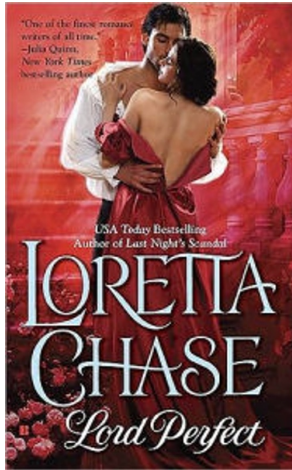


"LOVE IN MARRIAGE" Song of Songs 1:1 – 8:14

NIV MEMORY VERSE: Song of Songs 2:4

"He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love."



→ Romance The world seems to crave Romance ...

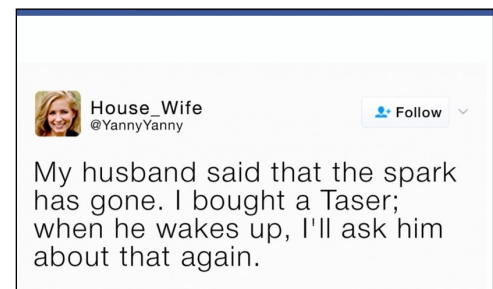
It's curious that few folks, including believers and students of the Bible, have ever studied this book of the Old Testament. I confess that I have never truly studied it before either, but then neither have I read the book "50 Shades of Grey." And I'm just not one to read romance novels. So I was not sure what I would learn preparing this lecture on the Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon – a book whose reputation seems almost too hot to touch.

Now, before you all start smirking and giggling over the expressions of this poetry, let's just get our nervous sexual tension behind us.

Most of us are pretty well seasoned in life, marriage, or living single. In fact, you may be feeling more like a faded bloom rather than a budding rose. First, a couple of tweets:

→ "House_Wife" wrote

→ And "Kent_Graham" tweeted ...



I must admit that Honey and I had our own conflict a few weeks ago. It was tax time and we simply did not see the situation from the same page. Occasionally we have issues that I describe as, "He thinks that he's Tarzan and I'm Jane."

Knowing that I was assigned this particular lecture, I felt totally inadequate to speak of the love language of King Solomon and his bride.

Two weeks ago, during our break for Easter, it was also Spring Break at our house. Honey was in Texas working at a national soccer tournament for the entire week while I was left alone at home with only the dog. Now, when a woman is left alone in her own home for a full week with only the dog and her credit cards, it can be good for her and bad for him.

➔ About mid-week Honey sent me a text message:

Honey: Are you up?

Me: Yes, but you can call my cell.

Honey: I can't, I'm working. (Now, this means that Honey is sitting in a bleacher watching a soccer game. That is nirvana for this guy.)

Me: (slightly annoyed) Then why did you text me if you can't talk?

Honey: Because I missed you....

Instantly, my feelings changed and I became the "Shulamite woman" and he became my "Solomon." Maybe I could do this lecture after all.

Warren Wiersbe in his Bible Commentary writes the following observation of the book of Song of Solomon:

"The presence of immature people in a (group) would make it difficult to (teach) from this book, but a series of lessons from the Song of Solomon would be very helpful to a class of engaged couples or newlyweds. This book would be ideal as a basis for premarital counseling. If in our teaching we do allegorize some portions, we must first give the basic interpretation. Since the relationship of Christ and His Church is like that of a husband and wife, there are certain applications that we can make.

In using this book in ministry, we must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves and not allow our good works to be classified as evil. Some people are against anything from the pulpit or podium that deals with sex, while others wonder where they can get the help that they desperately need. Wise is the minister and teacher who can keep the right balance."

Let's pray for that right balance in this lesson right now....

➔ Saturated with stories of sexual escapades, secret rendezvous, and extramarital affairs, today's media preach that immorality means freedom, perversion is natural, and commitment is old-fashioned. Sex, created by God and pronounced good in Eden, has been twisted, exploited, and turned into an urgent, illicit, casual, and self-gratifying

activity. Love has turned into lust, giving and getting, and lasting commitment has become nothing more than "hooking up."

