

Song of Songs: Bible Study Guide

8 Studies

The Love Song

— Song of Songs —



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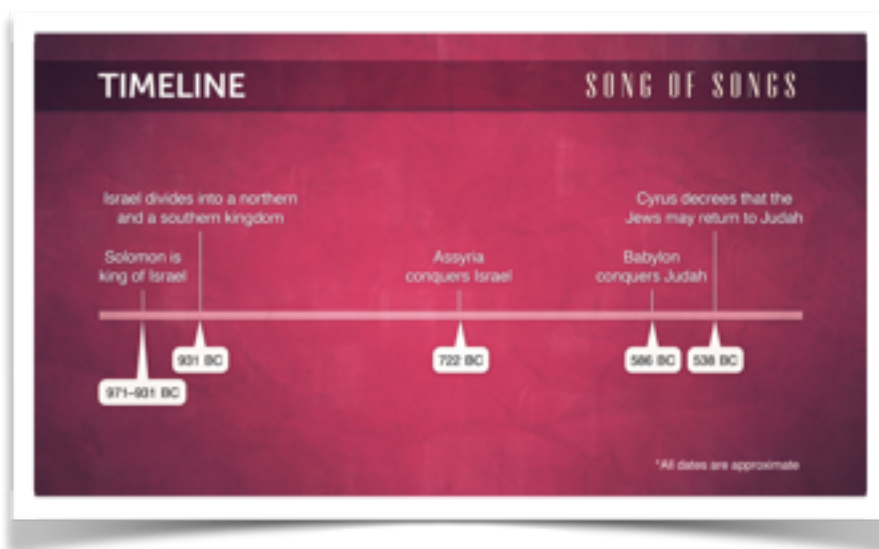
INTRODUCTION

The Song of Songs is a unique book of the bible. It's explicit language has certainly caused many to blush or giggle as it is read. Some may have grown up with the joke that Song of Songs is the "sealed section" of the Bible, a book only to read when you are over 18! Yes it has lyrics about "tasting" and "touching", but it is not crude (unlike much of contemporary Top 40 music!). It has adult content, but it is adolescent appropriate. It is not X-rated, it is PG - parental (and pastoral) guidance recommended and should be read without embarrassment or fear.

The Song of Songs is first of all a love song - the Love Song, as the name "Song of Songs" suggests. It is a drama in poetry; a song that vividly captures the yearning of bride and bridegroom, set off by a chorus of friends who rejoice with them about their love.

Authorship

King Solomon is clearly connected with the Song, appearing by name in many passages, including the very opening verse of the book, "Solomon's Song of Songs". Therefore, it has been a common view that Solomon wrote the book sometime during his reign in the tenth century BC.



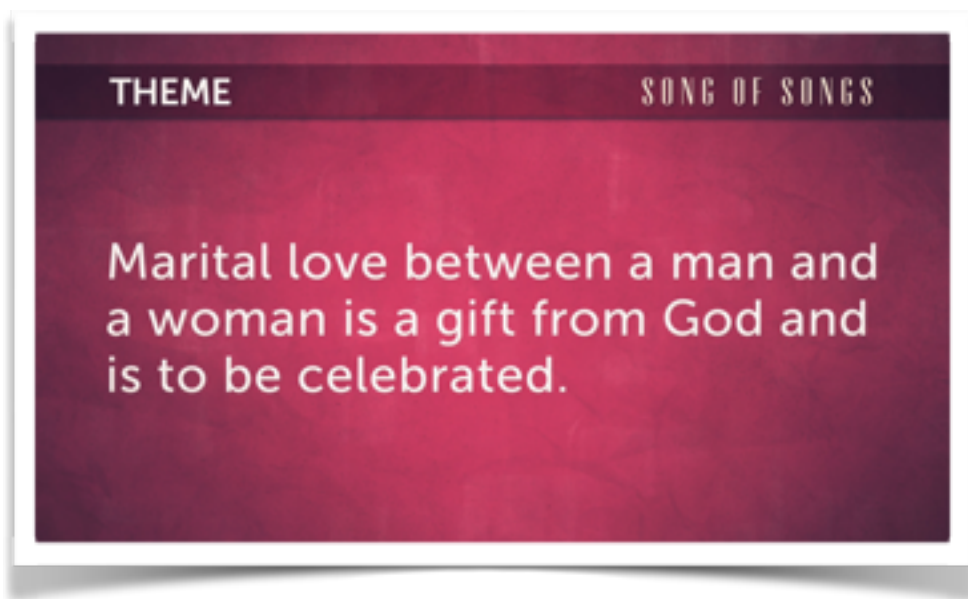
However, Solomon only appears in the book in third person references and they are quite negative. Moreover, questions are rightly raised about how a man who so departed from God's vision of marriage, massing some 700 wives and 300 concubines could write such a glorious song about genuine love. Some conclude then that the book, like Ecclesiastes, was written not by Solomon but one of his contemporaries offering God's people an alternative vision of life than the one represented by the King.

