing. This short poem is a self-description, an apology of sorts for her appearance. Her brothers are introduced as a subject for the first time. They do not speak until **8:8–9**.

Tom Gledhill: For the first time in the Song, the girl gives voice to her **insecurities**, her fears and her self-doubts. She is unsettled by the uncertain reaction of the daughters of Jerusalem to her deeply sun-tanned complexion. She is troubled by her relationship with her brothers, who were angry with her. She is conscious of her own low self-esteem, brought about by her enforced neglect of her own personal appearance. How can she accept herself, if she is not accepted by her friends and her relatives?

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The female solo sings this entire canto. As a speech-act, it is a self-appraisal set against the standards of her culture. It expresses an underlying fear that she will not attain love because she does not measure up to its standards of

feminine beauty. . .

the ideal she yearns for—love and true freedom in a marriage relationship—is valid in all times and all cultures.

I. (:5) TENSION OVER PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A. Color of Skin Tension -- Black But Lovely

“I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem,”

Bruce Hurt: Daughters of Jerusalem - This is a common refrain found some 6 times in this book (**Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8, 16; 8:4**). The identity of these women is not disclosed. Options include friends and companions of the bride, attendants of the King's palace or interested onlookers.

Tom Gledhill: The identity of the **daughters of Jerusalem** is uncertain. Most commentators take them to be the members of Solomon's harem, or else to represent the cultured elite of the upper-class ladies of Jerusalem, the high-society ladies who move in court circles. For both of these cases, darkness would not imply beauty. They would be incompatible. Their beauty would be of the light-skinned variety, produced by weeks of cosmetic treatments. . .

They act as a foil, as a sounding board, for the expression of the girl's deepest feelings and emotions. They draw out from the girl the articulation of her yearnings; seldom if at all do they play any active role in the drama. They may well be a literary fiction, like the wall through which the two lovers Pyramus and Thisbe speak in Shakespeare's play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and which comments independently on the relationship of the lovers. Perhaps another role they play is in highlighting the city/country contrast which occurs throughout the Song. The city represents civilization, man-centred achievements, culture, sophistication, architectural splendour, wealth, power, affluence and self-assertive independence. The countryside in which the lovers live, represents the natural order of simplicity, of being at one with the created order, a passivity or at least a co-operation with the natural order of things, with no attempt to impose or dominate the way things are. The city/country contrast is illustrated here by the tents of Kedar and the tent curtains of Solomon.

B. Class Tension – Uncivilized vs. Civilized

1. Uncivilized

“Like the tents of Kedar,”

2. Civilized

“Like the curtains of Solomon.”

Dennis Kinlaw: The maiden is self-conscious about her darkness (v. 5). Kedar was a territory southeast of Damascus where the Bedouin roamed. Their tents were made of the skins of black goats.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: As the shelters of Arab bedouin, one may surmise, the tents of Kedar were probably made of tanned hides or coarse sackcloth and were dark in color. They also must have been very sturdy since they had to withstand the rigors of the wind, sand, heat, and the occasional storm as the only shelter these travelers would possess. They may have been proverbial as tough, reliable tents. The curtains of Solomon, by contrast, would have been of the finest craftsmanship and would have had exquisite detail. Perhaps the curtains had interwoven colors, beads, or even pearls, as well as lacelike patterns. Therefore, the woman claims that she is dark like the tents of Kedar—and she is equally as sturdy as those tents. But she is also beautiful, like the curtains of Solomon, and worthy to receive the admiration given to princesses.

II. (:6a) TENSION OVER UNFAVORABLE JUDGMENTS OF OTHERS

A. Misdirected Evaluations Based Solely on External Appearance

“Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,”

David Guzik: In that day (as in most of history), fair skin was considered more attractive than tanned skin, because it showed that one was of a financial or social status high enough to where they did not have to perform outdoor work; they lived a higher life than that of simple farmers.

Tom Gledhill: The girl is made self-conscious by the **stares** of the city girls. Any stare is an intrusion, it is an invasion of our privacy. If it is held too long, it provokes embarrassment, hostility and defiance. If we are the victims of a stare, we are threatened by a critical appraisal of our external credentials. The real ‘us’ is masked by our external appearance, and we feel the stare might penetrate behind that mask and threaten us at the deepest level of our being. So we turn away, or confront the one staring at us with our defiant questioning. We don’t like being weighed up by others, lest we be found wanting. We feel disrobed, defenceless and naked. Perhaps the girl in our Song is conscious of the fact that those of her own sex can be far more harsh in their criticism of her than her male companion can be. Yet that criticism is brought about by the threat of her beauty. Her wild, sensual, unkempt beauty is a threat to their artificially cultivated beauty. Her blackness is both enviable and contemptible. They envy her because they do not have this natural beauty. They despise it, because they know they can never have it. They are wary of each other, they are half envious of each other, half fearful of each other. Her beauty threatens their ordinariness. Yet she in half her heart would like to be in their place. So she is not at ease with herself. She fears her own vulnerability.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Also, this description of the woman’s appearance is strikingly similar to what we read of the young David’s appearance: *“he was reddish [deeply tanned?] with beautiful eyes and good looks” (1 Sam 16:12)*. Even the reason for David’s reddened skin is similar: *“he is looking after the sheep” (1 Sam 16:11)*. Perhaps the woman’s keeping of the vineyard is to be regarded as the feminine counterpart to David’s watching of the sheep. It is difficult to know what to make of

this parallel; is it coincidental or deliberate on the part of the Song? If the latter, perhaps the point is to endow the woman with the same youthful vigor and heroic stature that the attentive reader associates with David.

B. Marked by Non-Intrinsic Blemishes

“For the sun has burned me.”

Dennis Kinlaw: She explains that her color is due to her exposure to the sun as she worked the vineyards for her brothers (v. 6). She obviously is from a family where the girls had to work.

Jack Deere: The beloved’s suntanned appearance (*dark am I*) revealed that she worked in the fields. This made her feel insecure (*do not stare at me*) among the city dwellers and in particular the woman of Jerusalem.

III. (:6b) TENSION OVER CONFLICTING PRIORITIES

A. Subjected to Family Mistreatment

“My mother’s sons were angry with me;”

Tremper Longman: The verse states that they required her labor because they were angry with her. However, the text does not give us an explicit motivation for their anger. Perhaps, given what we stated above about the brothers’ role in protecting their sister’s sexuality, they were suspicious of her in this area (again see **8:8–9**).

Tom Gledhill: Why her brothers should have been angry with her we do not know. We can only speculate. Perhaps it was because they disapproved of her flirting or of her chosen lover, and they put her in quarantine as it were, out of harm’s way, where they could keep an eye on her. An alternative view is that the brothers, having allocated the girl to family duties in the vineyard, became angry because the girl’s inevitable neglect of her appearance would reduce her chances in the marriage stakes.

B. Subjected to the Selfish Priorities of Others

“They made me caretaker of the vineyards,”

John Schultz: So, the point the girl wants to make is that her brothers did not allow her to live her own life. In our day and age, where it is fashionable to search for one’s identity and where invasions of privacy are viewed as emotional abuse, this image is very powerful and relevant. It tells us that a lack of love and respect, such as the brothers of the girl demonstrated, leads to a sense of loss of identity. We only know who we are when we are loved. As the girl starts to experience this love she realizes what had gone wrong in her life.

C. Denied the Freedom to Prioritize Her Own Physical Appearance

“But I have not taken care of my own vineyard.”

Bruce Hurt: Although this could refer to a literal vineyard, more likely it is a metaphorical way of describing her inability to care for her **personal appearance** (*my own vineyard*) by virtue of the fact that she was caretaker of the vineyards. Her brothers kept her so busy tending the vineyard, that she had no time to go to the beauty salon!

Iain Duguid: She has not been able to expend the time and resources necessary for developing her appearance, yet nonetheless she is still beautiful. True beauty does not reside in the artificial standards of any society or culture, but may be recognized by all those who have eyes to see (rather than to stare).

Tom Gledhill: Her **vineyard** represents everything that conveys her essential femininity. Her looks, her complexion, her dress, her status, her sexuality—all those considerations which would make her attractive to a man. That she has not been able to keep up her appearances is a cause of her low self-esteem. She is a prisoner of her circumstances, and longs to be free to be herself. And yet there is the pride that she exhibits in her own natural beauty, a power which, as we shall see, she knows how to wield to good effect.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How dangerous is it to judge a book by its cover?
- 2) How can a man develop greater sensitivity to the insecurities his mate may wrestle with regarding physical appearance/
- 3) What does the foundational truth of being created in the image of God contribute to our self worth and our security in our own uniqueness?
- 4) How do those who come from a class of sophisticated privilege tend to look down on those whose roots are more pedestrian?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Guzik: She worked hard in this unjust labor, while neglecting her own appearance. In this she well represents the thinking of many women who consider themselves not attractive enough to be truly and passionately loved. She should not believe the lie that her hardships have made her less attractive to a good man.

There is an old story about a thief who broke into a department store and stole nothing; but he switched the price tags. The next day an expensive Swiss watch was marked as being worth \$1.50; a fine leather handbag was marked for \$1.75. A simple rubber ball

for a child was marked for \$150.00 and three pencils were marked for \$175.00. If people bought or sold at those prices, you would think they were crazy. Yet all the time people value precious attributes and characteristics in other people very cheaply (especially when it comes to love and romance), and they assign high value to attributes and characteristics that are actually worth little.

Richard Hess: In this regard, it is interesting to observe the way the woman identifies her brothers as the sons of her mother. Of course, this suggests that antagonism generated by her brothers' hatred has not promoted close relations between them and their sister. However, it is worthwhile probing this observation more deeply. First, the designation "*my mother*" (*'immî*) rather than "my father" or some other relative suggests a close relationship between the women of this family. This reinforces the impression that the speaker communicates with an authentic female voice and not merely with the imaginations of a male author writing about a female. Second, the form of this designation implies a separation from the males who might be considered closest in her background. As noted, there is no mention of her father. Her language distances her brothers by relating them only through her mother. Thus the woman's words suggest an absence of a male among her close relations as one who would take care of her and protect her. Like Ruth, she has no immediate male relatives to whom she can turn for assistance. In that patriarchal society, the text suggests that she does not have wealth or other resources to take care of herself (that would have prevented her from needing to obey her brothers and work as a shepherdess). Hence this verse portrays her as a vulnerable woman and yet one possessing both beauty and a commitment to care for her family. These themes provide a reason for the insertion of **v. 6**.

Tom Gledhill: Yes, she is black, yet she is also beautiful. She is conscious of her own beauty, which is of the wild, unkempt, natural variety, and yet she is uncertain of the attitude of the daughters of Jerusalem towards her. Her 'blackness' of course is not the natural pigmentation of her skin. It is not a question of her race. She is, rather, deeply sun-tanned and windswept, having been exposed to the elements in her work amongst the vines on the hillsides. It is not altogether certain what the import of the conjunction **and/but** is in '*Dark am I, and/but beautiful.*' Is she responding to the critical appraisal of the city girls, 'Yes, I may be dark, and sun-tanned, which is not beautiful according to your accepted criteria of beauty, but I am conscious that I am beautiful in my own eyes, and in the eyes of my lover'? Or else is she saying, 'My beauty consists in my blackness, not in spite of it'? In other words, is she beautiful because of her sun-tan, or in spite of it? The first would be the interpretation of black and beautiful; the second, of black but beautiful. It is difficult to decide between these two. Probably the second is more appropriate. She is perhaps conscious of her low standing in the eyes of the city girls who look down in lofty disdain on those who have to perform manual labour. So she is defiantly proclaiming her beauty against those who prefer a more cultivated type of beauty. . .

In these verses we are brought face to face with the problems of our own self-image. How do we view ourselves? When we look at our reflections in the mirror, do we like what we see? Can we accept ourselves as we really are, with all our quirks,

idiosyncrasies and limitations? Do we like the way we look? Or are we always wishing we were like someone else? Can we accept our own temperaments and personalities, or are we always hemmed in by a crippling self-consciousness that paralyzes our emotional and social lives? Inferiority complexes can lead to a sense of worthlessness and self-rejection and self-hatred. So how do we cope and come to a more balanced sense of self-worth, and to a degree of psychological, emotional and social integration and poise?

Daniel Akin: A Woman of God Can Still Struggle with Her Appearance (1:5-6).

A. She must deal with being defensive (1:5-6).

B. She must deal with being disappointed (1:6).

Women are sensitive to their physical appearance, far more than a man, though some men are gaining ground in this area. Her sense of self-worth and even value can often be tied to how she sees herself.

These verses are different from what goes before and what will follow. There has definitely been a mood change. Further, the woman is not addressing her man but the “Daughters of Jerusalem.” This is “girl talk.” Shulammite is not an aggressive lover here. She is an insecure and apologetic female whose past has inflicted pain and left some scars. Every person comes into marriage with some baggage. Sometimes it is the baggage of a particular personality; sometimes it is the baggage of a particular past. Either way, the issues must be faced and addressed. Only then can one’s mate better understand the person. Only then can God administer His healing grace. . .

A woman’s appearance is important to her. It requires on the part of a man great sensitivity and understanding. We will see her king respond with exactly what she needs in short order (see 1:8). He hears what she says and he knows how to respond! He meets her (and all of us) at our point of need.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: These verses, therefore, do not concern racial issues but assert that the joys of love, particularly the appreciation of a woman’s body, belong to all social classes and not simply to the elite. More than that, they protest against artificial, culturally imposed standards of beauty that fail to appreciate the comeliness of a woman on the grounds that she is common. The love between a plebeian and his wife is as wondrous as that between two members of the court, and the admiration a peasant girl has from her beloved is as worthy of celebration in song as any love that a princess has inspired. . .

Greg Price: [Example of allegorical approach]

Let us answer the following two questions from our text today:

(1) What Is the Blackness and Comeliness of the Bride (Song 1:5)?

(2) Who Is Responsible for the Blackness of the Bride (Song 1:6)?

I. What Is the Blackness and Comeliness of the Bride (Song 1:5)?

Her blackness is not due to the pigment of her skin. It is, therefore, not a natural

blackness of which she speaks, but is a blackness (a darkness, a scorching of the skin) that has come from the sun beating down upon her during the heat of the day (**Song 1:6**). She does not have the soft, moist skin of a princess that has been pampered with all the beauty treatments that royalty in the world has to offer. Her skin is parched, scorched, and blackened (**Job 30:30**). She is likened to the black tents of Kedar (the son of Ishmael who persecuted Isaac).

The bride here gives an honest evaluation of how she is viewed by most. She knows she is not attractive or beautiful in the eyes of the world. Likewise, the true church is ugly in the eyes of the world because she does not have magnificent buildings, because those in high places do not speak well of her, because she does not have a huge budget, and because her doctrine, worship, and government is not favored by the world. However, all of that mere outward beauty in the eyes of the world doesn't matter to the true bride of Christ. What matters to her alone is that her King sees her as comely and beautiful in His sight. This is always a good indication of the condition of your heart. Whose favor and approval is most important to you: your family, friends, boss, co-workers, or your King's (**1 Corinthians 4:13**)? Do what others think of Christ or His truth cause you to be ashamed and embarrassed before them? The bride here is not ashamed of her blackness, but simply gives an honest confession as to how most view her (she's scorched from the sun). Jesus said that if you are ashamed of Him and His words, he will be ashamed of you (**Luke 9:26**). How would you know? If you have to be two different people depending upon who you are around (whether the ungodly or the godly), then you are likely ashamed of Jesus and His truth.

II. Who Is Responsible for the Blackness of the Bride (Song 1:6)?

The bride explains to the daughters of Jerusalem why she is black. She says to them in effect, "Look not upon me with scorn because I am black according to those who hate me, for the scorching sun of persecution, sorrow, affliction, tears, crosses, and suffering for Jesus Christ and His truth have made me ugly in the sight of many." The bride does not want her suffering for Christ to hinder by fear, indignation, or astonishment the growth in Christ of these daughters of Jerusalem. The metaphor of a scorching sun is used in Scripture to signify persecution for Christ and His truth (the seed that fell on the stony ground but was scorched by the sun, **Matthew 13:6, 21**).

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/62219412371161.pdf>

TEXT: Song of Solomon 1:7-8

TITLE: SEEKING THE LOVER TO SPEND TIME TOGETHER

BIG IDEA:

BE AGGRESSIVE AND INTENTIONAL IN SPENDING TIME WITH YOUR LOVER

INTRODUCTION:

Iain Duguid: After affirming her own beauty in the face of potential detractors, the woman asks her beloved to give her directions to find him. In keeping with the shifting kaleidoscope of metaphors that is characteristic of the Song, the image of her beloved shifts from a king (v. 4) to a shepherd. These are not completely unrelated images, of course, since kings in the Ancient Near East were often regarded as the shepherds of their people (e.g. Ezek. 34:23–24). Yet this verse represents her beloved as a literal shepherd, who would actually be found out in the fields day by day with his flocks. In the countryside, away from the sophisticated terrain of the city and the palace, perhaps her physical deficiencies would be less threatening and her beauty more easily affirmed.

Tom Gledhill: In verses 5–6 the controlling metaphor is that of cultivating a vineyard, whereas in verses 7–8 it is that of shepherding or pasturing.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Commentators frequently treat the second strophe (v 8) as the **man’s line**, no doubt because the text refers to the woman as the “*most beautiful of women*” and especially because she addressed her question to the man. Thus, it may be a tease by him (e.g., Murphy, 134). But there is no reason to think that **the chorus** could not answer her question or refer to her as beautiful.

Exum (ZAW 85 [1973] 72) demonstrates a pattern in vv 5–10 that indicates that the chorus sings in v 8 (see figure 6). So construed, **this strophe is the response of the chorus to the woman**, notwithstanding the fact that she addressed her question to the man. In addition, elsewhere only the chorus calls her “*most beautiful of women*” (“*the most beautiful among women*”; the phrase also appears in 5:9 and 6:1, both of which belong to the **chorus**). The tenor does not employ this sobriquet; he characteristically calls her “*my companion*”; “*my sister*”; and “*bride*.” Thus, it is fairly certain that v 8 belongs to the **chorus**.

α (“*beautiful*”; vv 5–6; woman to daughters/chorus)

β (“*you shepherd*”; v 7; woman to man)

β' (“*and shepherd?*”; v 8; daughters/chorus to woman)

α' (“*they are beautiful*”; v 10; man to woman)

Fig. 6. **Exum**’s analysis of Song 1:5–10

David Guzik: the picture is clear: she wanted to know where her beloved was, because she simply wanted to be **with him**.

Daniel Akin: This glorious future Shepherd-King is anticipated in the bridegroom-shepherd-king of the Song of Songs. He is the One who pastures well His sheep and gives them rest. His presence banishes all fears and insecurities, for He has promised those who love Him, “*I will never leave you or forsake you*” (**Heb 13:5**; cf. **Deut 31:6**). We may draw near to this Shepherd-King and find protection, provision, security, and shade. **First Peter 2:21** teaches us to follow in the steps, the tracks (**Song 1:8**), of the one who is “*the Shepherd and Guardian of [our] souls*” (**1 Pet 2:25**). Here in Song of Songs we find a faithful and loving Shepherd, a Shepherd-King, whom the people can love, trust, draw near to, and follow. Here we find a shepherd-king who points us to Jesus.

I. (:7) INVESTIGATIVE QUESTION – WHERE CAN WE RENDEZVOUS AT NOON? (Female – Addressing the Shepherd)

A. Soliciting the Where

*"Tell me, O you whom my soul loves,
Where do you pasture your flock,
Where do you make it lie down at noon?"*

Richard Hess: Of the five lines in v. 7, the first three have verbs in first position that address the male. The female seeks knowledge from her lover. He is also a shepherd who grazes his flock. He takes them out to pasture and gives them rest from their traveling during the heat of the midday. This term is emphasized by the two questions. Both have the same interrogative, “*Where?*” (‘*ékāh*’), followed by a verb in the same form. This parallelism of syntax and content is then followed by an adverb that functions to indicate the time, “*noon*” (‘*šohōrāyim*’). The female desires to join him at that time so that they may be alone together. The sun’s heat (v. 6) that caused her physical appearance contrasts with the midday sun of v. 7 that brings the need for rest and an opportunity to enjoy the company of her lover. Thus the negatives are turned into possibilities of something much better. In order to achieve her goal, however, she must know where he takes the flocks. Twice she repeats the key question: “*Where?*”

Tom Gledhill: She asks him (literally) ‘*Where do you pasture, where do you cause to lie down at noon?*’ The verbs to pasture and to cause to lie down normally would take an object. He would pasture his flock, and cause his sheep to lie down. But here in the words of the girl, the verbs are intransitive. No objects are given. Now this indicates a subtle undercurrent to her words. For the verb to pasture, or to graze the flock (‘*rā’â*’) has the same consonantal root as the word meaning darling or intimate companion (‘*rā’yâ*’). Not only so, but to ‘graze’ is also used metaphorically as a description of some sort of erotic activity (**6:3**, ‘*He grazes among the lilies*’). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the phrase ‘*One who pastures harlots*’ has clear sexual connotations. So there is perhaps a veiled **double entendre** here. The girl is asking for a secret rendezvous with the

possibility of some loving encounter between them. She may have herself in mind as the object of his causing to lie down at noon.

Tremper Longman: **M. Falk** suggests that “because the garden and its flowers are associated with female sexuality, pasturing is usually symbolic of male sexual activity.”

B. Specifying the Why

*“For why should I be like one who veils herself
Beside the flocks of your companions?”*

Iain Duguid: She is also aware of the social risks that come with searching for him. She does not want to have to conceal her identity as one who veils herself, which might lead to her being regarded as a loose woman or a prostitute (like Tamar in **Gen. 38:14**; **Fox** 1985: 103). She wants to be able to find the one whom her soul loves on his own, so that she can be with him with unveiled face, able to pursue a deeper relationship with him.

Tremper Longman: The question and the answer are both playful; indeed, the unit might be called a “tease.” The question exposes the woman’s yearning for the man’s company; the language expresses a concern that their meeting remain hidden from others. She needs to know where he will be so that she does not have to ask directions. She indicates that if he does not give her directions, then she will have to pursue him while wearing a veil, to hide her identity from others.

Tom Gledhill: If she has no specific directions, she will be wandering around blindly in search of him, and she will be in danger of being mistaken for a prostitute, plying her trade amongst the other shepherds. A veiled woman has been the subject of much discussion. Literally it means ‘*like one who wraps herself up*’. Others have emended it to a similar verbal root meaning ‘like one who wanders’ or ‘goes astray’. Now not all prostitutes were veiled, as Tamar was, and not every veiled woman is a prostitute. But it does seem likely that the implication of the girl’s words is that she does not want the shame of being thought a harlot. Perhaps it is a veiled threat to her lover. ‘If you don’t tell me, I’ll be taken as a loose woman. Now you wouldn’t want that, would you?’ Or perhaps it gives an indication of the depth of her urgency, a throwing of caution to the winds, as she throws herself with bravado into this reckless act in which she has to brave the wolf-whistles of the shepherds.

David Guzik: In this the maiden shows that she is both **humble** (in that she doesn’t want to make an ostentatious search for her beloved) and she has **integrity**, not wanting to even appear like one of these “loose girls.” She understood that when it comes to sexual attraction and reputation, what others think does matter.

[Alternate translation advocated for by **Duane Garrett / Paul House**:

*“You don’t want me to be like a woman picking at fleas
among the flocks of your companions!”]*

II. (:8) INTELLIGENT ADVICE – FOLLOW THE COMMON SENSE TRAIL (Chorus – Advising the Female)

A. Teasing the Answer

“If you yourself do not know, Most beautiful among women,”

B. Telling the Obvious – Go where you would expect him to be

*“Go forth on the trail of the flock,
And pasture your young goats By the tents of the shepherds.”*

[Alternative: some commentators take the advice instead as ironic and disdainful:]

Peter Pett: Their reply is probably ironic. They are saying that she may be the fairest among women, but, if she is so naive and insensitive that she cannot immediately identify the king’s tent, perhaps it would be better if she spent her time following the sheep tracks and feeding her young kids besides the other shepherd’s tents, for she does not deserve him. It may be that there is here a hint of jealousy here, and also a suggestion that if the king really had summoned her he would have ensured that she would know the way.

Jack Deere: the verse seems too cold and distant in tone for Solomon. So it may be a disdainful reply by the friends: “If you, of all people, do not know where he is, go to the other shepherds where you really belong anyway.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is spending quality time together so important in a relationship?
- 2) How would you suggest improving the communication in your relationship with your spouse?
- 3) To what extent should the woman pursue the man?
- 4) In what ways does this passage point us to Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tom Gledhill: These verses prompt us to reflect on the degrees of **aloneness** and togetherness which it is appropriate for a developing relationship to sustain. We may sometimes be tempted to think, especially in the early days of courtship, that the ultimate joy consists of being in the other’s presence every hour of the day and night. But this starry-eyed romanticism needs to be tempered by the fact that each one of us

needs to have a degree of ‘**private space**’, to enable us to stand apart and evaluate and come to terms with the growing friendship. To be crowded out by the other partner can often lead to a growth of resentment and hostility. We need to be able to breathe freely, without the sense that we are under inspection all the time. We need to be given time to grow into a relationship without a constant pressure bearing down upon us. We must give each other time and space to go our own ways and pursue our own interests. And this requires much trust, a letting-go by the partner, and then a coming together again. The degree to which we can participate in the other’s enthusiasms needs to be considered with some hard-headed realism. A confusion of expectations in this area can end up in bitter frustration unless a new *modus vivendi* is achieved. But of course new interests can blossom and flourish within the relaxed harmony of love.

Daniel Akin: She misses him. She wants to be with him. To speak so frankly exposes her heart, but it will also excite the heart of her lover. At noon the sheep would sleep. The other shepherds would be resting. There would be time just for them. No distractions. No interruptions. A mid-day rendezvous! What a great idea! What a creative lady we see. Their meeting would be outside in the wide open spaces, perhaps under a shade tree, perhaps in a temporary hut or shelter. Even as she sorrows over his absence, she strategizes about how to make their intimate time together new, exciting, and memorable. But you can’t love them if you’re not with them. They need to rendezvous and get together, and they need to do it now.

To wear a veil as she wandered among the other flocks and shepherds would be embarrassing. It could, in that day, give the impression that she was a prostitute (see **Gen 38:14-15**) or that she was possibly in mourning. A prostitute has many men, but if they are absent, she has no man she can call her own. There is no one to whom she can point and say, “That man is my man.” Shulammitte did not want there to be the slightest doubt that Solomon was hers and she was his. For there to be even a question concerning their fidelity and commitment to each other would be shameful. Shulammitte knew there was a cost, a price to be paid, in committing herself for a lifetime to another person, and she was more than willing to make the sacrifice. . .

Below are ten suggestions to help keep open good lines of **communication** between a husband and wife. Walk through the list together, and then talk through what you each see individually as strengths and weaknesses. Work hard at listening to your spouse’s perspective! It will be worth it.

Develop common interests. Start with the spiritual.

Learn about each other’s occupations and interests and try to put yourself mentally into your mate’s situation to foster mutual understanding.

Sharpen your sensitivity radar. Observe your spouse for signs of satisfaction, frustration, happiness, weariness, etc., and react appropriately.

Learn to listen. Be intentional. Focus! Don’t try to pry open a closed mind, but when your spouse voluntarily talks, listen attentively and intelligently.

Make yourself an interesting and desirable person. Keep mentally and physically fit and fresh so that you are magnetic to your mate. (And watch out for those tired late-night conversations!)

Avoid “sore spots” in conversation. Always approach “danger” areas with proper timing. Work at saying the right thing at the right time and in the right way.

Learn to accept criticism in a spirit of love and meekness. Try to examine yourself realistically from the viewpoint of your mate. Develop a teachable spirit.

Discuss problems with a willingness to settle for limited objectives (not having your way!), if necessary. Your overall relationship is more important than winning a temporary “victory.” In this context, “compromise” is a good word. Blend your recreational programs so that you can relax and “let off steam” together. Taking a 30-minute walk on a regular basis is an excellent strategy and habit.

As a wife, recognize that you need to siphon off tension. Work at being calm and cool-headed. As a husband, be decisive and reassuring in your love.

Take at least an annual time-out for a husband-wife “retreat” away from home. Evaluate the past and set goals for the future. Ask the Lord to help you learn from the past even as you plot a path for the future.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 1:9 – 2:7

TITLE: SONG OF MUTUAL ADMIRATION AND ROMANTIC LOVE

BIG IDEA:

RESPONSIVE EXCHANGES OF MUTUAL ADMIRATION ENHANCE THE PROGRESSION OF THE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Hess: Situated within the canon of the Jewish and Christian Bible, the Song celebrates physical desire and carnal love between a man and a woman as created and blessed by God. The Song explores this divine blessing. The female begins the exchange with appeal to each of the senses in her praise of their love. She moves from this description to a desire to be with her lover (1:2–7). The male’s response serves to reassure and confirm her appeal to him, by extolling her great physical beauty (1:8–11). The female takes up the dialogue with her “king” on his couch and moves quickly to a picture or fantasy of greater intimacy as he spends the night between her breasts (1:12–14). Following the reaffirmation of the female’s beauty (1:15), the female (1:16–2:1) and then the male (2:2) use repeated and intensive images of the natural world and especially the most beautiful and sensual flora of ancient Israel. Here, as well, the beauty created by God in nature corresponds to God’s creation of the love that the couple enjoys. The section concludes with the lovers united and with the adjuration of the female to her companions that love will come at its proper time (2:3–7). In the Song of Songs, which almost never refers directly to God, this suggests yet another divine blessing, that God’s greatest gift of physical love comes according to his own timing and within the natural world that he has also created.

Daniel Akin: Solomon had learned, or was at least in the process of learning, to speak her “love language.” **Gary Chapman**, in *The Five Love Languages*, points out that we all speak at least one of five love languages. Some are even equipped to speak several, and with varying dialects! However, it is rare that a husband and wife speak the same love language. After all, opposites do attract. **Dr. Chapman** identifies the five love languages as:

- Words of Affirmation
- Receiving Gifts
- Acts of Service
- Quality Time
- Physical Touch

The following verses will leap with personal applications if we will keep this insight in mind. As a couple grows in their knowledge of one another, they will also learn to hear, understand, appreciate, show love to, and respond to one another.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The governing topic is the question, What enhances the woman's beauty? The man and the chorus desire to adorn her with expensive ornaments of gold and silver. This sentiment is not bad, and it is born of love for her, but it substitutes a superficial embellishment for true adornments. She asserts rather that her desirability is enhanced by her fragrances of spikenard, myrrh, and henna and that her beauty is enhanced by the love of her lover. She gives off the fragrance of spikenard as she waits for him to come to her. She will have him, like her myrrh, between her breasts. He is like henna in that he adorns the beauty of her, the vineyard. The fragrance of these perfumes is like love itself; it is invisible but powerful and sweet. Her real adornment, she asserts, is the groom and the love she has for him.

I. (1:9-11) FIRST STANZA -- THE ADMIRATION OF THE GROOM FOR HIS BRIDE – HER SENSUALITY AND EXQUISITE BEAUTY

A. (:9) Her Sensuality

*“To me, my darling, you are like My mare
among the chariots of Pharaoh.”*

Richard Hess: these animals were used to pull chariots around the battlefield. This provided the quickest and surest means to gain a strategic position from which archers on the chariots could fire their weapons. Therefore, the comparison of the female lover with a mare would first and foremost emphasize her nobility and her value. . .

It is no surprise that [*darling*] is always used of the female lover. However, its occurrences also suggest that it forms a special term of endearment between the male lover and his partner. He alone uses it of her. This term “*darling*” also provides a wordplay with the pastoral images of the shepherdess who “*tends*” her flock in **v. 7**, since both words derive from verbal roots spelled with identical consonants (**r** **h**).

Iain Duguid: Just as those cherished royal horses often had **decorative** bridles, so too the woman's cheeks were adorned with ‘*earrings*’ (NIV) and her neck with a jeweled necklace (or perhaps an Egyptian-style jeweled collar; **Munro** 1995: 57).

Tremper Longman: Pope, however, puts forward an attractive hypothesis for the meaning of this verse. He first reminds us that chariot horses were usually stallions, not mares. He then describes an attested defensive strategy against chariot attack. As the stallions rush toward their intended target, a mare in heat is let loose among them, driving them to distraction so that they cannot proceed with the attack. He appeals specifically to the report of an Egyptian attack against Qadesh where this technique was used. It failed, though, when the mare was killed by an Egyptian soldier. To paraphrase the thought of the man, he is saying that she drives all the men crazy with her attractiveness, with the implication that she drives him to distraction as well. He will voice a similar sentiment in **4:9**. I find **Pope's** proposal not only interesting, but persuasive.

Tom Gledhill: So if our lover is saying that the effect his beloved has on him is the same as that which a mare has amidst a host of military stallions, pawing the ground and neighing lustily, then that puts a very different light on the picture. He is saying that his beloved sends him into a frenzy of desire, that is the ultimate in sex appeal.

The horse is a very sensual animal. No-one can stand close alongside a large magnificent race horse, or a ceremonial parade horse, without sensing something of the vibrancy, the thrill of so much potential power hidden within those large glistening flanks. There is a sense of awe at the aesthetics of such power.

Our lover senses a similar power within his girl, a kind of animal magnetism, and it unsettles him, by her sheer physical proximity. This allure, this attractiveness, is made more deadly by the exposure of skin; a thinly veiled body.

Bruce Hurt: Now Solomon inserts a surprising simile, comparing the Shulammitte to a mare which was a reference to her strength, graceful movement, and beauty, which was a "positive" comment from Solomon who loved horses (cf **1 Kings 4:26**). Furthermore, a horse in the Near Eastern culture was a cherished companion and not a beast of burden. In addition, stallions and not mares would pull a chariot of Pharaoh ("*among the chariots...*"). The presence of a mare among stallions in fact would be the ultimate distraction, and so in an indirect way Solomon pays the Shulammitte an ultimate compliment regarding her sexual attractiveness!

Duane Garrett / Paul House: If this is the meaning of the metaphor, however, it is odd that the canto does not develop it at all. From the following verses, it appears that the ornamentation and stately appearance of the woman are the real point. The woman is likened to a mare rather than to a stallion for the simple reason that she is female, and the point that in the Egyptian order of battle the chariot corps actually used only stallions, even if true, is irrelevant. The text says nothing about a military setting for this verse, much less about a mare running loose among stallions during a battle.

B. (:10) Her Exquisite Beauty

*"Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with strings of beads."*

Synonymous parallelism

Richard Hess: The earrings and jewels provide enhancement of the woman's beauty. Rather than a necessity to create an attraction that is not there naturally, these accoutrements serve to make more beautiful what already is desirable. They also do more. The earrings and jewels form appropriate adornments for one so noble and beautiful. The male lover wishes to further emphasize the incredible desire that he feels for the woman's beauty. Therefore, he describes her physical form. Her cheeks and neck may be the only parts of her body, along with the rest of her head, that are visible to the public. The male lover thus praises his partner's body in an initially modest manner. All the while he focuses on the physical form. . .

the male's concern addresses the one element that threatens to mar the female's otherwise perfect praise of their love. He uses it as a means to restore her confidence by reinforcing his love for her in the one area that she has displayed insecurity.

Iain Duguid: Instead of dismissing the woman's fears about her appearance as unspiritual or ridiculous, the man responds kindly by repeatedly affirming her beauty and enhancing it through his gifts of jewelry. By his words of praise, the man is building the woman up and assuring her of his love.

Tom Gledhill: The girl in **verses 9–11** is obviously dressed in her 'Sabbath-best'. She is no longer in her work-a-day clothes, tending the vineyards. Her lover sees her in her festive outfit, decked out with all the finery of shawls, veils, sashes, bangles, headbands, ear-rings, tiaras, head-dresses and so on.

C. (:11) Promise of Additional Adornments (Chorus)

*"We will make for you ornaments of gold
With beads of silver."*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: One can argue, as many interpreters do, that **Song 1:11** also belongs to the man, but the plural verb implies otherwise, and the interpretation of the wider context validates ascribing this verse to the chorus.

Reformation Study Bible: the "*daughters of Jerusalem*" echo the girl's praise of her lover; here they respond similarly to his praise of her. The plural subject "*we*" goes against taking this verse as a speech of the girl's lover using courtly language. The so-called "royal we" is not used in ancient Near Eastern literature.