In reality, sexual intercourse, the physical and emotional union of male and female, should be a holy means of celebrating love, producing children, and experiencing pleasure, protected by the commitment of marriage.

God thinks sex is important, and Scripture contains numerous guidelines for its use and warnings about its misuse. In the Bible, sex is always mentioned in the context of a loving relationship between husband and wife. Perhaps the highlight of this is Song of Songs, the intimate story of a man and a woman, their love, courtship, and marriage. Solomon probably wrote this 'song' in his youth, before being overtaken by his own obsession with women, sex, and pleasure.

There has been much debate of the meaning of this song. Some say it is an allegory of God's love for Israel and/or for the church. Others say it is a literal story about married love. In reality, it is both - an historical story with two layers of meaning. On one level we learn about love, marriage, and sex. On the other level we see God's overwhelming love for his people. As you read and study Song of Songs, remember that you are loved by God, and commit yourself to seeing life, sex, and marriage from his point of view.

Song of Songs is a wedding song honoring marriage. The most explicit statements on sex in the Bible can be found in this book. It has often been criticized through the centuries because of its sensuous language. The purity and sacredness of love represented here, however, are greatly needed in our day where distorted attitudes about love and marriage are commonplace. God created sex and intimacy, and they are holy and good when enjoyed within the bounds of marriage. A husband and wife honor God when they love and enjoy each other.

While romance keeps a marriage interesting, commitment keeps romance from dwindling away. The decision to commit yourself to your spouse alone begins at the marriage altar. It must be maintained day by day.

➔ Solomon wrote 1,005 songs, but this one is the "song of songs," that is, the greatest of all songs. Just as the "Holy of Holies" is the holiest place and the "King of Kings" is the highest of all kings, so the "song of songs" is the greatest of all songs. The theme of the book is love. During his period of skepticism, Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes with its doleful theme of "vanity of vanities," a phrase he used 38 times. But in his younger days, before he became entangled with the gods of his many pagan wives, Solomon understood the joys and virtues of married love and wrote this beautiful book. He ultimately had 700 wives and 300 concubines and in so doing violated the law of the Lord. He married many of his princess wives mainly to establish peaceful and profitable relations with their fathers.

There are many theological overtones to this book, but the major theme is the excitement and enjoyment of God's gifts of sex, love, and marriage. Unlike some religions that condemn physical pleasures in general and sex in particular, both Jews and Christians see life and its physical pleasures as the gifts of God. This is especially true of marriage and the intimate love of husband and wife.

➔ Sex and marriage were taken very seriously in the Jewish culture. Engagement was a binding relationship that could be severed only by divorce and premarital sin and adultery were dealt with severely. Weddings were joyful occasions that lasted a week, and the union was expected to last a lifetime. The Jews gladly accepted God's gifts of sex and marriage and they were not embarrassed to admit it. The Jews also saw their nation "married to Jehovah," and for this reason they read the Song of Solomon annually on the eighth day of Passover. God delivered them from Egypt because He loved them, and He was "married" to them at Mount Sinai when Israel accepted His covenant. Reading the Song of Solomon reminded them to love the Lord their God with all their heart. Since the church is the bride of Christ, and Solomon is a type of Christ (Matt 12:42), believers today can also learn many important spiritual lessons from this unusual book.

“... Now something greater than Solomon is here.”
Matthew 12:42 NIV

Unlike modern novels, this book doesn't present an obvious story line, but it seems to have a definite plot, which is 'discovered' as you read the book carefully. The cast of characters is small: King Solomon; the lovely woman (the Shulamite, a feminine form of the name Solomon) who becomes his wife; the Shulamite's brothers; and the "daughters of Jerusalem" who function as a background chorus. It is the Shulamite woman who does most of the speaking in the book.