However, these problems don't necessarily preclude Solomon from writing this Song. Could it be that later in his life, after reviewing his many relationships and pursuit of sexual pleasure, Solomon realised that he had missed genuine love and intimacy? Thus, inspired by God, Solomon could have penned this Song about two other lovers (real?), presenting a relationship he wished he could have had if he followed God's vision of love and relationships recorded in Genesis 2.

Meaning

It may not surprise you that the erotic poetry of the Song has made interpreting the Song challenging throughout history. Such “fleshly” themes of sexual intimacy have been seen by many scholars as inappropriate for Holy Scripture and so the Song has been interpreted as an allegory for God’s “holy” love. Some Jewish scholars read passages like “Take me away with you - let us hurry! Let the King bring me into his chambers” (Song of Songs 1:4), as a reference to the Exodus and God’s love for Israel! Likewise, many Christian interpreters have treated the Song as an allegory for Christ and the Church. For example, “My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breast” (Song of Songs 1:13) is a reference to Jesus and the Two Testaments of the Bible! However these interpretations seem more than just a little forced. The metaphors that are used (and there are many) don’t seem to go beyond the frame of reference of the text itself (physical beauty and sexual desire). Moreover, nothing else in the Old Testament really prepares us for such an explicitly sexual text about God’s relationship with his people - not even Ezekiel 16.

It is our view that the Song of Songs is what it appears to be. A song about the intimate love between a husband and wife. And far from this being a mere fleshly, even unholy thing, we must remember that sexuality is a hallowed aspect of what God deems is good in the beginning (Genesis 1-2). Yes sexual desire and intimacy has been tainted by sin but it still is a created good in itself.



It is our view that the Song of Songs presents to us a vision of what genuine human love and intimacy can look like, against the backdrop of a world and its Solomon’s who have gone so far awry in this arena.

Structure

We see the structure of the Song as follows:

- 1:1-17: Love's Words**
- 2:1-17: Love's Banner**
- 3:1-11: Love's Restraint**
- 4:1-5:1: Love's Intimacy**
- 5:2-6:10: Love's Frustration**
- 6:11-7:13: Love's Desire**
- 8:1-14: Love's Permanence**

The Song is primarily addressed to young unmarried women, “daughters of Jerusalem”, with the hope that they will emulate the simple, monogamous, faithful, passionate love the lover and beloved share. But the Song with its beautiful description of love, is relevant for all our relationships no matter what stage of life we are in - single, married, widow, or widower. It is a song that we can and should sing in the bedroom, the church, and the marketplace of ideas. Our hope for this series is that we can move beyond the giggles and see that this Song has much to communicate to us about the nature and focus of genuine love.

Our prayer is also that as a result of this series you will grow deeper in your knowledge and experience of God's love. The Song is in the Bible and so is therefore not merely anthropological (or human centred) in its scope. It is inspired by God and therefore does tell us something about his character and love for us. Human love, including erotic love, is a great good in itself, but is not God. At points we will see that even the idyllic love of the lover and beloved is not without its frustrations, pointing beyond itself to something greater - the creator in whom all our longing can truly be satisfied. We do hope you discover this love, during this series!

USEFUL RESOURCES:

Hubbard, D. A: Song of Solomon. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.). New Bible dictionary (3rd ed., p. 1120). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 1996.

O'Donnell, D.S: "The Song of Solomon." Preaching the Word. Crossway: Illinois. 2012.

Provan, Ian: "Song of Songs". The NIV Application Commentary. Zondervan: Grand Rapids. 2001.

Richards, L. O: "Song of Songs" in The Bible reader's companion (electronic ed., p. 402). Victor Books: Wheaton. 1991.

Millar, G: Song of Songs Talks from Adelaide's Men's Convention. <http://www.adelaidemensconvention.org/index.php/previous-conventions/2013/main-talks-sex-marriage-and-relationships>.