II. (:12-14) SECOND STANZA – THE ADMIRATION OF THE BRIDE FOR HER GROOM – THE FRAGRANCE OF LOVE

A. (:12) Fragrance of Perfume in the Royal Setting

*"While the king was at his table,
My perfume gave forth its fragrance."*

Richard Hess: In each of these three stanzas of two lines, the first line describes the male lover from the female's perspective. He is introduced as a king on his couch. However, with the strong focus on the fragrances, he becomes the myrrh and henna of **vv. 13 and 14**. Of course, this is made clear by the equation of the noun clause in the first line of each of those verses: "*A sachet of myrrh/bouquet of henna is my lover to me.*" Further, the second word in each of the three verses is the king, the myrrh, and the henna. These three are the only words in the entire poem (**1:12–14**) that are preceded by the definite article. They are all related in the poem and identified with one another. . .

The royal couch would evoke thoughts of lovemaking and the joys the female would experience with her lover. The spikenard or pure nard was a fragrance native to the

Himalayan region of India (the word “*nard*” appears in Sanskrit literature). Its scarcity and the difficulty of manufacturing and transporting it a long distance made it both valuable and exotic.

Tremper Longman: Lovemaking involves all the senses; here the emphasis is on smell. The sweet smell of perfume arouses other senses and emotions.

B. (:13) Fragrance of Myrrh in the Intimate Setting

*“My beloved is to me a pouch of myrrh
Which lies all night between my breasts.”*

Richard Hess: The picture of lying between her breasts evokes a scene of sexual pleasure. And yet the verse is not a description of the event itself but the fantasy of the female as she expresses rhapsodies of the best of fragrances and the most desirable of physical experiences.

Tremper Longman: The sachet “*lodges*” (*lyn*) between her breasts, the verb denoting a lengthy, languorous stay.

This verse stretched the imagination of allegorical interpreters with its explicit sensuality. Cyril of Alexandria is at his creative best when he suggests that the verse describes what we today would call biblical theology. The breasts are the Old and New Testaments, presumably only linked by their two-ness. Jesus Christ is the sachet of myrrh. The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old in the New revealed. Jesus spans the testaments as the sachet spans the woman’s two breasts.

Daniel Akin: Nestled between her breasts against her beating heart, there is an intimate bond of love, longing, and loyalty that cannot be broken. There is a connection, a commitment that virtually transcends words. All night long he laid his head as a precious fragrance between her breasts. She trusts him so completely, she loves him so dearly, she can make available to him the most intimate and precious parts of her body. She holds nothing back. She knows she does not need to.

C. (:14) Fragrance of Henna Blossoms in the Romantic Country Setting

*“My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms
In the vineyards of Engedi.”*

Richard Hess: The female has moved from the most exotic and valuable of perfumes, and its association with royalty, to the least expensive and most accessible of perfumes.

Iain Duguid: Once again there is movement in the poem from a domestic location to the countryside, as we travel from the king’s couch, which was presumably located in his chambers (v. 4), to the vineyards of Engedi, an oasis on the western shores of the Dead Sea. Engedi was the location of royal gardens, the home of some of these perfumes, and would have been all the more romantic for its isolation and the stark contrast between its lushness and the dryness of its wilderness location.

Tremper Longman: The surrounding landscape is desolate, but En-gedi is a delightful oasis with waterfall and stream. Hidden and private, it is a romantic place to be sure, contributing to the contrast developed through the Song between the countryside as place of love and the city as a place of alienation.

Iain Provan: We deduce that women of the time may also have secreted clusters of these blossoms about their person. It is perhaps also significant that a cluster of henna blossoms is shaped somewhat like the male sexual organ. The blossoms in question are said to derive from “*the vineyards of En Gedi*”—a famously fertile oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

III. (:15-17) THIRD STANZA – MUTUAL PRAISE OF THE OTHER’S BEAUTY

Tom Gledhill: 1:15 – 2:3 -- Here we have a **series of short exchanges** between the boy and the girl, of crisp point and counterpoint. The symmetry of the speeches is somewhat obscured by the NIV; but the Hebrew itself highlights the balanced structure of the verses. **Verses 15** and **16** both begin with ‘*How beautiful*’. The girl in **verse 16** then introduces the idea of their verdant bower, which is taken up in the next verse by the boy. In **2:1** the girl rather deprecatingly compares herself to a rose of Sharon and a lily of the valleys, which elicits the counter response from the boy, like a lily among thorns. The girl’s final response in **2:3** begins with a similar refrain, Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest. A division at the end of **2:2** is somewhat artificial, since **2:3** continues her admiration of her lover, though in soliloquy form—she addresses him in the third person. Perhaps she is dreaming or fantasizing as to how their love will be consummated. There is a progression of theme from **1:15** to **2:7**; mutual compliments using the imagery from the natural order (doves, verdancy, cedars, firs, rose of Sharon, lily of the valleys, an apple tree) lead to dreams about being together in some leafy bower where they can be alone, undisturbed and relaxed. This privacy leads inevitably to the blossoming of desire (**2:4–5**) and to the intimate embrace and fondling of **2:6**, concluding with the adjuration to the daughters of Jerusalem.

A. (:15) Beautiful Dove Eyes (The Groom)

*“How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are!
Your eyes are like doves.”*

Richard Hess: the metaphor of the male lover describes his beloved as someone whose depth of love and desire is betrayed by her eyes. The dramatic image is that of the couple staring deeply and lovingly into one another’s eyes.

Iain Duguid: Gazing deeply into someone’s eyes is surely one of the most personal experiences possible.

Tom Gledhill: The human eyes, together with the mouth are the most eloquent expressions of our inner feelings. There are bright sparkling eyes, indicating a vivacious personality; there are shifty eyes, hiding guilt and deception, never holding the gaze of an enquirer for the necessary length of time for normal contact to be made; there are mocking eyes, contemptuous eyes; there are arrogant eyes; cruel, despotic eyes; eyes full of fear and apprehension; eyes that indicate exhaustion or hopelessness; eyes that are dead with despair or vacuity; dreamy eyes that focus on another unseen world; lustful, leering eyes, full of depraved intent. Our eyes mirror exactly our inner disposition. Did not Jesus say, *‘the eye is the lamp of the body’*? Whatever this enigmatic saying may mean, surely it conveys at least the idea of our ‘inner light’ shining through our eyes? Of course, when the Song talks about the girl’s eyes, it refers to the totality of her eyes: the pupils, the iris, the eyelids, the eyebrows, the eye pouches, and the lines beneath the eye. Our eyes are the focus of attention in any act of communication. They are the initial means of contact.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Keel ([1994] 7073) argues that iconographic evidence conclusively demonstrates that the dove was a symbol of sexuality across the ancient eastern Mediterranean world. He cites, among other examples: a Syrian cylinder seal from ca. 1750 showing the fertility goddess unveiling herself before her mate as a dove flies overhead; a Mitanni cylinder seal from the thirteenth century in which the goddess holds a staff with a flying dove; also, a scarab from eight- or seventh-century Lachish in which a dove is beneath the sign of the moon, a symbol of the goddess. This evidence seems to be sufficient to demonstrate that ancient peoples associated doves with sexuality, albeit not exclusively with sexuality (as the other biblical texts, cited above, indicate). It is possible that your eyes are doves is cultural code for “I find you sexually attractive.”

It is possible, of course, that we are trying too hard. The doves may not strictly symbolize anything. The phrase *“your eyes are like doves”* may be simply an expression of attraction and affection that transcends any logical connection. When one thinks of a dove, one thinks of soft cooing, fluttering wings, gentleness, and in the case of the white dove, brightness of color. Rather than bind the term in a metaphoric equation, we should perhaps simply take pleasure in the connotations.

B. (:16) Handsome Beloved in a Fruitful Setting (The Bride)

*“How handsome you are, my beloved, And so pleasant!
Indeed, our couch is luxuriant!”*

Richard Hess: With the NIV in v. 16, it might seem more appropriate to translate the term *“beautiful”* as *“handsome”* for a male, but such a translation would lose the sense of a repetition of precisely the same term in the Hebrew. This, as well as the verbal parallel with the male’s praise of her in v. 15, allows the female both to express her view of her partner and harmonize with him in a corresponding poetic line. . . . What does it mean for a bed to be a **spreading tree**? Perhaps it refers to the fruitfulness of the love that the couple enjoys. Perhaps it describes a kind of bed associated with trees or foliage.

C. (:17) Pleasant and Secure Setting (Combined Groom and Bride)

*“The beams of our houses are cedars,
Our rafters, cypresses.”*

Richard Hess: This text embraces the created world and its pleasures with the realization that this all is a gift and to be celebrated and appreciated as such. Even the house and the bed do not originate only from human labor, but have their ultimate source in raw materials that come from the natural and created world. Hence the Song never attempts to worship nature but instead looks to it as the good world that God has created. Within this context the natural joys of the world may be appreciated and celebrated. This is nowhere more true than in the case of the physical love that the couple enjoys. Their love is part of the natural world.

Tremper Longman: The figurative language of **verse 16** continues in this verse. The woman describes the “*house*” where she will share a moment of intimacy with her lover. The picture is of a well-forested area, where there is a grassy opening. As they lie in the grass and look around and above, they are surrounded—that is, protected—by the trees. The trees provide privacy, and more: the cedar and the juniper are trees that produce a pleasant scent, making this spot a pleasant place for an intimate encounter.

IV. (2:1-3) FOURTH STANZA – UNIQUELY ATTRACTIVE

A. (:1) Self Praise from the Bride

*“I am the rose of Sharon,
The lily of the valleys.”*

B. (:2) Confirming Praise from the Groom

*“Like a lily among the thorns,
So is my darling among the maidens.”*

Richard Hess: The lotus continues the nature imagery of the preceding text, and it surely forms a tie with the previous verse as a means by which the male affirms the female’s boast of her attractions. Hence the lotus may well continue the theme of prosperity and success, as well as the natural form and beauty that this delicate flower possesses.

Iain Duguid: The man, however, turns her own image on its head, asserting that far from simply being one among many other equally attractive flowers, she is as uniquely attractive as a solitary lily would be when set among brambles. Brambles are the exact opposite of lilies: ugly and useless, a sign of curse rather than blessing. On the other hand, even though lilies are common enough, they are proverbially beautiful (**Matt. 6:28**); indeed, they formed a prominent part of the decorations of Solomon’s temple (**1 Kgs 7:26**). The man thus declares that his beloved is not merely the first in rank among many beautiful women; in his eyes, she is the one and only beauty among women.

Robert Rayburn: He says she is the fairest of ten thousand, a lily among the brambles. There is a lot of this characteristic language of love in the Song, by which I mean what is literally hyperbole, an exaggeration – the man wouldn't want to be taken to mean that all other women are actually ugly (brambles) – but as an expression of love such language is a literal expression of his feeling. A man doesn't have to believe that his beloved is literally the most beautiful woman in the world – and that objective observers would agree that she is, professional photographers, Hollywood casting directors, etc. – in order to say and mean that she is to him the most beautiful woman in the world. Beauty, like so many other things in life, is an effect, and the man's love for her makes any woman the most beautiful in the world!

C. (:3) Distinctive Praise of the Groom by the Bride

*“Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the young men.
In his shade I took great delight and sat down,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.”*

Richard Hess: “*apples*” seem to be used less for sustenance and more for refreshment, the pleasure of their taste, and the accompanying odor. Thus, if the lotus enhances the pleasure of visual form and beauty, the apple tree stimulates the taste and olfactory senses. . .

The fourth line begins with “*its fruit*” as something desirable to the female. Together these descriptions portray the female's relation to her lover as one who provides an abiding physical closeness and refreshment and as one whose physical touch and taste is a heady sweetness. As noted earlier, so here again the female expands the sensuality of the descriptions, accommodating more of them with lengthier and more complete explanations. In contrast, the male focuses on the visual aspect and draws from it his praise and appreciation of the female. However, this verse and the following description go beyond the sensual experiences and their excitement to include physical actions that will describe the closeness and support that the lovers provide one another.

Iain Duguid: It is striking that though both the woman and the man praise each other, they praise different things: he affirms that she is beautiful, while she affirms that he makes her feel safe and that his company is sweet. While stereotypes may be dangerous, it is worth noting that men and women are different and non-interchangeable in the Song, just as they are in the rest of Scripture. The ideal marriage involves not only the blending of two different people, but of two distinct genders into a greater whole, as **Genesis 2:24** anticipated.

Tremper Longman: She continues to use the imagery to comment on their **intimacy**. She not only looks at the apple tree from afar, but she places herself, figuratively, under his protecting and comforting branches (*I desire his shade and I dwell there*). Their physical union is represented by the fact that she tastes his fruit. **Pope** cites the title of two relatively recent songs to suggest that the sensual nature of the apple tree as a place

of romance continues down to the present: “*In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree*” and “*Don’t Sit Under the Apple Tree.*”

Tom Gledhill: Perhaps more importantly, however, she delights to sit in his shade. Here there is a strong indication of the role of the male as protector of the female. He provides the security in which she can shelter and blossom. It was considered an abnormal reversal of the established order that a woman should protect a man. This male role is not merely one of finance, or overall head of the family, but one of emotional and psychological strength to the woman.

V. (2:4-6) FIFTH STANZA – PROGRESSION OF DISPLAY OF AFFECTION (The Bride)

A. (:4) Reception and Commitment

*“He has brought me to his banquet hall,
And his banner over me is love.”*

Tremper Longman: The man has marked her out as his own and has stamped her with a public display of his love. The metaphor implies belonging, inclusion, and commitment.

Reformation Study Bible: Lit. “*house of wine.*” The setting is outdoors. The lovers’ “*house*” to this point has been the forest (**Song 1:16, 17**). Now they move to a different “*house,*” namely, the young man’s vineyard, his “*house*” of wine. The expression continues the royal imagery of **Song 1:4, 12** (the shepherd is a king), and the comparison of love and wine in **Song 1:2**.

B. (:5) Refreshment and Revival

*“Sustain me with raisin cakes, Refresh me with apples,
Because I am lovesick.”*

Tremper Longman: Raisin cakes and apples may provide more than physical sustenance and may have been understood to be aphrodisiacs. . .

Love has made her faint. The noun *hōlat* from the verb *hlh* denotes a loss of physical strength. Often it denotes illness, not just weakness. This phrase could conceivably be translated “I am sick with love,” but the meaning is roughly the same. She is overwhelmed emotionally and physically by her love for the man. It is a strong statement of the power of love and may also contain a cautionary note to the effect that love is wonderful but not something to play around with.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The image of lying on a bed of raisins and apples has layers of meaning. Lying down implies rest for someone who is weary or ill, and the eating of food gives strength to such persons. On the other hand, lying down has sexual implications, and sweetmeats such as raisins and apples probably connote love play. Lying down in these foods also betokens luxuriant extravagance. Her request is thus an appeal for both strength and for affection, but it suggests a paradise setting.

Tom Gledhill: “*Spread me out among the raisin cakes*” -- The raisin cakes have pagan cultic connotations. The cakes were made in the shape of a nude female with exaggerated genitalia. So there are strong erotic associations here. . . She is swooning with desire. She has that ache in the pit of her stomach, she has that loss of appetite which can only be cured by her being ‘*spread out*’ with her lover, and by eating and drinking of the delights of love-making. That is the only cure for her malady. She sees herself held in the strong embrace of her lover as they lie together under their leafy shade, her head locked in the strong left arm of the boy while with his right hand he gently caresses her. She allows him to explore her body, the smooth mountains and valleys of her shapely contours. She has surrendered to his advances.

Jack Deere: These three things—protection by her lover, intimacy with him, and obvious displays and expressions of love from him—are crucial factors that enable a woman to develop a sense of security and self-worth and thereby to enjoy a stable marriage.

C. (:6) Romantic Embrace

*“Let his left hand be under my head
And his right hand embrace me.”*

Richard Hess: Now they are physically close as only lovers may be. They melt into one another’s arms, and the dizziness of love’s overpowering sweetness is enhanced rather than removed.

(2:7) REFRAIN – DON’T RUSH LOVE (The Bride)

“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, That you will not arouse or awaken my love, Until she pleases.”

Bruce Hurt: quoting **Net Note:** Frequently, when oaths were taken in the ancient world, witnesses were invoked in order to solemnize the vow and to act as jurists should the oath someday be broken. Cosmic forces such as the “*heavens and earth*” were often personified to act as witnesses to an oath (e.g., **Deut 32:1; Isa 1:2; Mic 1:2; 6:1–2; Ps 50:2**). In this case, the “*witnesses*” are the “*gazelles and stags of the field*” (**Song 2:7; 3:5**). These animals were frequently used as symbols of romantic love in the OT (**Pr 5:19**). And in Egyptian and Mesopotamian love literature and Ugaritic poetry the gazelle was often associated with sexual fertility. For instance, in the following excerpt from a Mesopotamian incantation text the stag is referred to in the context of sexual potency in which a woman urges an ailing male: “With the love-[making of the mountain goat] six times, with the lovemaking of a stag seven times, with the lovemaking of a partridge twelve times, make love to me! Make love to me because I am young! And the lovemaking of a stag...Make love to me!” (**R. D. Biggs, Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations [TCS], 26, lines 4–8**).

Iain Duguid: The oath itself is to be sworn by the gazelles or the does of the field. At first sight, it may seem odd to swear an oath by a group of wild animals. These animals, along with stags, are clearly associated with lovemaking elsewhere in the Song, which suggests that to swear by these animals is to swear by love itself. Yet the sounds of the Hebrew words for gazelles (*šēbā'ôt*) and does of the field (*'ayēlôt haśśādeh*) also deliberately recall the divine names *yhwh šēbā'ôt* (*'the Lord of Hosts'*) and *'ēl šadday* (*'God Almighty'*), indicating clearly who the true God of love is. . .

There is nothing wrong with the passionate desire for sexual union, for the eager longing to be embraced by one's beloved in the house of wine. However, as the rest of Scripture makes clear, the proper place and time for such union is only within marriage. Those who are as yet unmarried, such as the daughters of Jerusalem, are warned about the danger of stirring up such feelings before their time.

In our contemporary context, we live in a culture that spends much of its waking time seeking to stir up our desires for love and sex, a culture in which sex outside marriage is increasingly regarded as normal. The woman in the Song urges all of us to beware of those temptations, not because sex is dirty or insipid, but precisely because it is so beautiful and potent. It is a glorious gift given to us by God, intended to bond two people inseparably together for life by its unique and overwhelming power.

Richard Hess: The appreciation of love as a gift from God is the traditional theological understanding of this book. This verse captures the counterbalance. The full appreciation of the joys of physical love can happen only when love comes at the appropriate time with the partner that love chooses. For the Christian, here are the beginnings of a powerful message of physical love as God's gift according to his will and timing. It is not a decision reached by the daughters of Jerusalem (any more than by the sons) but one that must be received when and in the manner that God has decided.

Tremper Longman: **Wait for love to blossom;** don't try to stimulate it artificially. After all, in the preceding verses we have seen that love takes its toll on the woman. She warns the others not to arouse love until they are ready to meet its rigors, both physical and emotional. Love is not a passing fling but rather a demanding and exhausting relationship.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The passion of love and of the powerful emotions of the transition from virgin to sexually active woman are to be experienced with what the OT calls the "*husband of your youth*." The woman is simply telling the younger girl to wait until she finds and marries the man she loves.

Tom Gledhill: What then is there to teach us here about our own love relationships and our thought-lives and fantasies? The first thing that needs to be said is that our imaginations often run far ahead of our physical reactions and they in turn run far ahead of what our actual relationship may be able to bear at that particular moment. When the physical outstrips the fully personal, emotional and psychological integration of two lovers, the danger signals should start flashing. Adulterous thoughts, thoughts of

fornication are all too easy to entertain in the abstract, divorced from a relationship that is developing healthily at its own pace. It seems that the girl in the Song recognizes that here. She wants their love to be consummated, but she is in great tension, because she knows that the time is not yet ripe. In speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem, she is speaking to herself. She is basically telling herself to cool it, to wait for the appropriate time. For the Christian, the appropriate time is always within marriage, never outside it. We are all so clever at rationalizing our own desires, at excusing our own lack of self-discipline of our bodies and of our thought-lives. But we need to be ruthless in this matter, as Jesus himself taught.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it so important to verbalize praise and admiration for your spouse?
- 2) How can you help foster transparency in communication and intimacy in marriage?
- 3) What is the highest praise you have ever received from your spouse?
- 4) What are some of the ways in which you guard against romantic feelings blossoming out of control outside of God's timing and context in marriage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: vv. 9-14 --

- I. Tell Her How Valuable She Is to You (1:9-11).
 - A. Tell her there is no one like her (1:9-10).
 - B. Tell her no cost is too great to honor her (1:11).
- II. Tell Him How Special He Is to You (1:12-14).
 - A. Tell him you desire him (1:12).
 - B. Tell him you love him (1:13).
 - C. Tell him you need him (1:14).

A number of years ago I read a book that had a profound effect on my life as a husband and a father. The book is *The Gift of the Blessing* by Gary Smalley and John Trent. In it they provide both biblical and practical advice on how we can bless rather than curse the relationships of life, how we can build up rather than tear down those we love and care for. When it comes to our mate, their counsel is invaluable. They explain how God has put each of us together in such a way that we have emotional and physical needs that can only be met by acceptance of intrinsic worth, affirmation, encouragement, and unconditional love. We all have the desire and need to receive "the blessing" from

others. "Others" include our heavenly Father, but it should also include our spouse. Neither is to be excluded if we are to receive true holistic blessings. They then point out that the essential elements of the blessing include five things:

1. A meaningful touch. This includes handholding, hugging, kissing, and all types of bodily contact that have the purpose of communicating love and affection.
2. A spoken word. This element can demonstrate love and a sense of worth by the time involved and the message(s) delivered. Its repetitive nature is crucial.
3. Expression of high value. This involves our passing along a message to others that affirms their intrinsic worth as a person. Praising them as valuable is the key idea.
4. Picturing a special future. This is the prophetic aspect of the blessing. What do our words tell others we believe the future holds for them? How do our present descriptions (nicknames) of others lay the foundation for future attitudes and actions on their part? How often it is that children, in particular, fulfill the earlier expectations and predictions of a parent and friends, for good or ill? Positive words of encouragement regarding future possibilities are those that will bless rather than curse.
5. An active commitment to see the blessing come to pass. This characteristic is both God-ward and man-ward. God-wardly, we are to commit others to His blessing and will. Man-wardly, we are personally to make the commitment to spend whatever time, energy, and resources are necessary to bless others.

Quoting **Steve Stephens**: "A healthy marriage is a safe haven from the tensions of everyday life. We need to hear positive things from our mate" ("*37 Things*," 177). He then shares 37 things we can and should say to our mate in order to bless, build up, encourage, and "wow" them! I love his list, and how I pray this will be the normal and regular vocabulary of marriages everywhere, beginning with mine! They prove beyond a shadow of a doubt there is power, awesome power, in praising our spouse.

1. "Good job!"
2. "You are wonderful."
3. "That was really great."
4. "You look gorgeous today."
5. "I don't feel complete without you."
6. "I appreciate all the things you've done for me all these years."
7. "You come first in my life, before kids, career, friends, anything."
8. "I'm glad I married you."
9. "You're the best friend I have."
10. "If I had to do it over again, I'd still marry you."
11. "I wanted you today."
12. "I missed you today."

13. "I couldn't get you out of my mind today."
14. "It's nice to wake up next to you."
15. "I will always love you."
16. "I love to see your eyes sparkle when you smile."
17. "As always, you look good today."
18. "I trust you."
19. "I can always count on you."
20. "You make me feel good."
21. "I'm so proud to be married to you."
22. "I'm sorry."
23. "I was wrong."
24. "What would you like?"
25. "What is on your mind?"
26. "Let me just listen."
27. "You are so special."
28. "I can't imagine life without you."
29. "I wish I were a better mate."
30. "What can I do to help?"
31. "Pray for me."
32. "I'm praying for you today."
33. "I prize every moment we spend together."
34. "Thank you for loving me."
35. "Thank you for accepting me."
36. "Thank you for being my spouse."
37. "You make every day brighter." (Stephens, "37 Things," 177–78)

Tom Gledhill: So our lovers **praise each other's beauty**. Surely this is no mere flattery; they are not out to gain short term advantage by mouthing falsehoods; but they give each other heart-felt praise. The psychological effects of praise and affirmation are beneficial to our well-being. It makes us 'feel good'. We are made to feel important and valuable to others. Surely this is an important part of any relationship. It is the oil that makes the machinery of everyday life run smoothly. It is an added fillip on grey days. It is the unexpectedness of it, the surprise element, that gives us the boost we need. But to set out on a programme of mutual affirmation can often be artificial and sterile in its basic self-serving mechanisms. Much of our ability or willingness to articulate emotion or praise is culturally or temperamentally conditioned. Many men would rather die than praise their wives. Perhaps we all need to break down barriers of reserve and inhibitions in this respect. Of course, it can go to the other extreme, where all our relationships are at a very superficial level of mutual back scratching, at the sort of level of 'how to win friends and influence people', which is at worst self-serving manipulation.

Iain Duguid: **Mutual attraction** is important. If the only biblical advice on seeking a spouse were **Proverbs 31:30** (*'Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised'*), we might not think that chemistry matters in relationships. And, of course, the important point of the Proverbs passage is that chemistry is not the only thing that matters: character is even more vital. Yet the Song

of Songs reminds us that mutual attraction has its own important place. If we cannot honestly say to our spouse on our wedding day that they are unique in our eyes – like a single lily among a world of thorns, or the only apple tree in the whole forest of ordinary trees for us – then we have no business marrying them. . .

Of course, the richest and deepest hope of **experiencing intimacy** is to be found in the One who loved us before the world began, God himself. Our passionate desire for human intimacy, our longing to love and be loved deeply by someone else, is a reflex of the thirst for the intimacy that may be found only in him. At the same time, Christ's self-sacrificial love at the cross provides the remedy for all of our failed attempts to pursue false intimacy in this broken world. Jesus Christ invites all of us to leave behind our barren wanderings in the wilderness and to enter into the refreshing oasis of his love.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 2:8-17

TITLE: *LONGING FOR THE CONSUMMATION OF ROMANTIC LOVE*

BIG IDEA:

ANTICIPATION AND INVITATION TO ROMANTIC LOVE CLIMAXES IN PASSIONATE CONSUMMATION

INTRODUCTION:

Tom Gledhill: The verses of this poem have such simple evocative power that any comment seems almost superfluous. The text is so marvelously alive, that any comment will appear to be very pedestrian. Beautiful poems can too often be reduced to dust and ashes by dry academic analysis. But, for the purposes of our exposition, we can divide the poem quite naturally into the girl's eager anticipation (**verses 8–9**) and the boy's urgent invitation (**verses 10–14**).

Richard Hess: On a larger level, **2:8–17** begin with mountains, gazelle, and stag, and they end with gazelle, stag, and mountains. . .

Contrary to some commentators, the Song does not portray sex as the great and final goal in order to experience true joy. Nor does it suggest that mutual admiration of the lovers, their physical bodies and sensuality, is the source of joy. Rather, the Song directly associates the joy of the heart with the final commitment of marriage. It is only **within this commitment** that all the joys of the male and female lovers come together, for it is only here that they realize the freedom to express those joys without restraint, knowing that the marriage bond seals their love in a lifetime commitment to each other.

Iain Duguid: The reference to gazelles and does (**v. 9**) links this poem to the preceding one (**v. 7**).

Kinlaw: We have seen in the text thus far the beginnings of a very free expression of love between a maiden and a man. The courtship has begun, and the desire for each other is intense. She is weak with passion.

Jack Deere: [Views the woman as anticipating this consummation of physical union in her mind . . . rather than yet experiencing it physically]

Her thoughts of their mutual possession of each other naturally led to her desire for physical intimacy. So in her mind she invited him to *turn* (i.e., to her) with the strength and agility of a *gazelle* or . . . *young stag* (cf. **v. 9; 8:14**). *Rugged hills* is literally, "*hills or mountains of separation or cleavage*." . . . It seems preferable to take this as a subtle reference to her breasts (cf. **4:6**), thus an inner longing that they consummate their marriage. If that is the meaning, then she wanted that intimacy to last during the night *till the day breaks* (lit., "*breathes*") at dawn and the *night shadows* vanish. When their marriage was consummated they did this (see **4:5-6**). As already stated, in

expressing their love in their courtship, the beloved and her lover used **restraint**. Yet because of their deep love and commitment to each other **they longed for their wedding day to come**.

I. (:8-9) EAGER ANTICIPATION – HERE COMES MY STUD (Female)

(:8a) His Awakening Call

“Listen! My beloved!”

Or alternatively: *“Ah, I hear him – my beloved!” (The Living Bible)*

A. (:8b) His Approach – Fervency of Love

*“Behold, he is coming,
Climbing on the mountains,
Leaping on the hills!”*

Trevor Longman: He is moving with agile grace and speed toward his beloved. The scene evokes a sense of excitement and eagerness. . . The excitement of the lover is communicated by the fact that he is leaping and bounding over *mountains* and *hills*. These two words are found together frequently in Hebrew poetry, and they are roughly to be taken as synonyms. They communicate that the lover overcomes obstacles in his desire to reach his beloved. This is an indication of his loving commitment, his determination to make a rendezvous.

Daniel Akin: His aggressiveness, agility, and attractiveness all are recognized by Shulammitte. He is motivated (running, leaping) and he is interested. His actions scream loud and clear, “I want this woman!” His is a holy passion, a righteous desire, as the Song makes clear. He is enthusiastic for her. He is not ashamed to let anyone and everyone know what he feels in his heart for this lady. Her excitement for him, in return, cannot be hidden either.

B. (:9a) His Appeal – Aggressiveness and Sexual Power

*“My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.”*

C. (:9b) His Arrival and Attentiveness

*“Behold, he is standing behind our wall,
He is looking through the windows,
He is peering through the lattice.”*

Richard Hess: the lover is seen to approach the female like an animal that moves rapidly across the terrain. Indeed, that is what happens in a series of verbs, actually participles. These forms can extend the action as an ongoing reality while additional verbs describe what is happening. In both verses an initial identification of the female’s partner gives way to an introductory participle that describes the basic purpose of the action: “*comes*”/“*stands*.” This is followed by two lines, each beginning with a

participle, which express in a synonymous manner a picture of the male as a gazelle leaping and then remaining motionless: “leaping”/“springing” and “standing”/“peering.” This parallelism and the overall structure serve to emphasize the approach of the female’s partner and her eager anticipation for his coming. She longs for his voice, but before she can hear it she witnesses his approach.

Trevor Longman: The fact that he stands quietly and looks intently after such agitated movement also evokes a mood of romantic tension. Will she go with him? How quickly?

Duane Garrett / Paul House: It is more likely that the peeking through the window is a function of the metaphor of the deer. The image of a young woman who is excited to see a deer outside her window is merged with the image of a young woman who is excited at the coming of her lover. He is outside, “*our wall*,” that is, the wall of her parents and brothers. The lover is thus a beautiful outsider, a gazelle, who comes to take her away from her childhood home. Her domestic environment, the home, is thus contrasted with the wilderness, the domain of the gazelle. The point is that the man is **wooing the woman**; he wants her to leave her childhood home and run with him in the wilderness—here suggesting the wilds of sexual maturity and the danger of abandoning the security of her childhood home.

Peter Pett: We are reminded here also of another Shepherd-King, Who came into the world that He might seek and save the lost. He too loves His true people. And we are reminded here of His persistence when He begins to seek us. One moment we are aware of Him behind the wall of our unbelief, then of Him looking in through the window. We cannot escape Him. He just will not let us go until we are sought and found. For He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (**Ephesians 1:4**), and loves us with an everlasting love (**Jeremiah 31:3**). In a similar way He had called to Jerusalem but in their case they would not hear Him (**Matthew 23:37**). For they were not of His sheep (**John 10:26**).

II. (:10-13) URGENT INVITATION – RENDEZVOUS WITH ME (Male)

Tremper Longman: Verses 10 and 13, part of the quoted invitation, provide a unit within the broader poem, separated by an *inclusio* formed by the request expressed by “*Rise up, my darling, my beautiful one, and come....*”

The main part of his invitation in **verses 10 through 13** has the form of a chiasm (a-b/b’-a’). The two outside members (a/a’) are the verbs asking her to move toward him. The middle members of the chiasm are his names for her (*my darling, my beautiful one*), both indicating his affection and passion for her.

(:10a) Response of the Beloved Introduced

“My beloved responded and said to me,”

Richard Hess: This section, in which the male speaks, begins with a comment by the female introducing his words. This is the first such introduction in the book. Although there have been changes of speaker before, these have been signaled by the alteration of the gender of verbs, nouns, and pronouns.

Iain Duguid: At this point, the woman finally hears the sound that she has been listening for, her lover's voice. The man speaks to invite her to arise ... and come away with him, declaring that springtime, the time for love, has now fully come.

A. (:10b) Rendezvous with Me

*“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along.”*

B. (:11) Recognize the Season of Love

*“For behold, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone.”*

Spurgeon: **Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation. **Bruce Hurt:** I would add, behold is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

Richard Hess: The opening lines that constitute **2:11** affirm that the period of remaining indoors has ended. The initial *kî hinnēh* suggests that all that follows provides the reason for the male's call to his lover to come out. It also directs her attention to look, in this case neither at the male nor at their love, but at the beauty that the outdoors provides. The cold and rain of the winter months have now gone. No longer need one remain inside. No longer does one go out only because of necessity. Now the warm sun of the summer has come. The picture here assumes the climate of Palestine, in which there are two primary seasons during the year: the summer with its heat and dryness, and the winter with its showers, storms, and cold. The latter lasts from October to March, and then the summer begins. There is no autumn or spring, because the appearance and disappearance of precipitation provide the main markers for the two seasons. Thus the male lover declares null and void any former reasons that would have kept the lovers from a rendezvous in the fields and forests. He explains that the period of mourning and separation has ended.

Trevor Longman: Springtime is the universal time for love: warmer weather, the fragrance of flowers—a time to go outside, a time for the removal of clothes and intimacy. The couple can leave the urban setting and go out to the countryside, the place of lovemaking and union.

Edwin Good: He invites her to come out of the house into which he is peering and enjoy the arrival of spring with all of its inducements to love-making. He recites the signs of spring: the new growth of plants, attractive fragrances, pleasant sights and bird-songs, all suggesting new and renewed life.

C. (:12) Renewal's 3 Key Signs of Spring

*“The flowers have already appeared in the land;
The time has arrived for pruning the vines,
And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land.”*

Richard Hess: each line appeals to the senses: seeing the blossoms, hearing the song [translation: *“the time for song has arrived”*], and listening to the sound of doves. Only in the springtime do these events occur.

Trevor Longman: It's springtime, the right time for love. Springtime is signaled by three events associated with its beginning. First, flowers appear. After the rainy season, the countryside of Israel is filled with wild flowers. Second, there is singing in the land. The root of *zāmîr* is debated. Is it from *zmr* “to sing” or *zmr* “to prune”? While the floral context might suggest the latter, many point out that the timing is wrong for pruning, which takes place in July through August. Both renditions have an old pedigree, and **Gordon** suggests that there may be a double reference here. Third, there is the cooing of the turtledove, a bird known to return to Palestine in early April.

Jack Deere: In a sense when one falls in love the feeling is like spring for everything seems fresh and new. The world is seen from a different perspective, which is how Solomon felt when he was with his beloved....So spring stimulates the senses of sight, sound, taste, and smell.

D. (:13a) Ripeness and Sweetness Abound – Time for Love to Blossom

*“The fig tree has ripened its figs,
And the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance.”*

Continuing the theme of fruitfulness

E. (:13b) Rendezvous with Me

*“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one,
And come along!”*

III. (:14) LONGING FOR INTIMACY (Male)

A. Accessing Secret Places

*“O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret place of the steep pathway,”*

Tom Gledhill: Some have seen in the references to clefts and crannies, some sexual innuendo. We cannot be certain. The whole purpose of double entendres is that the

ambiguities are unresolved. To plant the suggestion is a kind of tease. Hills, valleys, mountains of incense, mountains of ‘*Bether*’ (separation) all occur in the Song and can be interpreted at different levels of meaning. However, here, at the surface level of meaning, it is possible that the girl is playing ‘hard to get’, and she is deliberately setting a challenge to her lover. She knows she will ultimately be caught, but wants to sustain the thrill of anticipation by delaying the act of self-giving by prolonging the chase. . .

The imagery of the dove in the rocks may lead us to infer that he wants to be alone with her, far from the maddening crowds, alone in the secluded crags, the overhanging hiding places of the rocky outcrops of the wilderness, there to make love to her, there not just to gaze on her face, but also to see and gently touch the rest of her beautiful and wondrous form, and to hear her shy and mellowed responses. Perhaps they murmur ‘sweet nothings’ to each other, private love-talk on which it is improper to intrude, the sweet verbal nonsense and irrationalities of the communication of the lovers.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The motif of the woman’s **inaccessibility** appears repeatedly in the man’s songs. He cannot get to her; for them to come together, she must come out to him, or open the door to him, or descend to him. But he does not attempt to gain her by force or entrapment. His only means of attaining her are his words. He appeals to her, praises her, calls her by many pet names, and speaks fervently of the pleasures that she has the power to give.