The Shulamite's brothers were employed by Solomon to care for his vineyards, but they put their sister to work in them as well. King Solomon, disguised as a shepherd, visited his vineyards, saw the Shulamite, and fell in love with her. She pictures their times together as a rich banquet. The next spring, he came to her and proposed marriage, and she accepted, but he had to go away for a time, promising to come back. While he was absent, she dreamed about him. Then he returned and revealed that he was King Solomon. They married and consummated their marriage on their wedding night. The remainder of the book describes the celebration of their love as they experienced various adventures together.

This book has a great deal to teach us about God's gift to men and women of the pleasures of love and sex. It also presents the divine standards God has set for marriage, illustrating the joyful privileges and serious obligations husbands and wives have toward God and each other. The Jews called the Song of Solomon "the Holy of Holies" of Scripture and wouldn't allow it to be read by the young and immature. In

today's world, with its emphasis on the sensual pleasures of indiscriminate lust and not the pure pleasures of sex in marriage, our young people could use a good course based on the Song of Solomon.

➔ The Song of Solomon is an 'outdoor book,' using many images from nature - gardens, fields, mountains, flocks, birds, flowers, spices, and animals - and the love of the man and woman fits right into this context. All nature is God's gift to us and should be used for His glory, including human nature and the wonderful gift of sexuality. When a husband and wife have a beautiful and holy relationship, their whole world becomes beautiful and holy. Without dodging reality or defiling God's gifts, the book deals quite frankly with human sexuality and shows how it can be sanctified and used for God's glory. It is a book of metaphors and similes that uses many literary devices to show us the wonder and glory of divine and human love. Like the book of Esther, the Song of Solomon doesn't mention God's name, but understanding this book will certainly make the Lord much more real to you, whether you are married or single.

The Jewish rabbis saw the Song of Solomon as a book extolling human love and the proper use of sex in marriage. They also saw the book as an illustration of God's love for His people Israel and His desire to share a deeper love with His people. Christian interpreters take the same approach, seeing in Song of Solomon the love relationship between Christ and His church. The New Testament pictures the church as a bride and Christ as the Bridegroom. The Holy Spirit wants to bring to us a deeper fellowship with the Father and the Son as we commune with the Lord in His Word and obey His will. Worship and fellowship are to be much more than religious rituals and doctrines we agree with intellectually. There can be a deeper work of the Spirit in our lives that reveals the heavenly Bridegroom in a fuller way, and we should not be satisfied with a mere surface acquaintance with the Lord.

➔ Whatever Solomon was, had, or did, Jesus far surpasses him, for He is indeed "greater than Solomon" (Matt 12:42). Solomon was known for his great wisdom, but Jesus Christ IS the wisdom of God, and in Him all of God's wisdom dwells (Col 2:3). Solomon was also known for his wealth, but in Jesus Christ there are "unsearchable riches" (Eph 3:8, Phil 4:19). Solomon disobeyed God and married many wives, but Jesus obeyed the Father and died on the cross that He might have a spotless bride for all eternity (Eph 5:25-27). The relationship described between Solomon and the Shulamite pictures for us the love between Christ and His bride, and when Jesus returns and takes His people to Heaven, the bride will become His wife. Solomon built a temple that was ultimately destroyed, but Jesus is building His temple, the church (Matt 16:18), and it will glorify Him forever (Eph 2:20-22).

➔ In the Courtship we learn three things about true love:

- True love is like a banquet.
- True love is like an adventure in the country.
- True love brings dreams of the one you love.

Love is not only a banquet of delights, but love is also an adventure. There must be spontaneous expressions of affection if love is to thrive. It was the early springtime and the latter rains had stopped. The flowers were blooming, the birds were singing, and the trees and vines were sprouting. New life was everywhere and abounding! But it seems that his beloved would rather stay home, in the place of security, like a dove in the clefts of the rocks on the mountainside. He wanted to hear her voice and see her face, but she preferred to stay quietly at home. To grow in their love for each other, they needed to be together and have different experiences in different places. This is how we learn more about ourselves and our potential mates. But this principle also applies to our love for the Lord. We must go with Him into new and challenging experiences that will deepen our love and strengthen our faith.