Love, Sex, and Marriage: Genesis 2 and 1 Kings 11

Introduction

- ❖ Listen to a few famous love songs – e.g. “Endless Love” by Dianna Ross. “We Found Love” by Rhianna. and/or “Love Story” by Taylor Swift. What do you notice are the common themes of these famous love songs?
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- ❖ When it comes to thinking about God and Sex many people draw two opposing conclusions: 1. Sex is God or 2. Sex is Godless. Which view do you think represents the “Australian” view of love and sex? Why?
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- ❖ Why might certain people believe that sex is “godless” (naughty, unclean, impure)?
-

When we are thirsty we need water. There are many thirsty people in this world, but so often they are looking for water in the wrong place, the toilet. You can drink it but it’s not the best. The Good Shepherd is the one who leads us to springs of living water (Jer 2:13, Ps 23).

Read Genesis 2

- ❖ What is Adam’s response to the creation of Eve? What would the equivalent be today?
-

- ❖ What does it mean that Adam and Eve were “united and became one flesh”?
-

- ❖ Why are we told in v25, that Adam and Eve were both naked and felt no shame? What is the significance of including this verse in the description of the first marriage?
-

There are many similarities between the Garden of Eden (Adam & Eve) and Song of Songs. Song of Songs in many ways is an illustration or application of Genesis 2.

Read the following verses from Song of Songs: 4:12-5:2, 6:2-3, 8:13-14

- ❖ What are the similarities between these readings and Genesis 2?
-

- ❖ What do you think Solomon, the author of the “Song” is trying to communicate by such vivid imagery? What is its picture of love and sexuality?
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Read the following verses from Song of Songs: 2:7, 3:5, 8:4

- ❖ What does this refrain reveal about the Bible’s view of sexual intimacy? (e.g. does it say no? is it naughty? or something else?)
-

- ❖ Based on Genesis 2, and what you have seen from the Song of Songs so far, when is this “right time”?
-

Read 1 Kings 11:1-8

- ❖ How would you describe Solomon’s experience with love, sex, and marriage?
-

- ❖ What makes him qualified to write such a piece of literature as Song of Songs celebrating simple, monogamous, passionate, marital love? (cf. Song of Songs 8:11-12).
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APPLICATION

- ❖ **Would you say at this stage of your life you struggle more with Sex as God or Sex as Godless?**
-

- ❖ **Do you agree that Sex as God’s Wedding Gift to his people is the best kind of sex? Why/Why not?**
-

- ❖ **What makes a Christian today “qualified” to tell somebody how to live their sex life? (hint:Why did Solomon write this? How does the gospel of grace help us today?)**
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- ❖ **If someone is feeling guilty about this area of their life, or frustrated about a lack of progress in this area of life (single, unhappily married), how does Jesus, offer hope, comfort, and peace? How can we help each other in these fears and frustrations?**
-

Love's Words: Song of Songs 1:1-17

Introduction

- ❖ If someone was to say something nice to you, what is your first reaction? Why might this be the case?
-

- ❖ What is the nicest thing anybody has ever said to you (spoken or written)?
-

Read Song of Songs 1:1-4

- ❖ Who are the characters in the Song?
-

- ❖ What is it about her man that the woman finds so attractive?
-

- ❖ What place do you think “feelings” and “desire” and “chemistry” have in a romantic relationship?
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- ❖ What are some of the things that can cause “desire” to fade away in relationships?
-

In the remaining verses of chapter 1 we see a clear potential barrier to desire but also oil that can fan the flame.

Read Song of Songs 1:5-7

- ❖ How does the woman perceive herself in these verses?
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- ❖ Every culture has “standards” of beauty. It seems that being tanned and outdoorsy was not particularly attractive in the day of Solomon. What are the “standards” of beauty in our culture?
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- ❖ How do we feel about ourselves when we compare ourselves to the culture’s view of beauty? What impact might this have on our desires/feelings for intimacy?
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Read Song of Songs 1:8-11

- ❖ In contrast the woman's perception of herself, how does her lover "see" her? (note: which word is repeated?)
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- ❖ What is his "standard" of beauty and how does this compare with our culture today?
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- ❖ What do these verses reveal about how a husband can encourage growth in intimacy?
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- ❖ What is the difference between a real romantic and a smooth talker?
-

Read Song of Songs 1:12-17

- ❖ What impact does his words have on her desire and their relationship together?
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APPLICATION