B. Activating All of the Senses

*“Let me see your form,
Let me hear your voice;”*

Tom Gledhill: There is a language between lovers which is appropriate for their ears only. Similarly, there are sights which only lovers are allowed to see, such as the various stages of the intimacies of undress. The boy wants to see her beautiful ‘form’, her breasts, her body, her thighs. He is so easily aroused by what he sees. He would like to undress her in the secrecy of the wilderness and to explore her form. For he knows, like every male, that a partially clothed female figure is more alluring than a fully displayed body. The partial concealment is partial disclosure.

C. Appreciating Sweetness and Beauty

*“For your voice is sweet,
And your form is lovely.”*

IV. (:15) OBSTACLES TO LOVE MUST BE ERADICATED – BLOSSOMING VINEYARDS MUST BE PROTECTED (Couple)

*“Catch the foxes for us,
The little foxes that are ruining the vineyards,
While our vineyards are in blossom.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: What is unacceptable, however, is to take this as a verse addressed by the man to the woman or as addressed by the woman to the man. This interpretation disregards entirely the **plural form** of the imperative. Clues to the identity of the singers of the parts of the Song of Songs are few enough as it is; nothing is gained by disregarding the indications that are explicit in the text. . .

Conclusion: One must decide between the Speakers being:

- The Chorus
- The Couple together = my view here

Richard Hess: Verse 15 provides no hint as to whether it belongs to the male's previous address or should be part of the female's response. The former option seems out of character with either the descriptions of nature in the heart of the male's speech or the exhortations to his lover, which are filled with encouragement interspersed with terms of endearment ("*my darling, my beauty*"). Neither appears here. On the other hand, there is not a lot of similarity with what follows. Although the female does exhort her lover to do something (v. 17), she does not address him in the plural as in the initial command in v. 15. In fact, **the whole meaning of the verse is difficult**. Nevertheless, the preferred option is to understand here metaphors for those who would threaten the couple and their love. Therefore, it seems best to **attach this to the words of the couple, an intermezzo that both sing. . .**

The symbolic meaning of the relationship between the lovers suggests a preparedness for sexual relations. The vineyard is a metaphor for the female's body as well as a picture of their union of love. Their mutual desire to share their love with one another is expressed by the use of "*our*." This is a powerful statement about **the need to protect the love that the lovers possess**. Those in romantic relationships know all too well how quickly a relationship can be upset, especially by interlopers.

Trevor Longman: the presence of the foxes implies a threat to the relationship.

Glickman: Lists several "*little foxes*" that may trouble couples:

- Uncontrolled desire that drives a wedge of guilt and mistrust between the couple.
- Mistrust and jealousy that strains or breaks the bond of love.
- Selfishness and pride that refuses to acknowledge wrong and fault to one another.
- An unforgiving attitude that will not accept an apology.

These foxes have been ruining vineyards for years and the end of their work is not in sight.

Daniel Akin: I believe the basic thrust of Solomon's command is two-fold.

Trouble in Marriage Is Usually in the Small Things

Foxes are not large creatures. They are small and sly, sneaky and quick. They usually

come out at night when you can't see them, and they are especially gifted at hiding. Often you only recognize their presence after the damage has already been done. Two sinners saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are still sinners. There are details and issues we must learn to navigate and resolve. Communication, role responsibilities, finances, sex, children, in-laws, aging parents, and conflict resolution don't always (in fact, seldom!) naturally come together in a marriage relationship. What at first seems small can blow up into something big over time if it is not dealt with. Little foxes love to ruin a vineyard with bitterness, criticism, jealousy, and neglect. In addition, ignoring them (thinking they will just go away and resolve themselves) will only encourage the foxes to mate and multiply! Recognize from the very start that the health and success of your marriage is bound up in the little things of life.

The Relationship of Marriage Is a Uniquely Sensitive Thing

The HCSB says we must be on guard against the little foxes because "*our vineyards are in bloom.*" The NKJV says "*our vines have tender grapes.*" A marriage needs time to grow and bear fruit. It also needs **protection** because it is a tender and sensitive relationship, perhaps the most tender and sensitive of all. The fact is we all come into marriage with baggage. Open the trunk of your life and you will see both **the baggage of your past** and **the baggage of your personality**. The odds are overwhelming that you are unaware of all the things in these two bags.

V. (:16-17) SATISFY YOUR SEXUAL PASSION IN THE CONTEXT OF MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP (Female)

A. (:16a) Reaffirmation of Mutual Relationship (Love and Commitment)

"My beloved is mine, and I am his;"

Tom Gledhill: The female expresses her love in a simple but elegant statement that defines the relationship as one of commitment and possession of each other. . . He belongs to her just as much as she belongs to him. They own, they possess each other. Their relationship is totally symmetrical. The whole of each belongs, and is available to the whole of the other. As Paul says of the marriage relationship, '*The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife.*' But here in the Song we are not just talking about bodies. Their bodily sharing is an expression of their mutual love and loyalty, of their determination to treat each other as whole persons, and not just as instruments for mutual self-gratification. This **reciprocity**, this **mutuality** is something that shines out from the Song, something of a protest against the male dominance and macho-masculinity which sin brought into the world. But this sensitivity towards the female is known to the prophets of the Old Testament. Hosea especially was aware of the delicacy and fragility of this mutuality. There was the tendency for a woman to call her husband '*my Ba'al*'. This word has connotations of ownership, authoritarianism, of domination rather than complementarity. But Hosea, mouthing the words of Yahweh to his people, says '*You shall no longer call me my Baal, but you shall call me my husband.*' Of course, all this is in the context of Israel's apostasy away from Yahwism, when they embraced the indigenous Canaanite fertility cult. Yahweh was viewed by the

prophet Hosea as the rejected husband, and Israel was viewed as the unfaithful wife. So the whole idea of the covenant between Yahweh and his people Israel was pictured as marriage, with all that that involves, namely loyalty, faithfulness, mercy, compassion, and so on. This is looked at in detail in the whole of Hosea's prophecy. But for the moment, we see in Hosea the difference between a husband/wife relationship based on **mutual loyalty** and **compassion**, and a master/servant relationship, based on authority, submission and fear. The whole ethos of the Song is far removed from any hint of the latter.

David Guzik: These lines have been repeatedly allegorically applied to the relationship between Jesus and His people. **Charles Spurgeon** preached eight sermons on **Song of Solomon 2:16–17**, and in one of them titled *The Interest of Christ and His People in Each Other*, he meditated on the meaning of each aspect.

Ways that I belong to Jesus; ways that “I am my beloved’s”:

- I am His by the gift of His Father.
- I am His by purchase, paid for by His own life.
- I am His by conquest, He fought for me and won me.
- I am His by surrender, because I gave myself to Him.

Ways that Jesus belongs to me; ways that “He is mine”:

- He is mine by connection in the same body; He is the head and I am part of His body.
- He is mine by affectionate relationship; He has given me His love.
- He is mine by the connection of birth; I am born again of Him.
- He is mine by choice; He gave Himself for me.
- He is mine by indwelling; He has decided to live inside me.
- He is mine personally, He is mine eternally.

B. (:16b) Romanticization of Sexual Intercourse

“He pastures his flock among the lilies.”

Tom Gledhill: *to browse among the lilies* is a metaphor to represent some very close intimate behaviour such as kissing or fondling some tender part of each others' bodies. It is totally speculative to attempt to be more precise in this matter. The metaphor, drawing as it does from the realms of gardening and shepherding, and combining them in such a surrealistic way, is meant to evoke an atmosphere of fantasy and make-believe.

C. (:17) Ravishment Invited

*“Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle Or a young stag on the mountains of Bether.”*]

I prefer this alternate translation by Duane Garrett and Paul House:

Until the day comes to life

*and the shadows flee,
Take your fill!
Make yourself, my lover, like the gazelle
or like the stag of the deer on the cleft mountains!*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: [I like this approach] –

She is inviting him to **love her all night**, until the morning dawns. His enjoyment of her body is described under the metaphor of eating, like the grazing of the gazelle in v 16, but she represents the eating in more human terms when she tells him to “*recline and eat.*”

[Verb] has been translated as “*turn*” or “*return*,” but neither makes sense in this context. It is more likely that the verb here has the same sense that it has in **1 Sam 16:11**, *to sit or recline at a meal*; v 16 speaks of the man as a gazelle that feeds on the lotuses. Of course, gazelles do not literally lie down to eat, but this is not supposed to be a literal portrayal of the natural history of gazelles. The language of this verse melds several images, including the gazelle or deer, **the taking of a meal**, and **making love**. Reclining was a normal human way of taking a meal and also of making love.

Tom Gledhill: The basic question about **2:17** is, is it an invitation to her lover to intimacy, or is it a command to him to depart and then return later?

Examples of following the traditional translation:

Richard Hess: How can it be that in the midst of passion and pictures of erotic love, the female should send her lover away? The full explanation must await the completion of the Song. However, she is not ready to participate with her partner in a time of amorous pleasure, despite her strong feelings for him. One therefore suspects that lovemaking is anticipated but not yet consummated. Instead, the poetry, with all its suggestive imagery, awaits fulfillment at a future time. This picture of delayed gratification challenges all who would see this book either as a biblical license for free sex or as a manual for a successful marriage. It is neither, although it may have insight for marriage. It is erotic love poetry that makes no apology for appealing to all of the senses that God has created. Yet it also affirms that there is an order to this wonderful gift of sex. Its potency and wildness does not mean that there is no restraint.

Iain Duguid: Are the lilies her lips (cf. **5:13**), or another part of her anatomy (**7:2**), or is this simply a description of his literal shepherding activities (**1:7**)? In context, it seems best to see this image as an affirmation of her continued physical desire for him. However, in spite of that continued desire, it is not yet time for the consummation of their relationship. The day has not yet fully come and so, picking up on the imagery used to describe the man in **verse 8**, it is time for her gazelle or young stag to turn around and go back to the mountains. ‘*Turn*’ (*sōb*) cannot mean turn towards her; it invariably has the sense of to turn away (see **Hess 2005: 99**).

Daniel Akin: The couple longs for marital union and sexual consummation. Because they belong to each other they want each other with no barriers standing in the way.

Thinking ahead to what they will enjoy, Shulammitte invites Solomon to come into her with the agility, strength, and beauty of a gazelle or young stag (cf. **2:9**). Her invitation includes an episode of all-night lovemaking. Would any red-blooded, sane male say no? “*The divided mountains*” could be translated “*the mountains of Bether*” (NIV, “*the rugged hills*”). Literally it is “*hills or mountains of separation.*” This would seem to be a not-so-subtle reference to the woman’s breasts (cf. **4:6**). With all of his desire and passion before her, she welcomes him. “*Before the day breaks [lit. “breathes”] and the shadows flee*” (in other words, “all night”), be my lover and enjoy the fruits of our love. Shulammitte has come a long way in her own personal self-evaluation. The unreserved love of this man who has entered her life has effected a great change. She is now the woman God created her to be. Together the two of them are far better and more beautiful than they ever could have been alone (**Gen 2:18**). Love will do that when we pursue it God’s way and with all our heart.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of **love languages** do you use to express your love and commitment to your spouse?
- 2) What type of **anticipation** and **eagerness** do you display for lovemaking with your spouse or are you inhibited by some type of negative connotation of the full expression of your sexuality?
- 3) What is the point of all of these **animal images** in this text? What are the *little foxes* that you need to root out to protect your relationship?
- 4) How do you view the **mutuality** of your relationship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Iain Duguid: Those who see the Song as an **unfettered celebration of erotic love** will find it hard to explain why the woman should send the man away when, by her own admission, their vineyards are in blossom (**v. 15**). They are physically ready for love, and their environment cries out to them to come together without further delay, as the man himself urges. Yet the woman’s refusal of his plea fits perfectly with her own warning to the daughters of Jerusalem in the immediately preceding poem, not to mention the concerns of broader biblical (and Ancient Near Eastern) morality. There is a time to say no to the appeal of sexual passion, not because sex is unattractive or evil, but because the day has not yet dawned for that aspect of their relationship to be expressed. What seems on one level simply natural and desirable may actually be as destructive as a fox in a vineyard, ruining the potential fruitfulness represented by the

blossoms on the vine. Premarital sexual activity can have long-term consequences physically, psychologically and emotionally, providing plenty of reasons for wise couples to **wait**, even when one's hormones are screaming the opposite message.

Iain Provan: It is the beauty of creation that is the driving theme of Song of Songs 2, as it has also been a focus of chapter 1 (e.g., **1:5, 8, 15–16**). The glory of springtime provides the backdrop, as life bursts anew from the earth and all creatures stir and renew their activity. We are invited to picture flowers and fruit trees, mountains and hills, deer and doves, and to marvel at it all. The lovers identify themselves with this wider creation, merging with it and embracing it as they affirm each other with images drawn from the flora and fauna that they see around them, each competing with the other as they try to find ways of extolling the other's beauty. He is to her an apple tree, strong and sweet, and a graceful and athletic stag. She is to him a lovely flower and a beautiful dove. . .

Biblical literature stands apart from its ancient Near Eastern context precisely in its insistence that what is created cannot itself be truly divine, and particularly in its teaching that what is human, although reflecting divinity, is not itself truly divine. Biblical authors are acutely aware that when created things become the objects of worship, they cause great human damage. Insofar as beauty becomes to us an idol, it too causes great human damage—to those who have it or desire it or lack it. Insofar as it is received as a gift of God and set in the context of all that is good in God's creation, it enhances our lives and becomes itself a pointer to God, whose own person it reflects. . .

The Song of Songs, especially **chapter 2**, offers the church both challenge and healing. It challenges false dichotomies between the earthly and the heavenly, demanding that we give up all notions that beauty is somehow incompatible with godliness and even with God. It undermines our false belief that beauty should be veiled because it can be dangerous and that a strong sense of the self and its beauty are undesirable in those (specifically women) who walk the Christian path. It legitimates, rather, the enjoyment of and the mutual embrace of beauty as an aspect of the enjoyment and the embrace of God, and it encourages the affirmation of each other in our beauty and "very goodness" (cf. **Gen. 1:31**). . .

That God looks for an "intimate ally" in his people, however—that he may make her beautiful and affirm her as his own—is clear enough. Human love at its best reflects this divine pursuit of the beloved, for our love for one another reflects (albeit imperfectly) God's love for us. It actually helps us (even enables us), in fact, to believe that God does love us and is pursuing us. It is a means of grace, pointing us toward the end of all things as it is pictured in **Revelation 19:7**:

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.*

Tom Gledhill: Another way of dividing up the poem is to note the rural–domestic–rural sequence. The rural countryside motif is an expression of untrammelled freedom and

exhilaration, of energetic enthusiasm and adventure. The countryside represents the thrilling liberty of the natural order of things, of excitement, or potential for new growth, new experiences and new relationships. It represents adventure, travelling new and unexplored pathways, taking the risks that a new liberty entails.

The domestic scene as a literary motif, on the other hand, represents safety, security, the acceptance of society's norms and conventions. There is the possibility of dullness and decay and of drab conformity. This motif can indicate a prison within which free spirits are confined. The girl is there in her house (our wall) together with her mother and brothers. And her lover regards her as being shut in by society. That is why he beckons her so urgently to join him in the wide outdoors, away from the drab darkness of suffocating domesticity, to enjoy the scents of the blossoms, to feel the wind blowing through their hair as they skip hand in hand across the hills. The barriers between these two types of existence are dramatically and forcefully represented by the wall, the windows and the lattice. She must penetrate these obstacles in order to join her lover, not just physically, to be with her boy, but emotionally and psychologically.

Daniel Akin: There are a number of questions that any wise couple will consider as they contemplate the prospects of marriage. These questions address various small things that could become big things if not faced head-on:

1. Have you discussed and come to agreement on what the Bible means when it says that the husband is to be a loving leader and the wife is to be gladly submissive (Eph 5:22-33)?
2. Have you agreed always to tell your spouse the truth, to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15)?
3. Have you committed never to criticize your mate in public?
4. Are you in agreement on how decisions will be made when disagreement occurs?
5. Are you both committed to intimacy in your communication as a couple, giving the effort this will require?
6. Do you both want to be used of God to help your spouse grow in Christlikeness (Rom 8:28-30)?
7. Do you like your mate's values and outlook on life?
8. Are you personally committed to making your marriage a success whatever the cost or sacrifice?
9. Have you determined to follow biblical premarital sexual standards with honest and open discussion so that your decision honors the Lord and your partner?
10. Does the woman realize that men move from the visual to the physical (usually quickly!) and therefore they need a healthy sexual relationship with their spouses to deter temptation?
11. Does the man realize that women move from the emotional to the sexual (sometimes rather slowly) and therefore need love demonstrated in verbal and practical ways often?
12. Do you have complete confidence that your spouse will be faithful to you? I.e., can you trust her or him with a member of the opposite sex?

13. Can you identify a day or time period when you placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation?
14. Do you have the certainty that your mate has come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
15. Has your mate demonstrated a lifestyle of similar spiritual commitments as you have?
16. Have you decided where you will attend church together (!) and to what degree you will be involved?
17. Are you comfortable sharing openly your feelings, desires, and goals with your spouse?
18. Do you experience a sense of emotional pain when you are separated from your spouse?
19. Have you demonstrated a willingness to be flexible and open to healthy compromise in your relationship?
20. Have you been able to forgive your partner for an offense, reconcile, and forget the matter (Eph 4:32)?
21. For those who are engaged, are both sets of parents in agreement with your intention to marry? If not, do they have a good reason?
22. Have you objectively looked at your fiancé's family to see the major influences shaping her or his life?
23. Do you really respect your fiancé and are you proud to have people for whom you have high regard meet him or her?
24. Do you find generally that you like the same people?
25. Have you observed differences in your social backgrounds that might cause conflicts?

Discussing and answering these questions will go a long way in handling successfully the little foxes that will attempt to wreck your relationship. . .

50 Premarital Discussion Questions

In preparing for marriage we can never have too much information. Really knowing the person you are going to marry is essential if the marriage is going to start well, continue well, and end well. The following are some important questions prospective couples should discuss together before the "I do's." Expect some disagreement! Don't skip over and ignore the tough questions—they probably need the most attention and discussion.

1. What does love mean to you? What does it look like? Does it reflect 1 Corinthians 13?
2. Do you believe the one you love is a mature person?
3. How do you try to please the one you love?
4. Who comes first after Christ in your relationship . . . you or the one you love? Someone else?
5. How often and in what way do you express feelings of warmth, tenderness, and appreciation to the one you love?
6. What activities will you desire to continue to do separately once married?

7. How long do you want or expect your marriage to last? Why?
8. What are your strengths and weaknesses as you see yourself?
9. What do you see as your major responsibilities (or roles) in marriage?
10. What was the degree of happiness or unhappiness of your parents? What did you learn from them?
11. What feelings do you have toward each of your parents? Your brothers and sisters?
12. Did you come from a home where there were quarrels and fights? How did your parents solve differences and problems?
13. Did you favor either parent? Do you feel like you are the favorite child of either parent?
14. How did you cope with your parents when they argued?
15. How do you anticipate dealing with your parents once married?
How do you anticipate dealing with your in-laws?
16. How much time do you want to spend with your parents or in-laws in the first year of marriage? After that?
17. How near do you plan to live to your parents or in-laws?
18. If a problem should come up with your parents or in-laws, who do you think should handle it?
19. Is your marriage going to be like the marriage of your parents, your in-laws, or neither? Why?
20. Is the one you love too close with either parent? Can he or she leave and cleave?
21. What form of entertainment do you like? Does the one you love enjoy the same kinds of entertainment or are they different?
22. Do you like the friends of the one you love?
23. Do you have many friends, and how close are you to them?
24. After you marry, how will you choose friends? Spend time with friends?
25. Do your feelings about God or spiritual matters play a particular, even important, part in your relationship with the one you love?
26. Do you attend church regularly? Does the one you love? Will you attend regularly and together once married?
27. Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? If not, would you like to?
28. Will any future children you may have be brought up in church and taught to love God?
29. What are your goals in life?
30. Do you like sympathy and attention when you are ill? How much do you require?
31. As a general rule, do you enjoy the companionship of the opposite sex as much as that of your own sex? How, if at all, will that change after marriage?
32. How much praise do you feel you need?
33. Do you think it will be a good idea to allow your future spouse an appropriate amount of the family income to spend as he or she chooses, without giving an account to you?
34. Do you like to tease the one you love in front of others? Why?
35. Who is more intelligent, and how do you feel about this? Who is wiser?

36. Do you ever feel depressed? Is this ever noticeable in the one you love?
37. Do you perceive yourself as a “talker” or a “listener”?
38. What interests, sports, or hobbies do you two share?
39. Do you like children? How many children do you want? How many does your future spouse want?
40. Would you express your feelings on family planning and discipline?
41. How will finances be handled in the marriage? What are your thoughts about debt?
42. Do you plan to use a budget? Have you ever tried to draw up a projected budget?
43. What sexual experience(s) have you had? Is this known to the one you love?
44. Could you express your ideas on the need for affection and sex in your forthcoming marriage?
45. Do you think your sexual needs are more or less than those of the one you love? Have you discussed this area much? At all?
46. Do you think your affectional needs are more or less than those of the one you love?
47. Who informed or instructed you on the so-called facts of life? Are you sufficiently knowledgeable in this area?
48. Do you usually remember birthdays and special occasions? How do you recognize and honor them?
49. How would you feel about getting professional help from a marriage counselor should you not be able to work out problems in your marriage?
50. Do you know many happily married couples?

TEXT: Song of Solomon 3:1-5

TITLE: *SEEKING . . . INQUIRING . . . FINDING . . . HOLDING*

BIG IDEA:

THE BRIDE'S DREAM OF LOSING HER LOVER LEADS TO AN ANXIOUS SEARCH AND RECOVERY

INTRODUCTION:

Tremper Longman: The setting of the present poem begins in the woman's bed (v. 1), moves to the public areas of the city (vv. 2–4b), and then to the privacy of the mother's bedroom (vv. 4c–5). The whole scene is somewhat surreal, and indeed it has been debated on the basis of the opening words of the poem (on my bed at night) whether or not this was a dream fantasy rather than reality. Our own view of the song undercuts this discussion, as explained in the commentary on the first verse, since we believe the poet is creating a world rather than describing an actual event. . .

She is pining for her absent lover and she pursues him until she finds him and brings him back to a place of intimacy where they can experience union. Thus, again, we get a pattern that we have seen and will see repeated numerous times in the Song: absence and longing leads to search and discovery, which results in intimacy and joy.

Tom Gledhill: It is unlikely that the scenes in 3:1–5 represent actual reality, for it is highly improbable that the young woman would go off in the middle of the night all by herself to search for her absent lover in the city streets and squares. Also the speed of the action seems too compressed to represent an actual event.

Constable: Some scholars believe that the Song is not a sequential narrative. [Note: Hess, p. 34.] Other writers have seen chronological progression in the experiences of the lovers in view. [Note: e.g., Delitzsch.]

Iain Duguid: This poem corresponds in many ways to the night-time scene in 5:2–8, where the similar themes of **searching** and eventually **finding** recur. Both scenes have a dreamlike quality, in that they are describing events that are outside the realm of normal experience, while nonetheless seeming disturbingly familiar. Of course, a poem about a dream is not the same thing as a dream; nor is either of them the same as an actual experience (Longman 2001: 127).

Henry Morris: The experience described in **Song 3:1-5** is evidently a dream, perhaps brought on by her concern over the "little foxes" which might eventually separate them ("Bethel" in **Song 2:17** means "separation").

Bruce Hurt: Note that many but not all commentaries interpret this as a dream which seems to express the young woman's fear of losing her young man - some see it as

something that literally happened, while others see it as symbolic descriptions. The fact that it begins with the location "*on my bed night after night*" would tend to support that this is a dream. Even in the context of this first verse, how could she be on her bed on one hand and seek him on the other hand? He could hardly be lost in or on her literal bed!

I. (:1) SEEKING AND NOT FINDING IN THE BEDROOM

A. Seeking in the Bedroom

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves;"

Richard Hess: The first four verses are linked by the repetition of "*the one whom my heart loves.*" As the key object of each of these verses, its frequent appearance acts as a refrain, drawing the reader/listener back again and again to the object of the female's search. . . The seeking without finding gives way to finding, and all has as its source and goal "*the one whom my heart loves,*" a phrase that remains constant and unchanged throughout the story.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: means not "all night long" but literally "*in the nights*" or "*night after night*" or simply "*by night.*" The point is that it is a **regular nocturnal occurrence**, not that it is an event that took place during the course of one specific night. She seeks her lover night after night on her bed but does not find him. This indicates nocturnal yearnings for sexual fulfillment and for the companionship of a man. It should not be taken to mean that she actually expected to find her lover in her bed. What she describes, simply enough, is the desire one experiences when sleeping alone. She wants "*the one whom [her] soul loves.*" Her words both reflect desire for the specific man whom she already loves and refer to her loneliness in bed and to her desire for affection and a husband. The yearning and agitation of the young woman are the actual focus here.

B. Not Finding

"I sought him but did not find him."

David Guzik: There is something good in the maiden's seeking of her beloved; yet it came after their relationship was well established. The relationship did not begin nor was it founded upon her pursuit of him.

II. (:2) SEEKING AND NOT FINDING IN THE CITY

A. Seeking in the City

*"I must arise now and go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves."*

Tremper Longman: The city is a place hostile to intimate relationship (see similar theme in 5:2–7), particularly when compared with the safety and privacy of the bedroom. After all, the city, especially the street (*šûq*) and the public square (*rehôb*), is

a place teaming with people, hardly conducive to romance.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: She stops her idle, romantic fantasizing and actually goes after him with all the emotional risks that this action entails (again, this is all metaphorical). . . the words describe a movement from a passive desire to a focused determination to bring her lover to her bed. In fantasy, the pleasures of sex are easy, uncomplicated, and come of themselves to a passive subject. In reality, sexual pleasure and the fulfillment of a relationship require effort, maturity, active participation, and a determination to overcome obstacles. . .

The woman of the Song shows herself to be the true protagonist of Song of Songs by metaphorically embarking on a heroic journey. The wandering in the streets of Jerusalem represents the ideal of the quest. Reading these lyrics as actual events misses the deeper point. The woman takes upon herself the responsibility of nurturing her love by courageous determination to take the man to herself. Nevertheless, she does not immediately find him; she must first deal with the guards of the city.

B. Not Finding

“I sought him but did not find him.”

III. (:3-4) INQUIRING, FINDING AND HOLDING

A. (:3) Inquiring of the Watchmen

*“The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me,
And I said, ‘Have you seen him *whom my soul loves?*’”*

B. (:4a) Finding

*“Scarcely had I left them
When I found him *whom my soul loves;*”*

Richard Hess: Note the courage and daring implicit in the opening phrase of this verse. The expression (lit.) “*I had passed over from/behind them*” (‘*ābartī mēhem*) suggests that she does not at this point return to her home. The female has met the guardians of the city, and they have nothing to tell her. The reasonable thing to do would be to give up her search and return home, perhaps with their escort. However, her love and dedication will not allow this. She will go further, down the street, around the corner. Whatever the risk, she will not be deterred from the object of her desire. With this additional leap, brought about solely by her devotion to her lover, she finds her lover. How this speaks of love at every level: the devotion of the lover to the object of her desire.

C. (:4b) Holding

*“I held on to him and would not let him go,
Until I had brought him to my mother's house,
And into the room of her who conceived me.”*

Tom Gledhill: Motion to my **mother's house** leads us in two opposing directions; to the literal homestead, which is an unlikely place for the secret love-making of the unmarrieds; and metaphorically to the girl's own secret place, to the entrance to her womb, the 'chamber' (**1:4**), the innermost sanctum of intimacy to which she longs to bring her lover. That this is the meaning is confirmed by the request the girl (or is it the author?) makes, that love should not be awakened or aroused until there is an appropriate opportunity for it to be fulfilled.

Carr: Immediately after leaving them she finds her lover. *Held* (NEB *seized*) is satisfactory (cf. **Song 2:15** *catch the foxes*), but '*clutched and refused to slacken her embrace*' catches the urgency and relief of the discovery better. Still clinging to him, she leads him gently but forcefully to her mother's house and into the maternal bedroom (cf. **Song 1:4**, and **Song 8:2**).

Duane Garrett / Paul House: She then seizes her lover and will not loosen her grip. The language is dramatic and speaks of determination, decision, and steadfastness. She has in her mind stepped across a border. She has turned away from her virginity and instead clings tightly to her lover. That is, she has chosen him over her virginity. . .

Therefore, the mother's "*house,*" and the "*room,*" of the woman who conceived her are again representative terms. They can only be the **womb**; this is the house and room where all are conceived. She is determined to bring her lover into her maternal chamber, so to speak. More than that, the woman identifies with her mother in the matter of confrontation with the loss of virginity. Her mother, in effect, has become a role model for her and gives her the strength to face this event. . .

She has in her mind confronted the issue of her virginity and has resolutely decided to take her lover rather than retain her virginity. Understood in this way, the sudden charge to the Jerusalem girls suits the context perfectly. She is in effect saying that this is a very big decision and that her friends should not rush into it. Wait for the right time and right man, she suggests.

John Schultz: The girl brings her lover to her paternal home. "*To my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me.*" Had her intend been on sexual intimacy, she would not have done so. The reference to the place establishes in a poetical way, a **chain of life**. The sexual reference is not to her own experience, but to that of her parents. It is the place where she was created, the place where she came into the world. The suggestion is that the fruit of the marriage she anticipates will be the birth of their own children. **She sees herself as a link in the miracle chain of life.** The picture she paints is more than one of mere enjoyment of intimacy with her lover; it is a picture of life. This is not the typical attitude of people in love. Young lovers tend to forget the consequences of their behavior. This girl is level-headed enough to realize that if she and her lover would have pre-marital sex it would spoil the reality of their love. This we understand from the following exhortation in **vs. 5**, "*Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*"

Dennis Kinlaw: It may be that the reference to the maiden's bringing her lover to her mother's home reflects **Genesis 2:24**, where the husband is to leave father and mother, but no like command is given to the woman. This passage may also reflect ancient Israelite marital customs now unknown to us. Perhaps we should notice that Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother, even though Sarah was deceased, and there consummated their marriage (**Gen 24:67**).

IV. (:5) REFRAIN – DON'T RUSH LOVE

“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, That you will not arouse or awaken my love, Until she pleases.”

Richard Hess: As in **2:7** (cf. also **8:4**) the poetry reaches a high point of erotic celebration and union and then suddenly interrupts with a message of caution. The caution betrays not only the awareness of an element of control in this poem; it also suggests that the Song portrays a picture that itself is a fantasy, a poetic celebration of carnal love as a gift.

Tremper Longman: That this poem culminates in the act of love is underlined by the warning that the woman brings to the circle of young women around here. Her passion led her in an energetic pursuit of her man. Once she found him, she brought him to a place of intimacy. What woman would not want to feel her passion and find its satisfaction? Yet the woman wisely tells the others not to rush into love, but rather to wait for the right moment, the moment indeed she has apparently found.

Sierd Woudstra: Love can be a mighty force in the lives of men and women. Unanswered and unsatisfied it can cause untold pain and great grief to the human heart. But love requited gives unspeakable joy. The Shulamite in her dream experiences both in some degree – both love unsatisfied and love fulfilled. Hence this refrain (cf. **2:7**) is not an anticlimax to the reunion of the two lovers in the dream. Rather, it indicates recognition of the fact that because these are the effects which love can have, it must be handled with the utmost care and should not be aroused before its proper time.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of loneliness and pain do you experience when you are apart from your lover?
- 2) Do you view the Song of Solomon as presenting some type of chronological progression (in which case commentators mark this as the transition between courtship and marriage) or rather as a series of love songs/lessons that cannot be harmonized with chronological precision?

- 3) How can couples encourage mutual sexual self-control before their marriage night?
- 4) What types of applications can be made to our relationship to Jesus Christ in terms of seeking and finding and holding and Him never letting us go?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The only coherent interpretation of this text is that it represents the mental anxiety of the woman as she goes through the process of preparing to become a wife. Alone at night, she yearns for her lover. As she mentally seeks him out and contemplates a physical relationship with him, she confronts her own virginity. She knows she cannot have him without going through the event of losing her virginity. Nevertheless, she resolves to take him to herself. She does not view this decision as a trivial matter, and she closes the canto by admonishing her friends to hold on to their virginity until they are certain that the proper time has come.

Iain Duguid: This theme of the **elusiveness of intimacy** is underlined by the repetition of the warning refrain from **2:7**. **Unrequited passion** has a haunting and painful quality to it, even if the search finally ends positively. Frustration may plague the entire experience. Yet it must not be missed that in the end the woman does find the man whom her soul loves . . .

True intimacy is a hard-won prize that can be attained only after surmounting many obstacles. This is true, of course, not merely in human relationships, but in our desire for intimacy with God.

Daniel Akin:

Main Idea: The right spouse is worth waiting for and searching after diligently.

In the gospel, Jesus Himself seeks after His bride even when she is unworthy.

- I. Do You Really Love Him (**3:1**)?
- II. Is He Worth the Risk (**3:2-3**)?
- III. Is He the One With Whom You Want to Spend the Rest of Your Life (**3:4**)?
- IV. Is He Worth the Wait (**3:5**)?

Thomas Constable: In either interpreting or applying **Song of Solomon 3:1-4** to the relationship between Jesus and His people, many commentators have noted that this is an example of how the believer, under some sense of separation from Jesus, must seek after Him.

“When, either in a dream, or in reality we lose our sense of His presence, let us search for Him; and then in the finding, with new devotion, let us hold Him, and refuse to let Him go.” (**Morgan**)

Spurgeon: [making applications from this text]

Jesus must be held; He will go unless you hold Him.

Jesus is willing to be held; He is not trying to escape us.

Jesus can be held; He we can grasp Him by faith.

Jesus Himself must be held; not merely a creed, tradition, or a ceremony

Charles Ryrie: Sex as God designed in proper place and time is good, powerful, living, unifying. Outside of God's design it becomes evil, cruel, perverted, divisive. Whereas humanism overemphasizes the flesh and denies the spiritual, asceticism overemphasizes the spirit and tends to ignore the importance of the physical. God, however, in His plan for Christian marriage unites both spirit and flesh in the "one-flesh" intimacy to unite two people totally (cf. **Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5**). Though the Bible is not a book on sex, it does contain a complete theology of sexuality, i.e., purposes for sex, warnings against its misuse, and a beautiful picture of the ideal physical intimacy as set forth in the beautiful and holy Song. The "one-flesh" relationship (cf. **Gen. 2:24**) is a reference to the most intense physical intimacy and the deepest spiritual unity between husband and wife. God is always approving this relationship (cf. **Prov. 5:21**) in which husband and wife meet their physical needs in sexual intercourse (cf. **Prov. 5:15, 18, 19**). The author of Hebrews adds his sanction to the marriage bed (cf. **Heb. 13:4**). In fact, Paul indicates that sexual adjustment in marriage affects the Christian life, especially prayer (cf. **1 Cor. 7:5**). Both husband and wife have definite and equal sexual needs which are to be met in marriage (**1 Cor. 7:3**), and each is to meet the needs of the other and not his own. The sexual instinct is given to man as a means of communication. To satisfy that instinct selfishly by oneself is to abuse the gift because it is the seeking of a satisfaction that is to be received in fellowship between the husband and wife. These purposes are assigned to physical intimacy:

- (1) knowledge (cf. **Gen. 4:1**),
- (2) unity (**Gen. 2:24**),
- (3) comfort (**Gen. 24:67**),
- (4) procreation (**Gen. 1:28**),
- (5) relaxation and play (**2:8-17; 4:1-16**), and
- (6) avoiding temptation (**1 Cor. 7:2-5**).

A husband is commanded to find satisfaction (**Prov. 5:19**) and joy (**Eccl. 9:9**) in his wife, and to concern himself with meeting her unique needs (**Deut. 24:5; 1 Pet. 3:7**). A wife also has responsibilities:

- (1) availability (**1 Cor. 7:3-5**),
- (2) preparation and planning (**Song 4:9ff.**),
- (3) interest (**Song 4:16; 5:2**),
- (4) sensitivity to unique masculine needs (**Gen. 24:67**).

The feeling of oneness experienced by husband and wife in the physical union should remind both partners of the even more remarkable oneness which the spirit of a man experiences with God in regeneration.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 3:6-11

TITLE: IMPRESSIVE BRIDAL PROCESSION (CHORUS)

BIG IDEA:

THE IDEALIZED BRIDAL PROCESSION WOWS EVERYONE WITH ITS DISPLAY OF ROYAL WEALTH AND POWER

INTRODUCTION:

Trevor Longman: Song of Songs 3:6–11 clearly stands out as a separate poetic unit. It begins with a question that draws the reader’s attention out to the wilderness where what is soon to be identified as a palanquin (and later a litter) is kicking up dust that looks like a pillar of smoke (3:6). The remainder of the poem describes this luxurious vehicle as well as the guards that accompany it. The poem concludes with a focus on the wedding crown of Solomon (3:11). . .

3 Views:

- 1) **Mythological approach**
- 2) **Actual historical event**
- 3) **Poetic view** -- see below

Throughout the commentary, we have maintained an approach to the Song that appreciates its **poetic quality**. Here too, we understand that this poem offers not historical description but rather a poetic description that draws upon the traditional opulence of Solomon’s life and kingdom in order to **celebrate love and marriage**. The Solomon/royal fiction is being exploited here, not because of Solomon’s reputation in the area of love per se (where he has a dubious reputation!), but rather because of his incredible wealth. In other words, this poem expresses the woman’s poetic imagination as she reflects upon the wonders of love and, in the case of this poem at least, marriage.

Edwin Good: The entire poem may be a complex metaphor for the lover as Solomon, as king, providing his bride with all the trappings of queenship, attendant warriors, richly appointed palanquin, all the local women gathered to see them on “*the day of his heart’s joy*.” (And why not “her heart’s joy”?)

Richard Hess: The references to King Solomon, like the crowns worn up to the present day by Jewish brides and grooms on their weddings, represent the images that the male and female possess in the eyes of one another. The female here appears perfumed with the finest of aromatics, guarded by a retinue of the strongest of warriors, and housed in the most gorgeous and exotic of chambers. She presents an altogether magnificent spectacle of one who might well have come from the ends of the earth to her lover. The male is the greatest of all kings of Israel, whose crown and glory are unsurpassed. Previous sections have considered their passion and pure sensual desire for one another. Later chapters will turn to describe in detail their physical bodies. Here the erotic poetry pauses as it considers only the manner in which the lovers appear in the eyes of one

another. They are queen and king. Is this hyperbole? Of course it is, from the perspective of those of us who read this poetry. Of course it is not, from the perspective of those of us who find here our own beloved and recall how beautiful or handsome they seemed to us on our wedding day. For the lover, the object of his or her love is one who exceeds everyone and everything else. We gaze upon the object of our love in desire, admiration, and ultimately joy because we want to do so, because we see there the fulfillment of all that we long for. In the Song it is the male and female lovers, the bridegroom and bride. For interpreters throughout history, it has been God and his people, and for Christians, Christ and the church.

I. (:6) IMPRESSIVE WEDDING PROCESSION OF THE BRIDE

*“What is this [Better: Who is this]
coming up from the wilderness
Like columns of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all scented powders of the merchant?”*

I think it is best to take **vs. 6** as referring to the procession of the **perfumed bride** as the **chorus** (the daughters of Jerusalem) watches in amazement. While **vs. 7** refers to the accompaniment of the **king-groom**, the idealized Solomon, on his very opulent traveling couch, accompanied by his mighty men. I do not see this approach favored in any of the commentators quoted below. They all want to see the same character in **vs. 6** as the one in the traveling couch of **vs. 7** – though they differ as to whether it is the female or the male. Remember – this is all being viewed from the perspective of the Chorus.

Richard Hess: The male understands that what approaches is no ordinary group of people, but one whose opulence is signaled in advance by columns of smoke burning fine aromatics. Already in this first verse the male has addressed the senses of sight and smell. Whenever the senses go beyond what is seen and heard, the male directs his attention toward his lover or something wonderful that reminds him of her physical presence and lovemaking.

Tom Gledhill: there is a disjunction between **verse 6** and **verse 7**. **Verse 7** is not the answer to the question in **verse 6**. The whole verse represents an announcement of her dazzling appearance. **Behold, she comes!** It is an awesome manifestation, her royal epiphany.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The phrase means “*Who is this (woman)?*” Many scholars argue that context indicates that a man is at the center of the sight on the basis of **v 11**. In reality, however, the text never indicates that the “*Solomon*” of **v 11** is in the palanquin of **vv 6–10**. The fact that **v 7** says that it is Solomon’s palanquin, moreover, does not mean that he is inside. It is true that [*Who*] can be a neutrum, a feminine pronoun with a vague or undefined reference (IBHS, 692), and one might suggest that the word refers to the whole spectacle that is approaching and not to a single person. A

problem with this interpretation is that the text does not have “*What is this?*” as in **Exod 13:14**; it reads “*Who is this?*” implying that the feminine pronoun is indeed a **person**. The phrase appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only at **Song 6:10** and **8:5**, and in both of these **the object of attention is the woman**. The simplest solution is that the woman is in the palanquin (v 6) and that the man is awaiting her arrival (v 11). . .

From a canonical and literary standpoint, **the wilderness** is highly significant (see **Garrett, Hosea, Joel**, 88–91). The wilderness is the place of Israel’s sojourn with God, and from the wilderness Israel came into Canaan to seize the land of promise. It was there also that Moses resided during his years of formation and there that he had his mystical experience with the burning bush. Wilderness almost connotes images of Eden: Hosea invokes wilderness as the place of divine wooing, where God would win back the heart of the woman Israel (**Hos 2:16** [ET **2:14**]). **Keel** ([1994] 126) observes that both Ashtarte and Ishtar were goddesses of the wilderness. This canto speaks of the arrival in these terms in order to endow the event with **grandeur** and **wonderment**. Like the armies of Israel or like God himself, the entourage appears from the wilderness with **clouds of glory**.

Iain Duguid: Following the suggestion of **Assis** (2009: 103–106), however, I believe that the key is to recognize that the crucial identifier of the person coming from the wilderness is that she is ‘*perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant*’ (**3:6**). Nothing in the description of Solomon’s bed corresponds to this emphasis on scent. Rather, we have to wait until **4:6** for myrrh and frankincense to recur in the man’s description of his **beloved**, whom he then invites to come to him from the wild and untamed regions of Lebanon.

This suggests that there is a twofold potential answer to the question: ‘*Who is this?*’ with each part introduced with *hinneh* (‘*Behold!*’; **3:7**; **4:1**). The first potential answer draws our attention to the glory of Solomon’s bed and his wedding day (**3:7–11**), which are described in great detail. Yet the superficial glory that so appeals to Solomon is not what has captured the man’s heart. Instead, the sight that he longs to see with aching eyes is **the simple beauty of his beloved**, whom he describes in equal detail (**4:1–7**). Solomon can keep his bed and all of its glorious accoutrements: the man’s desire on his own wedding day is simply to **behold his beloved**, coming up out of the wilderness to share their new life together. . .

II. (:7-8) IMPRESSIVE WEDDING PROCESSION OF THE GROOM

A. (:7a) The Transported Groom on His Opulent Couch

“*Behold, it is the traveling couch of Solomon;*”

B. (:7b) The Accompanying Military Entourage

1. Sixty Mighty Men of Israel

“*Sixty mighty men around it,
Of the mighty men of Israel.*”

Duane Garrett / Paul House: implies men chosen from the warriors of Israel—i.e., elite troops of an honor guard. Scholars have observed that the number is twice that of David’s guard, thirty (**2 Sam 23:18–19**). If the doubling is intentional, it is probably a hyperbole meant to imply that this spectacle is glorious beyond description. In reality, a bridal procession in a normal wedding probably was accompanied by some friends of the groom, but the royal trappings here add further spectacle to the scene. . .

While the warriors of this text are probably not strictly a metaphor for her virginity, the image may connote some of the same ideal. The woman must be delivered pure and safe to the man. The terrors of the night are ambiguous, but it is significant that they are of the “night.” This is the time of love, but it is also the time of treachery, stealth, ambush, and rape. The woman is protected so that she may come safely to her night with the groom.

Richard Hess: The “*warriors of Israel*” (*gibbōrê yiśrā’ēl*) first appear in **Exod. 17:11**, where they form the army that defeats the Amalekites. These battle-ready warriors form the honor guard for the passenger. For her to control a contingent of this size suggests great power and prestige.

2. (:8) All Expert and Equipped Fighters

*“All of them are wielders of the sword,
Expert in war;
Each man has his sword at his side,
Guarding against the terrors of the night.”*

III. (:9-10) IMPRESSIVE TRAVELING COUCH FOR KING SOLOMON

A. (:9) Constructed from the Strongest Materials

*“King Solomon has made for himself a sedan chair
From the timber of Lebanon.”*

Edwin Good: At v. 9, the “*litter*” is called a “*palanquin*” (*‘appiryown*, a word that occurs nowhere else and is apparently borrowed from Greek *phoreion*). A palanquin ordinarily held only one person—fitting for a king or a king’s bride—and was carried on poles like a sedan chair. The poet wants us to be interested in its materials and fittings: Lebanese cedar with silver posts, gold cushions (we would think of golden fabric, not gold metal, though the silver-gold parallelism might lead us to think the latter), purple fabric on the seats. At that point the meanings seem to fall apart. “The interior joined” seems all right, but suddenly it is followed by the word for “*love*,” which is sensible in the context only if we suppose that “*love*” is the mode of joining, at best difficult to understand.

B. (:10) Constructed from the Most Expensive Materials

*“He made its posts of silver,
Its back of gold*

*And its seat of purple fabric,
With its interior lovingly fitted out By the daughters of Jerusalem.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: One might object to assigning these lines to the chorus on the grounds that in vv 10–11 they summon the girls of Jerusalem to come out, and therefore the singers are thus not themselves the girls of Jerusalem. But this objection is flimsy; the chorus is not all of the Jerusalem girls but a small, representative group. The people who are most likely to call out girls to come see a spectacle are other girls.

This canto has four strophes of six lines each, for twenty-four lines in total. . . the pieces of the sedan chair are not fastened together with nails, ropes, or other materials but by means of carefully carved interlocking joints.

Trevor Longman: This object is luxurious; it radiates wealth and power. It is made out of the most precious of materials: silver, gold, and purple cloth, all associated with royalty. Purple cloth was particularly rare, being made from a pigment from the murex shellfish. According to **R. L. Alden**, the Phoenicians were the only ones who could make the dye.

David Guzik: It was clear from this that the beloved (Solomon) could do the two essential things a man must be able to do before he is ready to be married: he must be able to **protect** and **provide** for his maiden. The protection was shown in the armed men who surrounded this procession; the provision was shown in the opulence of Solomon’s entourage. Of course, he cannot protect or provide for his maiden (or bride) until he can protect and provide for himself; then they live a shared life, a oneness, with whatever belongs to him now also belongs to her also.

IV. (:11) IMPRESSIVE RECEPTION BY THE DAUGHTERS OF ZION

*“Go forth, O daughters of Zion,
And gaze on King Solomon with the crown
With which his mother has crowned him
On the day of his wedding,
And on the day of his gladness of heart.”*

Richard Hess: Here and only here in this section, and indeed in the whole of the Song, is a wedding (*ḥātunnâ*, **3:11**) explicitly mentioned. The entire section has been building to this climax, the **announcement of a wedding**. This is what brings joy to the heart of the king, rather than wealth or power or anything else. So significant is this happiness that the term *śimḥâ* occurs only here in the whole of the Song, despite its frequency elsewhere in the Bible (some 95 appearances) and the joyous tone of the Song. Contrary to some commentators, the Song does not portray sex as the great and final goal in order to experience true joy. Nor does it suggest that mutual admiration of the lovers, their physical bodies and sensuality, is the source of joy. Rather, the Song directly associates the joy of the heart with the final commitment of marriage. It is only within this commitment that all the joys of the male and female lovers come together, for it is

only here that they realize the freedom to express those joys without restraint, knowing that the marriage bond seals their love in a lifetime commitment to each other.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The chorus calls on the girls of Jerusalem to come out and view “Solomon” but says little about the man himself. Instead, their words draw attention to

- (1) the crown he wore on his wedding,
- (2) his mother, and
- (3) the joy that filled his heart at his wedding.

As suggested already, “Solomon” here is not a character in a story but serves as a symbol of regal majesty, a quality that every groom (ideally) partakes of. . .

The joy of “Solomon” at his wedding reminds the audience of the celebratory nature of the event. The joy is not simply a matter of the impending wedding night but is also a result of the exaltation of the bride and groom and of love itself. The young women of the city are called out to experience the excitement.

The marriage of a man and woman is here represented as an event that is both regal and divine. Of themselves, the man and woman are ordinary mortals, but the ceremonial bringing of the bride to the groom exalts both of them to the status of royalty. One might suggest that a marriage reenacts the story of **Gen 2**, when God brought the woman to Adam, the first “king.” It reminds us of the ideal that we were intended to fulfill and of this creation miracle, the union of man and woman, that was not altogether spoiled by the fall. The ceremonial trappings of the entourage convey the reality that the joining of man and woman is a thing of great glory. It is a **celebration of love**. . .

this is probably not a presentation of how a normal bridal procession in ancient Israel would have actually looked. It is an idealized image of a wedding procession under the metaphor of royal splendor.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it proper to make a **big deal** out of the wedding ceremony rather than just inconspicuously sliding into marriage?
- 2) How can a young man demonstrate that he is prepared to **protect** and **provide** for a spouse?
- 3) What is the significance of the bride arriving from the **wilderness**?
- 4) That type of **terrors of the night** require protection for the bride on her procession?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Hess: The focus of this section is **King Solomon**, who is mentioned three times, in **vv. 7, 9, and 11**. The suffix “*his*” (-ô) refers to the king once in **v. 7**, again in **v. 9**, and four times in the second half of **v. 11**. Indeed, the final word in the section is “*his heart*” (*libbô*), a direct reference to the essential part of King Solomon’s person, and the aspect of a person that has the most relevance in the love poem of the Song. Furthermore, the king is the subject of every verb and participle in **vv. 9 and 10a**. His royal bodyguards and the daughters of Jerusalem/Zion serve as subjects of verbs in **vv. 7, 8, 10b, and 11a**. The king’s mother is the subject of the single verb in **v. 11b**. However, in every case these other figures relate directly to the king, serving him and his interests in one way or another. Thus **the king remains the key figure** and theme of this portion.

Tom Gledhill: Obviously the poem has some original connection with one of Solomon’s weddings. But now it appears in the Song rather abruptly. We have already assumed that our lovers are **representatives** of Everyman and Everywoman, and that the role of Solomon in the Song is minimal. Furthermore we have distanced ourselves from the idea that a strong narrative thread can be found in the Song. This enables us to avoid the difficult questions posed by the passage to those who see such a sustained element of plot . . .

My own view is that this unit provides a focusing context for the whole of this third cycle (**3:6–5:1**) Here the lovers are getting married and celebrating their own wedding. The allusion is rather indirect, however. The lovers are perhaps singing a snatch of a wedding song originally sung at one of Solomon’s own nuptials, which had gradually been assimilated into the popular musical choruses sung at village weddings. At their own banquet, the couple and their guests are celebrating their own ‘royal’ occasion. All this sets the legitimate context for the only explicit description of the lovers’ physical union, at the end of the cycle. . .

for our couple in the Song, this happy and very public day puts the seal on their union, and the elated groom is moved to extol the beauty of his bride in the song which follows (**4:1–7**). His trembling anticipation of their bodily union is reflected in **4:12–15**, and at his bride’s urgent invitation (**4:16**), they consummate their marriage (**5:1**) in the privacy of the bridal chamber.

Peter Pett: The application is even more awesome as we have already seen above. For on the day when we are made one with Christ, we become a part of this great festivity. We enter into Christ and are from that day borne upon His litter and surrounded by His mighty men, awaiting the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb. How can our hearts not overflow with gladness at the thought? But we too also cry out that all may look at Him and not at ourselves. He is the One Who is altogether lovely (**Song of Solomon 5:16**). And meanwhile in His case His Father crowns Him with the crown of rejoicing and

love, a symbol of His joy in us. For that is the even more wonderful thought here, that it has especially brought gladness to His heart because He loves us so.

Daniel Akin:

Main Idea: Great weddings will reflect important components of the gospel and anticipate the day when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

I. A Great Wedding Will Involve a Public Celebration (3:6-7).

II. A Great Wedding Contains a Promise of Protection (3:7-8).

III. A Great Wedding Includes a Pledge of Love (3:9-10).

IV. A Great Wedding Has the Approval of Others (3:11).

In a sermon on this text, **Mark Driscoll** is quite practical in what a godly husband will promise and provide for his bride: He's looking out for her safety and her well-being, and this is something that a man has the great opportunity to do with the woman that he loves. In our day, this would include: safe car, living in a place that is safe and well-lit and not dangerous and crime-infested. This would include: wife gets a cell phone so that if emergency comes, she can contact you, you're accessible and available. This would also include things like medical insurance, life insurance, so that even in the occasion of your death you're still providing for her and/or your children. He's a man who thinks through issues of safety and protection. Provision: He's coming to pick her up. 60 warriors carrying her into town: enormous wedding day. The kind of wedding day that little girls dress up like princesses for, and practice, beginning at a very young age for this kind of amazing wedding day. (**Driscoll**, "His Garden")

And in the context of the wedding ceremony itself, **Tommy Nelson** is right on target when he writes, Part of the safety and security of the wedding ceremony will be evident in the people who serve as your best man, maid or matron of honor, groomsmen, and bridesmaids. Choose godly people who will support you fully in the vows you make. As a whole, those who witness your marriage should be like a holy hedge of protection around you, keeping you focused toward each other inside the circle of matrimony, and keeping out anybody who might try to destroy your marriage. Don't ask someone to stand up for you who isn't completely committed to you, to your marriage, and in general, to the sanctity and value of marriage. Such a person will not encourage you to work through problems in your marriage. Such a person will not do the utmost to help you and your spouse when you need help. And they may embarrass you at the rehearsal dinner! (**Nelson**, *Book of Romance*, 76) . . .

[Regarding "inlaid with love"] -- I do find helpful and attractive the comments of the great Baptist preacher in London, **Charles Spurgeon**. He states that the phrase is a complicated, but very expressive form of speech. Some regard the expression as signifying a pavement of stone, engraved with hieroglyphic emblems of love, which made up the floor of this travelling chariot; but this would surely be very uncomfortable

and unusual, and therefore others have explained the passage as referring to choice embroidery and dainty carpets, woven with cost and care, with which the interior of the travelling-chair was lined. Into such embroidery sentences of love-poetry may have been worked. Needlework was probably the material of which it was composed; skillful fingers would therein set forth emblems and symbols of love. As the spouse in the second chapter sings, “*His banner over me was love,*” probably alluding to some love-word upon the banner; so, probably, tokens of love were carved or embroidered, as the case may have been, upon the interior of the chariot, so that “the midst thereof was paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.” We need not, however, tarry long over the metaphor, but endeavor to profit by its teaching. (Spurgeon, *Most Holy Place*, 281) . . .

When the red hot passions of desire are ablaze, we can easily confuse a thing called lust with a thing called love. This is especially true when we are young and the hormones are raging with desires wanting (even demanding!) to be satisfied. This is a time when “cooler heads” must prevail. This is a time when we need to see the mammoth difference between passing lust and lasting love. Dennis Rigstad is very helpful in his article, “*Is It Love or Lust?*” It is balanced, but best of all, it is biblical. Think through his observations. There is real wisdom here as we consider the person with whom we want to spend the rest of our life.

LUST:

- Focuses on self
You have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. (Gal 5:13 NKJV)
- Leads to frustration
You want something, but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. (Jas 4:2 NIV 1984)
- Continually wants more
They are separated from the life of God . . . and have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (Eph 4:18-19 NIV 1984)
- Enslaves self
To whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves . . . you have presented your members as slaves to uncleanness, and lawlessness. (Rom 6:16,19 NKJV)
- Desires to gratify the sinful nature with things contrary to the Spirit
The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit. (Gal 5:17 NIV 1984) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. (Gal 5:19-21 NIV 1984)
- Excludes Christ
Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind . . . they have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. (Rom 1:28-29 NIV 1984)
- Sins to gratify the desires

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. (Eph 2:3 NIV 1984)

- Entices with evil desires
But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (Jas 1:14 NIV 1984)
- Wars against the soul
I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. (1 Pet 2:11 NIV 1984)
- Avoids commitment and leads to tragedy
Don't lust for their beauty. Don't let their coyness seduce you. For a prostitute will bring a man to poverty, and an adulteress may cost him his very life. (Prov 6:25-26 LB)

LOVE:

- Focuses on the other
Let each of you look not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil 2:4 NKJV)
- Leads to fulfillment
To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God . . . who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. (Eph 3:19-20 NKJV)
- Brings satisfaction
No discipline seems pleasant . . . Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:11 NIV 1984)
- Encourages self-control
I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. (1 Cor 9:27 NKJV)
- Desires to live by the Spirit
Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Gal 5:16 NIV 1984)
- Includes Christ
Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Rom 13:14 NIV 1984)
- Seeks God to gain its desires
Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. (Ps 37:4 NIV 1984)
- Prevents sin
Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (Gal 5:14-15 NKJV)
- Nourishes the soul
May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless. (1 Thess 5:23 NIV 1984)
- Commits to one another (free love is a contradiction of terms)
You, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but by love serve one another. (Gal 5:13 NKJV)
(Rigstad, "Is It Love or Lust?")

TEXT: Song of Solomon 4:1-15

TITLE: CELEBRATION OF BIBLICAL SEX

BIG IDEA:

PRAISE FOR YOUR BRIDE'S FLAWLESS BEAUTY OPENS THE DOOR FOR CELEBRATING THE SENSUALITY AND EXHILARATION OF INTIMACY

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Together, the four stanzas present the bridegroom alternatively praising the bride and declaring her to be inaccessible to him. The obvious point is that he cannot have her until she voluntarily yields to him; it is a decision she must make.

α The pleasures of the bride: her beauty (vv 1–6 [*“my companion”*])

β The inaccessible pleasure: the bride as mountain goddess (v 7–8 [*“bride”*])

α' The pleasures of the bride: her affection (vv 9–11 [*“my sister, (my) bride”*])

β' The inaccessible pleasure: the bride as locked garden (vv 12–15 [*“my sister, (my) bride”*])

Dennis Kinlaw: The bride has now come to the groom. The time for consummation has arrived. The bride in biblical fashion is veiled (v. 1; cf. **Gen 24:65; 29:23-25; 38:14**). But her lover is now free to enjoy her physical charms. The result is an erotic physical inventory of the details of her beauty. The description of her is given in metaphors that may seem alien to moderns. But, even then, the power of this bit of love poetry is moving. Her sense of modesty is protected (vv. 1, 3). His freedom is uninhibited. She is his, and what he sees is perfection (v. 7). To him there is no flaw in her.

Sierd Woudstra: **Chapter 4** is a song praising the exquisite beauty of the bride, in imagery best understood and appreciated by the Oriental mind.

I. (:1-7) FOREPLAY FOR BIBLICAL SEX (INTIMACY) IS PRAISE FOR YOUR BRIDE'S FLAWLESS BEAUTY

Trevor Longman: The reason why we treat **4:1–7** separately is that it comprises a form critical unit, which has been called a **wasf** in recent years. **Wasf** is an Arabic term, which simply means **description**, and its application to biblical scholarship originated with the research of **J. G. Wetzstein** in the nineteenth century. **Wetzstein** was not a biblical scholar, but rather a German diplomat living in Syria at this time. As he

attended local weddings, he noted similarities between the customs and songs of the day and what he read in the Song of Songs. In correspondence with the eminent biblical scholar **Franz Delitzsch**, he talked about songs where the groom and the bride would **describe one another's physical beauty as a prelude to lovemaking**. **Delitzsch** published excerpts of his personal correspondence with **Wetzstein** in an appendix in his commentary. Since this time, other more ancient analogies to these descriptive songs have been discovered and described, but they have nonetheless retained the name **waşf** in the literature.

Song of Songs **4:1–7** is simply the first of four **waşfs** in the Song. The others are found at **5:10–16; 6:4–6; 7:2–8**. . . All except **7:2–8** follows the pattern of starting at the head and working down the body. The descriptions all stop with the object of the speaker's sensuous attention. In the case of **4:1–7** that would be the woman's breasts. If we allow that **verses 10–14** continue the **waşf**, then it is the woman's vagina. In either case, it is clear that this poem is a prelude to lovemaking.

A. (:1a) Opening Summary Praise of Bride's Beauty

*"How beautiful you are, my darling,
How beautiful you are!"*

Tom Gledhill: The poem itself is framed by two similar exclamations of praise: *How beautiful (4:1)*; *All beautiful you are (4:7)*. This is how he feels about his beautiful girl, and then he proceeds to the specific aspects of her beauty.

Daniel Akin: Time and tenderness are essential twins for a sexually and romantically attractive bedroom. Here we see that slow, romantic foreplay is underway. He praises her specifically and in detail for everything he sees. He gives before receiving. He is as much concerned, if not more so, for her pleasure and satisfaction than he is for his own. He is loving her as Christ has loved us (**Eph 5:25ff**).

B. (:1b-5) Specific Body Parts Praised by Creative Metaphors

1. (:1b) Eyes

"Your eyes are like doves behind your veil;"

Iain Duguid: The descriptive poem (sometimes called a *wasf*) begins with her dove-like eyes. Like many of the other images in the poem, this metaphor is full of motion, as doves flutter about from branch to branch. It also communicates shyness and inaccessibility, since doves are often observed hidden in the clefts of the rock (see **2:14**). Here, used in conjunction with her veil, the focus is on the latter attribute.

2. (:1c) Hair

*"Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Mount Gilead."*

Iain Duguid: The image is one of shimmering motion and life

3. (:2) Teeth

*“Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes
Which have come up from their washing,
All of which bear twins,
And not one among them has lost her young.”*

Iain Duguid: symmetrical perfection of form

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The woman has all of her teeth! This may seem like a rather droll bit of praise to the modern, Western reader, but we live in an age of highly sophisticated dentistry and orthodontics. Until very recently, a beautiful, healthy smile with no missing teeth was hardly something people could take for granted. The fact that the teeth are like shorn lambs that come up from washing obviously implies that they are clean and white.

Trevor Longman: In a word, dental hygiene was nothing like it is today. To be banal about it, the verse basically has the man saying to the woman, “Your teeth are white, and you even have all of them!” although the flattery is delivered with more of a flourish than that.

4. (:3a) Lips

*“Your lips are like a scarlet thread,
And your mouth is lovely.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The obvious visual link between the metaphor and the lips is the **color red**, a feature still regarded as attractive for women’s lips in many cultures. For the reader of the biblical canon, it is noteworthy that the phrase “*scarlet thread*,” is precisely the same as that used to describe the “*scarlet thread*” by which Rahab signaled to the Israelites which house was hers (**Josh 2:18**). Is it coincidence that Rahab, a prostitute, had such an item readily available in her home? Possibly; but a scarlet thread may have had some kind of sexual significance and thus have been a kind of trademark for prostitutes. **Keel** ([1994] 143) suggests that a prostitute would have attached the red cord to her door as a symbol of her profession. If so, the red cord may not have of itself signaled prostitution; it could have been a **symbol for love** (like the “heart” shape today) that was co-opted by prostitution. In any case, the point may be that the man sees her lips as an **invitation to love**.

Trevor Longman: The reference might be to the natural color of the woman’s lips but could refer to the fact that they are artificially colored in a way analogous to modern lipstick.

However, in the context of a love poem, the intention of the compliment is obvious. She has lovely lips; he desires to kiss them. Indeed, her mouth is desirable; he would like to possess it.

5. (:3b) Temples

*“Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate
Behind your veil.”*

Iain Duguid: on account of their many seeds, pomegranates were associated with fertility, a theme never too far below the surface of this poem. The word for mouth (*midbār*) is unusual, focusing on the mouth as the organ of speech: it is not merely the appearance of her mouth that is lovely, but the use to which she puts it.

6. (:4) Neck

*“Your neck is like the tower of David
Built with rows of stones,
On which are hung a thousand shields,
All the round shields of the mighty men.”*

Iain Duguid: it seems likely that this is an image of strength and confidence. She carries herself with a regal bearing. Her neck is also like the tower of David in its adornment: the decorative stonework and two different kinds of shields hung about the tower suggest a comparison to the woman’s multi-layered necklaces which the man admired in **1:10**, though the language is admittedly obscure. The choice of such military imagery is an interesting one: it depicts her as a fortified city, impervious to assault (**Walsh 2000: 97**), just as she will later be described as a locked garden and a sealed fountain (**v. 12**) and as a city wall, defended with towers (**8:10**). Clearly, she is no easy conquest for any man who comes along; she has followed her own counsel not to stir up love too soon (**2:7; 3:5**).

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Applied to walls and towers, this language connotes impregnability. The man’s adoration of the woman arises in part from the fact that he cannot take her at will. He speaks tenderly to her, hoping that she will give him willingly what he cannot take by force. Furthermore, his words imply respect for how she deports herself and possesses her beauty. She is not weak in her beauty but strong.

7. (:5) Breasts

*“Your two breasts are like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle,
Which feed among the lilies.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: the juxtaposition of lotuses and fawns is significant. Both connote beauty, sexuality, and life. The woman can compare the man’s lips to lotuses (**Song 5:13**) and call herself a lotus (**Song 2:1**). For the man, her breasts are a focal point of her sexuality.

Tom Gledhill: They are graceful, sprightly and playful. Their texture and softness are invitations to caressing and fondling.

Richard Hess: The emphasis again is upon life and fertility. **Pope** observes how the biblical texts can identify the breasts as givers of milk and life (**Isa. 28:9; Joel 2:16; Ps. 22:10 [22:9 Eng.]; Job 3:12**), as well as objects that sexually attract (**Ezek. 16:7; 23:3, 21; Hosea 2:4 [2:2 Eng.]**). They represent the part of the female that, in the eyes of her lover, combine **beauty and grace** with **fertility and youth**. The twin fawns enhance this image with a picture of perfect balance between the two as well as a doubling of all these characteristics.

Trevor Longman: They are *grazing among the lilies*. Are we to picture them from the rear then? That is, as they stick their heads into the sweet smell of the flowers, their rounded rumps with their small tails may remind the poet of breasts with their protruding nipples. Perhaps we carry the image too far, but then again there are no formulas for knowing when to stop.

C. (:6) Sexual Desire Expressed

*“Until the cool of the day
When the shadows flee away,
I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh
And to the hill of frankincense.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Having described her breasts, the man abruptly breaks off from the description and declares his intentions. He is determined to get himself to “*Myrrh Mountain*” and “*Incense Hill*,” and the meaning of his words is hardly obscure: the two hills are obviously her breasts.

Richard Hess: It is as though the male, having joyfully praised one part of his lover’s body after another, reaches the breasts and can go no farther. A torrent of sensual images and passions come cascading down upon him as he determines in his mind to spend the night with her and to realize the love that he has imagined. Altogether overcome, he expresses a collection of images selected from earlier expressions of love by his partner and himself. The overpowering aromas of the spices betray a fever pitch of excitement in his own heart as he thinks only of his lover.

D. (:7) Closing Summary Praise of Bride’s Beauty

*“You are altogether beautiful, my darling,
And there is no blemish in you.”*

Richard Hess: The summary of v. 7 frames its comments with two second-person feminine pronominal suffixes on the first and last words, “*All of you/in you*.” There is no verb in this verse, unlike all the others. Instead, there are two designations that surround the term of endearment. The whole produces a chiasm:

*All of you
is beautiful,
my darling,
There is not a blemish
in you.*

Iain Duguid: Having described the perfect number (**seven**) of perfect body parts, it is not surprising that the man concludes his description by saying, *You are altogether beautiful, my love*. Not only are the woman's concerns about her own appearance in **1:5** swept away at a stroke, but when he adds, there is no flaw in you, he widens the statement. To be without flaw sometimes refers to physical appearance, as in the case of Absalom (**2 Sam. 14:25**), but it can also refer to moral and intellectual capacity as well (see **Dan. 1:4**). She is not just physically attractive, but **altogether beautiful** in his eyes. The man's joy in his bride on their wedding day is comparable to the Lord's delight in his original creation when he declared of all that he had made that it was 'very good' (**Gen. 1:31**).

Tom Gledhill: But the mysterious combination of the correct proportions that makes for true beauty defies all detached description. We can only stop and gaze in awe, and know that it is so. **Alexander Pope** has written:

“Tis not a lip or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.”

(:8) HINGE – SUMMONS TO JOIN HIM – BIBLICAL SEX IS BY INVITATION ONLY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

*“Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
May you come with me from Lebanon.
Journey down from the summit of Amana,
From the summit of Senir and Hermon,
From the dens of lions,
From the mountains of leopards.”*

Richard Hess: His invitation to his bride then turns into a call to come away from the impregnable heights and to join him. . . **Verse 8** forms a “hinge” between what has preceded and what follows. . . The connections of **v. 8** guarantee that the waş of the first half of this chapter will not be separated from the garden imagery of the second half.

Trevor Longman: The distant, dangerous location signifies her present distance from the man. He wants her to join him in a place of safety, namely, his embrace. The emphasis of the verse is on the *with me*.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The point of the text is that she is wonderful, powerful (in her sexuality), and inaccessible. . . Once again, the virginity of the woman asserts itself and sets her far beyond his reach. She will be his only if she chooses to come down from her mountain lair. . .

Furthermore, we need to account for the surprising cluster of uses of the term “*bride*,” here and only here. As suggested above, this canto depicts a bridegroom calling his new

bride on their wedding night to their first union. He tenderly woos her, in effect seducing her rather than simply claiming his right as husband to her body. Even so, he repeatedly calls her “*bride*” in this context to gently remind her that she has entered this relationship with him, and that a bride is not truly a bride until she has consummated her marriage. Calling her “*bride*” is not simply demanding sex from her on the grounds that she is now his wife, but it is a tender reminder of the nature of their relationship. Five times in a row addressing her by this epithet, he declares how beautiful and delightful she is to him while yet speaking of her as a goddess on a mountain (**Song 4:8**) or a locked up garden (**Song 4:12**). The point is that to truly be a bride she must descend to him and open her garden to him. Finally in **Song 5:1**, at the celebration of their sexual union (as I interpret it), he calls her “*bride*” for the last time. From that point forward, she is no longer a bride but a **wife**.

II. (:9-15) BIBLICAL SEX IS SENSUOUS, EXOTIC AND EXHILARATING

A. (:9-11) Your Love Must be Celebrated

1. (:9) Your Love is Alluring and Exciting -- You Drive Me Crazy

*“You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride;
You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes,
With a single strand of your necklace.”*

Trevor Longman: Here, the focus is on the emotions, and the word refers to the man’s excited emotional state as he thinks of the woman. A more colloquial translation of the verb would be “you drive me crazy!”

Duane Garrett / Paul House: “*Sister*” -- The term here does not mean that she is literally his sister. Still, we must ask why the Song would use a love term that seems to imply incestuous love (cf. **Lev 18:9**). The significance of the term as an affectionate expression of licit love is not unrelated to its literal meaning. A brother and sister are members of the same family and household. As close relatives, the emotional bond between them is very strong. In an ancient Israelite family, to be sure, kinship and its duties were not taken lightly. In calling her his “*sister*,” the man implies that they have become **one family**. The canonical analogue is Adam’s declaration that the woman was *bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh* (**Gen 2:23**). In Wisdom literature, by contrast, the prostitute or adulteress is the “*foreign woman*” or “*stranger*” (e.g. **Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5**). In calling her sister, he declares that the two of them are bound as by having **common flesh and blood**.

Richard Hess: The **eyes** represent to the male the most alluring part of the female’s body. They are what one looks at first, and they increase the value and beauty of the whole of the female.

Tom Gledhill: Our lover has been smitten by his girl. The words translated by the NIV as ‘*You have stolen my heart*’ constitute one word in Hebrew. The verbal form is derived from the noun for heart, and can mean either, ‘You have captured or taken away my heart’ or else, ‘You have inflamed, aroused, excited my heart.’ It is a rare

form in the Hebrew, and can most likely bear both meanings. Whilst in the majority of Old Testament usages the heart is the seat of the mind, the will, or the conscience, or more generally the person himself, in this particular case his heart is more evidently the seat of his emotions. Our lover is completely bowled over. One glance is enough to slay him, one sparkling shaft reflected from her jewels, is sufficient to render him helplessly in love. He is a captive. He cannot help himself. He has been remorselessly drawn to her. His thought process cannot explain it, his love is in a sense irrational. He has been rendered weak and feeble by her beauty, overpowered by her loveliness, yet aroused and made strong by his every thought of her. But it is not mere thoughts that arouse him. Her caresses (*dôdîm*), her stroking and embracing are more intoxicating than any wine. Her perfume is heady and sends him reeling. Sight, touch and smell—all these work their magnetic power on her beloved.

2. (:10-11) Your Love is Sensuous and Exhilarating

*“How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much better is your love than wine,
And the fragrance of your oils Than all kinds of spices!
Your lips, my bride, drip honey;
Honey and milk are under your tongue,
And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.”*

Iain Duguid: As in the beginning of the Song, desire seeks the fulfilment of a kiss, but now the tables have been turned. **Verses 10–11** closely mirror **1:2–3**, only now the sentiments originally spoken by the woman are found on the man’s lips. Like her appearance (**4:1**), the woman’s caresses are desirable, better than wine. The meaning of the metaphor in the opening chapter is now illuminated and enhanced by the intervening comparison of her body to a vineyard that is in blossom (**1:6; 2:13**): we now discover that wine is not merely a random symbol for the sweetness of a kiss, but rather represents the appropriate product of vineyards that have been harvested at the right time, not when they are in blossom but when their fruit is fully ripe. Now, on their wedding day, the couple’s love is fully mature, like a fine wine, ready to be consummated.

Fragrance and taste go back and forth as the dominant sense in the poem: the taste of the woman’s lips combines with the scent of her oils to form a heady concoction.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: This strophe opens with a recapitulation of the praise of her body but moves into a celebration of the joys of receiving affection from her. The metaphors here relate to **sensations** rather than to physical objects. Wine, perfume, balsam, honey, and milk all connote not the items themselves but their tastes and smells. Also, metaphors that are **liquids** rather than solids (such as towers, mountains, goats, or sheep) more readily lend themselves to the **celebration of an action**—her lovemaking—rather than to the praise of her physical body.

Richard Hess: The **tenth verse** provides an enthusiastic assessment of the lover’s lovemaking. This central expression of physical love is assessed and pronounced both

“*delightful*” and “*better*” than wine.

Daniel Akin: Verse 11 moves us into even greater sensual and romantic territory. Her lips, he says, “*drip sweetness like the honeycomb,*” and “*honey and milk are under your tongue.*” The idea that a particular kind of kissing began in France is put to rest by this verse! Deep, wet, sweet, and passionate kissing is at least as old as this Song. Canaan was a land of milk and honey (cf. **Exod 3:8**). It was a land of promise, joy, blessing, and satisfaction that God graciously provided for the nation of Israel following her enslavement in Egypt. It was a land of sweetness to a people who had been enslaved for more than four hundred years. Solomon found immeasurable joy in the deep, long, and intimate kisses of his bride. He could, as we say today, “just eat her up!”

Tom Gledhill: The girl’s **garments** also add to her allure. Probably they refer to her undergarments or her *négligé*. The word used is the same as that describing the covering of the wedding bed on which the ‘tokens of virginity’ were found. So there is the possibility of some erotic connotation here. The delicacy and flimsiness of female underwear, sprayed with scent, has an undoubted erotic appeal.

B. (:12) Your Virginity Must be Protected

*“A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
A rock garden locked, a spring sealed up.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In this verse the notable feature of the metaphor is that she is a “*locked*” garden and “*sealed*” fountain. The point is not that she is locked to all others but open to him. Rather, it is that she is as of yet still virginal and out of even his reach. Like the prior metaphor of the goddess on a mountain, this strophe presents her as **inaccessible**. He appeals to her to open herself to him.

Richard Hess: The locked garden provides an image of the female, whose physical love is not open to anyone. It thus continues the image of inaccessibility exemplified by the mountains of v. 8. However, as the verses continue, it becomes clear that the male does visit the garden and knows of the fruits and beauties found in it.

Trevor Longman: The next three verses will describe the woman as a garden and a fountain. In the ancient Near East and elsewhere in the Bible (**Prov. 5:15–20**), these are highly erotic images. The images of fountain and garden probably are to be visualized together since a garden would need a water supply. The focus may well be on the ultimate place in the act of lovemaking, the woman’s vagina. Two of the images are in the present verse, garden and fountain. She is not a garden or fountain open to every passer-by; she is rather a locked garden, a sealed fountain. These images describe her inaccessibility. However, as we will see soon, she will open up her treasures to the man who will enter her garden (“*enter*” often has the overtones of sexual intercourse). With the image of sealing and locking, we would be hard pressed to miss the idea of virginity (at least up to now).

C. (:13-15) Your Love is Exotic and Revitalizing

1. (:13-14) Your Love is Exotic and Fragrant

*“Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates
With choice fruits,
henna with nard plants,
Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,
With all the trees of frankincense, Myrrh and aloes,
along with all the finest spices.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In short, the phrase “*your growth [shoots]*” does not refer to any parts of the woman’s body. Rather, it refers to the variety of plants found in her “*garden,*” a metaphor for the pleasures of her lovemaking. This verse does not catalog parts of her anatomy under the metaphor of plants; still less does it focus on her vagina. It uses an assortment of aromatic plants to communicate the idea that her love gives manifold and diverse pleasures. Her affection is to him an Eden (“*paradise*”), a garden-park with every kind of exotic, delicious, and wonderful kind of plant. Loving her could never be boring.

Trevor Longman: perhaps the *shoots* refer to her pubic hair. . .

Exotic Plants:

- Saffron (*karkōm*): a type of crocus that has purple flowers and produces an oil that gives a sweet, spicy, floral scent. The flower is native to western Asia, Asia Minor, and the eastern Mediterranean. The word is from Sanskrit.
- Calamus (*qāneh*): literally, the “cane,” but in this context it is likely a reference to sweet cane oil, which has a warm, woody, spicy odor.
- Cinnamon (*qinnāmōn*): refers to the aromatic bark of any of a number of trees. The English word is derived from the Hebrew via the Greek, although the substance comes from the far East, Ceylon, or India. In the Hebrew Bible we find it used in the oil of anointing (**Exod. 30:27**) and in the bed of the adulteress (**Prov. 7:17**).
- Incense tree (‘*ašē lebônâ*): a word that does not denote a certain kind of tree but rather a type of sweet-smelling tree.
- Myrrh (*mōr*): as defined in **1:13**, an aromatic gum from the bark of the Balsamadendron tree from Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. The word also occurs in Song of Songs **1:13; 3:6; 4:6; 5:5, 13**).
- Aloes (‘*āhālôt*): a fragrant wood of an east Indian tree.
- Spices (*bōšem*): or perhaps “perfumes” in this context; see **4:10**.

2. (:15) Your Love is Active and Revitalizing

*“You are a garden spring,
A well of fresh water,
And streams flowing from Lebanon.”*

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you think Christians are prudish and unwilling to discuss biblical sexual issues?
- 2) Why such tension between the inaccessibility and the openness of the bride to sexual intimacy?
- 3) How can you encourage a more open and celebratory experience of intimacy within marriage?
- 4) What type of praise do you lavish on your spouse?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: A number of **motifs** are present. Scholars routinely refer to the **song of admiration** (especially as seen in vv 1–7) as a **wasf**, a song in praise of one’s beloved. The motif of **pinning over one’s inability to reach the beloved** is also common in Egyptian love poetry. There, however, the pining is more literal in that the two lovers are physically separated. Here, the two are in one another’s presence but separated by the bride’s virginity. The motif of the woman as a **garden of delights** appears elsewhere in the Song and in ancient Near Eastern poetry. The portrait of the woman as a **goddesslike figure**, high on a mountain and surrounded by lions, draws upon a motif familiar from ancient artwork. Here, as elsewhere, the Song skillfully manipulates and recasts traditional motifs and images to create a text that is altogether unlike its contemporary analogues.

Mark Driscoll: This is why we tell you, “Don’t cohabit. Don’t fornicate. Don’t look at pornography. Don’t create a standard of beauty that is not your spouse and then compare your spouse to the standard of beauty. Have your spouse be your standard of beauty.” This is the biblical principle: one-woman man; the Bible’s against lust; those kinds of things. If she is his standard of beauty, then there is no flaw in her because she looks like her. He is not comparing her to other women, and the same is true for both husbands and wives. Your standard of beauty is your spouse. There is not a standard of beauty that you evaluate your spouse by. This is one of the great devastating effects of pornography. You lust after people, compare your spouse to them. It’s impossible to be satisfied in your marriage if you don’t have a standard that is biblical. The standard is always your spouse. (“*His Garden*”)

John Schultz: We have a hard time imagining that God would get excited about us. Some of God’s excitement rings through in John’s description of the New Jerusalem. It must have been God’s idea to show this to John in a vision. We read: “*One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the*

Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” God sees His own glory reflected in the bride He has intended to present to His own Son. It is beauty beyond description. . . God expressed inner beauty in a human body and He expresses spiritual love and perfection in human love. It is a triple comparison. But the ultimate truth is the last one. The other two are pictures of reality.

Rob Salvato: Divine Romance – Principles about Biblical Sex

So He brings us into the Honeymoon suite to learn some principles about Biblical sex –

- A) Meant to be descriptive – not directive –
- B) In other words – not a play by play
- C) He wants us to learn from the experience -- Catch the Flow & the heart in what is happening

#1 Biblical sex is between a husband and a wife!

#2 Biblical Sex is tender!

- A) Solomon starts to undress his wife with incredible tenderness!
- B) He doesn't rip her clothes off – like Conan the Barbarian!
- C) He is going to undress her with great tenderness commenting on her beauty
Beauty that has as much to do with her Character as it does her physical appearance

Men and women have very different sex drives

When it comes to sex – Men are always ready

- A) Any time anywhere –doesn't matter! –
Woman like to be Romanced
- B) Men are all about the Destination – get there
Woman are about the Road – how do we get there
- C) Men are like a Microwave – 20 seconds heated up
Women – Crock pot
God made men and women differently in this way for a reason.
- D) Men a woman likes to be romanced – Starts earlier in the day – call – card – a touch
Involves good conversation

Solomon seems to understand that for a woman sex usually begins in the mind – A woman's mind is her most sensitive sexual organ

- A) A woman gets ready for intimacy through what she thinks and feels
- B) But to a great extent, she thinks and feels as a man leads her to think and feel
- C) Nothing calms a woman's fears and excites her passions than to have her man tell her how wonderful she is
- D) Biblical Sex is Tender – tender words – tender touch!

#3 Biblical Sex is Sensuous!

Guys your wife needs to know that you are pleased with her appearance

- A) Stolen his heart – Smitten
- B) Being with you is better than any other earthly pleasure! Nothing compares

#4 Biblical Sex is Holy!

- A) Isn't it amazing that the Bible talks about Sex in this way!
- B) The Bible is incredibly graphic about marital love!
The word Holy = set apart – sacred – special
- C) Our society has made sex
- D) Because of that the Church has responded by making sex Taboo and Profane –
because of that we tend to look at it as dirty – don't use the S word

God wants us to understand that in marriage Sex is Sacred – Holy – special –

- A) Magnify our oneness – Give Glory to God
- B) Because a spring in the desert was a rare commodity an owner would often build a wall around the garden – so no one would come into it and ruin it
- C) The symbolic of her body – He is speaking of her virginity –
- D) The Bible refers to a man's sexuality as a fountain –
- E) Meaning he has kept his fountain out of her well

#5 Biblical Sex is responsive!

God knows that a man is energized sexually by what he sees and feels.

- A) If nothing is withheld, he withholds nothing
- B) Solomon's bride was holding nothing back
- C) Great sex to a woman is tenderness – Great sex to a man is responsiveness –
This couple had deeply met their mutual needs

6 Biblical sex is rejuvenating!

<http://media.calvaryvista.com/salvato-rob/studies-books/22-SON-2008/22-SON-003-006.htm>

TEXT: Song of Solomon 4:16 – 5:1

TITLE: *THE CONSUMMATION OF SEXUAL UNION*

BIG IDEA:

THE CELEBRATION OF ROMANTIC LOVE REACHES ITS CLIMAX IN PASSIONATE SEXUAL UNION

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The garden in this canto is the woman's body. Since Song 4:16b speaks of "my garden" but 4:16c speaks of "his garden," it appears that the man sings 4:16ab and the woman sings 4:16c. In 5:1 the man speaks of "my wine," "my balsam," and "my myrrh," all in reference to the delights of the woman's body and affection. Thus, the man also sings of her as "my garden." Of course, it is possible that the woman sings all of v 16, first speaking of her body as "my garden" and then as "his garden," but it is not possible that the man sings 4:16c.

Similarly, it is clear that the man sings lines 3A–D in **Song 5:1**, but it seems that the chorus sings 4A–B at the end of **5:1**; this final pair of lines addresses "friends" and exhorts them to drink deeply of love. That is, it appears that the chorus in 5:1c is telling the two lovers to enjoy their time together. . .

In the structure of Song of Songs, this piece is the **center of a large chiasmus** that spans the whole of the work. Often, in a biblical chiasmus, the central text governs and provides the hermeneutical key to the whole text. In this case, the **centerpiece** is the **sexual union** of the man and woman. This moment is the pivot point for the whole book, and this commentary suggests that the bridal event, the **movement from virgin to wife**, is the theme of Song of Songs.

Tom Gledhill: The verse is full of the first person: *I have come . . . I have gathered. . . I have eaten. . . I have drunk*; four very deliberate and incisive verbal actions. Eight times the strongly possessive 'my' occurs: *My garden, my sister bride, my myrrh, my spice, my honeycomb, my honey, my wine, my milk*. It seems on the surface of it to indicate a strong male triumphalism. 'I came, I saw, I conquered.' But the whole tenor of the Song is against any such interpretation. She has invited him in eagerly, their passion is **mutual**. Most of the Song is concerned with the girl's feelings; it is only occasionally that the passion of the man is described.

Daniel Akin: In beautiful and enticing poetry Shulammitte invites Solomon to make love to her. She who has twice said not to "*stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time*" (cf. 2:7; 3:5) now says, in effect, "The time is right. I am yours. Come and take me." North winds are strong and south winds more gentle. In lovemaking Shulammitte wants and needs both.

She has been listening to every word spoken by her husband, for she picks up on the imagery of the Garden of Eden. She is now that garden for him, and here “love” as she calls him is welcome to come in and enjoy. She invites him and she guides him. She tells him what she is feeling and what she wants. Great sex is the result of good communication. All the physical parts fit when a man and woman come together, but sex is no mere mechanical union. It is a personal and spiritual union nurtured by careful communication. We cannot be certain of all that is meant by the imagery of coming to the garden and tasting the choice fruits, but it is not difficult to imagine all sorts of good things that this couple will share!

Iain Duguid: In this poem, the man and the woman discover the true meaning of marriage as a union of heart, soul and flesh. The long period of waiting comes to an end, and their sexual union is a moment of great delight and joy, not merely for them but for the wider community. The garden that was once carefully sealed and locked is now open so that the pleasures of its paradise can be explored and enjoyed. The Song joyfully affirms that the context for the richest of human relationships is within God’s design for marriage, which is between a man and a woman.

John Schultz: *The Tyndale Commentary* says about these verses: “The third major division of the song comes to a climax with these two verses. They form the exact middle of the Hebrew text with 111 lines (60 verses, plus the title, 1:1) from **1:2** to **4:15**, and 111 lines (55 verses) from **5:2** to **8:14**. These two verses contain five lines of text, but they also contain the **climax** of the thought of the poem. Everything thus far has been moving towards the consolidation and confirmation of what has been pledged here. The sister/bride now becomes the ‘consummated one’ ... as lover and beloved extend to each other the fullness of themselves.”

I. (4:16a) STIRRING UP SEXUAL PASSIONS (Male)

A. Sexual Passions Involve Powerful Forces

*“Awake, O north wind,
And come, wind of the south;”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The blowing of powerful winds on a garden conveys the idea that the garden has been seized by an external power, such that the trees seem to move of their own accord and the resins and oils of the plants are released. It is an appropriate metaphor for sexual passion in the woman.

John Schultz: Some commentators are confused as to who the speaker is in **4:16**. Some divide the verse in two and assign the first part “*Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad*” to the boy and “*Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits*” to the girl. There can be little doubt but that the girl is speaking in the last sentence. But I see no reason why the first part should not attributed to her also.

B. Sexual Passions Involve Strong Attraction

*“Make my garden breathe out fragrance,
Let its spices be wafted abroad.”*

II. (4:16b) INVITING SEXUAL UNION (Female)

*“May my beloved come into his garden
And eat its choice fruits!”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The woman responds that the man should come into his garden and eat his choice fruit. In the language of the Song of Songs, this is a straightforward invitation for him to enter her sexually. In the structure of the Song of Songs, this is the centerpiece and crescendo. All of the Song focuses on this, the union of the new husband and wife.

Tom Gledhill: There it was a call to avoid premature awakening. But now the time is ripe. There is to be no restraint. What has for so long been held back, can now with great abandon be allowed its full expression. With great eagerness the two lovers come together. She is freely giving herself to him, with seductive invitation. She is enticing her lover and making herself so alluring, that he becomes mad with desire. She is not merely passive, but ardent and eager. She wants him to feel her attractiveness, her desirability. She wants him to enter her garden and taste its exquisite fruits. The use of the verb ‘to enter’ or to come into is a standard Hebrew metaphor for sexual intercourse. He is ‘entering’ his garden, which is my garden (i.e. the girl’s and also his). The garden is their mutual possession.

III. (5:1a) REVELING IN SEXUAL SATISFACTION (Male)

*“I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride;
I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
I have drunk my wine and my milk.”*

Tremper Longman: Metaphorically he describes how he follows up on her invitation for sexual union. He enters the garden and enjoys all of its delights. He has gathered, eaten and drunk in the garden. The verbs all speak of his partaking of the good things in the woman’s garden. The delights are represented by the myrrh, spices, honeycomb, honey, wine, and milk. The double objects of each of the final three cola indicate the totality of his experience. He hasn’t just had her wine, but also her milk, not only her honey but also her comb. He has possessed her completely, a fitting image of sexual intercourse.

Bruce Hurt: Paige Patterson notes the following about Solomon’s three expressions:

- (1) The gathering of myrrh and spices refers to the fragrant and enriching result of their union.
- (2) The eating of honey and honeycomb suggests the sweetness of their relationship.

(3) The drinking of wine and milk focuses on the satisfaction derived from the relationship and the complete fulfillment of their sexual thirsts and appetites.

IV. (5:1b) AFFIRMATION OF SEXUAL UNION (Chorus)

*“Eat, friends;
Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.”*

Richard Hess: Again, it is not clear who is being addressed or even who is doing the talking. It may be that the male and female address young men and women who are their companions. The couple exhorts them to join in the joy of their love with food and drink. On the other hand it is possible that a group such as the daughters of Jerusalem forms a chorus here and addresses the couple. They encourage the pair in their expressions of love and in finding love. This is even more likely if the final word is translated “lovers” rather than “with lovemaking.” However, it is true even in the latter case. . .

The wine of love has reached its full potency, and the couple is ready to share in its giddy pleasures. The chorus encourages the lovers to partake of their feast. The image here of lovemaking suggests that the eating and drinking involve more than a marriage feast or other special event with foods and drinks. The picture of lovemaking in the context of the preceding use of verbs of consumption implies feasting upon one another’s bodies in the satisfaction of sexual desire. As the male lover declares (**5:1a**), so the chorus also recognizes no limit to the joys that the lovers may find in one another (**5:1b**). To the contrary, they command indulgence in the fullness of these pleasures.

Daniel Akin: [Identifies the speaker as God who speaks approvingly of the union]

Iain Duguid: It is more likely that this speech represents the **daughters of Jerusalem** (**Hess** 2005: 156–157), or even **God himself** giving his sanction on their union, as it were, declaring their marriage to be ‘very good’ (**Estes** 2010: 362). The distinction between the last two choices is perhaps more apparent than real, since in either case it reflects the author’s evaluation of the consummation of their marriage. However, this corporate benediction once again reminds us that sex and marriage are not simply individual appetites and pleasures that may be indulged as a private matter between any two consenting adults, but always exist in the larger context of the covenant community.

Jack Deere: A more plausible suggestion is that the speaker was God Himself. Only their Creator would have been a “guest” on that occasion. Since their love was from Him it was fitting that He approve it. He invited them to enjoy sexual love in marriage as if it were a banquet (“*eat . . . and drink*”). This clearly indicates God’s approval of marriage, which He designed in the Garden of Eden (cf. **Gen. 2:24**).

Tremper Longman: The chorus is the voice of those outside the relationship who put their imprimatur, as it were, on the relationship. They encourage them in their union.

They command them to eat and drink, indeed drink so much that they get intoxicated because of their union. Love, and the act of love, sometimes acts like a little too much alcohol, making the head reel and causing one to lose touch with reality.

Tom Gledhill: The last line of **5:1** is an **affirmation** of the lovers' activity. What they are doing is good, wholesome, right and proper. It is the natural physical consummation of their love. Their abandonment in self-giving is thoroughly approved and endorsed. There is to be no reserve, no restraint, but a complete and happy enjoyment of each other in their mutual love. They are to become 'drunk' with lovemaking, they are to be inebriated, on a physical and emotional high. The last word could be interpreted either as 'with love-making, with caresses' or as 'O lovers', referring to the lovers themselves. These words are spoken by the author of the poems. He intrudes on to the stage, as it were, to pass a comment on the action of the characters whom he has created. It is a literary device to indicate an external approval of the closing scene of intimacy.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can you describe your sexual experiences as feasting and drinking?
- 2) Do you view your sexual union in marriage as a garden of sweet fragrance, fruitfulness and unbridled pleasure?
- 3) What are some of the consequences of so many couples engaging in premarital sex – even when they are themselves intending to eventually marry?
- 4) Do you sense that you have God's affirmation on your marriage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tom Gledhill: The language which is used to describe the act of sexual union ranges across a very broad spectrum. It varies from the coarse and vulgar use of four letters words, through the vast variety of current slang, the cool and clinical descriptions of a medical manual, the beauty of poetic metaphor and simile. The power of such language to induce desire and stimulate mental images depends not only on the degree of explicitness conveyed, but on the ability to evoke a mood or feeling into which we can be drawn. Indeed there is the possibility of a distancing effect of the more explicit language, which may cause shock or revulsion. On the other hand, the more oblique metaphors may have a more subtle power of seduction. But the line between erotic sensual language and beautiful metaphor is sometimes very difficult to discern, for pornography can so easily masquerade under the guise of high-class literature. What is good taste for some may be totally unacceptable to others. We have seen that the

biblical metaphors are somewhat restrained (knowing, entering, coming into the garden, eating honey and the honeycomb, drinking wine and milk, gathering myrrh and spice) and we are drawn comfortably into their orbit without too much visual stimulation. **D. H. Lawrence** in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is much more seductive with his descriptions of dark waves rising and heaving, heavy cumulative rhythms, the depths parting and being rolled asunder and so on. **Chaucer's** raunchy bumpkin who 'pricketh harde and deepe' is at the other end of the spectrum. The high literary reputation of an author does not necessarily mean that he will not at times offend the sensibilities of a later age, or that he himself has not violated universal moral norms of any age.

David Guzik: Seeing the high value of virginity also helps us to understand the Biblical commands against pre-marital sex. It is helpful to refute many myths about pre-marital sex:

Myth: **"The Bible says nothing against premarital sex."** Fact: The high value placed on virginity, seen here and in other passages such as **Deuteronomy 22:13–29** shows premarital sex is wrong. But it is also clearly found in the passages that speak against the sexual sin known in the New Testament as porneia, and commonly translated "fornication" (**1 Corinthians 6:13** and **6:18**; **Ephesians 5:3** and **5:5**; **1 Thessalonians 4:3**). Porneia broadly refers to all types of sexual activity outside of marriage (including homosexuality); it encompasses practically all sexual behavior outside of that which is practiced between a husband and a wife in the bonds of their marriage.

Myth: **"He wants to have sex with me because he loves me."** Fact: His love for you will be proved by his willingness to wait for marriage. The desire for sex does not prove love in a man. In one survey, 55% of men said "yes" to the following question: "If you could be certain that your wife or girlfriend would never know, would you have sex with any of her friends?" And to the question, "Have you ever had sex with a woman you have actively disliked?" 58% of men said "yes". You are foolish if you think a boy loves you—or even likes you—because he wants to have sex with you.

Myth: **"My boyfriend is a Christian and loves the Lord. I don't have to worry about that."** Fact: Christian men face the same challenges as non-Christians when it comes to sexual desires and lusts. They have the ability to overcome those lusts by the power of the Holy Spirit, but it isn't easy and many who thought they were strong enough have fallen to these sins.

Myth: **"We are going to get married, so it doesn't matter."** Fact: It does matter. First, you are setting a value on your own sexuality; there is a sense in which a woman then gives her future husband the right to treat her as an object. Second, you are setting a pattern; you are agreeing that in some circumstances, sex outside of marriage is acceptable, and this is something you don't want in your mind or in the mind of your marriage partner; especially because one of the most important aspects of a long lasting, fulfilling sexual relationship is trust.

Third, you are only taking away from the blessing God intends for your sexual relationship when married.

Myth: “**We can be married before God.**” Fact: If you were on a desert island without any intuitions of government or society, this might be an argument. But marriage in both the Biblical and cultural sense is being joined together in a public ceremony that is recognized as legal and legitimate by the law and the culture. You aren’t on a desert island.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 5:2 – 6:3

TITLE: TENSION BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE SEX DRIVES

BIG IDEA:

SEXUAL COMPATIBILITY CAN BE A STRUGGLE – GIVEN THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

INTRODUCTION:

Dennis Kinlaw: This is a remarkable picture of the kind of adjustments that are necessary in life style in marriage. Our natural sloth the differences between a man and a woman, our uncertainty about the other's thinking, the variations in our life rhythms, our unwillingness to alter our preferred patterns for the other, our own self-consciousness – all contribute to the problem of reading each other's advances. The lover misunderstands and departs. She is sick now with longing for him.

POSB: This is a common scene in marriages. Men and women have different sex drives and different sexual needs. Men usually desire sex more frequently than women do. Psychologist and marriage coach **Willard F. Harley, Jr.** lists the top five needs of men and women in his best-selling book, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-proof Marriage.* The top five needs of men, in order of priority, are...sexual fulfillment, recreational companionship, physical attractiveness, domestic support, admiration. The top five needs of women are: affection, conversation, honesty and openness, financial support, family commitment. Notice that sexual fulfillment is man's number one need, but it is not even on the list for women. Most men have a continuing appetite for sex. Though most women have a sexual appetite, it is usually not as strong. If a wife has a long, hard day, the last thing she feels like doing is having sex. If a man has a long, hard day, he may need to have sex to relive some tension! In this area and countless others, marriage partners must adjust to each other. Considering only one's own desires and needs makes these adjustments impossible, and leads to serious marital problems and often divorce. Attitudes other than selfishness are just as dangerous: indifference, emotional withdrawal, lack of consideration, failure to communicate, bitterness, impatience, and so many more. These "little foxes" (**Song 2:15**) can do great damage to marriages. Every couple experiences problems in their marriage—even kings and queens! In fact, any time there is more than one person, problems will arise....The honeymoon is over when the problems start.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: it is impossible, I will argue, to give this passage a literal reading without the text becoming nearly incomprehensible. Even if one should claim to make sense of the literal gist of these lyrics, one is left with a love song that is horrifying: A man pounds at his lover's door; after some hesitation, she arises to let him in, but he has already run away; she frantically looks for him, but the night watchmen find her, strip her, and beat her up! As a love song (if taken literally), this is a monstrous parody. The only way to interpret this material meaningfully is to take its

surreal imagery and incongruous twists for what they are: a **metaphor** symbolizing something altogether different from the quasi-story on the surface of the text.

Tremper Longman: The point is that this poem, like all the other poems in the Song, are not focused on a real life occurrence. They are creating moods and sensations. We can debate whether the poem intends for us to understand this as the woman's dream or not, but we cannot insist that these are real experiences. They are dream-like and poetic. This poem, especially the first part, utilizes some of the most erotic imagery in the Bible, but it does so very tastefully, through the use of double entendre.

I. (5:2-8) THE STRUGGLE FOR SEXUAL COMPATIBILITY

A. (:2a) Female Perspective: Slow to Perceive Her Lover's Desire for Sex

*"I was asleep, but my heart was awake.
A voice! My beloved was knocking:"*

Perhaps this section gives new depth to the cry of the groom in **Rev. 3:20** to His desired bride: *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with me."*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: it may be that *"I am asleep, but my heart is awake"* is a signal to the reader to expect a text that is dreamlike in its use of bizarre but emblematic images.

B. (:2b-3) Male's Perspective: Shut Out but Aroused for Sexual Activity

1. (:2b) His Urgent Plea

*"Open to me, my sister, my darling,
My dove, my perfect one!"*

Tremper Longman: The **door** is clearly a euphemism for a woman's vagina, and an open door denotes a **sexually available woman**. In the context of the Song and the intimate, exclusive relationship described here, there is no question of promiscuity, just sexual openness (see also **Song of Songs 8:9**).

Jack Deere: The fact that the lover no longer addressed her as *"my bride"* indicates there is a time lapse between **Song 5:1** (the wedding night) and Song 5:2. The couple should no longer be regarded as newlyweds. But he did address her by other affectionate terms.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: This rapid-fire string of affectionate terms implies that the man is trying to be as tender as possible but is in a desperate hurry for her to *"open."* [I do not agree with their conclusion that this is dealing with her **loss of virginity on her wedding night**. I think this refers to **sexual tension** that comes later in the marriage. But I do agree with much of the obscure sexual imagery and double entendres which they propose.]

2. (:2c-3) His Physical State of Sexual Readiness

*“For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of the night.
I have taken off my dress [garment], How can I put it on again?
I have washed my feet, How can I dirty them again?”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The man is pleading that his sexual stimulation is so strong at this point that further delay is unbearable for him. In modern English parlance, *head* is sometimes a euphemism for the penis, and this text seems to be employing the same circumspection in its language. The “*drops of the night*” refer to semen. . . it is apparent that the man’s primary concern is not that his hair is getting wet with dew. Rather, his words symbolically describe an urgent desire for sexual release. . .

This verse [3] is almost always taken to be part of the soprano’s lyrics. Interpreters generally assert that she is making the excuse that she cannot get up to open the door because she has already gone to bed. This is improbable, however, since the man is not asking her to come outside; he wants to come inside. She would have no reason to claim that she had washed her feet and therefore could not get them dirty. There is no indication that these words are anything but a continuation of the man’s lyrics. That is, they are further entreaties for her to let him in. We should note that the “*tunic*” is rarely women’s clothing; it is more frequently used of male apparel in the OT (e.g., **Gen 37:3; Exod 28:4; 40:14; 2 Sam 15:32; Isa 22:21; Ezra 2:69**).

Taken as the man’s words, the phrase that he had washed his feet may imply that he had washed them with a basin of water provided outside the door and did not want to go back out on the street, having just gone through the trouble of washing his feet. We should also note that “*foot*” in the dual is also used as a euphemism for the genital area. The statement that he had stripped off his tunic gives the startling image of him standing naked outside the door. . . The reality is that he is naked as he seeks to join himself to her; the metaphor is that he is standing outside the door. The sense of urgency implied in the metaphor is all the more vivid if one imagines him standing naked outside the door and desperately trying to come in.

[If you take the last line as spoken by the female:]

Tremper Longman: She has washed her feet, and she doesn’t want to walk across the floor and dirty them again. . . Perhaps again we are justified in suggesting double entendre. After all, feet are a well-known euphemism for genitalia, both male (**Exod. 4:25; Judg. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:4 [24:3]; Ruth 3:4, 7**) and female (**Deut. 28:57; Ezek. 16:25**) in the Old Testament. If this is double entendre, then she is expressing her reluctance to engage in physical intimacy at this point.

C. (:4-6a) Female’s Response: Too Hesitant to Open Up to Her Lover in Time

1. (:4) Beginning of Her Emotional Arousal

*“My beloved extended his hand through the opening,
And my feelings were aroused for him.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The intended significance, the sexual union of the man and woman, is at the surface of the text.

2. (:5) Realization of Her Physical Arousal

*“I arose to open to my beloved;
And my hands dripped with myrrh, And my fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the bolt.”*

Tremper Longman: the mention of the sweet smelling ointment and the sensuous description of a thick-dripping liquid certainly adds to the erotic atmosphere of this section.

3. (:6a) Moment for Physical Engagement Has Passed

*“I opened to my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away and had gone!
My heart went out to him as he spoke.”*

Iain Provan: What are we to make of these opening verses of chapter 5? The imagery of **verses 2–5** is plainly erotic and speaks to us of sexual intimacy. What is at one level a dream about the opening (or not) of a “door” is in fact at another level a dream about the consummation (or not) of the lovers’ physical relationship. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the reference to the man’s “*hand*” that lingers in the region of the “*hole*” in the door, causing his beloved’s insides to seethe (**v. 4**). The implication of intimacy is already apparent even before one realizes that the Hebrew word *yad* (hand) can also be used as a euphemism for “penis,” as in **Isaiah 57:8–10** (although obscured there by the NIV in both **verse 8**, where *yad* is rendered “*nakedness*,” and **verse 10**, where “*renewal of your strength [hand]*,” *hayyat yadek*, probably refers to sexual potency).

The “*feet*” (*raglayim*) can also be used euphemistically of genitals, as in **2 Samuel 11:8**, where Uriah is commanded by David (who hopes to cover up his sin with Bathsheba) to “*go down to your house and wash your feet*” (his own or Bathsheba’s?). There may therefore also be a playful double entendre in Song of Songs **5:3**, when the woman “complains” that if she lets her lover in, she will have to wash her “*feet*” all over again. She lies naked in bed as he, wet with dew (surely an image of sexual arousal here), presses his attentions upon her. She feigns disinterest, and he hesitates, even as she herself is aroused and moves to unbar the door. The moment is lost, however, and consummation never occurs. It is a dream about deep and mutual sexual desire and yet about misunderstanding, loss, and separation.

D. (:6b-8) Travails of Sexual Frustration (Female)

1. (:6b) Searching But Not Finding

*“I searched for him, but I did not find him;
I called him, but he did not answer me.”*

2. (:7) Struck by the Watchmen

*“The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me,
They struck me and wounded me;
The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me.”*

Iain Provan: The function of these watchmen, therefore, may not be so much to keep an eye on the outside world from the city walls as to ensure that the “walls” (i.e., the women) within the city are not “breached.” If it was unclear in **3:1–5** that they are actively interested in what occurs in love under their jurisdiction, it is now plain that they represent powers intent on keeping the lovers apart.

Dennis Kinlaw: Does this treatment by the watchmen reflect the girl’s guilt and sense of failure at the slowness of her response to her husband?

Tom Gledhill: She then begins her panic-stricken search. Seeking, seeking but never finding. Calling, calling but never an answering reply. She flits around the empty streets and squares in desperation, and bumps into the city watchmen. They obviously take her for a loose woman, and begin to beat her up and strip her of her clothes. The public judgment of a prostitute was the ritual exposure of her nakedness. But it is unlikely that there was any formal judicial act here. In her struggle to free herself, her flimsy garments were torn from her, leaving her battered, bruised, shivering and half naked. This is a picture of her defenselessness, without her clothing as a covering, without her lover as a protection.

3. (:8) Seeking Assistance from the Daughters of Jerusalem

“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, As to what you will tell him: For I am lovesick.”

Bruce Hurt: *I adjure you* --This phrase translates the Hebrew verb normally associated with making an oath and here calls upon the maidens to make a solemn promise. In the Old Testament the person swearing an oath does so by calling on a divine being or power, or even some part of the body (cf. **Amos 8.14; Mt 5.36**) in this way the oath-takers indicating how serious they are about fulfilling what has been promised. The young woman is seeking their help to find her beloved and tell him she was lovesick.

Tremper Longman: What is it that she makes them promise? She makes them promise to give her lover a message if and when they find him. That message is **I am sick with love**. She used this exact phrase (*kî-ḥôlat ’ahăbâ ’anî*) in **2:5**, but there, we would argue, with a slightly different nuance. In chapter 2, she was physically spent from the exercise of love. She needed the sustenance of food, of aphrodisiacs, to carry on. In other words, he is present in the poem in chapter 2. Here, however, he is absent, and so here the translation “sick” rather than “faint” is appropriate. She pines for him. She needs him desperately. Her message is an **exclamation of desire and a plea for union**.

II. (5:9-16) THE SENSUALITY OF ATTRACTIVENESS

A. (:9) Question: What is so Desirable about Your Beloved (Chorus)

*“What kind of beloved is your beloved, O most beautiful among women?
What kind of beloved is your beloved, That thus you adjure us?”*

B. (:10-16a) Answer: Desirable in Every Way (Female)

1. (:10) Complexion

“My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, Outstanding among ten thousand.”

2. (:11) Head and Hair

*“His head is like gold, pure gold;
His locks are like clusters of dates, And black as a raven.”*

3. (:12) Eyes

*“His eyes are like doves, Beside streams of water, Bathed in milk, And
reposed in their setting.”*

4. (:13a) Cheeks

“His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, Banks of sweet-scented herbs;”

5. (:13b) Lips

“His lips are lilies, Dripping with liquid myrrh.”

6. (:14a) Hands

“His hands are rods of gold Set with beryl;”

7. (:14b) Abdomen

“His abdomen is carved ivory Inlaid with sapphires.”

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The meaning of “*his loins are a piece of ivory hung with sapphires*” is transparent, and one is tempted to hide behind a more innocuous, traditional translation (e.g., “*his belly is a plate of ivory inlaid with sapphires*”). As far as I can tell, however, evidence indicates that this is indeed a piece of ivory hung with sapphires. This naturally suggests the **male genitals**, and one might well look at this and wonder if there is the kind of phallic humor going on here that one would expect to find among the Greek comedians. This imagery, however, does not relate to having an enormous penis, as in Greek comedy (as described above, the word does not mean “tusk,” contrary to **Longman**, 164). Instead, the woman describes his private parts as having high value to her. She does not focus any more on these parts than she does on his eyes, arms, or legs, and she uses precious metals and gems to describe these body parts as well. It is not inappropriate for a woman in love to take pleasure in the anatomy of her husband, including his sexual parts. The tone here is not comic.

8. (:15a) Legs

“His legs are pillars of alabaster Set on pedestals of pure gold;”

9. (:15b) Overall Appearance

“His appearance is like Lebanon, Choice as the cedars.”

10. (:16a) Mouth

“His mouth is full of sweetness.”

11. (:16b) Overall Desirability

“And he is wholly desirable.”

C. (:16b) Conclusion (Female)

“This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

III. (6:1-3) THE SATISFACTION OF RENEWED SEXUAL COMPATIBILITY

A. (:1) Reflecting on the Reality of Separation and Reunion (Chorus)

“Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women?

Where has your beloved turned, That we may seek him with you?”

Iain Duguid: As she describes him, she realizes that even though the man has turned and gone from her, in a sense he has never left her. Their separation is only temporary, for they are two halves of the same coin, ultimately inseparable. Though the daughters of Jerusalem now profess their readiness to join her in the search, she doesn't require their assistance. The final twist in the dream is that the difficult and dangerous search that she went through was ultimately unnecessary, since she discovers that she knows precisely where to find her beloved.

B. (:2) Reveling in Sexual Satisfaction (Female)

“My beloved has gone down to his garden, To the beds of balsam,

To pasture his flock in the gardens And gather lilies.”

Richard Hess: The verse concludes with the metaphor of gathering lotuses, suggesting the beautiful, delicate, and intoxicating effects of physical love.

C. (:3) Reunited in a Committed Relationship (Female)

“I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine,

He who pastures his flock among the lilies.”

Iain Provan: Yet now it transpires that the search is unnecessary and the fears that have come to expression in the dream are groundless. The woman knows where her lover is. He was never really lost to her. He is to be found in his own garden (6:2)—that female “place” where he is accustomed to spend his time (4:12; 5:1) and whose fragrances are complementary to his own (cf. “beds of spice[s]” in 5:13 and 6:2). He has returned to his characteristic activity of “browsing” there, especially among the lilies (6:2–3; cf. 2:16). All is as it was before—the lovers caught up with each other and committed to each other (“I am my lover's and my lover is mine,” 6:3; cf. 2:16).

Richard Hess: Once more a section concludes with the lovers reunited in a committed relationship (6:2–3). However difficult the search, however hopeless the cause, the

lovers' desire for each other assures that they will find one another. Love between couples, and between God and his people, never surrenders hope (1 Cor. 13:7).

Tremper Longman: we can find significance in the fact that a poem that begins with the problem of alienation between the man and the woman ends with an affirmation of togetherness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did God create the man and the women with such differences in sexual drive and responses?
- 2) How do married couples communicate openly with one another and resolve sexual differences?
- 3) Why is it so important to focus on what you find attractive in your spouse?
- 4) How does the Bible characterize romantic love as only one facet of the overall one-flesh union?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Guzik: It wasn't that the maiden refused to open for her beloved; it was that she long delayed to do so, and delayed out of self-interest and self-indulgence, probably connected with some resentment towards the beloved. Here the writer gave us an emotionally accurate picture of the dynamic of conflict in a relationship, especially in marriage.

The maiden felt resentment towards the beloved (the nature and reasonableness of that resentment is impossible to determine).

The beloved refused to force himself upon his maiden, and would only enter at her invitation.

The beloved made a true and persistent appeal to his maiden that they might be together and enjoy their relationship.

Because of her resentment, the maiden long delayed her response to the desire of the beloved.

When she finally did respond, it seemed too late—the moment had passed and her beloved was gone.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: This text uses the familiar **wasf**. Under the literary guise of the woman describing her beloved to a group of girls so that they can help her search

for him, the woman actually reminds herself of all the things that she finds extraordinary about him (5:9–15). Her love for him allows her to move beyond the pain of 5:2–7. Then, under the guise of telling the girls where to find the man, the woman proclaims that he is in love with her and delights himself in the pleasures that she gives (6:2–3). She triumphantly concludes that she and the man belong to one another (6:3).

Iain Duguid: Marriage is not the cure-all for lovesickness, nor does it mean an end to the need to search and pursue one another in order to attain intimacy. It is easy for a husband and wife to become out of step with each other, not least in the realm of physical intimacy. If left uncorrected, these difficulties can result in a couple drifting apart and losing touch with each other. She may end up painfully tormenting herself over missed opportunities and lost intimacy. The remedy for the woman lay in what follows: searching eagerly for him, no matter how painful the pursuit; pondering and declaring the manifold beauty of her husband; remembering and recounting everything that she once saw in him. In such a way, she rekindled the romance that she had lost. Here is wise counsel not just for wives, but for husbands as well, in those times of marital estrangement.

Every married person has similar experiences of distance in their relationship: not all have such a happy outcome. For some, their failures to pursue their spouse, coupled perhaps with equal failures on the part of their spouse, have led to a deep and settled coldness within marriage, or a separation or divorce that ends the marriage. For that reason, our hope of peace cannot rest in the state of our marriage and our own faithfulness to our wedding vows. It must rest instead in the grace and mercy of our greater Beloved, Jesus Christ, whose beauty truly is beyond compare. Though we have often failed to pursue intimacy with him and have squandered many sweet and tender moments that we might have enjoyed in his presence, he is never unfaithful to us. Instead, he delights in us and will never leave us nor forsake us, even though we are deeply broken and ungrateful.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 6:4-10

TITLE: RENEWED PRAISE FOR THE INCOMPARABLE BRIDE

BIG IDEA:

THE GROOM VIEWS HIS BRIDE AS INCOMPARABLE AND EXQUISITE

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The language of the **garden** has been dropped here probably because this metaphor focuses heavily upon sexual pleasure. In this canto, the tenor sings of his **continuing devotion** to her rather than of his sexual desire for her.

Tremper Longman: section marked by **inclusio**: “as awesome as an army with banners”

This wasf is in the context of arguing that the woman’s beauty is superior, even unique, compared to the beauty of others—represented by the sixty queens, eighty concubines, and countless young women. At the conclusion, even they will join in their enthusiastic assessment of her beauty (**6:10**). The woman’s beauty is so great that it shakes the man to the very core (**v. 5**). She is surrounded by mystery. Geographical, military, floral, and faunal imagery are all evoked to give a sense of her hold on the man’s affections.

I. (:4) INCOMPARABLE

*“You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling,
As lovely as Jerusalem,
As awesome as an army with banners.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The three lines in **v 10** (“*Beautiful as the moon, / bright as the sun, / awesome as the panoply of heaven*”) answers the three lines of **v 4** (“*You are beautiful, my companion, like Tirzah, / lovely, like Jerusalem, / awesome, like panoplied cities.*”).

MacArthur: The nation’s capital city was known as “*the perfection of beauty, a joy to all the earth*” (cf. **Ps 48:1, 2; La 2:15**).

Carr: The parallel between the two cities—one the capital, the other a northern ‘*garden city*’—is in keeping with the **royal/rural elements** in this unit.

Richard Hess: The further comparison with Jerusalem allows for a merism between two cities that would encompass all of Israel and Judah. While Jerusalem might be mentioned alone in a prose text, the parallelism of poetry allows for and expects a second city. By choosing a northern as well as southern center, the writer can include all the Israelites of both kingdoms as sympathetic readers or listeners. The contrast of

the loveliness of these cities with the awe-inspiring fear of their power is manifest in the final line. Other than vv. 4 and 10, the term “*fearful, terrible*” (‘ym) occurs in this form only in **Hab. 1:7**, where it describes the Chaldean army. Thus the scene in **Song 6:4** includes battlements that defend a city and standards that are raised over them as proud symbols of the identity and power of a nation and city. It is this theme that inspires both desire and fear, that radiates both beauty and power.

Tremper Longman: Tirzah: the capital of the northern kingdom from the time of Jeroboam (**1 Kings 14:17; 15:21, 33; 16:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 23**) until Omri moved the capital to his new city of Samaria (**1 Kings 16:24, 28**).

Tom Gledhill: The comparison of the beautiful girl to capital cities falls somewhat strangely upon our modern ears. But the resemblance is not so much in physical beauty (who would these days think of likening a girl to a city?), but in royalty, power and stature.

Iain Duguid: Tirzah sounds like *rāṣā*, ‘to desire, take pleasure in’. Like these famous cities, the woman is beautiful and desirable, the source of the man’s peace.

Bruce Hurt: This would be very apropos coming from a king and one who had seen impressive armies. And so looking at his bride was like surveying an awesome army with **banners** waving in full array and glory. As stated below the word Solomon chooses (*ayom*) combines a mixture of awe and fear at the beauty of his bride.

II. (:5-7) EXQUISITE

A. (:5a) Eyes

*“Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have confused me;”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The point here is probably that her eyes so excite him that he can hardly keep a cool head and not that she makes him feel ashamed. So in the hip ‘il should be taken to mean “*embolden*” or “*excite*” rather than “*embarrass*.” The meaning seems to be that he can hardly keep his head when near her; everything about her sweeps him away.

Richard Hess: It is not that they are dreadful to behold. Rather, they possess a power of attraction that the male cannot resist. They overwhelm him; their beauty enchants him. Unlike **4:1**, where her eyes were likened to doves, here they possess a much greater power. The theme of the strength of their attractiveness, and its association with the image of martial power in the preceding verse, introduces a new aspect of the love that the male describes. From the desire emerges a strength in which the female holds him fast. Such is her power that he cannot avert his own gaze;

Iain Provan: There is wondrous beauty in all of this, but it is beauty with an edge—an awesome loveliness that induces trembling as well as devotion. It is this aspect of the

woman's beauty that is perhaps picked up also at the beginning of **6:5**, where her eyes are said to “*overwhelm*” the man (although what this means precisely is unclear). He can hardly bear to look into them, so unsettling does he find them to be.

B. (:5b) Hair

*“Your hair is like a flock of goats
That have descended from Gilead.”*

C. (:6) Teeth

*“Your teeth are like a flock of ewes
Which have come up from their washing,
All of which bear twins,
And not one among them has lost her young.”*

D. (:7) Temples

*“Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate
Behind your veil.”*

III. (:8-10) INCOMPARABLE

A. (:8-9a) Uniquely Worthy of Praise for Her Perfection and Purity

*“There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, And maidens without number;
9 But my dove, my perfect one, is unique: She is her mother's only daughter;
She is the pure child of the one who bore her.”*

Tremper Longman: He describes three classes of women in this verse: queens, concubines, and young women. These three categories may reflect different levels within the royal harem. . . The three classes of women in the court move from most important in terms of status to less important.

Tom Gledhill: However many royal beauties, consorts, maidens there may be, our girl outshines them all in the radiance of her dazzling splendour. . .

In these verses, our lover describes his girl as being unique. It is the extravagance of the language of love; that is the way he feels about her, for she is beyond all comparison; there is absolutely no-one else who can fill his life as she does.

Iain Provan: A mother knows her child as that **specific** child, however—one who is irreplaceable and for whom there is no substitute. Likewise, a man who truly loves a woman knows that woman as a specific person, whose identity cannot simply be collapsed into her gender and is certainly not summed up only in her sexuality and in her sexual relationship with him. She is not simply a woman but the woman. This uniqueness, it is claimed in **verse 10**, has even been grasped by the other women who have been mentioned (since this verse is best taken as representing their words). The man's perspective is attributed to them, no doubt because he cannot think but that it is obviously the only possible perspective.

B. (:9b-10) Universally Praised by Her Peers for Her Beauty

*“The maidens saw her and called her blessed,
The queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying,
10 'Who is this that grows like the dawn, As beautiful as the full moon,
As pure as the sun, As awesome as an army with banners?’”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: It is not absolutely necessary to read v **10** (“*Who is this. . .*”) as belonging to the chorus; the tenor could sing this strophe as well. On the other hand, a choral response is appropriate after v **9b** declares that girls, queens, and royal concubines all praise her. For that matter, it is possible that v **10** is sung by both the tenor and chorus together.

Tom Gledhill: The use of the terms *the dawn, the moon, the sun and the stars*, gives an impression of the **transcendental** nature of the girl’s beauty. She is indeed a natural phenomenon, but almost out of this world.

Iain Duguid: In **verse 10**, we come full circle to the question that began this section back in **3:6**: *Who is this?* The answer – that it is the woman, who is like the ‘*bannered ones*’ – forms an **inclusio** with the beginning of the man’s speech in **verse 4**. Once again, the answer to the question describes the woman, but this time, instead of coming up from the wilderness, she is ensconced in the heavens themselves looking down like the Ancient Near Eastern deities. . .

The man has gone from praising the woman to her face in **verses 4–7**, to boasting about her to others in verses 8–10. At the end of this poem of praise, as at the beginning, the focus is on her unique splendour and glory that set her apart from all other women. Of course, it is precisely her uniqueness that makes both his longing for her so intense and his fear of losing her favour so awful. Because she is the unique object of his fascination and desire, she is utterly irreplaceable.

Net Note: The common point in these four comparisons is that all are **luminaries**. In all four cases, each respective luminary is the focus or **center of attention** at the hour at hand because it dwarfs its celestial surroundings in majesty and in sheer brilliance. All other celestial objects pale into insignificance in their presence. This would be an appropriate description of her because she alone was the center and focus of his attention. All the other women paled into the background when she was present. Her beauty captured the attention of all that saw her, especially Solomon.

John Schultz: So must God see us from above. In God’s eyes we surpass the radiance of the heavenly bodies. The elders of the churches are, in Jesus’ hands, represented as seven stars. And in **Dan. 12:3** we read, “*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*” But of the New Jerusalem, which is the bride of the Lamb, we read, not only, that it shone with the glory of God but that the city doesn’t need any sun or moon

because of the glory of God within it. We have more eternal value for our Creator than the rest of creation.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some ways you can communicate to your wife that she is incomparable and exquisite?
- 2) What makes your wife so special?
- 3) In what ways does a woman reflect the beauty and purity of her mother?
- 4) How does Christ view His bride? How does He communicate His love?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The verbatim or near-verbatim repetition here of certain lines from **chap. 4** is more than the use of formulaic expressions. By repeating his previous words of admiration for her, the man implies that his desire for the woman is undiminished by his having consummated the relationship with her. She is still as desirable to him as ever before. The fact that **Song 6:4–10** is not as detailed or fulsome in describing her body is primarily for aesthetic reasons—the Song would be rather tedious if this section mechanically worked its way through all the details of the wash in **Song 4:1–15**. The repetition of a few items of praise—for her hair, teeth, and cheeks—is enough to signal to the audience that he still feels the same way about her. On the other hand, the lengthy praise of her beauty in **4:1–15** serves a specific purpose. There, the man is persuading her with words of admiration and love to give herself to him. He is in effect tenderly seducing her, if one may rightly speak of a groom seducing his bride on their wedding night. In **Song 6:4–10** it is enough for him to reaffirm his desire for her.

Richard Hess: As noted, the theme of this address (**6:4–10**) is different from the first hymn of praise to the female. There the emphasis was upon the desirable features of her face and body. Here the words summarize and generalize the beauty of the female to emphasize the power of that beauty, a power that can overcome her lover’s defenses with a gaze of her eyes and that can evoke praise from the finest women in the land. The central statement, that of **v. 9**, emphasizes how unique and therefore how special the female is. None can compare to her. Her lover learns this, not only from his own senses, but also from the praise of others. Together they observe in the female one whose beauty is a great power that can be used for good or evil. It remains for the rest of the Song to identify the female’s own values that are concerned only with love and not with manipulation.

Daniel Akin:

- A. Tell her she is beautiful **(6:4)**.
- B. Tell her she is irresistible **(6:5-7)**.
- C. Tell her she is special **(6:8-9)**.
- D. Tell her she is awesome **(6:10)**.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 6:11-13

TITLE: BEAUTY AND PASSION IN THE NUT GROVE AND THE PALACE

BIG IDEA:
**SEXUAL PASSION AND PHYSICAL BEAUTY ARE TRANSFORMATIVE
AND ALLURING**

INTRODUCTION:

This is the toughest portion of the book to interpret. There are serious questions about the text. It is difficult to determine who is speaking each line. The poem is too brief to be definitive about the nature of the experience. It lends itself to much speculation and conjecture.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The singer of vv 11–12 is evidently the woman since v 12 seems to speak of this person being taken away in a chariot, and, immediately after that, the chorus proclaims the line “*Come back, O Shulammitte!*”

This brief section quickly moves through three singing parts, and this rapid change of singers is indicative of a transformation in the woman’s situation. It begins with calm, pastoral imagery (the woman strolls down to see how her plants are growing), but suddenly introduces a jolting shift of scene (she can hardly comprehend how she came to be among the chariots of Ammi-nadiv, “*My-beloved-is-a-prince*”). The Song abruptly indicates that the woman is leaving, much to the distress of her companions. Finally, the groom issues a mild rebuke to the women to the effect that they should not call on her to stay so that they can continue to look at her.

Tremper Longman: In this section, the woman recounts an experience. The setting is the cultivated countryside, a setting that we now associate with intimacy. It is springtime, a time of love. As she goes to the garden to investigate the spring growth, something unexpected happens to her. What that is, unfortunately, is not clear, since **verse 12** is one of the most difficult passages in the entire book.

Tom Gledhill: The girl is wandering alone, dreamily inspecting the budding trees and vines, when she is suddenly transported in her thoughts into the presence of the lover.

I. (:11) INVESTIGATION OF INTIMATE RELATIONS (Female)

*“I went down to the orchard of nut trees
To see the blossoms of the valley,
To see whether the vine had budded
Or the pomegranates had bloomed.”*

Richard Hess: The symbol of the walnut as a picture of the male scrotum or the female vulva can thus exhibit erotic imagery that combines with the pictures found in the remainder of this verse.

The verb “*to see*” suggests a lingering and the evocation of fantasy regarding these symbols of sexuality and fruitfulness. The object of the lover’s vision are the plants of the valley. . .

The stroll around the garden is a stroll around the body of the lover. It is a description of the beauty of the lover’s body as well as suggesting the pleasures of love that await the speaker. Other than in the Song, it is unusual for Hebrew poets to portray the fruit or blossom of the pomegranate in the plural. In contrast to the vine, which is singular, the plural “*pomegranates*” reflects a particularly strong image of fruitfulness. The fruitful yield portrayed here, as elsewhere in the Song, is concerned less with reproduction and more with the joys of love that the two may experience in the deepening of their physical relationship.

Tremper Longman: The whole nut represents the male gland (even down to contemporary English slang), and the open nut, the woman’s vulva. In any case, the verse as a whole is a coy suggestion of **intimate relations** between the man and the woman. When she talks of exploring the grove, she means that she will be exploring the man’s body. Thus, whether we understand the imagery to refer to the place of lovemaking or the lover’s private parts, or perhaps both, we understand the speaker to say that intimate union is in mind.

II. (:12) TRANSFORMATION TO STATE OF POWER AND PASSION (Female)

*“Before I was aware, my soul set me
Over the chariots of my noble people.”*

Tom Gledhill: Here is a selection of what some English versions make of the verse:

AV *Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.*

JB *Before I knew. . . My desire hurled me on the chariots of my people, as their prince.*

NJPSV *Before I knew it, my desire set me mid the chariots of Ammi-nadib.*

NEB *I did not know myself; she made me feel more than a prince reigning over the myriads of his people.*

GNB *I am trembling; you have made me as eager for love as a chariot driver is for battle.*

RSV *Before I was aware, my fancy set me In a chariot beside my prince.*

Richard Hess: The translation expresses the fantasy of the female lover placed beside her princely lover in a dramatic and public display of power. The term for chariot is in the plural, suggesting a squad of chariots that go to battle. The passion of desire translates into the excitement of the most adventurous and dangerous experiences known to the author. . . The female lover's sense of a place on board this instrument of terror is part of a fantasy of danger and excitement, which provides the climax of this experience. Away from the peaceful gardens, the chariotry of the nobles, whether in war or in procession, heightens the drama and fuels the passion of the lover.

Tremper Longman: Whatever interpretation is adopted, it should be held very lightly. . . The most definite point we can make about this verse is that it expresses **strong passion**, most likely of the woman for the man. Her passion has so overwhelmed her that she is "*caught up*" and discovers herself transported into the man's chariot.

Sierd Woudstra: The bride may be speaking here of the way in which she was unexpectedly and suddenly elevated to queenly dignity.

III. (:13a) DESIRE FOR A PUBLIC VIEWING OF THE BRIDE'S BEAUTY (Chorus)

*"Come back, come back, O Shulammit;
Come back, come back, that we may gaze at you!"*

Richard Hess: The women call her with four repeated imperative commands: *šûbî*. Two begin each of the first two lines and frame the only proper noun identifying the female in the entire poem: "*Shulammit*." The term occurs only in this verse, in the first and third lines. Its possible derivation from the root *šlm* may carry the sense of "whole, complete, perfect." In a Song that repeatedly names Solomon (**1:5; 3:9, 11; 8:11, 12**), [14] it is appropriate that the female counterpart should have her name derived from the same root. Actually, hers is **not a personal name**. The definite article indicates that it should be understood more as **a title**. Perhaps it carries the sense of **one who is altogether beautiful**. This would agree with the second and fourth lines.

Tom Gledhill: The girl is far away, lost in her dreams, and she is being called back to reality by her friends, who want to gaze on her beauty. . .

At the very least, *šalomoh* and *šulammit* are linked by a very strong **assonance**; and the word-pair gives more than a hint of the **mutual fulfilment** of the two lovers. Each one finds *šālôm* in the complementarity of the other. This seems to be yet another reflection of the Garden of Eden narrative of **Genesis 2**, where the primal pair, man (*'ish*) and woman (*'ishshāh*) find their mutual complementarity in the one-flesh relationship. *'ish* and *'ishshāh* are linked by assonance (though most probably not by etymology); the woman was originally taken out of the flesh of the man, and they are reunited in the bodily **one-flesh union** of their marriage. For man in his solitariness had found no

suitable helper in the rest of the created order. His joyful exuberance at his recognition that the creation of the woman has brought the possibility of the gift of peace, is shown in his triumphant cry, ‘*This at last is bone of my bones. . .*’

IV. (:13b) DESIRE FOR A PRIVATE VIEWING OF HIS BRIDE’S BEAUTY (Male)

*“Why should you gaze at the Shulammite,
As at the dance of the two companies?”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Rather than leave her to answer for herself, however, the groom speaks up for his bride. His words imply that the time for staring at her is over. Her great beauty was that of a bride in all her array, but now **the wedding is over**. The precise meaning of the “*Dance of the Two Companies*” is unknown, but one can presume that it was a dance familiar to the audience of the Song. If it involved two companies of dancers, it must have been quite complex and have received the rapt attention of spectators. The noun “*dance*” (from “*to whirl*”), seems to imply a particularly exuberant kind of dancing (**Exod 15:20; 32:19; Judg 21:21; 1 Sam 29:5**); it was perhaps something similar to the ecstatic dancing of the “whirling dervishes” of Turkey. The groom is telling them not to stare at her as though she were such a show. . .

In the psychology of the Song, the chorus wants the woman to stay in their world, but she cannot do this because she has crossed the threshold from virgin to wife.

Tom Gledhill: A dancing girl may become so engrossed with her own whirling movements that she may induce within herself a trance-like state, where she is barely conscious of her body, and is transported into another world, like the whirling dervishes of Turkish Islam. This self-intoxication may be yet another form of escapism from reality, the futile attempt to recapture the bliss of Eden.

Daniel Akin: They want her for a public viewing, but her husband wants her for a private viewing. He asks them, almost as a taunt, “*Why are you looking at the Shulammite, as you look at the dance of the two camps,*” the dance of the Mahanaim? The exact meaning of this phrase is unclear, but her actions are not. They have praised her beauty, and she is appreciative. But there is another whose praise means even more. That person is her husband. His praise has freed her to express herself with unhindered abandonment. She will now dance, and dance nakedly and seductively. However, this dance is not for many, but only for one. It will be a private performance reserved only for her husband. He has brought her to the bedroom because he sensed he could. He was right, and he will not be disappointed with what happens.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What helps you to identify the speaker of each line in this short poem?
- 2) Why does the sexual imagery change from the setting of a garden to a grove of nut trees?
- 3) How does the use of chariots in warfare contribute to the imagery here?
- 4) What is the reason for the tension involving who gets to gaze at the beauty of the bride?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Iain Duguid: Whereas the man went down to his garden to graze (*rā'āh*; **6:2**), the woman went down to the garden to gaze (*rā'āh*), which forms a parallel for her activity in the exalted position of the skies in the previous verses. She went down to look for evidence of the return of the spring: to see whether there were blossoms in the valley, whether the vines had budded and the pomegranates were in bloom. This language is strongly reminiscent of **2:12–13**, where these features were signs that the whole world was in flower, and that it was therefore the time of love. Now, after her earlier rebuff of the man, she is hesitantly but hopefully searching for similar signs of a spring thaw in their relationship. . .

When she heard the man's words and discovered that he still found her uniquely attractive, she was as enraptured as if she had been caught up in a royal chariot with Prince Charming. She was utterly overwhelmed emotionally to find that their romantic relationship had been restored.

Iain Provan: [His commentary throughout the book usually takes some unique – and sometimes oddball – position. Here he takes the groom to be the speaker in vv. **11-12** and comes up with a very different slant on the passage.]

The first-person account of this person who “*went down*” (*yrd*) to a garden “*grove*” (*ginna*) corresponds to the third-person description by the woman in **6:2**, when she tells her friends that her beloved has “*gone down*” (*yrd*) to his “*garden*” (*gan*). In all likelihood, then, **the man** is speaking in **6:11–12**. . .

It is to a fertile place that the man goes, then—a place that produces fruit in abundance. The woman herself is again clearly in mind, and the imagery may be deliberately chosen (as in **4:12–15**) to evoke the intimate parts of her body. . .

Chariots in the Song of Songs speak of male desire for a woman. In view of this reality, the Hebrew word *nadib* is best taken, not as part of a proper name or as a reference to

nobility or royalty, but as a reference to the passion that the woman excites in men. . .

The man is pictured as out of control, either caught by surprise by the speed with which he joins the herd of “stallions” straining after the beloved or disconcerted by it and not quite recognizing himself in his own behavior. He begins his journey to the nut grove in possession of himself; he ends it possessed by the object of his desire.

Yet on this occasion the group is most naturally understood as that same group of males whose presence is implied in **verse 12**—those many men who wish to “gaze on [*the woman*]” (**6:13a**).

The woman has her back turned to them or perhaps is moving away from them to escape their attention. Thus, they plead with her to “*come back*,” or perhaps simply to “*turn around*” (*šwb*), so that they may view her beauty. The lover, in turn, objects to the attention that his beloved is receiving from this broader group of men, comparing what is happening to what occurs on the occasion of “*the dance of Mahanaim*.” . . . The main point of the comparison is that these men are looking for the woman to present herself before them for their pleasure and entertainment, in the same way that a woman might dance before an audience. The lover objects to this. He may find himself in the company of these men as they pursue the woman, but he does not accept their right to view his beloved in the same way he has viewed her hitherto in this song.

Edwin Good: [He just gives up completely on trying to make sense out of this short poem]

There is no clue to the speaker’s gender in the opening couplets; it describes a stroll in the country to look at blossoms, mentions the nut orchard, the vines, and the pomegranates. The time seems to be spring. We have seen something of the code of vines, which appears to be sexual, and pomegranates suggest the same area, without being as distinct. The rest of the book is more interested in the fruit than the blossoms of the pomegranate. As for the nut orchard, this is its only mention in the book, and the kind of nuts cannot be recovered. Sometimes a collection of poems will have one, like this, that seems less than readily comprehensible, even now and then in a collection whose author we know and who wrote in our own language. I regret my inability to shed more light on what seems a partial little poem.

Don Fortner: [Example of how a commentator completely **spiritualizes** the text; based on wild speculation he tries to make some practical applications based on the relationship of Christ to His bride, the Church.]

In these verses our Lord speaks to his church, not in her time of shame, sleeping in carnal ease; but he speaks here to his church in her very best condition. She had just begun to again enjoy his blessed fellowship. Christ has now returned to his spouse. The breach she had made by her neglect, he had healed by his grace. There was now a sweet renewing of love and fellowship.

In **verse 11** our Lord speaks to his beloved church and says — Though I had withdrawn

myself from you and gave you no comfort for a while, even then I had my eye upon you, even then I was watching over my garden with tenderness, love, and care. Though you did not see me, I saw you. I will never forsake the apple of my eye or the work of my hands. — *“I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.”*

In **verse 12** our Savior tells us how that he was overcome by our broken, aching hearts and how anxiously he returned to his people who cried after him. — *“Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.”* It is as though he said — I could hide my face no longer. My love for you compelled me, with irresistible force, to return to you. Almost before I knew it, *“my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people”*. . .

In **verse 13**, the Lord Jesus, having returned to his beloved church, courts her, wooing her heart, and invites her to return to him. *“Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee.”* . . .

But then, in the second part of **verse 13**, we hear the bride, the church, the people of God speaking. Being convinced of her own sin, being full of shame, she confesses her frustration with herself. She thinks that there is **no beauty in her**, nothing in her that he could want to see. *“What will ye see in Solyma? As it were the company of two armies.”*

She is saying, “There is nothing in me but conflict and confusion. In my heart two armies are at war. If you look upon me, you will see a raging battle, good fighting evil, light contending with darkness. I am not worth looking upon. I am a house divided against itself.” Is there something in that language that you can relate to, something that is true to your experience?

Proposition: This is a true and accurate description of God’s people. All God’s elect experience **inward conflicts between the flesh and the Spirit** continually.

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John Shearouse: [Example of allegorical, spiritual approach to the Book]

II. We have seen how this Song sets forth the true experience of Christ and His relationship to the true believing church through the analogy of marriage.

- Even though the Scripture frequently uses marriage, and even the marriage bed, to describe our relationship with Him,
 - having an entire book in the Bible that is entirely devoted to this subject has a way of forcing us to pay attention to the ardent affection that Christ has for us and that we have for Him.
- We have seen that the Song is very realistic.
 - It doesn’t paint the relationship as all rosy.
 - It describes the ups and the downs, the struggles and the triumphs, of our walk with the Saviour as His bride.

- Keep in mind, of course, that the bride of Christ is one bride who is made up of many members—all believers make up His one true bride.
- We can identify with the contents of this Song in our personal as well as our corporate relationship with Him—at the local level all the way up to the worldwide church level.

- Consider the great variety of experience that is described in this Song.
 - It opened with a description of our yearning for His kisses (**1:1-4**), that is, our desire for Him to show us how much He loves us (to manifest His love as John 14 expresses it). We speak of our delight in receiving His love!
 - It spoke next of our insecurity in His love when we consider our unworthiness and of how He graciously reassures us of His full acceptance of us. This was in **1:5- 11**.
 - Then the Song rose to even greater heights as it described how our delight in His love can rise to such intensity that we must beg Him to stop (**1:12 -2:7**).
 - This was followed by a description of His wonderful visits where He was depicted as leaping across the mountains like a gazelle to get to us, as warmly calling us so as to draw us out of shyness, and of our sense that we want these visits to continue forever. That was in **2:8-17**.
 - But then in **chapter 3**, there was a time when, without explanation, He withdraw for a time, causing us to seek Him—but then to find Him (**3:1-5**).
 - **In 3:6-11**, He is seen as the great king who openly and publicly conveys us to Himself to be His bride—He brings us to His house by covenant as it were.
- **In 4:1 – 5:2**, we were taken aback by His praise of our beauty as His bride, and by the delight that He has in even one glance of love from us toward Him.
 - I explained that even the tiny beginnings of our love for Christ are the result of His all-powerful saving work. He loves to see our progress.
 - We saw how we are depicted as His garden where He grows the fruit that He delights in with His skillful and powerful hands.
 - The Song shows how all this makes us want to bring forth fruit for Him more than ever—we want Him to come to us and enjoy the fruit that we bring forth—the fruit being the new life that comes by His saving work.
- But then in **chapter 5, verse 2**, we saw the description of a time when we grew cold and unwelcoming toward Him.
 - This is all too common. We find it recounted all through the Bible—we lose our first love, we grow frigid toward our gracious divine husband, Jesus Christ.
 - **In 5:2-3**, we are shown to be unwilling to trouble ourselves enough to be intimate with Him, even to the point of leaving Him out in the cold night because we can't be bothered to open the door.
 - **In 5:4**, He arouses us so that we finally get up to open to Him, only to find that He is gone (**5:5-6**). He has withdrawn from us to teach us a lesson.
 - We are then depicted us going out in the night to find Him, and in our unrewarded quest, of growing stronger and stronger in our desire to be with Him

(5:7-16), until at last He returns to us, and we find ourselves in His arms again (6:1-3).

- What happens next is wonderful.
 - In **6:4-13** we have a description of how He reassures us that He still loves us just as much as He did before.
 - Last week we looked at the first part of this in **verses 4-9** where He told us how attractive we were to Him even during the time that He kept Himself away...
 - He explains that He could not keep Himself away (**6:4-5**), that we are still as lovely to Him as ever (**6:5-7**), and that we are His only bride (**6:8-9**).
 - He does not want the great nations of the earth, He wants those who are reconciled to Him by His saving work.
- He said much in those verses to reassure us, but He knows us.
 - He knows that even when we return to His arms after times of declension, we are often quite insecure, still wondering if He really accepts us or not.
 - So He does not stop at **verse 9** like we did last week. He continues on the end of **verse 13** and even beyond that, reassuring us of His full acceptance of us.
 - He knows that His true bride knows that she is unworthy of Him—entirely so—and we know that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy.
 - We need reassurance from Him that we are fully accepted by His grace.
 - Justification by His blood shed on the cross is the foundation of our acceptance, but here in the Song, He gives us the relational experience side of that acceptance.

[Here is his analysis of vv. 11-13]

In **verses 11 & 12**, Jesus explains to us (now that we are back in His arms) what He was doing while He was separated from us. He also explains how He was brought back to us.

- A. During His withdrawal, He was actually watching over us the whole time.
 1. He was watching intently to see if our affection for Him had been rekindled.
 2. What we have here is Him watching to see if His withdrawal has had its desired effect on her.
 3. We should be greatly encouraged to know that even when the Lord has withdrawn for a time—for whatever reason—He is never far from us!
- B. In **v. 12**, He explains how in watching us, He found Himself powerfully drawn to us.
 - He says, **verse 12**: *Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people.*

1. This is one of the most difficult verses in the Song of Solomon to interpret (many say the most difficult verse in the Song), so allow me to break it down a little.

a. First, the words “*Before I was even aware*” show how rapidly He was drawn back to us.

- No sooner had He looked, than He saw, in this case, our strong yearning for Him and realised that it was already the time for love.

- He realised that we had learned our lesson and were ready to receive Him.

b. Next, the words, “*my soul*” in the phrase, “*my soul had made me...*” speak of His whole person. - His entire self was moved by what He saw in us, His bride.

c. Next, what do the words “*my soul made me as the chariots*” mean? - The words “*made me as the chariots*” can also be translated “*set me on the chariots.*”

- The idea is that His soul either got on a chariot or became a chariot, whose purpose was either to bring Him to His bride or to bring her to Him, and to do it swiftly.

- Understand that because we are not speaking of physical distance, but the distance that was between us relationally,

- the point is that He who was keeping Himself apart from us (relationally) until our affection was sufficiently rekindled, was now wanting to make haste to close the gap between us.

- Either He will get on the chariot or He will be to us a chariot to bring us to Him.

- Either way, it will be the same result... - So He is telling us, now that we are in His arms again, how He couldn't stay away from us.

d. And finally, what do the words “*of my noble people*” mean in the phrase “*chariots of my noble people?*”

- Some interpreters believe it simply refers to the quality and speed of the chariots—that they are the fine chariots of noble people.

2. Here is how a couple of commentators summarise this verse for us.

- **James Durham** explains the whole like this: “Here is set down how suddenly He is transported with affection to His Bride; while He is viewing her graces in His absence from her, He is so taken with love to her, that He can stay no longer from her.”

- **Matthew Henry** says: “Christ could not long content Himself with this [separation from her], but suddenly felt a powerful, irresistible, inclination in His own bosom to return to His church, as His spouse,

being moved with her lamentations after Him and her languishing desire towards Him.”

3. This is super encouraging.

- Our Lord Jesus is showing us here that He cannot endure to be separated from us once he sees that our desires for Him have been rekindled.
- What an encouragement this is for us to pray.
- **Matthew Henry** comments, “No chariot sent for Christ shall return empty.”
- We sent out the chariot to call Him to return to us and He gets on the chariot and comes.
- Last week, we saw how Jacob would not let go of the Lord until He blessed him and how the LORD changed Jacob’s name to Israel because as a prince, Jacob had prevailed with Him—he had overcome Him.
- Our Lord comes on our yearning prayers as on a swift chariot so that once again we are in His arms, loving Him and being loved by Him.

TRANS: So our LORD tells us that our rekindled love has brought Him back to us. Now that we are again in His arms, He tenderly tells us that we need not hold back or hesitate.

III. In **verse 13**, He insists that we return to Him without holding back.

- He wants to make sure that we come with complete assurance that He will not reject us. He wants us to come without restraint or any fear of rejection.

A. Look at how strong His appeal is!

1. He repeats the call to return four times: *Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return.* - He wants nothing partial here, nothing uncertain, nothing hesitant. - The quarrel is over.

- His acceptance is full and complete.
- This is what justification does—it completely clears the record of all the wrongs that we have ever done.
- You can come to your Lord and give yourself wholly to Him with complete abandon—that is what He wants you to do.

2. Notice how He calls us Shulamite here.

- I have explained to you before that this name, Shulamite is the feminine form of His name, Solomon.
- Solomon means Prince of Peace, one of the names of our Lord Jesus, and Shulamite is our name when we marry Him, Princess of Peace.
- We become a people of shalom, the rich Hebrew word that we translate by the English word peace, which also includes the idea of wholeness and prosperity, fullness of life as life is meant to be.
- It is from the Bible that we have the tradition of a wife taking her husband’s name when she marries him. She enters his household.

- When God brought Eve to Adam to be his wife, Adam who was man (*Ish*) said, “*She shall be called woman (Isha) because she was taken out of man.*” (**Gen 2:23**)

- In **Genesis 5:1-2**, the scripture tells us that God did the same thing with the name Adam. **Gen 5:1:** *This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind [Adam] in the day they were created.*

- In **Isaiah 4:1**, we read of this general practice in these words: **Isa 4:1:** “*And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach.”*”

- This speaks of the unity that we have with Christ—that we are given His name. Indeed, we are called Christians when we become His bride.

- And here in the Song of Solomon, when He calls us to return to Him after we had drifted away, He calls us Mrs. Solomon, reminding us that we belong wholly to Him and so ought to wholly return to Him.

3. It is understandable how we might be insecure in returning to Him.

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TEXT: Song of Solomon 7:1 – 8:4

TITLE: *NOURISHING OF MARRIAGE PASSION*

BIG IDEA:

NOURISHING MARRIAGE PASSION REQUIRES INTENTIONALITY AND FEEDS ON MUTUAL PRAISE

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The point is that the lovers are now free to engage in sexual play, and they are intent on doing so. This song concludes with the woman expressing her happiness at being in the arms of her beloved and warning the other girls not to squander their affection and hearts.

Sierd Woudstra: Our God, who created the magnificence of nature, with its almost infinite variety, also created the human body in such a way that it is a marvel of his handiwork. Physical beauty and the pure desire of husband and wife (and bridegroom and bride) for each other are God-given gifts to man. It is the perversion of these gifts that is base (cf. **Rom 1:26, 27**), and therefore to be condemned.

POSB - Introduction: one of the most basic laws of science, the **Second Law of Thermodynamics**, teaches that everything in existence is in a state of decline or degeneration. In order for something to be sustained, there must be some force at work that overcomes the item's natural tendency toward deterioration. Simply stated, **everything in life must be maintained and nourished**. Nothing ever reaches a point where it is permanently self-sustaining. Fires must be fed or they will burn out. Structures and machines must be maintained and improved or they will wear out or erode. People must be continually nourished or they will become weak and eventually die. Marriages are no different. If wood is not added and the flame is not fanned, the fire in marriage will go out. If a marriage is not nurtured and nourished, it will die. Some marriages are starved—wasting away and barely existing. God does not want it to be this way. The Word of God teaches the truth of the Law of Thermodynamics in regard to marriage. All of the actions commanded of husbands and wives in the New Testament are in the Greek present tense, which indicates continuous action. Husbands must continually love their wives (**Eph. 5:25**) and be respectfully considerate of them (**1 Pe.3:7**). Wives must continually submit to their husbands (**Eph. 5:22; 1 Pe.3:1**). This most beautiful of songs ends with Solomon and the Shulamite nurturing their relationship. Chapters seven and eight present a valuable list for keeping the fires of marriage burning, for growing and maturing a marriage. Husbands and wives everywhere would do well to follow their example. (*Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible- Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*)

I. (7:1-5) PRAISE FOR HER CAPTIVATING BEAUTY (Onlookers)

Most commentators take the speaker in this section to be the male lover. However, the designations in v. 1 (“*O prince’s daughter*”) and in v. 5 (“*the king is captivated*”) seem to fit better with **outside observers** commenting on the woman’s beauty. That would fit the context of the end of **Chapter 6** where the woman is dancing before her friends and onlookers in almost an exhibitionist fashion. Her beauty and sexuality and desirability are being extolled by others so that the man responds beginning in v. 6.

Bruce Hurt: Carr seems to agree with **MacArthur** - Most commentators and translations assign the whole unit **Song 7:1–9** to the lover as he responds to her question, but the context (i.e. the **plural forms** in **Song 6:13** and the **last colon** in **Song 7:5**) makes it clear that these five verses are spoken by the **onlookers**, not by the lover himself. His contribution—and a highly personal one it is—comprises **Song 7:6–9**. The companions respond to her question with a very explicit and erotic description of why she is the focus of their attention. Beginning from her feet and progressing upward to the crown of her head, they sing the praise of her beauty. Whether, as **Delitzsch** suggests, she removed her outer garments and danced in the light clothing of a shepherdess, or as **Gordis** argues (p. 96), she danced either naked or in diaphanous veils, she ‘displayed all her attractions before them’ (**Delitzsch**, p. 122). *The Song of Solomon - Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*)

A. (:1) Feet and Hips

*“How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince’s daughter!
The curves of your hips are like jewels, The work of the hands of an artist.”*

Tremper Longman: This waṣf is different than the previous ones, however, in that it begins with the feet and works up the body rather than vice versa. The reversal was most probably compelled by the previous verse that remarks on the woman’s dance, which would focus attention on her feet. Indeed, that may be why her feet are specifically mentioned as sandaled, in that she is involved in a dance. However, appropriate footwear can enhance the erotic attraction of the female foot, and this may be the reason why the sandal is mentioned.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: It may be that a sandal, which is an article of clothing that leaves most of the foot bare, is something of a tease. **Keel** ([1994] 231), on the basis of a portrayal of exiles in a relief from the palace of Sennacharib, suggests that Judean women normally went barefoot. If so, then the sandal may convey the idea that she is dressed up in a way that is particularly alluring to him. Also, as **Keel** suggests, the wearing of sandals may give her a dignity above the common woman.

Richard Hess: The feet and legs form a natural bridge between a vision of the female dancing and the waṣf that begins with this text. . . The second half of the verse moves upward from the feet to the hips and thighs. The female’s enticing curves are likened to the adornments of jewelry that attract attention by their beauty and thereby enhance the beauty of the one wearing them. . . The flesh forms not an end in itself but a

praiseworthy object that both physically and metaphorically, in the language of the text, points to the source of all beauty and all true desire. It points to God himself.

Tom Gledhill: Her feet and ankles are delicate and dainty. The Hebrew word used for ‘feet’ (*pā’ām*) can also mean a step, a pace, an interval of distance. This would lend support to the **dancing scenario**. So her movements are swift and light and well coordinated. Like the ladies of Jerusalem of Isaiah, she is ‘tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles’.

B. (:2) Naval and Belly

*“Your navel is like a round goblet Which never lacks mixed wine;
Your belly is like a heap of wheat Fenced about with lilies.”*

Daniel Akin - verse 2 is badly translated in my judgment in virtually every English version. The problem is with the word translated “*navel*.” It simply does not fit the upward progression or the description. The Hebrew word is rare, occurring only three times in the Old Testament (cf. **Prov 3:8; Ezek 16:4**). Here the word almost certainly is a reference to the innermost sexual part of a woman, her vagina (vulva) (see **Carr, Song, 157; Snaith, Song, 101**). Solomon’s description makes no sense of a navel, but it beautifully expresses the sexual pleasures he continually receives from his wife. Like “*a rounded bowl; it never lacks mixed wine*”—she never runs dry. She is a constant source of intoxicating pleasure and sweetness. The idea of blended or “*mixed*” could refer to the mingling of male and female fluids in the appropriate place of a woman’s body (**Snaith, Song, 103**). Shulammitte was an exotic garden (**Song 4:12, 16**) and an intoxicating drink (**Song 7:2**) in her lovemaking. Seldom, if ever, was her husband disappointed. She was his dream lover, and amazingly, he wasn’t dreaming! The more he learned about her the more he loved and enjoyed her.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: the use of “*wheat*” here is striking. Since wheat, along with the other staples of the Israelite diet, was essential for life and could be regarded as the primary fruit of the field, it may be that “*wheat*” obliquely alludes to the woman’s distinctive **reproductive power**, the ability to grow a child in her “*belly*” (or “*womb*”). For the ancient Israelite, the birth of the first child was not a long-deferred blessing, much less something to avoid; it was the much-desired fulfillment of a marriage. Couples desired the first pregnancy to come as soon as possible. Thus, it is possible that the man here is also celebrating the power of the woman’s “*belly*” to produce fruit. The association of wheat, the staff of life, with this power seems appropriate.

The Hebrew “*belly, womb, stomach*” is an **ambiguous term**, and it appears that this verse makes much of its ambiguity. On one level, the verse speaks of the simple beauty of her navel and curved waist, like a bound sheaf of wheat. On another level, it suggests her genital area as well as sexual arousal. On a third level, it speaks of her as one who has the power of fertility in her “*belly*.” In other words, the meaning of the verse should not be limited either to the woman’s navel and waist or simply to her vagina and to sexual arousal but should encompass her whole “*belly*” with all its beauty, sexuality, and fertile power.

C. (:3) Breasts

“Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle.”

Tom Gledhill: Perhaps we should see pictures of shyness and gentleness here.

Dennis Kinlaw: Her breasts are symmetrical objects of grace and beauty that evoke tender and solicitous response.

D. (:4) Neck, Eyes and Nose

“Your neck is like a tower of ivory, Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon By the gate of Bath-rabbim; Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, Which faces toward Damascus.”

Richard Hess: The eyes provide a powerful magnet, perhaps to break the hearts of numerous suitors. Like the pools, their reflection and beauty promise an abundant life. However, this is not to be enjoyed by all. Hence the pools themselves, like the eyes of the female, need to be guarded by the strongest towers possible. . .

The picture thus is not that of a large nose but, like the neck, of the features of the face that reflect nobility, personal security, and well-being for the woman.

Trevor Longman: The comparison here is with Carmel. Carmel is the range that juts out into the Mediterranean, just south of Acco. In this context, the reference to Carmel likely refers to the fact that she stands tall and dignified.

Wiersbe: The reference [to the neck] isn't to size or prominence but to proportion and fitness. Like a tower on the city wall, or even standing alone in the land, it was in the right setting and had its own beauty.

E. (:5) Head and Hair

*“Your head crowns you like Carmel,
And the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads;
The king is captivated by your tresses.”*

Trevor Longman: Royal imagery comes back into play in the second colon, where her hair is said to be purple. Purple was the most expensive dye at the time and reserved for both human (**Judg. 8:26**) and divine (**Exod. 25–39**) monarchs. She is queen-like and fit for a king. Indeed, according to the third colon, her hair (a metonymy for her whole being) ensnares or entraps a king. Her stunning beauty cannot be resisted.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The two stanzas [7:1-5 and 7:6-8] thus mirror each other in that both are exclamations of the woman's beauty, but stanza 1 gives a detailed, area-by-area description of her beauty, while the latter describes her body in a more holistic fashion but focused on her breasts. [Breasts are at the heart of stanza 1 as well.]

Sierd Woudstra: **Carmel** is the mountain range the summit of which overlooks the Mediterranean sea and the Palestinian land in solitary majesty.

II. (7:6-10) PURSUIT OF SEXUAL PASSION

A. (:6) Recognition of Her Sexual Charms (Male)

*“How beautiful and how delightful you are,
My love, with all your charms!”*

Trevor Longman: The last phrase of the verse, *O love, with your delights* (*‘ahăbâ batt ‘ănûgîm*), seems awkward in the Hebrew and has led to some proposed emendations. It may be simply a cry of ecstasy as the man contemplates a joyous union with the woman.

B. (:7-8) Ravishing of Her Breasts (Male)

1. (:7) Admiration

*“Your stature is like a palm tree,
And your breasts are like its clusters.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: it is at least clear that the attention on the breasts here and in **Prov 5** indicates that sexual activity is for pleasure also and not simply for reproduction.

Iain Duguid: While continuing to affirm her stately majesty, the man declares that he is not content to admire the woman’s beauty visually from a distance; rather, he wants to engage his other senses as well, touching, smelling and tasting her sweetness. In metaphorical terms, he longs to climb the palm tree and pick her dates or, shifting the image in typical poetic fashion, her clusters of grapes. In more straightforward language, the man longs to bridge the distance that has come between the so that he can once again caress and fondle her breasts. He also desires to breathe in the *scent of her breath*, which he compares to *apples* (see **2:3-5**), and taste the *best wine* of the kisses of her mouth (see **1:2**).

2. (:8a) Acquisition

*“I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree,
I will take hold of its fruit stalks.’”*

3. (:8b) Appreciation

*“Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
And the fragrance of your breath like apples,”*

Tom Gledhill: Here is the violent urgency of aroused desire. It is not a male chauvinistic triumphalism. He articulates (‘methinks’) a passionate intention to climb the tree; this is his ‘conquest’. But it is a willing and eager surrender on the part of the girl. Her breasts are taut and juicy, grapes ready to be plucked, the object of great desire.

Richard Hess: This single verse, with its four lines of imagery, encompasses a range of senses that bring about full pleasure to the male. There is the female as a palm tree, the touching of her breasts as seizing the branches, the taste of her breasts as grapes from the vineyard (amplified in the following verse), and the aroma of the lover’s breath as fresh and sweet as apples. Add to this the auditory message introduced by the first word, “*I said,*” and the twelve words of the verse provide a feast of sensuality.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In the third stanza (7:9-10), the tenor and soprano sing four lines antiphonally (lines 11A–D). The feminine singular suffix on “*and your palate*” implies that the tenor sings line 11A. Line 11B uses the word “*to my beloved*” which is the woman’s sobriquet for the man; it indicates that this line is sung by the soprano. Line 11C contains no suggestion of who the singer is but is assigned to the man. Line 11D again refers to and thus is sung by the soprano.

C. (:9) Reveling in Her Kisses

1. (:9a) Intoxication (Male)

“And your mouth like the best wine!”

Wiersbe: Kissing her was like drinking wine, and he told her so. Her reply was that she hoped the wine would flow gently over his lips and teeth and please him.”

Jack Deere: The rapid interchange of speakers (the beloved is not introduced as the speaker in v. 9b) reflected their excitement in giving and receiving kisses and caresses. The intermingling of their **lips** in kisses was stylistically reflected by the poem’s intermingling of their voices.

2. (:9b) Participation (Female)

“It goes down smoothly for my beloved,”

3. (:9c) Satisfaction (Male)

“Flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep.”

D. (:10) Relationship of Mutual Possession (Female)

“I am my beloved’s, And his desire is for me.”

Richard Hess: The usage of “*desire*” (*těšûqâ*) in **Song 7:11 (7:10 Eng.)** is unique. Within its context it should be understood first as erotic desire. Nevertheless, more is suggested here, as well. As in Genesis, this also concerns the control of the partner’s body. However, here it is no longer a negative feature. **Keel** is correct that the verse conveys a **reciprocity of possession**. The lovers give themselves to one another and possess each other’s bodies. Thus the Genesis judgment of each person seeking domination is reversed, with each person now seeking **mutuality** and willingly giving possession of their body to their partner. In the NT this becomes the test of love between a husband and wife, that they give their bodies to one another and love each other as they love their own bodies (**1 Cor. 7:2–4; Eph. 5:22–33**).

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In the Song, the ideal of love and marriage is represented almost as though the fall had never happened. One should not transfer the meaning of in Genesis to the Song. Song of Songs presents love, sexuality, and the pleasures of a man and woman as compassionate as well as robust and healthy.

Wiersbe: Again she assures him of their mutual love and devotion (v. 10; see 2:16 and 6:3). “*His desire is toward me*” reminds us of **Genesis 3:16**, where the Lord said that Eve’s desire would be for her husband. Sexual attraction in marriage must be a mutual experience, and the husband and wife must work at making themselves desirable.

Dennis Kinlaw: There is a primeval Edenic purity about all of this. Once again we are reminded of that first couple that God gave to each other and commanded to be one flesh.

III. (7:11-13) PLANNING A ROMANTIC GETAWAY (Female)

A. (:11) Romantic Destination

*“Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country,
Let us spend the night in the villages.”*

Tom Gledhill: They want to be far away from human habitations, they are seeking the solitude of the rustic bower. They are to go on a tour of inspection of the springtime, to see whether the vines have budded, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There, in the early morning, in the fragrance of the misty countryside, among the blossom and budding fruit, she will give herself totally and unreservedly to her beloved. We have met this theme of love in the countryside before (2:8–13). The whole of nature seems to be sprouting and blossoming, and the two lovers want to be part of that. Their love has blossomed and become fragrant, they are ripe for love. Love in the springtime is a common literary motif. It seems to suggest that powers and urges that have long lain dormant can now burst forth unhindered and without restraint. The imagery seems to indicate that there is a time and a season for everything. There were times when restraint was necessary, but now it is a time to embrace.²⁵ Romance in the great outdoors is also a picture of untrammelled freedom and of closeness to nature. The literary fiction reminds us of our creatureliness and of our unashamed delight in participating in the natural order of things.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Her invitation to him to go to the fields is probably a double entendre. No doubt lovers did literally go out into the fields to enjoy their love in privacy. The level of privacy one could find out in the fields, in contrast to the close quarters in the confines of cities and villages, to say nothing of houses with extended families, is evident in the rape legislation of **Deut 22:23–27**. At the same time, the fields, like the gardens, vineyard, and meadows of the Song of Songs, symbolize the pleasures of love.

Wiersbe: Sometimes visiting another place gives a freshness to marriage relationships, and she promised to give him her love (7:12).

Jack Deere: Spring is a universal symbol for love. The beloved used the image of spring to ask whether there was still the same freshness and anticipation that had initially characterized their relationship (cf. 2:10-13).

POSB - The Shulamite was very wise: she recognized the need to get her husband away from the incredible busyness and pressures of life to focus on their relationship. She recognized the need to add some variety to their lives, including their love life. She tantalized her husband by telling him she had some special ideas for the two of them during their most personal and private times together. **How to Keep the Marriage Fires Burning:** Go away together—alone. Every marriage needs revitalizing along the way to maintain the passion. Every couple should plan occasional excursions where they can get away from the pressures of life and the familiarity of home to rekindle their love and their identity as a couple. Such trips need not be long, or far away, or expensive. Some couples err by putting their personal lives on hold during the child-rearing years. Some do not want to leave their children overnight or to exclude them from an activity they would enjoy. One of the best things parents can do for their children is to nurture and nourish their love for each other. This instills security in the hearts and minds of the children and sets an example for them to follow later in life. Husbands and wives must never forget: one day those children will be grown and gone, but the spouse is going to be there always—at least, that is the way God intends it. Sadly, when the nest is empty, many people find themselves alone with a stranger. For that reason—and before it is too late—husbands and wives need to put their marriage relationship first. Scripture is clear on the subject: (*Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible- Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*)

B. (:12) Romantic Intentions

*“Let us rise early and go to the vineyards;
Let us see whether the vine has budded and its blossoms have opened,
And whether the pomegranates have bloomed.
There I will give you my love.”*

C. (:13) Romantic Inducements

*“The mandrakes have given forth fragrance;
And over our doors are all choice fruits, both new and old,
Which I have saved up for you, my beloved.”*

NET Note - In the ancient Near East the **mandrake** was a widely used symbol of erotic love because it was thought to be an aphrodisiac and therefore was used as a fertility drug. The unusual shape of the large forked roots of the mandrake resembles the human body with extended arms and legs. This similarity gave rise to the popular superstition that the mandrake could induce conception and it was therefore used as a fertility drug. It was so thoroughly associated with erotic love that its name is derived from the Hebrew root (*dod*, “love”), that is, (*duda'im*) denotes “love-apples.” Arabs used its fruit

and roots as an aphrodisiac and referred to it as *abd al- sal'm* (“servant of love”) (*NET Note Song 7*)

Tom Gledhill: Supremely confident of her capacity to satisfy him, she articulates all the delights she has in store for him and describes the circumstances where she will give him her love. This kind of advance planning must drive her lover wild with frenzied anticipation. Such psychological ploys are part of the game of love. She is creating a mental and physical environment in which their union may be consummated with the maximum intensity and minimum of inhibition. She even hints that she is able to teach him a thing or two. All is fair play in the desire for a happy release of sexual tension.

Iain Duguid: The *choice fruits* of this garden (see **4:13**) are *new as well as old*, which may be a merism referring generally to all of the various kinds of conjugal love, or more specifically may indicate the joy of renewed union (“new”) as a reiteration of their original union on their wedding night (“old”). Either way, these are the delights of love that the woman has *laid up* and kept safe to give to her husband alone. There is certainly no celebration of promiscuity in the Song.

Wiersbe: The Shulamite enjoys fruit that is both new and old, suggesting that they’re brave enough to try something new but wise enough not to abandon what they know really works.

IV. (8:1-4) PINING FOR FREEDOM OF SEXUAL EXPRESSION (Female)

A. (:1-2) Physical Desires

1. (:1) Desire for Public Display of Affection without Shame

*“Oh that you were like a brother to me
Who nursed at my mother's breasts.
If I found you outdoors, I would kiss you;
No one would despise me, either.”*

Tremper Longman: This verse is a nearly insuperable problem for those who want to read the Song as a logical plot from courtship to wedding and then early marriage. Here the relationship is best understood as a secret one; at least it is highly unlikely that they are married at this time. . . The second line of the verse explicates the reason for her desire that he were her brother. She could kiss him in public without shame. The term shame is what shows us that a matter of cultural delicacy is at issue here.

Wiersbe: As she closes her monologue, she expresses regret that she can’t show her love to him spontaneously, as a sister can do to a brother (**8:1-4**).

2. (:2) Desire for Private Delight of Sexual Passion

*“I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother,
who used to instruct me;
I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my
pomegranates.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: she declares that since she cannot give him any affection openly, she will more than make up for it with the affection she gives him in private. . .

The “*house of my mother*” occurs elsewhere in the Song only at **3:4**. There, I suggested that the house of her mother and the chamber of the woman who conceived her can only be the womb. Here the meaning is even clearer. In **Song 8:1–2** she self-evidently is taking him to a night of lovemaking, and no explanation for doing this in her mother’s literal house is satisfactory. The “*mother’s house*” is thus here a euphemism for the female genitals, and it is appropriate as a designation of the place of procreation.

Iain Duguid: True love is never content to exist in secret: it craves public approbation of the relationship. Therefore, the woman wishes to bring the man to the *house of her mother*, to receive the approval of her family. In **chapter 3**, this was where she wanted to bring the man when she found him, as a sign of public approval of their relationship. Now she is able to bring him there without fear. This is an appropriate place for celebrating their relationship, since it was there her mother *used to teach her*. The exact nature of what her mother taught her is left unspecified, but in context, it is presumably the ways of love (perhaps illuminating an important aspect of what the older women are to teach the younger women in **Titus 2:4**).

B. (:3) Physical Embrace

“Let his left hand be under my head, and his right hand embrace me.”

C. (:4) Refrain of Restraint

*“I want you to swear, O daughters of Jerusalem,
Do not arouse or awaken my love, until she pleases.”*

Dennis Kinlaw: It is the better part of wisdom, she informs her friends, not to permit love to be awakened until the time is right. Love like this should have no shadows or constraints.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What discourages or prevents wives from being the one to initiate intimacy?
- 2) How can couples work at being best friends in their marriage relationship?
- 3) What do you and your spouse do to prevent the passion in your marriage from growing stale?
- 4) How important do you think it is to occasionally take a romantic getaway?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Hess: The poem has clearly seen the love of the couple aroused. However, they have explored it for reasons other than purely as a satisfaction of desire. Instead, their bodies with their desires, like the beauty of nature and the blessing of family, are traced back to an Artist who brings all these things into being. This unexpressed key provides for the integration of beauty, desire, and commitment. It thus allows the lovers to give themselves fully to one another without fear (**1 John 4:18**) and without oppression (**Eph. 5**, especially v. **21**).

Iain Duguid: Marriage, and the public affirmation of the relationship that it represents, is not merely a meaningless piece of paper. It matters what society thinks about the relationship between the man and the woman. Sex is not simply a private matter between two consenting adults; it is something that needs to be celebrated by the family and the community in order to be fully enjoyed. Equally, though, sexual enjoyment is not simply the domain of men: women too are designed by God to long for and enjoy satisfying sexual passion within marriage.

POSB - How to Keep the Marriage Fires Burning: Praise your spouse regularly. You can never offer your spouse too much genuine praise. Affirmation and appreciation add fuel to the fires of passion. For the wife, they provide the support and approval she needs. For the husband, they provide the respect and admiration he craves. Words are powerful things. Words of praise for your spouse can help keep your marriage from getting stale and can even keep it exciting. It is not enough just to refrain from criticizing or speaking negatively to or about your spouse. Spouses should give positive affirmation and praise to each other every day. God's Holy Word is clear. Praise helps a marriage in many, many ways: It builds confidence in your spouse. It makes your spouse feel valued. It makes your spouse want to please you. It keeps you focused on the positive things about your spouse and helps to keep you content in your marriage. It is a reminder of how much God has blessed you in giving you this person to walk with throughout life. Remember this: God not only demonstrated His love for us by giving His Son (**Ro.5:8**), but He also tells us throughout His Word how special we are to Him and how much He loves us. We must follow God's example and faithfully tell our spouses how special they are and how much we love them. (*Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible- Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*)

Daniel Akin: Twelve Ways to Keep Passion Alive in Your Marriage

- 1) Work at it.
- 2) Think team.
- 3) Be protective.
- 4) Accept that good and not perfect is okay when it comes to your mate.
- 5) Share your thoughts and feelings.
- 6) Manage anger and especially contempt better.
- 7) Declare your devotion to each other again and again.
- 8) Give each other permission to change.

- 9) Have fun together.
- 10) Make yourself trustworthy.
- 11) Forgive and forget.
- 12) Cherish and applaud.

TEXT: Song of Solomon 8:5-7

TITLE: CELEBRATION OF THE UNQUENCHABLE FLAME OF LOVE

BIG IDEA:

ONCE AWAKENED, ROMANTIC LOVE PROVES POWERFUL AND PRICELESS

INTRODUCTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In the structure of Song of Songs, however, this unit looks back to **1:7–8, the Song of Finding the Beloved**. There, the soprano despaired of finding her beloved and asked him where he might be, adding that she did not want to be a woman “*picking fleas*” among the flocks. The chorus in turn told her to go out to where the shepherds may be found. Here, however, instead of telling her to go out to the pastures, the chorus sings of the arrival of the woman. She begins her part with lyrics addressed to the man, “*Under the apple tree I aroused you.*” That is, instead of seeking her lover, she sings of where she found him. Furthermore, in **Song 1:7** she asked where he made his flocks lie down at the heat of noon, but in **8:6** she sings of the heat of love, declaring it to be an unquenchable fire. Most importantly, whereas **1:7–8** describes her somewhat desperate desire to find her beloved, in this text she demands that he permanently set her as a seal on his heart and arm. She will never lose him again.

Richard Hess: The fulfillment of *eros* with the allusion to conception and childbearing leads to the climax of the entire Song, the emphasis on a commitment in love that is stronger than anything known.

Tremper Longman: First she declares (**vs. 5b**) that she aroused him under the apple tree (an erotic image), and then she asks him to proclaim his ownership of her (**v. 6**). This gives her the occasion to talk about the power of love with a series of profound and compelling metaphors (**v. 7**). She ends the section by proclaiming the value of love over money, reminiscent of the frequent claims in other wisdom books that wisdom itself is more precious than fine jewels or precious metals (cf. **Job 28**).

Tom Gledhill: Thus, the love in our Song is all-embracing. It embraces pleasure, it embraces pain. It is passionate, yet fearful. It possesses, yet lets go. It liberates, yet binds. It empowers, it weakens. It brings turmoil, it brings peace. It is solemn, yet playful. It is lofty in conception, yet earthy in expression. It is self-centred, it is totally other-centred. It gives, it receives. It longs to give pleasure, it hopes to receive pleasure. It is cautious and timorous, yet extravagant and brave. Such a union of opposites, such a conflicting array of incompatibles, alone can do justice to the immensely complex phenomenon of the love between a man and a woman. It transcends logic, rationality, definition and even sense. Yet this whole thing called love is there to be experienced in all its agony and ecstasy. It is this love about which our Song sings.

I. (:5) REMEMBERING THE AWAKENING OF ROMANTIC LOVE

A. (:5a) Arrival Motif (Chorus)

*“Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning on her beloved?”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Lines 1A–B repeat verbatim a text from **Song 3:6** (“*Who is this coming up from the wilderness?*”). The following line, however, is radically different. Where **3:6** has the theophany-like description “*like a pillar of smoke,*” the present text continues with “*leaning on her lover.*” The earlier text depicted the bride arriving with regal splendor where this text presents an image of the woman at peace drawing security and stability from her man. Also, where the former text moved into a section in which the chorus gave an elaborate portrayal of the military entourage of the Solomonic groom (**Song 3:7–11**), here the arrival imagery is dropped as quickly as it is mentioned. Instead, the woman sings of the passionate love that binds her to her husband. The motif in **3:6–11** was the man and woman in a formal ceremony; the motif here is of the man and woman in **passionate love**. . .

The choral prelude informs the audience that the woman has sufficient stature and experience to make the profound pronouncements on love that follow.

Richard Hess: As the female leans upon her lover, the themes of their physical closeness as a symbol of the love that they share continues the picture of **v. 3**, where they are seen in an embrace. It anticipates the intimate relationship concerning which the female will speak in the following verses.

Tremper Longman: We assume that it is the chorus, elsewhere identified as the women of Jerusalem, who asks this question. After all, what is seen in the distance is the lover and the one who is leaning on him, a fact that rules out the man and the woman as speaker. . .

The posture of the woman leaning on her lover denotes intimacy and mutual dependence and alludes to what they were doing in the wilderness.

B. (:5b) Arousal Remembered (Female)

*“Beneath the apple tree I awakened you;
There your mother was in labor with you,
There she was in labor and gave you birth.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The Syr. renders the second sg. suf. in this verse as fem. and so requires that this be taken as the man’s lines, and some interpreters have followed suit. The Syr. alone, however, is slender basis for making the emendations, notwithstanding the extensive discussions on the part of some scholars (e.g., **Murphy**, 191). The Heb. is clear and widely supported; in these circumstances, emendation is ill advised. It appears that some interpreters found the notion that the woman would intentionally arouse the man to be offensive.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The verb appears nine times in the Song of Songs, and four of these times, as here, it is in the po‘lel stem. In the qal, the verb means to “awaken” (cf. **Song 4:16; 5:2**). In the nip‘al it means to “be woken up.” The hip‘il means to “awaken” or more frequently to “set in motion” (e.g., **Isa 41:2, 25; 45:13; Ezr 1:1**). In the po‘lel it means to “set in motion,” “disturb,” or “arouse” (**Ps 80:3; Job 3:8; Prov 10:12; Zech 9:13**). The po‘lel frequently suggests arousing some kind of fury or passion. The three other po‘lel occurrences in the Song are in **2:7; 3:5; and 8:4**, where the woman exhorts the Jerusalem girls not to “arouse” (po‘lel) or “awaken” (hip‘il) love. In short, the woman is not saying here that she simply woke the man when he was napping under an apple tree. Rather, “arouse” is the proper translation. . .

One can hardly doubt that “*I aroused you*” refers to sexual and reproductive activity, but the woman does not literally mean that all this took place under an apple tree. Rather, under the metaphor of the apple tree she speaks rather directly of sexual intercourse and what follows it, conception and birth. Sexual union and giving birth are times of intense physical and emotional pleasure and trauma. The woman has entered this kind of intense physical relationship with her husband, and she recapitulates the experience of their mothers.

Richard Hess: In addition to the sweetness of the apple’s aroma (**7:9 [7:8 Eng.]**) and its value as a source of strength (**2:5**), the female has previously compared her lover to the apple tree for his unique qualities in comparison with other young men and for the sweetness of his fruit (**2:3**). The comments on those verses discussed the erotic aspects of the apple tree. Here they appear in all their power as an aphrodisiac to awaken and arouse the young man for the love pleasures that the female has desired. That both senses, awakening from sleep and arousing sexually, may be present is indicated by the use of this root (‘wr) earlier in the Song. The root occurs six times in the three verses where the female charges the young women of Jerusalem not to awake or stir love, most recently in the verse immediately preceding this one (**2:7; 3:5; 8:4**). In all these contexts it refers to romantic and sexual desire. . .

There is no doubt that the repetition in **Song 8:5b** is designed to emphasize the **generational aspect**, so that the erotic sense of lovemaking is set in the context of the family. It is not merely the nuclear family but especially the extended one, in which generation after generation is envisioned as safeguarding the family and perpetuating it. In the same place and manner as the current male begins a family with his lover, so his father and mother began their family. Hence the erotic tenor of the whole Song here moves beyond the inevitably selfish tendencies of pleasure seeking to describe the broader vista of fulfillment of the goal that God wishes for his people, to be fruitful and to fill the earth (**Gen. 1:26–28**).^[6] That this should be accomplished within the bounds of committed heterosexual marriage is the only possible understanding of the remainder of the biblical text. There was little respect and no inheritance for those born outside this marriage relationship (cf. **Judg. 11:1–2**). This is not mentioned here because it is not the concern of the book. Nevertheless, to assume that the lovers were unmarried and celebrating a sexual relationship, as many commentators do, runs against the

assumptions of this verse in the context of Israelite society. The reference to the previous generation and the expectation of one to come assume that the erotic love of the couple does not lie outside the bounds of marriage but is integral to it.

II. (:6-7) CELEBRATING THE POWER AND VALUE OF ROMANTIC LOVE (Female)

A. (:6a) Preserving Power – The Covenant of Love

*“Put me like a seal over your heart,
Like a seal on your arm.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Seals were especially important for indicating ownership or maintaining security. . . In this text, the woman calls upon the man to set her as a seal on his heart and arm. This is a sign of covenant commitment to marriage and is analogous to the wearing of phylacteries as tokens and reminders of Israel’s covenant fidelity to Yahweh (**Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21**). In the Song, the “*seal*” could refer to the wearing of a seal around the neck or on an armband, but it is more likely to be purely metaphorical.

Daniel Akin: Believers in Jesus have a King who has set His seal on us, emblazoning it on our foreheads (cf. **Rev 9:4**) as a personal pledge of possession and protection. And we did not even have to ask. Indeed, through salvation provided for us in Christ, our God has “*sealed us and given us the Spirit as a down payment in our hearts*” (**2 Cor 1:22**). We have His seal on our foreheads and His seal in our hearts. We are “double-sealed” by our great Shepherd-King. The personal and intimate love He has for those who belong to Him is a pledge and promise we should never doubt.

Iain Duguid: Seals were objects of great personal value in antiquity and were therefore guarded carefully, carried on a cord around the owner’s neck or on an armlet (**Hallo 1985: 22**). They were used to identify possessions and to sign documents, by making an imprint on another object, as we might brand an animal or imprint a wax seal on a legal contract. In a similar way, the woman wants to be imprinted on the man’s *heart and his arm*. The heart was the seat of a person’s thoughts and feelings, their inner self (cf. **Prov. 3:3**), while the arm was the locus of a person’s actions or power. Together they represent the whole person (**Longman 2001:210**): the woman wants to be constantly by his side and in his thoughts, an integral part of his identity.

Tom Gledhill: She wants, perhaps not unreasonably, to be the very **centre** of his existence. For she knows without a shadow of doubt that he is the centre of her life. But is it true that she is the centre of his life? Perhaps she has a lingering doubt, for she needs constant reassurance and affirmation. She knows that she has already captured him (**7:5**, ‘*a king . . . held captive by . . . tresses*’) but will he escape? Will she lose him to someone or something else? **Anna Louise de Stael** has said, ‘Love is the whole history of a woman’s life; it is only an episode in man’s.’ This, as a generalization, probably polarizes too strongly the differences between the psychology of the male and female. It is sometimes said that a woman is seldom at the centre of a man’s life to the

same degree as a man is to his beloved, and that she is but one aspect of his broad spectrum of interests. For a man may have his job, his hobbies, his club, his companions as well as his wife. But it may just be the simple fact that a man may often compartmentalize his life so that he devotes his full attention to each of his interests in turn, and seldom allows one area to overlap with another; whereas for a woman her equally varied interests spill over and enrich each other and her life becomes a more **integrated whole**. Thus her love relationship suffuses every part of her existence, whatever job, career or vocation she pursues. . .

It is this central theme of security that links the girl's words to her lover to the theme of the following lines, namely, the strength and enduring nature of true love.

B. (:6b) Possessive Power – The Jealousy of Love

*“For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy is as severe as Sheol;”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: She claims that love, like death, is **inescapable**. The love the man and woman have experienced has bound them together permanently. The passion of their love for one another holds them as relentlessly as does death, and only death itself can actually separate the two lovers. Fury and destruction are implicit in these words. Those who passionately love are passionately possessive. One cannot trifle with love or with one's lover. Yahweh himself is a **jealous God (Exod 20:5)**. Although there are those who are paranoid about infidelity, neurotically dependent, or wrongly jealous (exemplified in literature by Othello), exclusivity is not of itself corrupt or oppressive. It is wrong, indeed perverse, for the lover to be indifferent to the presence of rivals. Also, jealousy in this context need not refer to the paranoid suspicion that one's lover is faithless. If the jealousy of Yahweh over Israel is the model, the term refers to a **proper possessiveness** in the setting of a wholesome relationship. Rightly experienced by healthy souls, this **exclusivity** is part of the glory of love and further indicates the seriousness of entering this relationship.

Tremper Longman: 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**. Humans can only have one God. If they worship another, it triggers God's jealousy. God's jealousy is an energy that tries to rescue the relationship. Similarly, a man and a woman can have only one spouse. If there is a threat to that relationship, then jealousy is a proper emotion. All this is because so much hangs on the **integrity** of relationship. It is so basic, so deep, that it stirs up strong emotions and passions.

Tom Gledhill: This unit also introduces new themes which have not previously arisen in the Song: *death, sheol* (the grave), *jealousy*, and the *many waters*. There is a new element of **hostility** here, **dangerous forces** which threaten the very existence of love. For many, this unit represents a high point in the Song. If **5:1** represents a climax in the lovers' physical relationship, then these verses represent a climax in praise of the **unconquerability** of love in the face of all its foes.

C. (:6c) Passionate Power – The Strength of Love

*“Its flashes are flashes of fire,
The very flame of the LORD.”*

Iain Duguid: Love and jealousy are likewise compared with *flames*, which also have a life of their own and are not easily mastered. These are no ordinary flames, however, but the *very flame of the Lord*.

Richard Hess: The last word (*šalhebetyāh*) is the most controversial in the entire verse (8:6). It occurs only here, and its meaning is not clear. The construction of the word invites its division into possibly a prefixed relative pronoun followed by a word for “*flame(s)*” (*lhb*) and then the shortened form of Yahweh, the divine name. It could thereby be rendered as “*flames of Yahweh*.” This might reflect a superlative, the mightiest of flames (so **Brin**, “Superlative”), or it could imply that God is the ultimate author of this arousal of love and the heat of passion. The LXX renders it as “*its flames*,” whereas the Vulgate interprets it as “*and of the flames*.” Nevertheless, the characteristically shortened form of Yahweh, as found frequently in the major book of biblical poetry, the Psalms, suggests that here is mention of Yahweh. If so, in the entire book this is the only direct reference to God, by any name. It may well be that here at the climactic point of the whole Song, the poet chooses to mention the name of God, a **name otherwise hidden and reflective of his operation behind the scenes**. God is not in the conscious concerns of the couple as they celebrate their sexual love, just as he is not himself ever portrayed in a sexual sense. This would prevent the erotic poetry from somehow being applied to God as though he were sexual. . . Nevertheless, the absence of any direct reference to God, except at this point, suggests that here the erotic love of the Song reaches a level of the love that transcends all and through which God is known. Thus God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and those who would know and worship him must know that love. The greatest physical pointer to such love is the committed sexual intimacy between a husband and wife.

Tremper Longman: This flame represents the intensity of passion and perhaps hints again that there is potential danger involved. Care must be exercised around something as powerful as love.

D. (:7a) Persistent Power – The Staying Power of Unquenchable Love

*“Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor will rivers overflow it;”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The contrast between fire and water is so obvious that one hardly need look to mythological images of the waters of primordial chaos for an explanation of this line. The fury of the fire of love is so great that even great volumes of water cannot quench it. One cannot easily escape its power after one has entered this realm. Those who have admitted this fire into their lives will find it impossible to douse.

Tom Gledhill: For though water can quench any flame, there are no hostile forces which can quench the flame of love. It is inevitable that love will always be tested and tried, will always encounter forces that threaten to undermine and destroy it. These may be the outward circumstances that may erode love's power: the pain of separation, the uncertainty of the present or future, the loss of health or means of livelihood. But the love which is fueled by the energy of God will triumph and overcome all these adversities and will emerge purer and stronger and more precious through the testing.

E. Priceless Value -- The Inestimable Value of Love

*"If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love,
It would be utterly despised."*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Love is here valued above wealth and possessions, and it cannot be bought. **Prov 16:16** proclaims, *"To get wisdom, how much better it is than gold! / And to get understanding is preferable to silver!"* Love, like Lady Wisdom, exceeds the value of gold (**Prov 8:19**). It is important to observe that in **Song 8:7** it is the woman who demands fidelity of the man. In the ancient Near East it was a given that adultery by a wife was a heinous offense, but expectations of men were far less in this regard. Yet here, as in **Prov 5:7–23**, sexual devotion is demanded of the husband. The bride makes the same kind of claim on him as Lady Wisdom does on the young man (**Prov 1:20–33**). Fidelity to one's bride is equated with fidelity to Wisdom; holding to the one preserves love, and holding to the other preserves life.

Richard Hess: The sense is that not even every possession of a householder could suffice to buy love. It is a commodity that cannot be bartered or bought. It is free but not cheap. There is no trade for it. Instead, its value is higher than all earthly possessions. Therefore, when it is found or acquired, it must be valued and preserved beyond anything else. That such an attempt to buy love would be despised is expressed emphatically by repeating the root with an infinitive absolute (*bôz*). It thus attests to what forms popular opinion: love has a greater value than anything else.

Tremper Longman: So far the woman has placed the power of death and even the power of the mythological waters against love, and she found the latter to be superior. Lastly, she pits love against another powerful force, money (the wealth of his house), with the same result. Money will bring many things, but not love. Love is not able to be bought. To even try brings shame. All the money at one's possession will fail.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What value is there in remembering the early days of your romantic love?
- 2) How do you continue to express your commitment to your spouse?

- 3) How does the marriage ring serve as the seal on your devotion and commitment?
- 4) How do you communicate to your spouse their priceless value?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The Song's fixation on the **mother (v 5)** is important. Not one time does the Song refer to the father, but seven times it mentions the mother (**Song 1:6; 3:4, 11; 6:9; 8:1, 2, 5**). The woman's premarital domestic life was governed by her "mother's sons" (**1:6**). Solomon was crowned by his mother (**3:11**), and the bride is the beloved daughter of her mother (**6:9**). The intimate connection between brother and sister is defined by the fact that they both nursed at the breasts of one mother (**8:1**). The "mother's house" is a metaphor for the woman's womb with its sexual and reproductive functions (**3:4; 8:2**). Here in **8:5** the passions of the wife/mother bind her and her husband together. Taken together, the reason for the dominance of the mother and the silence about the father are not difficult to explain: against the passionate depth of her experiences in losing virginity, entering pregnancy, giving birth, and nursing children, the man's sexual experiences are rather trivial by comparison. The woman is the domain of sexual and domestic love.

POSB - A seal was a signature of **possession** and ownership. In Jewish culture, it took the form of a signet ring usually worn on the finger, or occasionally on a chain around the neck. In some Mesopotamian cultures, it was an engraved cylinder that left its imprint as it was rolled upon clay. Both forms were marked by an image that was exclusive to the owner, and was stamped upon the possession. It left a **permanent mark** that could not be removed. This is how the Shulamite was asking Solomon to stamp her upon his heart. The reference to his arm refers to the strength and muscle that provided the force of the stamp. Solomon's wife was saying, "*Stamp me hard upon your heart, with all of your strength.*" The basis for her request was an inspired description of true love. True love is like: Death: the strength of death is irresistible and unconquerable. The grave: the hold of the grave is cruel and jealous. It obstinately refuses to give up its possession.....Fire: the flame of the fire continuously burns. It is an intense, consuming flame.

How to Keep the Marriage Fires Burning: Regularly renew your **commitment** to your spouse. The Shulamite yearned for assurance of her husband's commitment to her. She longed to know that her husband had stamped her upon his heart. Husbands and wives should never allow or cause their spouses to be unsure of their commitment. This is another area where it is necessary to be active rather than passive. Some husbands and wives control their spouses by keeping them in doubt. They want them to fear the breakup of their marriage in order to keep them striving to please them. This is manipulation and it is wrong. It is exactly the opposite of the way Christ loves the church. His perfect love casts out all fears, and He gives His bride (the church, all true believers) security in His love for her. Women especially need **security** and

reassurance. A wife needs to know that her husband will never leave her. She needs to know that her husband’s love for her is as strong as death and as jealous (protective) as the grave. She must know that there is nothing—or nobody—her husband would take in exchange for her, that she is priceless to him. A wife who feels this secure will delight in giving herself fully to her husband and in submitting to him.

Iain Duguid: Love cannot be bought and sold. It is a single-hearted, lifelong, jealous devotion between one man and one woman, from the moment it seizes a person until the moment of their death. Nothing but the grave can separate two people who are thus joined together. This surely fits the biblical ideal of marriage, laid out in Genesis 2:24. The marriage that the Song describes is no insipid institution, no mere cultural convention, but a blazing fire of passion! Far from being opposed to one another, marriage and passion go hand in hand in the Song.

Tom Gledhill: Our present-day society has perhaps an exaggerated view of the importance of romantic love. It becomes the touch stone for the survival of a relationship. But as we have seen, romance comes and goes and comes again; it is a delicate plant that needs to be sensitively nurtured; a flickering flame that constantly needs to be fueled. The will to refuel and nurture is the true love that makes for survival. We need to fan the flames by little acts of kindness, springing thoughtful surprises that break the patterns of dull routine.

Daniel Akin: 8:5-14 - A Love That Lasts Forever –

Main Idea: The gospel shapes marriage in such a way that the love shared by husband and wife extends grace to both and reflects the love between Christ and His bride, the church. Twelve different characteristics of the love God cultivates between a man and a woman in covenant marriage are addressed in **8:5-14**. Here we will see that love truly is “a many splendored thing.” Here we will discover “a love that lasts forever!”

- I. Cultivate a Love That Is Public (**Song 8:5**).
- II. Cultivate a Love That Is Private (**Song 8:5**).
- III. Cultivate a Love That Is Personal (**Song 8:6**).
- IV. Cultivate a Love That Is Protective (**Song 8:6**).
- V. Cultivate a Love That Is Possessive (**Song 8:6**).
- VI. Cultivate a Love That Is Passionate (**Song 8:6**).
- VII. Cultivate a Love That Is Persevering (**Song 8:7**).
- VIII. Cultivate a Love That Is Priceless (**Song 8:7**).
- IX. Cultivate a Love That Is Pure (**Song 8:8-9**).
- X. Cultivate a Love That Is Peaceable (**Song 8:10**).
- XI. Cultivate a Love That Is Privileged (**Song 8:11-12**).
- XII. Cultivate a Love That Is Permanent (**Song 8:13-14**).

(Exalting Jesus in Song of Songs -Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)

TEXT: Song of Solomon 8:8-14

TITLE: PAST REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE ANTICIPATION OF ROMANTIC LOVE

BIG IDEA:

HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT PROTECTS VIRGINITY UNTIL YOU CAN ENJOY YOUR PARTNER IN A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Tom Gledhill: What is being compared and contrasted here is the administration of two different vineyards and the disposal of their fruit. On the one hand, we have King Solomon's literal vineyard in Baal Hamon, which he lets out to tenant farmers. On the other hand (**8:12**), we have the girl's own metaphorical vineyard which unlike Solomon's is not to be let out for hire. Her person, her body, her sexuality are not to be made an object of a commercial transaction; she cannot be wooed with money. She herself is in sole charge of her future destiny, and she will only give herself freely to the man of her choice.

Jack Deere: Verses **8-12** are a flashback explaining (a) the protection of the beloved by her older brothers when she was young and (b) her subsequent initial meeting with Solomon [I do not adopt this historical drama approach]. The Song concludes in **verses 13-14** with statements that show the couple's love has not lost its intensity.

I. (:8-10) IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING THE GIFT OF VIRGINITY

A. (:8-9) Reflections on Her Physical Development from the Perspective of Her Brothers and Their Concern for Her Virginity (Chorus)

1. (:8) Guarding the Sexually Immature

"We have a little sister, and she has no breasts;

What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for?"

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The chorus describes the little sister by saying that she has no breasts. She could therefore be anywhere between a small child and a preadolescent. The sexual nature of the depiction is striking; it defines her in terms of her **sexual maturity**. This contrasts with the more typical way of defining childhood in terms of mental capacity, as in **Isa 7:15-16** (ability to make moral choices), **Isa 8:4** (ability to say "father" and "mother"), **Jer 1:6** (ability to speak with eloquence), and **Jonah 4:11** (ability to distinguish left from right). But the description is appropriate because it is precisely the sexual life of the girl that is the focus of the chorus's concern.

Tom Gledhill: The brothers were watching their developing young sister protectively. As in the allegory of Ezekiel 16, they watched her grow up and develop and become the most beautiful of jewels. Her *'breasts were formed and her hair grew'*. In **Ezekiel 16:8**

we read, ‘*Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you . . .*’

2. (:9) Guarding Her Virginity

a. Analogy to a Wall

*“If she is a wall,
We shall build on her a battlement of silver;”*

Tom Gledhill: The next point at issue is to decide whether the metaphors of the wall and the door are saying the same thing, or the opposite. For a door can be either open or shut, a means of entry, or a barring of access. Are the two halves of the verse in synonymous [cf. **Duane Garrett / Paul House**] or antithetic parallelism [cf. **Richard Hess**]? It is impossible to be certain and it is probably best to leave the matter open. In any case, the question of the brothers is one of self-deliberation, of speculating about her potential for chaste or unchaste behaviour.

Iain Duguid: Since the accoutrements which the brothers to add to her, a *battlement of silver* and *boards of cedar*, both seem to be more decorative than functional, it is probably best to take the metaphors as **parallel**. Thus far, her purity is unblemished, and the brothers propose to adorn that feature (perhaps to make up for the lack of other physical attributes, such as developed breasts) as their marketing strategy.

b. Analogy to a Door

*“But if she is a door,
We shall barricade her with planks of cedar.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The “*tier of silver*” and the “*plank of cedar*” are both meant to fortify the castle (the virgin) against assault (loss of virginity). The metaphor does not concern how she might lose her virginity (whether by force or by consent); it only indicates that the chorus intends to prevent loss of virginity. Silver and cedar, however, are ornamental; they are not materials one would typically use for defensive bulwarks. This is self-evident in the case of silver, but cedar is associated with palatial dwellings as well (e.g., **2 Sam 7:2, 7; Jer 22:14–15; 1 Kgs 5–7; Ezra 3:7**). The implication of using expensive and decorative materials (as opposed to iron, stone, or generic wood) to secure the virginity of the girl is that her status as virgin is to be honored and maintained in a way that enhances her dignity. She is not placed in a prison like a criminal; she is protected like a precious treasure. The historical analogy is how the virgin daughters of David were honored with decorative clothing (**2 Sam 13:18**).

Richard Hess: The metaphor of a wall describes an image of a city wall that protects the inhabitants. Here its contrast with the door in the second half of the verse may suggest that this describes **two different situations**, the first where the female resists (like a wall) and the second where she acquiesces (like a door). In the first case, the brothers will build a silver battlement along and on top of the wall. In addition to the added security that they wish to provide their sister, and so protect the honor of their family,

there is also the beauty or adornment that this brings. Its translation from the metaphor to the reality of their sister's condition means that the brothers remain watchful to guarantee that her honor is not compromised and that her beauty is adorned in the best way possible. The same is true of the picture in the second part of the verse, but here the female is more inclined to yield to her lover's advances. The cedar panels (*lūah*) of the door would provide both protection and strength, giving the door increased security. It would add beauty to the entrance so that all who pass through would be impressed by the home. The same is true of the brothers' concern for their sister. They wish to protect her and to add to her beauty as well as to the nobility of their home.

Tremper Longman: Playing with these images of **wall** and **door**, the brothers speak to their response to either of these theoretical possibilities. If she is a **wall**, that is, chaste, they will build a silver battlement (*tīrā*) for her. A *tīrā* refers to either a “camp protected by a stone wall” or “a row of stones.” In other words, they will reinforce her will to be chaste by further protecting her. The fact that this battlement (*tīrā*) is silver (*keseṣ*) may be a way of indicating that they honor her for her decision.

However, if the woman proves to be a **door**, then they will watch over her with a cedar board. In other words, they will plug up her opening. They will force her to cease being sexually open. In the biblical world, the brothers often played the role of protector of their sister's sexuality.

Tom Gledhill: the brothers are performing their duty of protection, preservation and public presentation towards their sister.

B. (:10) Reflections from Her Own Perspective on Her Transition into Sexual Maturity While Protecting Her Virginity (Female)

1. Sexual Maturity While Protecting Her Virginity

“I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers;”

Duane Garrett / Paul House: The soprano turns the image of the wall in an unexpected direction by describing her breasts as the towers on the wall. This obviously conveys the fact that, unlike the little sister, she has attained sexual maturity and has full breasts. But it also indicates her resistance to seduction. In the defense of a city, the towers are the proud symbols of its resistance to all attackers; the taking of the towers implies that the last vestiges of resistance have collapsed and the city is in the hands of its enemies.

Iain Provan: She is now a “wall,” however, that has assuredly been breached, as a matter of her own free choice. She has no need any longer of their ornamental “*silver towers*,” for she has towers of her own—her mature breasts; these “*towers*” are by no means defensive fortifications but themselves draw her lover into her “*city*.” In these towers he finds “*contentment*” (*šalom* in **8:10**, a sense of well-being and peaceful satisfaction).

2. Satisfying Her Romantic Partner at the Appropriate Time

“Then I became in his eyes as one who finds peace.”

Richard Hess: “*peace*” -- it suggests the absence of conflict and the readiness to pursue good relations. The female appears to suggest that she will not avoid the pursuit of her lover; instead, she will be open to his advances. Rather than using her powers to resist him, she intends to pursue their mutual well-being and delight.

Tremper Longman: Though they do not address themselves to her, the woman responds to the speech of her brothers. She disputes their perceptions of her maturity and asserts her chastity, a virtue prized greatly in women in the world of the Old Testament. She does the latter by simply saying “*I am a wall*” (see previous verse for meaning of this image). She does the former by responding to their comment about her lack of breasts with “*my breasts are like towers.*” She is sexually mature and has, up until this point at least, kept herself from men. As a result, she is ready for an intimate and satisfying relationship with a man. . . It is because of her sexual maturity and exclusiveness that she will bring peace (*šālôm*) to her lord/husband. The term *šālôm* has a rich connotation, including not only the absence of strife but also fulfillment, contentment, satisfaction, and wholeness.

Daniel Akin: This woman made this man complete, whole. She was that divinely sent companion, the helper who is his complement (**Gen 2:18, 20**). In her presence he finds peace; he is set at ease. For him, the wall comes down and her towers fall into his hands. His banner over her is love (**2:4**), and her banner over him is peace (**8:10**).

O’Donnell says it well: “His victory over her virginity (ironically) brings peace – to her, to him, to them, to everyone around them” (*Song*, 129). So we see in marriage holiness is a path to happiness. Purity is a path to peace, just another gift ultimately provided by the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ (**Isa 9:6-7**).

II. (:11-12) INCOMPARABLE VALUE OF EXCLUSIVE LOVE COMMITMENT – RECALLING HER INITIAL COMMITMENT

A. (:11) Exclusive Love Cannot be Shared with Others (Chorus)

*“Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
He entrusted the vineyard to caretakers;
Each one was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit.”*

Richard Hess: **Verse 11** prepares the reader for **v. 12**, in which the speaker claims sole possession of a vineyard, in contrast to Solomon, who with all his wealth must share the produce of his vineyard with his caretakers. The point thus is not who the caretakers are or how they relate to the metaphor of the harem. Instead, the vineyard is a picture of true love in which the couple shares one another’s bodies in an exclusive commitment.

Tremper Longman: This may well describe the large stable of women that King Solomon had in his harem (**1 Kings 11:3**: “*He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines*”). The next verse makes the contrast with the couple at the center of the Song.

Iain Duguid: He employs others to take care of his wives as if his harem were a commercial farming enterprise, rather than actually knowing and loving his wives intimately himself.

Dennis Kinlaw: There is always the possibility, though difficult for us, that the reference to Solomon's vineyard is to be taken literally while the reference to the spouse's vineyard is metaphorical. Jesus did the same kind of thing when he said, "*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*" (**John 2:19**). That would be consistent with the double entendres of the book. It would also be fitting that the text come to its climax with a passage of such ambiguity and possible double meaning.

B. (:12) Exclusive Love Cannot be Bought (Female)

*"My very own vineyard is at my disposal;
The thousand shekels are for you, Solomon,
And two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit."*

Richard Hess: the vineyard belongs to the female, the most natural and most frequent speaker throughout this Song. When the female claims the vineyard for herself (**8:12**), she claims that she alone takes care of it (contra **1:6**) and that she alone opens her locked garden to the one whom she loves (cf. **4:12, 16**). The true and committed love of this couple thus contrasts dramatically with the harem of Solomon. He can have the great wealth and the appearance of great pleasure that is demonstrated by, and (supposedly) comes with, his harem. However, the female regards her body and her love as her own and of greater worth than all of Solomon's wealth. This theme, placed in the concluding verses of this great poem, is so important. The pleasures of sex, as great and praiseworthy as they are, do not become ends in themselves. All the joy, all the sensuality, is subsumed beneath the respect for the woman and her right to use her body in a committed relationship of love.

Tom Gledhill: Love cannot be coerced; the response of love is given freely. Awakening love is the dawning realization of the worth and dignity of the other, which blossoms into the desire for mutual self-surrender and self-giving and is not merely a relationship of convenience, for mutual self-gratification.

Today in the Word: [The bride] compares what she has to offer with the vineyard in Baal-hamon that Solomon already possesses. Just as Solomon had the right to let his vineyard out to tenants, she has the right to give herself to the one she chooses. The Song of Solomon concludes with her offering herself to the one she loves, as a treasure unequalled.

III. (:13-14) INTIMACY OF SEXUAL UNION IS AN UNENDING JOURNEY – REVELING IN THEIR ONGOING JOURNEY

A. (:13) Anticipation (Male and Chorus)

*"O you who sit in the gardens,
My companions are listening for your voice—"*

Let me hear it!"

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Scholars are unsure about who the singer is in v 13, but, since the woman is the focus and protagonist of the Song, the chorus and tenor are understood to sing together to her here. They in effect throw the spotlight on her in order to celebrate her transformation. This blending of voices is the counterpart to the introduction in **Song 1:2–4**, where the soprano and chorus compete with one another in declaring their admiration for the man. The woman responds in v 14 by calling on the man to resume his role as lover under the guise of the stag on the mountains of balsam. As the Song had begun with a call for the man to “*kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*” (1:2), it ends with a call for him to **exult in the love of the woman**. . .

Here, as the lady who inhabits the gardens, she is the domain of love. The joys and desires of love have her at the center and all look upon her in wonder. Certainly the man is enchanted by her.

Richard Hess: The male had earlier described his lover as a garden (*gan*; 4:12; 5:1) and as a fountain in the garden. The female had invited him to come and taste the fruits of the garden, a metaphor for the sexual delights of her body (4:15–16; 6:2). So for the male to describe her as residing in a garden suggests that the delights of her garden are now made permanent for him.

B. (:14) Invitation (Female)

*“Hurry, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.”*

Duane Garrett / Paul House: Here she focuses her attention wholly on him and ignores all others. When she tells him to “*flee*” she does not mean that he should run away from her. Under the metaphor of the stag on the mountains, she is calling on him to come away from the crowds and give all his attention to her. The phrase “*mountains of balsam*” refers to the woman’s breasts and by metonymy to her whole body (with focus on her sexuality). She is calling on him to make love to her.

Richard Hess: Thus the female counsels the male to depart, but not for a distant land. Instead, he is to depart from the noise and commotion of the surrounding society and to taste her own mountains of spice. As he “*flees*,” so she “*flees*.” But it is only so that they may join one another in the privacy of their own love.

Tremper Longman: The Song ends **abruptly**, leaving the reader begging for more. Again, that is the intention of the poet or the collector of the poems. His literary expression thus matches love itself, never satisfied with enough, but longing for more.

Iain Duguid: Rather, the open-ended conclusion to the Song reminds us that love is not a destination at which we arrive, but a **journey** to be undertaken together, a song that truly never ends (Munro 1995: 89). . . Love is a journey, not a destination. It is two

people united into one, travelling together, but confident enough to be apart when necessary. At the centre of this union is a delightful physical relationship, but this is merely one aspect of knowing each other completely. The man longs to hear the woman's voice, as well as to hold her in his arms. Her desire to kiss him, with which the poem began, has been fulfilled but not satisfied: it never can be. The note of **yearning** and **longing** persists in their relationship, wonderful as it is. This longing is intended to remind us all of a love greater than any human love, a love for which marriage provides the best picture that the world affords. This jealous love of God for his people has triumphed over death and Sheol through the cross, and now invites his bride into his eternal embrace, to embark on a journey together that stretches beyond our own deaths and the grave, onwards and upwards forever.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have you experience infatuation vs. true love? What are the differences?
- 2) How highly do you value sexual purity?
- 3) What are the implications of the priceless value of love and the inability to purchase it?
- 4) Why did God intend for the love commitment to be permanent? How does our culture undermine such convictions?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duane Garrett / Paul House: This unit clearly relates to "*The Virgin's Education*" in **Song 1:5–6**. Catchwords that link **Song 1:5–6** to **8:8–12** are "*Solomon*", "*tend, tenants*", and "*my vineyard*." The point of this text is that she has left childhood behind and entered the freedom and responsibility of womanhood.

Interpreters often assert that **Song 8:8–9** belongs to **the brothers**. Nowhere else in the Song, however, does one find any indication that there is a male chorus functioning as "brothers." This is the result of thinking of Song of Songs as a drama rather than as a Song. Even the female chorus only very loosely plays the part of the Jerusalem girls; their main role is to provide a third voice in the Song. They interact with the two principal singers and allow for more freedom and complexity in the libretto than a song of only two parts would allow. There is no need to ask about the relationship between the little girl of **8:8–9** and the chorus, as though these were actual characters in a drama or history. The whole point behind introducing the little girl is to provide a vehicle that allows the Song to elaborate on the transformation from virgin to wife.

One should also add that the plural forms in **Song 8:8–9** are fairly clear indicators that these lyrics belong to the chorus and not to the soprano or the tenor. It is of course possible that we could have something more complex going on here (e.g., the soprano and tenor singing together in **vv 8–9**), but, in the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, it is best to go with the simplest solution, that the first-person plural forms imply that the chorus is singing. The singer of **8:12** is undoubtedly the same as the singer of **8:10**, the woman (see also **Alden**, JETS 31 [1988] 271–78).

Paul House: The commentators are in general agreement that the speakers of **vv. 8** and **9** are best understood as the siblings of the sister, in particular, her **brothers**. This forms an **inclusio** for the whole book since the brothers are also mentioned in **1:6**.

Duane Garrett / Paul House: In **Song 1:5–6**, the woman sang of her life in the home of her mother, where her brothers treated her as a slave. She was forced to work in the family vineyards and had no opportunity to cultivate her own. She was in effect an outsider in that she was given no freedom to find and develop her interests. Nevertheless, she was made strong by the experience and is ready to take her place as a woman.

This text, **Song 8:8–12**, also deals with the **education of the virgin**. First, the singers of the chorus ask what they should do with their little sister and rhetorically answer their own question (**vv 8–9**). The woman then sings of her transformation from virgin to wife under the metaphor that the chorus has employed, the wall (**v 10**). Previously she had been like one ready for war where men were concerned. Her defenses were up, and she was the walled city surrounded by the guards of the wall (**Song 3:3**), her virginity. With him, however, she found peace. That is, looking into his eyes, she found one whom she could fully trust. She was no longer a town under siege; she could open the gates freely. The “*towers*” now belong to her lover, but not by conquest or force. His banner flies over the city, and it is a banner of love (**Song 2:4**).

In **v 11**, the chorus sings of the **vineyard of Solomon**, a motif that obviously looks back to the vineyard of **Song 1:5–6**. Solomon has in effect cut himself off from the pleasures of direct involvement in life and converted the process into a financial transaction. The agrarian ideal of tending a garden and having the joy of eating grapes from vines that one has cared for with one’s own hands is lost on Solomon as he sits sequestered in Jerusalem taking in accounts receivable. The text alludes to his harem here in the sense that the true meaning of sexual love is lost on Solomon as well. For him, a vast harem was a political necessity and a visible sign that he was a great and wealthy monarch. But he had no experience of love as the singer of this canto experienced it: “*My lover is mine and I am his.*” Solomon was the Baal Hamon, the lord of a mob. He owned a great many things and people but knew them only from a distance.

The woman responds that she would rather have personal control over her own vineyard than be in Solomon’s position, that is, be the absentee landlord over vast estates. In contrast to Solomon, **the woman experiences life and her one lover**

directly.

Tom Gledhill: In most love-stories, the young lovers overcome mountainous obstacles in order that they might achieve their goal of finally being united together; after which they live happily ever after. But that happens only in fairy stories. Real life is often very different. And perhaps it is the function of these closing verses to mirror something that reality, the endless cycle of love, its restless ebb and flow and fluctuating moods. For in any developing relationship, we never “arrive.” There are always new lessons to learn and old lessons to re-learn. We may sometimes play “hide-and-seek,” as these two lovers to on occasion. But there is always the coming back and starting anew, the making of fresh beginnings. How foolish to think that we ever become experts in the realm of human relationships. Here, as elsewhere, it is a case of “*Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*” A casual word here, a shrugging gesture there, an innocent silence totally misinterpreted, and the whole fragile house of cards comes tumbling down, and we have to start rebuilding again, slowly, painfully, honestly, clearing the air through mutual forgiveness, and a determination to get on an even keel again. All this can be emotionally and nervously exhausting. We nurse our grievances; we mentally catalogue the supposed faults, real or imagined, of our partners; we prefer the hostility of stony silence rather than be the first to take the initiative in reconciliation. But the sharp recriminations and counter-accusations of the lovers’ violent quarrel can open the way towards a calmer mutual acceptance. But it is only when the tension has dissolved and the atmosphere has lightened that the real issues can be addressed. Compromises have to be made, each has to defer to the other in different ways. Only then can a *modus vivendi* be reached, with a greater degree of tolerance of each other as we really are, warts and all, with our idiosyncrasies, our volatile temperaments and stubborn wills. The see-saw goes backwards and forwards, the changes in motion being often sickeningly jarring and violent; and what we fear most of all is being totally thrown. But perhaps that is not the happiest of illustrations. For we spiral around each other, sometimes drawing closer in deepening intimacies of intercourse, physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual; sometimes withdrawing, letting each other find our own separate pathways, yet always secure in the knowledge of our ultimate mutual acceptance and attraction. Each cycle of movement towards and away for each other must bring a deeper sense of that underlying commitment which is the true bond of freedom.

Jack Deere: The Song of Songs is a beautiful picture of God’s “endorsement” of physical love between husband and wife. Marriage is to be a monogamous, permanent, self-giving unit, in which the spouses are intensely devoted and committed to each other, and take delight in each other. “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*” (**Gen. 2:24**).

The Song of Songs shows that sex in marriage is not “dirty.” The physical attractiveness of a man and woman for each other and the fulfillment of those longings in marriage are natural and honorable. But the book does more than extol physical attraction between the sexes. It also honors pleasing qualities in the lovers’ personalities. Also moral purity before marriage is praised (e.g., **Song 4:12**).

Premarital sex has no place in God’s plans (2:7; 3:5). Faithfulness before and after marriage is expected and is honored (6:3; 7:10; 8:12). Such faithfulness in marital love beautifully pictures God’s love for and commitment to His people.

Daniel Akin: Contrast between Infatuation and Love

| The Fairy Tale—Infatuation | The Real Thing—Love |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall into it suddenly • Deepens little with time • Wants sex now • Up and down emotionally • In love with love • Fickle • Can’t eat or sleep • Hostile break-up at the slightest irritations • Emphasizes beauty • Gets • Based on my feelings • Self-centered • Shows emotion • Physical • Expects to find happiness • Asks, “How am I doing?” • Focuses on the performance of the other person • May feel this way toward more than one person • Possessive • May be based on few contacts (only person you’ve dated) • Has an idealized image of the other person • Avoids problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grows with time • Always deepening • Willing to wait for sex • Consistent • In love with a person • Faithful • Has proper perspective • Does not panic when problems arise • Emphasizes character • Gives • Based on other’s needs • Self-controlled • Shows devotion • Spiritual • Expects to work at happiness • Asks, “How are you doing?” • Provides unconditional acceptance of the other person • Feels this way toward one person • Allows the other person to relate to others • Based on many contacts (dated many others) • Has a realistic view of the other person’s strengths and weaknesses • Works through problems (McDowell, “What’s the Difference?”) |

Richard Hess: The final verses of the Song culminate in a confession of the power of love. It is stronger than any force in the universe, and it alone can vie with death and perhaps extend beyond it (1 Cor. 13). The twin emphases of **commitment** and **desire** continue to the end of the Song, and the whole remains open-ended. Love with commitment allows a freedom for the couple to play, to explore their desires with each other’s bodies and persons. They do so without fear of the loss of their partner. Love burns with the passion of desire. This desire is not satisfied but continues to grow stronger and stronger. It is the secret of love and the secret of life, whether human or

divine. As the couple's desire grows with their love, so the believer's desire for God enflames the divine love that knows no consummation in this world, but becomes only better and better (**Deut. 6:4–9; Matt. 22:37–40; Mark 12:30–33; Luke 10:27**).

The Song thus concludes, not with an erotic ecstasy of consummated love, but with an awareness of separation and a longed-for reunion. As **Bergant** notes so eloquently, this characterizes the nature of human love: "Human love knows no definitive consummation, no absolute fulfillment. Loving relationships are never complete; they are always ongoing, always reaching for more."

It is the finitude of human love that points toward something greater and more complete. From a canonical perspective, this love points toward the consummation of all yearnings for a more complete love, **a fulfillment that is reached in the marriage of Christ and his Bride:**

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Rev. 19:7–9 NIV)

This scene is nothing less than a witness to the irrevocable power of love between Christ and his people, something stronger than death or any other power known:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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" (Rom. 8:38–39 NIV).

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