“Catch for us the foxes,
The little foxes
That ruin the vineyards,
Our vineyards that are in bloom.
Song of Songs 2:15 NIV

➔ "The little foxes" are an example of the kinds of problems that can disturb or destroy a relationship. The lovers wanted anything that could potentially cause problems between them to be removed. It is often the "little foxes" in life that cause the biggest problems in marriage. These irritations must not be minimized or ignored, but identified so that together, the couple can deal with them.

At last the day arrived for the Shulamite to wed her beloved! Not only would he claim her as his wife, but she would discover that her husband was the king!

➔ The glorious precession appears on the horizon. It is Solomon being carried in his richly decorated palanquin, surrounded by 60 of his bravest soldiers, with a cloud of fragrant incense above him. He wears a wedding crown given to him by his mother. The daughters of Jerusalem get excited and sing to each other, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion!" The bride has her attendants, the king has joy in his heart, and the time has finally come for the wedding to take place. Today's Christians would see in this a reminder of the coming of the King of Kings to claim His bride, the church.



➔ Beginning in Chapter 4, six times Solomon calls her his "spouse" or his bride. After the marriage is consummated, she is no longer a bride but a wife. They are enjoying a "mountaintop experience" as they share their love and he tells her how beautiful she is.

"Thy love" refers to her words and actions and not just her feelings. This could be translated as "love-making."



He rejoices that his bride is a virgin, "a garden locked up, a spring enclosed and a fountain sealed." This is further evidence that the Lord wants both the man and the woman to stay sexually pure. Conjugal love is pictured in terms of satisfying thirst and exploring a beautiful and fruitful garden that never grows old. The bride is the garden, and the bridegroom prays that the winds of life will make her even more beautiful and desirable. We may not appreciate the north wind, but even it can help us mature in our love.

During the week following a Jewish wedding, family and friends treated the newlyweds like royalty. Modern couples have a "honeymoon" and usually travel to some special place where they will be left alone. Eventually the couple has to return to life with its problems and duties, and so did Solomon and his wife.

The number of queens and concubines in Solomon's harem was much lower than in his later years, so this was written very early in his reign. But of all the women in his life, the Shulamite was his favorite. In the eyes of the Shulamite, Solomon was "altogether lovely (beautiful)," and in Solomon's eyes his wife was "the only one of her kind – she was unique." Even the daughters of Jerusalem praised the Shulamite for her beauty.

The beloved wife decided she wanted to visit their garden to see if the spring had brought new growth to trees and vines, so there was a temporary separation from her husband. Then a remarkable thing happened: she found herself "among the chariots of the people of the prince." Her husband's army was arriving, and the garden looked like a battlefield. But gardens are for beauty and nourishment, not for battles. There is a suggestion here that marriage should be neither a battleground nor a playground, but a garden that is carefully cultivated and thoroughly enjoyed? In fact, the first marriage took place in a garden. This takes work, but it is worth it!

➔ Song of Songs has three main messages. First, the primary message of the book is this: that human love, marriage, and sexual love, are a gift from God. If there is one area of life that we tend to get into trouble over, it is this one. On the one hand, you have the worst excesses of Western secular culture, where sex is cheapened and disengaged from love or, at worst, simply used as a marketing tool to sell automobiles and household appliances. At the other extreme, you have what occurs in many Eastern cultures, where sex is seen as totally taboo, dirty, is not talked about, and where women are hidden away behind closed doors. These are just two examples of the various errors into which a society can fall — cheapening sex, or writing it off as dirty and taboo. Song of Songs, and indeed other parts of the Bible, correct both errors. The