- ❖ **Husbands, when was the last time you complimented your wife's appearance? Turn to her and share what you find beautiful about her!**
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- ❖ **Wives, when was the last time you complimented your man? Turn to him and share what you find attractive about him!**
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- ❖ **Everyone, how is the appearance of Jesus described in Isa 53: 2-3?**
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- ❖ **What title does John 1:1-14 give to Jesus? How is the Word treated? But what does God do through his Word according to Romans 5:8? Write down a prayer you would like to stay to God in response to his kindness.**
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- ❖ **If a kind word from God is needed for our renewed relationship with God, kind words are important for every relationship (cf. Ephesians 4:15). Who is someone you can speak an encouraging word to today? What do you want to say?**
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Love's Banner: Song of Songs 2:1-17

Introduction

- ❖ If you had to list the top 3 attributes of a person you would like to be in relationship with (not just intimate relationships!) what would they be and why?
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- ❖ What value do you place on “safety” in a relationship? Why might safety be important?
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- ❖ Domestic violence is the leading cause of death and injury in women under 45. DV - accounts for 40 per cent of police time, the cost to the economy - \$13.6B. Domestic violence is the leading cause of death and injury in women under 45. How does this make you feel?
-

Read Song of Songs 2:1-7

- ❖ What do you think is meant by describing “She” as a “lily among the thorns” and “He” as an “apple tree among the trees of the forest”? What are we meant to picture?
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- ❖ “Banners” were often used in militaries, what does this imagery add to the “apple tree” image?
-

- ❖ How can “She” feel so content in his arms (left arm under her head, right arm embracing her)?
-

- ❖ What do you think is the relationship between “safety” and the command to the daughters of Jerusalem in v7 to “not awaken love until it so desires”?
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- ❖ What “right time” is inferred by the Song and why do you think it might be “dangerous” to enter into an intimate relationship outside this time?
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Read Song of Songs 2:8-15

- ❖ Who would you describe the pace of these verses? What does this reveal about the intensity of their emotions?
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- ❖ Why do you think he is described as a “Gazelle/Stag” and she a “Dove”? What do those metaphors reveal about their relationship?
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- ❖ What does the young stag want in v10-13? But how does he go about getting it?
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- ❖ What do you think the foxes that ruin the vineyard (v15) refers to? (cf. SoS 1:6).
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Read Song of Songs 2:16-17

- ❖ The young stag has been “gazing” in v9 and “leaping” over hills in v8. Now he is invited to “graze” among the lilies and “be on the hills”. What is implied here? (are you blushing yet!)
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- ❖ What do you think is the relationship between “protection” (v1-7) and “pleasure” (v8-17)?
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APPLICATION

- ❖ **Sexual intimacy requires vulnerability, which requires safety. What are the implications of this for couple’s who are not married? (e.g. “safe” sex, cohabitation etc).**
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- ❖ **Husbands, how can you be a place of emotional and physical “safety” for your wives? (hint: ask the wives!)**
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- ❖ **What are the potential foxes that can ruin intimacy in marriage and other relationships today? Are there any in your relationships at the moment?**
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- ❖ **How is Jesus the ultimate tough and tender bridegroom. Read Eph 5:25-27, what does he do to protect and provide for us?**
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- ❖ **What are the foxes that can inhibit our relationship with God in Christ? According to Ephesians 5:26 how can we allow him to remove these foxes?**
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Love's Restraint: Song of Songs 3:1-11

Introduction

- ❖ Do you think there is a difference between sex and intimacy, fantasy and fulfilment? If so what is it?
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Read Song of Songs 3:1-5

- ❖ It is likely the woman is recounting a dream in these verses about her lover. What happens in the dream, and what emotions does she express?
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- ❖ What does this dream reveal about the power of sexual desire?
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- ❖ What do you think is the relationship between the dream and the charge/refrain of v5. "do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires"?
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- ❖ Where can we see the power of sexual desire drive people to crazy dreams today? (e.g. pornography). What are the dangers of such fantasies?
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Read Song of Songs 3:6-11

- ❖ These verses contrast the genuine intimacy experienced by the lover and beloved, with the many fantasies enacted by King Solomon on his "carriage" (bed). We are encouraged to "look" (v7, v10, v11) at Solomon. How is Solomon and his bed pictured by the Woman and what are we meant to "See"? How is it different to the "lovers" bed?
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- ❖ What does the language of "column of smoke" and "myrrh and incense" meant to evoke about how the author views Solomon's relationships? (cf. Lev 2:1-2).
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- ❖ How would you summarise Solomon's experience of relationships from this section?
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APPLICATION

- ❖ Would you say our contemporary culture has “seen” and “learned” from Solomon’s experience?