poem in this book celebrates the joy of sexual love; but within the context of a one-on-one relationship in marriage. The poem commends the shepherd and the maiden for their devoted love to one another, the maiden is praised for guarding her virtue and her virginity because she is saving herself for the one she loves and wants to marry. Yet sexual love is also commended and celebrated in the poem as a gift from God to be celebrated and to praise Him for.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Song of Solomon is a beautiful poetic lesson in the importance of love. Love between a man and a woman is fundamental to all human experience; and in the poem we have the most supreme blueprint of what love is to be like. We learn that:

- ➔ Love means giving one to another. The man is not to lord it over the woman, nor vice versa, but there is to be a mutual giving, one to another.
- True love is a fire that burns strongly, and love like that is a gift from God that is not to be treated lightly. This is one of the major reasons, for example, that the Bible treats divorce so seriously, and why Jesus effectively banned it outright.
- Love means remaining loyal and faithful to one another, no matter what the circumstances.
- Love cannot be rushed or forced. In the advice that the maiden gives to the harem women, this is stressed time and time again throughout the poem; *do not awaken love before it is ready*.

➔ And finally, the poem paints a sad moral lesson as to what happens to those who try to disregard God's instructions, who do not understand that the relationship between a husband and wife is a special one-to-one relationship, leaving room for no others. We learn in the poem that by this time, Solomon had 140 wives and concubines. By the end of his reign, he had almost one thousand. Where was there room or time for love in the heart of a man who simply amassed women as playthings, marrying new maidens when he got bored of the old ones? Way back in Deuteronomy 17:17 God gave an important piece of law to the kings of Israel: "do not multiply wives." I.e. do not use your position and authority to do what Solomon had done, build a harem. God's model in the Bible is monogamy, just as we see laid out in Genesis 2. So, why is it this way? Because the gift of love that God gives is a one-to-one love that leaves room for no substitutes; just as the maiden and the shepherd's love for one another was so strong, that there was no room for her or him to even consider another.

➔ *As I mentioned earlier, Honey and I each made trips to Dallas last month, primarily to meet our new grandson. Here is a picture of the three generations of men in our family today.*

The fellow standing in the back is our older son. When this young man was only a few weeks old, my grandmother challenged me that we were not just raising our little boy, but someone's husband and someone's father. Recently, I've been reminded that we have indeed accomplished this goal. Not only is our son a great dad, but he does what he can to help his bride at home.



It seems to me that in this group we are well seasoned in the actions and language of love. In addition to our own relationships, we have a responsibility to teach that love language to our children – to recognize and speak it in their own relationships.

Last week our daughter in law posted a video on Facebook she found amusing. Her comment said how blessed she was to have a husband who loved her like this. I guess our son has learned the language of love, and we feel so proud of the husband and father he has become – the “Solomon” to his bride.

➔ *This is Christian comedian Tim Hawkins. I understand this was recorded last year in San Diego. [video of ‘This is What Women Actually Want to Hear – I’ll Clean Up for You]*

➔ Love, relationships, marriage, and sex are all gifts from God. The Song of Songs demonstrates and celebrates this time and time again. In light of this part of the Scriptures, we should give grateful thanks to God for the wonderful mystery of human sexuality, and pray that He guides us into using it responsibly and rightfully; within a one-to-one marriage relationship where there is mutual trust, giving, love, total commitment and respect.

*Place me like a seal over your heart,
Like a seal on your arm.
For love is as strong as death,
It’s jealousy as enduring as the grave.
Love flashes like fire,
The brightest kind of flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can rivers drown it.
If a man tried to buy love
With all his wealth,
His offer would be utterly scorned.*

Song of Songs 8:6-7 (NLT)

References:

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“Song of Songs: What does God want to teach us through this often overlooked book in the Bible?” by Andy Bannister for Answering Islam at: www.answering-islam.org