- ❖ \$13b a year is spent on pornography in the US (\$2b in Australia). The average age of first time viewing is said to be 11 -13 y/o. And it is well documented that it wires false expectations of sex into our brains leading to potential sexual disorders in future relationships. Why then do you think the “fantasy” world of sexuality so alluring?

- ❖ How do we so often deal with sexual sin (either done to us or done by us)? What are the danger of these responses?

- ❖ How does Jesus deal with the sexually immoral (cf. John 8:1-11)?

- ❖ How is Jesus a better Solomon? How is his love different? (cf. Philippians 2:5-11).

- ❖ Christian marriages have a chance to model a new way of sexual intimacy that is more fulfilling and attractive. How can we encourage and support this in our churches and community?

Love's Intimacy: Song of Songs 4:1-5:1

Introduction

- ❖ When it comes to sex in marriage, how does our media (movies, TV shows) portray it? Where does it communicate the best sex is to be found? Why do you think this is the case?

Read Song of Songs 4:1-7

- ❖ Once again the lover expresses his delight in his beloved's physical beauty. What do you notice about the order or movement of his sight/eyes?

- ❖ Men, what order do you normally notice a woman's physical appearance? Why?

- ❖ What is significant in him noticing her eyes first? How does he see her?

- ❖ How is "she" a contrast to Solomon's many women in chapter 3?

Read Song of Songs 4:8-15

- ❖ What do you think the Lover means when he longs for her to come down from the mountains, the haunt of Lions & Leopards? What ideas are being pictured by these locations and animals?

- ❖ How does he encourage his lover to descend into his arms?

- ❖ Why do you think he describes her as a "locked up garden" (v12)? How is this different to Solomon's relationships?

Read Song of Songs 4:16-5:1

- ❖ How can she be so bold in her response? What has led up to this point?

- ❖ What do you notice about the friends response in 5:1b?

APPLICATION

- ❖ What might this Song be telling husbands today about their wives and sexual desire?

- ❖ What distance and dangers might there be in our marriages that need to be overcome for true marital intimacy? What might cause intimacy to shut down? How can these issues be overcome?

- ❖ If you are single, how do you often feel when couples are into P.D.A (public displays of affection)? Why do you think this is the case?

- ❖ What hope does the gospel of Christ offer? (hint: sex is good but only temporary - Rev. 21 - the ultimate "garden" experience)

- ❖ How can those of us who are not married ("friends") respect the "locked garden" of marriage and encourage couples to "drink your fill of love" without jealousy?

- ❖ All of us, what distance and dangers might there be in our relationship with God? How can these be overcome so we grow in intimacy with him?

Love's Frustration: Song of Songs 5:2-6:10

Introduction

- ❖ Christian marriages and relationships in general are never perfect. What are some of the times where you have seen this?
-

In the studies so far we have walked into the bedroom of this committed couple and witnessed their pillow talk, beautiful bodies, tender touches, and passionate lovemaking. We have seen their Edenic love. But now we walk east of Eden. We take a brief reprieve from relational paradise, and step into the inevitable realisms and imperfections of married life.

Read Song of Songs 5:2-8

- ❖ What do you think it means she “slept but her head was awake”?
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- ❖ How would you describe the scene of v1-6? Is she being playful or resentful or what is going on?
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- ❖ Why do you think he leaves?
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- ❖ How is the result of this “dream” different to that at the beginning of chapter 3? If you had to psychoanalyse her at this point, what do you think is going on?
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- ❖ What part to the daughters of Jerusalem / friends play in this scene? What do they think?
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Read Song of Songs 5:9-16

- ❖ How does she answer her friends doubts?
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- ❖ What do you notice about the order/movement of her eyes/sight? How is this similar to what we read of his description of her in the previous chapter?
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- ❖ What is significant about her statement, “my beloved, that is my friend”?
-

Read Song of Songs 6:1-10

❖ How have the friends changed their tune? What have they learned?

❖ In answering their question, where does she say he now is? What has happened?

APPLICATION

❖ Have you ever said anything (even in jest) that was taken the wrong way?

❖ Where have you noticed that miscommunication or misunderstanding can lead to frustration in relationships? What can that frustration look like?

❖ Given the beloved reaches out to her friends, how can we as friends help Christian couple's going through a "frustrated" patch?

❖ What can we learn from this chapter and the previous about overcoming frustration in relationships? What is a key strategy?

❖ How do we see the same challenges in non married relationships?

❖ Read Revelation 3:20 - how might we close the door to God?

❖ How does God pursue us when we go "missing"? (cf. Romans 5:6-8, Luke 15)

❖ How can the beloved's description of her lover, help us when we feel distant from God?

❖ Is there another relationship of frustration for you at the moment? How could you initiate the resolution of such frustration?

Love's Desire: Song of Songs 6:11-7:13

Introduction

- ❖ What do you think “desire” is? Is it a good thing or bad thing? What is it that people “desire” most in life?

Read Song of Songs 6:11-13

- ❖ What is it that the man “desires” in these verses?

- ❖ What do his friends “desire” and is that desire different to his?

Read Song of Songs 7:1-9a

- ❖ What do you notice is different in the movement of his eyes in these verses compared to previous chapters? Where does he start? Why do you think this might be the case?

- ❖ This woman might be seen as a dancer to be gazed upon by the young stallions of the town, but in His eyes she is His dancer! And she is a “generous / willing girl” to him (not “prince” as in the NIV). How would you summarise his desire for his beloved? Do you think he feels he has a chance in having his desires fulfilled?

Read Song of Songs 7:9b-13

- ❖ What is the beloved's response to her lover's desire?

- ❖ How does this open description of marital intimacy make you feel? If we feel uncomfortable why might that be the case?

APPLICATION

- ❖ We have already seen on multiple occasions allusions to the Garden of Eden and Genesis 2 in the Song of Songs. That connection is again clear in these verses. However, in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 we see a new “desire” appear. Read Genesis 3. How is desire expressed there?

- ❖ In Genesis 4, Cain invites Abel to come outside into the fields (like the beloved and lover of Song of Songs), but why does he issue that invitation?

- ❖ Sadly we live in a world where the desire of self protection and power so often dominates. Where can we at times see that in our sex lives, marriages, and other relationships?

- ❖ How does the Song of Songs, particularly this chapter, take us back to the Garden pre Fall? What is the focus of the couple’s desire?

- ❖ How is this reflective of God’s love of us? Which Garden did Jesus go to give us his love?

- ❖ How does the couple throughout the Song constantly renew or fan their desire for each other? How does this point to what we might be able to do to renew our desire for our spouse?

- ❖ Are there any pointers in this idyllic relationship about how one might be able to renew their desire for God?

- ❖ How does being “generous” in relationships promote intimacy and how can you be “generous” in all your relationships? (not just marriage!)

Love's Permanence: Song of Songs 8:1-14

Introduction

- ❖ What do you think of the fairy tale phrase: “and they lived happily ever after”? Is it attainable?

- ❖ What have you discovered about “love” throughout this series on Song of Songs?

The final chapter of Song of Songs brings together many of the themes we have seen in the Song to a glorious climax (excuse the pun!).

Read Song of Songs 8:1-4

- ❖ In v1, we see the woman wants what has been private to become public, not in some crass voyeurism, but so everyone can see how much joy is in their relationship. Why do you think their relationship may have been frowned upon (despised)?

- ❖ What themes from earlier in the Song are repeated in v1-4?

Read Song of Songs 8:5-7

- ❖ Love is described in v5 as “leaning on her beloved”? What does this signify for you?

- ❖ The beloved brings her lover’s mum into the picture in these verses, indicating that “love” is not unique to them. It was there before them and will no doubt be there after them. Why is it important for a married couple to be aware of this?

- ❖ Why does the beloved seek reassurance that her lover will always be hers (seal on his heart)?

- ❖ How is love stronger than death? How can it last forever? (hint: God is love!!)

Read Song of Songs 8:8-9

- ❖ How can we protect and prepare our young people for relationships in the future?

Read Song of Songs 8:10-14

❖ How is Solomon's relationships contrasted with the Beloved and Lover in these final verses?

❖ Do you think this is a good ending to the Song?

❖ Why does the Song end with an invitation rather than consummation?

APPLICATION

❖ Given the power of love and desire, what practical steps can we take to ensure "faithfulness" is central to not only marriage but all our relationships?

❖ If the Song finishes without a big bang, pointing us to a greater love Song in Jesus, what comfort does this offer those who struggling with being single or those who are unhappily married?

❖ What guarantee do we have that God will always love us (hint: Romans 8:31-38)?

❖ Finish by listing different ways this series can provoke you to prayer:

A. For married couple's:

B. For single's:

C. Your relationships with others:

D. Your relationships with God:
