SONG OF SOLOMON

An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of the Song of Solomon. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: "What is the subject of this book?" Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators' comments by putting their names in parentheses, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of the Song of Solomon.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon.

Rather than footnotes, the author's name is in parentheses in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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INTRODUCTION

The Song of Solomon has been called "the most obscure book in the Old Testament" (Delitzsch), "one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible" (Lee), "a beautiful eulogy of love" (Boa).

Its name is taken from the first verse. It is a Song of Solomon.

Author

The question of authorship should be simple since the Song of Solomon 1:1 says, "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's." Solomon's name appears seven times in the book (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12). Five of these are connected with actual appearances of Solomon in action (3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12), whereas 1:5 mentions "the curtains of Solomon" as a simile.

Many facts fit the view that Solomon wrote the book: 1) 1 Kings 4:32 says he wrote 1,005 songs. This was the chief ("song of songs" means "the best;" see "Holy of Holies," which means "holiest of all"), 2) 1 Kings 4:33 says he had an encyclopedic knowledge of trees and animals. The Song of Solomon contains twenty-one varieties of plant life and fifteen species of animals. 3) The book shows many pieces of evidence of royal luxury and the abundance of costly imported products such as spikenard (1:12), myrrh (1:13), frankincense (3:6), palanquins (3:9), cosmic powders, silver, gold, purple, ivory, and beryl. 4) Cities from both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are mentioned as belonging to the same political realm, suggesting a date before the division of the kingdom.

Recipients

If Solomon had written this book late in his life, there would have been a problem. How can a man with a harem of 140 women (6:8) extol a Shulamite as though she were the only bride? The answer to that problem may be that his relationship with her was the only pure romance he ever experienced. After all, the bulk of his marriages were political arrangements. However, it is probably best to conclude that Solomon wrote the song early in his reign, about 970 BC. There is no indication within the book as to who the readers were intended to be. The recipients were obviously the Jews who lived during Solomon's lifetime.

Message

The subject of the Song of Solomon is love. The problem is the love of whom for whom? The answer depends on the view you take of how the book is to be interpreted. There are three primary interpretations of the Song of Solomon.

The Allegorical Method In an allegory, fictional people and events are used as symbols to suggest a deeper or hidden meaning. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a modern illustration. One allegorical treatment sees the song as an allegory on the history of Israel from the time of the Exodus to the coming of the Messiah. In this Jewish view, the beloved is the Lord and the maiden is Israel.

Matthew Henry said it should be viewed as an allegory depicting God and Israel. Christians who adopt this approach interpret the beloved as Christ and the maiden as the church.

Admittedly, there is symbolism within the book. The maiden is compared to a flower (2:1-2) and the shepherd to an apple tree (2:3) (see Bullock, p. 227 for more). That is not the issue. The song contains symbols, but the main characters and events are not fictional or symbolic.

Boa says, "There are other places in Scripture where the husband/wife relationship is used symbolically (Ez. 16:23; Hos. 1:3), but these are always indicated as symbols." (That's true in the song!) Then he says this may be an application of the book, but it should not be the primary interpretation.

Bullock says objections to this method include: 1) Solomon was hardly a worthy candidate to represent God or Christ (1 Kings 11:4). 2) Many who follow this do so on the presupposition that a book presenting the pleasures of virtuous love is not worthy of inspired Scripture. Therefore, the author must have intended an allegory. To those could be added that this approach casts one on a sea of speculation and anything becomes possible. For example, a philosophical mind in the Middle Ages maintained that the beloved was the astute intellect and the beloved one was the receptive material intellect.

The Song of Solomon is not an allegory; it is historical.

The Typological Method The typological method differs from the allegorical method in that it maintains the historicity of the story. In an allegory, the events may or may not be historical; in a type, the events are always actual historical events. Many who have followed this method for the Song of Solomon have insisted that the historical foundation of the book was Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter or some other princess and that the marriage typically represents the union of Christ and (the Gentiles) the church. Dispensationalists have difficulty with this approach because the church did not exist until New Testament times.

The Literal Method The literal method interprets the Song literally, depicting the love of a man for a woman and stops short of seeking a deeper meaning. As has been said, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no further sense."

Bullock says, "If we can agree that a book that celebrated virtuous love between man and woman deserves a place in the canon of Holy Scripture, then we will have no difficulty with interpreting the Song in its literal sense. The creation of mankind as male and female and their sexual relationships were part of the original order and not a post-Fall alteration. Paul's view of marriage was that it mirrored a much higher sphere of relationships, that between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21-33), and John described the consummation of redemption as the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7-9). The Scriptures elevate the love relationships between husband and wife, and we should not disparage a book that presents such ideal love, nor ought we to indict those who choose on sound exegetical grounds to interpret the Song literally and stop short of seeking a deeper meaning" (Bullock, p. 231).

The message is that husbands and wives should enjoy marital love.

Structure

Psalms is a songbook. Proverbs is a collection of proverbs. What is the Song of Solomon? As Bullock says, "There is always an essential relationship between literary form and the meaning of any composition" (Bullock, p. 232). On one end of the form issue are those who say it is "an anthology of loosely connected individual love lyrics" (Unger, p. 380). In short, a collection of love songs. The unity of the song militates against it being a collection of detached lyrics. On the

other hand, some regard it as a drama. Many who hold this view say there are three main characters instead of two: Solomon, a woman, and a shepherd lover. Delitzsch calls it a "dramatic pastoral." It is definitely not a drama in the theoretical sense since the theater was not a Semitic institution. Furthermore, it does not possess sufficient action, plot, or dramatic sequence to be a drama. It is more accurate to view the form of the Song as somewhere between a loose collection of songs and a drama. Unger says it is a lyrical poem with dramatic dialogue (Unger, p. 380). Boa calls it a dramatic poem built on dialogue (Boa, p. 142). Bullock says it is a lyrical ballad (Bullock, p. 235). The point is that it is a unified lyrical song with a dramatic form.

Delitzsch divides the book into six acts, with two scenes in each act. Ginsburg sees only five parts. This much seems clear: three times, the maiden adjures the daughter of Jerusalem (2:7; 3:5; 8:4; and 5:1 may be a concluding formula). According to Delitzsch, "The first act is played both in the dining room and in the wine room appertaining to the women of the royal palace. In the second act, Shulamith is again at home. In the third act, which represents the marriage, the bride enters Jerusalem from the wilderness, and what we further hear occurs during the marriage festival. The locality of the fourth act is Jerusalem, without being more particularly defined. The fifth act is the park of Etam and then Solomon's country house there. In the sixth act, we see the newly married pair first on the way to Shulem and then in Shulamith's parental home. In the first half of the dramatic pictures, Shulamith rises to equality with Solomon; in the second half, Solomon descends to equality with Shulamith. At the close of the first, Shulamith is at home in the king's palace; at the close of the second, Solomon is at home with her in her Galilean home (Keil and Delitzsch, p. 11).

I. First Stanza ("Dating") 1:2-2:7
   A. 1:2-11
   B. 1:12-2:7
II. Second Stanza ("Dating" Continued) 2:8-3:5
   A. 2:8-17
   B. 3:1-5
III. Third Stanza (Marriage and Honeymoon) 3:6-5:1
   A. 3:6-11
   B. 4:1-5:1
IV. Fourth Stanza (The Honeymoon is over) 5:2-6:9
   A. 5:2-6:3
   B. 6:4-6:9
V. Fifth Stanza (The Marriage Deepens) 6:10-8:4
   A. 6:10-7:6
   B. 7:7-8:4
VI. Sixth Stanza (The Maturity of Love) 8:5-14
   A. 8:5-7
   B. 8:8-14

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Song of Solomon is to exalt the joys of love in "dating" and marriage. It offers a proper perspective of human love and avoids the extremes of lust and

asceticism. It is a bold and positive endorsement by God of marital love in all its physical and emotional beauty.

It is also intended to illustrate God's love for His people. The literal interpretation does not mean the book has no spiritual illustrations or applications. It certainly illustrates God's love for His covenant people, Israel and anticipates Christ's love for His bride, the church (Eph 5:3-32), but that is an application, not a primary interpretation.

Summary: Solomon wrote a song about his love, courtship, and marriage to a Shulamite woman to exalt the joys of human love and illustrate divine love. A husband and wife are to enjoy human love.

WHEN A WOMAN FALLS IN LOVE

Romantic love Songs abound. We all know more than one love song. God put a love song in the Bible. Furthermore, He called it one of the best love songs. It is called the Song of Solomon.

Before we look at the content of the book, perhaps we should consider the nature of the book. Is it 1) an allegory, 2) a "type," meaning a symbolic representation of love between God and His people, or 3) describing romantic love between a man and a woman? In an allegory, *fictional* people are used as symbols to suggest a deeper meaning. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a modern illustration. The Shepherd in the Song of Solomon is a fictitious character. In a type, *historical* people are used as symbols of something else. The Shepherd in the Song of Solomon represents God or Christ, and the woman represents Israel or the church. Taken at face value, the Song of Solomon depicts the love of a man for a woman and stops short of seeking a deeper meaning. That approach does not mean that there is no application to God's love for his people. After all, marriage is an illustration of our relationship to the Lord, but in the Song of Solomon, that is in an application and not the primary interpretation. As has been said, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no further sense."

The Song of Solomon begins by describing the relationship between a man and a woman before they get married. After that, they get married and the rest of the book describes their relationship after the marriage. What can we learn about romantic love from the Song of Solomon? For starters, it describes a woman who has fallen in love. What does this teach us about one of the first things a man needs to know?

The Song

The Author "The song of songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1). Solomon, who wrote 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), wrote this one.

The Song The expression "songs of songs" means this is a superlative song (*cf.* "King of kings"), "the best one" (Constable), "the best or the most excellent song" (Barnes). Solomon is saying this is his best song (Barnes; Deere, however, says that it is more likely it means this is the best of all songs). Clarke says, "The rabbis consider this superior to all songs. Ten songs, says the Tarpon, have been sung, but this excels them all.

1. The first was sung by Adam when his sin was pardoned.
2. The second was sung by Moses and the Israelites at the Red Sea.
3. The third was sung by the Israelites when they drank of the rock in the wilderness.
4. The fourth was sung by Moses when summoned to depart from this world.
5. The fifth was sung by Joshua when the sun and moon stood still.
6. The sixth was sung by Deborah and Barak after the defeat of Sisera.
7. The seventh was sung by Hannah when the Lord promised her a son.
8. The eighth was sung by David for all the mercies given him by God.
9. The ninth is the present, sung in the spirit of prophecy by Solomon.
10. The tenth is that which shall be sung by the children of Israel when restored from their captivities."

The Desire of the Woman

Kiss Me "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (1:2a). "Him" is no doubt Solomon (1:1), but who is the speaker? The NKJV, NASB, NIV, etc., identify the speaker throughout the book, but those are additions by the translators, not part of the inspired text. It is clear here that the speaker is a woman. From what follows, it appears the woman is a Shulamite and Solomon is viewed as a shepherd-lover (MacDonald).

"Who was the Shulammite? No one knows for sure. She may have been Abishag, the Shunammite (*cf.* 1 Kings 1:3-4, 15). 'Shulammite' could describe a person from Shunem (*cf.* Josh. 19:18; 1 Sam. 28:4). The location of this Shunem was in lower Galilee, south of Nain, southeast of Nazareth, and southwest of Tabor" (Constable).

"As the book begins, the young woman and young man have already met and 'fallen in love.' In verses 2-4a, the girl voices her desire for her boyfriend's physical affection. According to LaCocque, the main female character speaks 53 percent of the time and the male 39 percent in the book" (Constable). The girl speaks first, expressing a desire to be kissed. Women want to be kissed. I know a woman who says she married her husband because he was a good kisser.

"for your love is better than wine" (1:2b). In the first part of this verse, she spoke about her lover ("him"). In the latter part of the verse, she speaks *to him* ("your"). "The rapid interchange between the third person (him, 1:2, and his, 1:2, 1:4) and the second person (your and you, 1:2-4) is confusing to modern readers, but it was a regular feature of love poetry in the ancient Near East. This stylistic device gave a strong emotional quality to the poetry" (Deere). The reason ("for") given for her desire to be kissed is that his love is better than wine. The "tokens of affection are more desired than any other delights" (Barnes). "His physical affections were exhilarating, refreshing, and a great source of joy (*cf.* 1:4)" (Deere). His love, especially his kisses (1:2a), stimulated her like wine.

"Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you" (1:3). The word "because" is not in the Hebrew text (*cf.* NASB; NIV; ESV). She is not saying kiss me *because* of the fragrance of your ointment; she is simply making the statement, "your anointing oils are fragrant" (NASB; ESV; see "pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes" in the NIV). His cologne smells good. She adds that his name is like that anointing oil. In the Scripture, a person's name represents his character (Constable; *cf.* the use of a nickname today). She is saying that his character is pleasing and attractive to her as the smell of perfume (Ryrie: "pleasant and attractive"). She is attracted to his character. Virgins love him because of who he is ("therefore"). The Hebrew word translated "virgins" means "a virgin; a young woman of marriageable age. It is the same word that is translated as "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14.

This story begins with a woman who respects a man. She is attracted to him, as are other women, because of his character. Women are attracted to men they respect. On top of that, his anointing oil appeals to her sense of smell, like perfume. She desires him and wants to be kissed by him.

Men take note. **Women are attracted to men they respect.** Women appreciate men who smell good. Women in love want to be kissed by the man they love. Women take note. A desirable man is a man of character. A desirable man is one who is loved by others, not just you. You should not be the only person in the world who sees what a good person you think he is (Glickman, 1976).

Take Me Away "Draw me away! We will run after you. The king has brought me into his chambers" (1:4a). The first part of the Song of Solomon 1:4 has been translated in several different ways. Notice how "we" and "has brought" are translated in the following translations. "Draw me after you. Let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers" (NASB). "Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers" (NIV). "Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers" (ESV). In other words, the statement (NKJV) is a request (Deere). The woman is saying, "*Take* me away with you. *Let us* (not "we") run away. *Let* the king (not "the king has") bring me into his chamber (see Constable; Deere). The king is Solomon (1:1, 5).

Women in love want to be with the man they love. "This is an expression of longing for intimacy. Such a desire is normal and healthy (*cf.* Prov. 5:18-19)" (Constable). "She was expressing her desire for intimacy and marriage with the lover" (Deere).

Men take note. Women want to be with the man they love. Women take note. Let your request, not your demands, be made known.

"In summary, this opening soliloquy suggests that physical desire is a characteristic of romantic love and that properly channeled desire is good, not evil. One ought to be 'intoxicated' with love for one's own mate (*cf.* Prov. 5:18-19) rather than with wine, drugs, or other people. However, the choice of a marriage partner should be based on far more than purely physical considerations. The beloved's speech indicates that the character ("name") of a person is vitally important in the selection of one's spouse" (Deere).

The Response of Her Friends

Concerning the Woman "We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine" (1:4b). In the middle of verse 4, the woman ceases to speak and a group ('we") speaks. The group is the daughters of Jerusalem (1:5; see also 2:7; 3:5, 10, 17; 5:8, 11, 16, 8:4). The daughters of Jerusalem have been identified as the female inhabitants of Jerusalem (Deere), the friends of the woman (LaSor), the women of Solomon's harem (Tanner, cited by Constable). Other suggestions include the female wedding guests and ladies of the royal court (see Deere). The content of what the group of women says is most likely the sentiments of the women's friends. **They are glad for her and rejoice with her. She has found a love that is more stimulating than wine.**

Concerning Her Lover "Rightly do they love you" (1:4c). These are the words of the woman's friends (Deere). The friends of the woman tell her that they approve of the romance (Constable) and they approve of her lover.

Love and romance are between two people, but they do not exist alone on a deserted island. They have family and friends who are needed to support the relationship. In this case, the woman's friends rejoice with her and affirm that she has made the right choice. That is important. If people close to you object during the dating phase of your relationship, you need to give what they say serious thought.

After listening to a fellow describe in great detail his rocky relationship with his girlfriend, I suggested he seriously consider exiting stage right. When I did that, he immediately began to give me reasons why he should stay in the relationship, none of which were convincing in light of all he had told me. He did not hear a word I said. Do not make that mistake. Listen to the chorus of people around you. You need their support and you may need their insights to help or even terminate the relationship.

The Insecurity of the Woman

To Her Friends "I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept (1:5-6). The woman tells her friends not to look at her ("stare" in the NASB and the NIV; "gaze" in the ESV) because she is dark like the tents of Keder and the curtains of Solomon. The tents of Kedar were made of black goat's hair and the curtains of Solomon were also black (Deere), but those curtains were, no doubt, magnificent (Ryrie), "comely (beautiful)" (Barnes). Her explanation of her suntanned skin is that her mother's sons, that is, her stepbrothers (Ryrie) were angry with her and made her the caretaker of the family vineyard. Thus, her skin was very dark because of the sun's rays, not because of her race (Constable).

Her "own vineyard" is a reference to her personal appearance [Constable, who points out that in this book, "vineyard" is a frequent metaphor for the physical body; see 1:14, 2:15 (twice), 7:12, 8:11 (twice), 12). In other words, she did not take care of herself. "She had not had available to her the luxurious baths and toiletries or fashionable clothing of the court. There had been no opportunity for her to take care of her hair, skin, or hands according to the obvious courtly style" (Patterson, cited by Constable). "These words express humility without abjectness" (Delitzsch). Unlike the pale ladies of the court, this rustic lady of the field was tanned but lovely (MacDonald). Her dark skin made her feel insecure among the city dwellers. "Her explanation for her dark appearance was almost an apology. Because of hard outdoor work in the vineyards required of her by her brothers, she was forced to neglect the cultivation of her own vineyard**,** that is, herself and her appearance (*cf.* 8:12)" (Deere).

To sum up: this woman had some family problems; her stepbrothers were angry with her (1:6). She was self-conscious of her appearance, especially when she compared herself with other women (1:6). She felt insecure. She had worked hard and now she has fallen in love with a man she respects (1:3) and who is king (1:4).

Men take note. Women are self-conscious about their physical appearance. Women take note. Do what you can with what you got.

To Her Lover "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions? (1:7). The woman speaks to her lover as a shepherd. Most commentators conclude that Solomon was probably not a shepherd. Some say ancient Near Eastern love poems commonly portrayed men as shepherds (Deere; Constable). In other words, this is a figure of speech (Barnes). Solomon's father, David, was a shepherd. Could it not be that Solomon was a shepherd as a young man?

By requesting that Solomon tell her where he fed his flock at noon, she is expressing a desire to be with him (Ryrie; Constable). "The verse is either a soliloquy (assuming the lover is absent) or, if he is present, a request for a meeting later in the day" (Deere).

"If she could not be with him, she said she would be like a veiled woman. This enigmatic expression means either that she would be mistaken for a prostitute (cf. Gen. 38:14-15) [Ryrie] or, more likely that without Solomon, she would be as sad as a person in mourning (*cf.* Ezek. 24:17, 24:22)" (Deere).

Your insecurity is all the more reason to listen to the choir. You need their support.

The Response of Her Friends

"If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents (1:8). Because the lover is addressed in the previous verse, this reply is said to be by Solomon, but the tone doesn't fit him (Deere). It is more likely that these are the words of the woman's friends (Barnes; Deere; Constable). They are simply suggesting that if she doesn't know where the shepherd feeds his flock, she should follow the footsteps of the flock and feed her goats beside his tent. They support her (see "fairest").

The Praise of Solomon

Desirable "I have compared you, my love, to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots" (1:9). Solomon is comparing the woman he loves to an Egyptian horse ("Pharaoh's chariots")! Comparing the woman you love to a horse does not sound very flattering, especially to a woman today. To appreciate what is going on here, we need to understand several things. Solomon imported horses and chariots from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28-29). Egyptian horses were as esteemed in his day as Arabian horses were later (Delitzsch). They were the best (Constable). To Solomon, this was the height of flattery (Ryrie).

Furthermore, Pharaoh's chariots were pulled by Stallions, not mares. A filly among stallions would have been desirable to every one of them. In fact, "a passage from Egyptian literature demonstrates that mares were sometimes set loose in battle to allure and distract the pharaoh's chariot-harnessed stallions" (Parsons, cited by Constable). In other words, "the point of the comparison is that in Solomon's opinion, she was as beautiful and sought after as if she were the only woman in a world full of men" (Deere). Solomon is saying the woman he loves all the best men of his court would have pursued (Constable).

What is really going on here is that Solomon is answering his beloved's feelings of insecurity (1:5-6; Deere). "Solomon's praise would have bolstered his beloved's confidence that he loved her. This encouragement is often necessary and is always appropriate in such a relationship" (Constable).

"The comparison of the bride to a beautiful horse is singularly like one in Theocritus, and some have conjectured that the Greek poet, having read at Alexandria the Septuagint Version of the Song, may have borrowed these thoughts from it. If so, we have here the first instance of an influence of sacred on profane literature" (Barnes).

Beautiful "Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold" (1:10). The woman is wearing jewelry. She is wearing a headdress with a string of beads or other ornaments descending from her head to her cheeks and she has a gold chain around her neck (Barnes). Today, she would be wearing earrings and a necklace. Solomon is telling her how beautiful she looks when she's all dressed up. Deere points out that this is the first "of numerous times in the book where he said she is beautiful" (see 1:15 [twice], 2:10, 2:13; 4:1 [twice], 4:7; 6:4; 7:1, 7:6).

Women take note: dress up. Men take note: when the woman you love dresses up, comment on how lovely she looks.

The Response of Her Friends

"We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver" (1:11). The woman's friends promised to make ornaments of gold with studs of silver so that she could be even more attractive to Solomon (Constable). Barnes thinks that the ornaments of gold with studs of silver are a substitute for the beads of her necklace. He adds, "They promise the bride ornaments more worthy and becoming than the rustic attire in which she has already such charms for the king." Deere says these women are "forced to change their attitude of disdain (1:6) and to agree with the royal opinion."

Summary: Women are attracted to men they respect, appreciate men who smell good, and desire to be kissed by and be with the man they love, but they are self-conscious about their physical appearance, so wise men tell them they are desirable and lovely.

Women marry a man they respect; men be respectable and sensitive. "In summary, since the beloved had felt self-conscious about her appearance, the lover praised her physical beauty so that her detractors were forced to agree with him" (Deere).

Romantic love is biblical. Bullock says, "If we can agree that a book that celebrated virtuous love between man and woman deserves a place in the canon of Holy Scripture, then we will have no difficulty with interpreting the Song in its literal sense. The creation of mankind as male and female and their sexual relationships were part of the original order and not a post-Fall alteration. Paul's view of marriage was that it mirrored a much higher sphere of relationships, that between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21-33), and John described the consummation of redemption as the 'marriage of the Lamb' (Rev. 19:7-9). The Scriptures elevate the love relationships between husband and wife, and we should not disparage a book that presents such ideal love, nor ought we to indict those who choose on sound exegetical grounds to interpret the Song literally and stop short of seeking a deeper meaning" (Bullock, p. 231).

While romantic love is the primary interpretation of the Song of Solomon, there is a valid application of our spiritual relationship. Boa says, "There are other places in Scripture where the husband/wife relationship is used symbolically (Ez. 16:23: Hos. 1:3), but there always indicated as symbols." (That's true in the song!) Then he says this may be an application of the book, but it should not be the primary interpretation. Paul says, "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church" (Eph. 5:28-29). A husband is to love his wife as his own body, which means that he cherishes it. The Greek word "cherish" means "to heat, to warm." It is used in only one other passage in the New Testament. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, it is used to describe the affection and concern a mother has for her child. This, then, is a sensitive love. Did you ever see a man cherish his body? Did you ever see a man get sick? Many women claim that there is nothing sicker on the earth than a sick man. When a man gets sick, he is sensitive to the part of his body that hurts. Granted, Ephesians 5 is talking about a husband's love for his wife, but the point is that in a romantic relationship, the man needs to be sensitive to the needs of the woman, especially her insecurity.

"In summary, since the beloved has felt self-conscious about her appearance, the lover praised her physical beauty, so her detractors were forced to agree with him" (Deere). The compliments in this passage are just physical. Lovers should compliment each other on looking good, for example, when they dress up, and for their characteristics, such as being talented.

ROMANTIC LOVE'S GROWTH

Concerning the nature of love, Paul makes the interesting statement, "But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you, for God teaches you yourselves to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more" (1 Thess. 4:9-10). Even though love is present, it can grow. Paul is talking about "brotherly love," that is, love between believers. Solomon says the same thing is true of romantic love, that is, the love between a man and a woman. What can we learn from what he said?

Constable comments, "If there is indeed a chronological progression in the telling of this love story, as seems likely, this section relates the development of the love that Solomon and his loved one experienced before their wedding. In this section (1:12-2:7), the love of Solomon and his beloved continues to intensify." Five things are going on in this passage. A man in love needs to remember two of them and a woman in love is to remember two of them. What do you need to know about the growth of romantic love?

The Dream of the Woman

Her Perfume "While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance" (1:12). The woman sees the man she loves, who is the king (Solomon), at his dinner table. Her "spikenard" (Hebrew: an aromatic plant from India; see "perfume" in NASB, the NIV) sends forth its fragrance.

Her Thoughts "A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts" (1:13). Myrrh was a pleasant-smelling gum that came from small trees in Arabia (Deere; see 1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 4:14; 5:1, 5:5 [twice], 5:13). Women wore a pouch of perfume around their necks (Ryrie). Thus, the woman says the man she loves is "as sweet to her as the fragrant myrrh sachet that hung around her neck" (Constable). "He was constantly in her thoughts just as the smell of the myrrh (in her sachet around her neck) was constantly in her nostrils" (Deere).

"My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi" (1:14). Henna was a plant that bore white blooms. This plant appeared at En Gedi, an oasis on the west coast of the Dead Sea (Deere). To her, the man she loves is "as attractive as henna at the refreshing Engedi oasis" (Constable). As compared to him, all other men were like a desert; he stood out like a beautiful cluster of white flowers in a desert oasis (Deere).

A woman in love daydreams about the one she loves.

The Attention of Solomon

"Behold, you could are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes" (1:15). The Hebrew word translated "fair" means "fair, beautiful." Solomon praises the woman he loves, telling her that she is beautiful. Telling her that she has the eyes of the dove does not sound very flattering. It is a poetic way of saying she has beautiful eyes. To the ancients, doves were noted for their cleanliness and tranquility (Deere). According to the ancient rabbis, a woman with

beautiful eyes possessed a beautiful character. Thus, Solomon is not only praising her for her physical beauty, he is praising her for her beautiful and tranquil character (Constable). Perhaps this indicates that they were staring "deeply and lovingly into one another's eyes" (Hess, cited by Constable). At least, it indicates that Solomon noticed her eyes.

Men who are in love should notice and comment on the loveliness of their lady. A single lady was telling my wife about a first date she had just had. In the process, she said that after the date, he texted her a message which included a French phrase. The French phrase addressed her as "beautiful." My wife's immediate response was, "He is a keeper." Women like it when a man tells them they are nice-looking and that they have inner beauty.

Patricia, my wife, saw a lady at the supermarket in the line ahead of her who struck her with her gentle spirit. Patricia introduced herself and told the lady she had a beautiful, gentle demeanor and that in this harsh world, she should not lose it. There are ladies like that who are unique.

The Admiration of the Women

Her Admiration "Behold, you are handsome, my beloved! Yes, pleasant! (1:16a). The woman tells the man she loves that he is handsome and pleasant. Pleasant refers to his "charming personality" (Constable). Although she recognizes his physical good looks, she is more taken by the charm of his personality (Deere).

Their Setting "Also our bed is green" (1:16b). Verses 16b and 17 refer to the woods where they met (Ryrie). She tells him this as they are lying on green grass (MacDonald). They are having a picnic.

"The beams of our houses are cedar and our rafters of fir" (1:17). The woman "pictures the great outdoors as their house, the grass as their bed, and the overhanging cedar and fir branches as their roof. The setting of their romance is uniformly pastoral, not a palace" (MacDonald).

This reminds me of a homeless man camped in a park overlooking the Pacific Ocean. On my morning walk, I would often sit on a bench and talk to him. The first time we talked, he described the outdoor setting as if it were his house. Pointing to the Pacific Ocean, he invited me to admire his aquarium and he referred to the public restroom as his private bathroom.

Her Self Image "I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys" (2:1). Jewish commentators generally assign this verse to the bride. The majority of Christian fathers, however, assigned it to the King, that is, Christ (Barnes). Sharon was a fertile area on the coast (Ryrie), the plain from Joppa to Caesarea, between the hill-country and the sea (Barnes; Deere).

The woman is not referring to "cultivated flowers we call 'roses' and 'lilies' but probably of the common, wild scarlet anemones, or perhaps the crocus" (MacDonald). Deere says that the Hebrew word translated "rose" only occurs here and in Isaiah 35:1, where it is translated "crocus" in the NIV. He adds, "It was a common meadow flower." The lily, too, was a common flower often mentioned in the Song of Songs (2:1-2, 2:16; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2-3; 7:2). "The 'rose of Sharon' probably refers to the crocuses (possibly narcissuses, lilies, or meadow saffrons) that grew on the plain of Sharon that bordered the Mediterranean Sea south of the Carmel mountain range. Lilies grew and still grow easily in the valleys of Israel" (Constable).

The woman describes herself as a common flower (Deere) but attractive (Constable). Her statement here "reflects a significant contrast with her earlier self-consciousness (1:5-6). Her improvement probably was because of her lover's praising her (1:9-10, 1:15)" (Deere). "She did

not depreciate her appearance here as she had earlier (1:5-6), though she was modest. Perhaps Solomon's praise (1:9-10) had made her feel more secure" (Constable).

The Affirmation of Solomon

"Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (2:2). Solomon responds to her comment that she is common (2:1) is that she's not common; she is a rare beauty (Constable). "He tells her that she is very special. Compared to other virgins, she is like a lily among thorns" (MacDonald). "He agreed that she was a lily (2:1) but not just any lily! She was as unique among all others as a single lily would be among many thorns" (Deere).

Not all women have the physical beauty that wins beauty contests, but all women, and for that matter all men, have unique qualities that should be affirmed. Every human being is different. We all have different fingerprints. Likewise, we all have unique qualities that should be affirmed.

The Appreciation of the Woman

Rare "Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons" (2:3a). As a cultivated (Barnes; MacDonald) apple tree would have been a rare find among "the wild trees of the woods" (Barnes), so she says her beloved is rare among men (Deere; Constable). Such an apple tree would have been "uncommon" (Ryrie), "a delightful surprise" (Deere).

Delightful "I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (2:3b). She had worked in the sun (1:6); now she is in his shade. "In his shade" speaks of closeness (Constable). To be with him was a great delight (MacDonald). Deere takes shade as a reference to protection. He says, "The beloved's praise of her lover reveals three aspects of romantic love that are important to women. First, she felt protected by him. Sitting in his shade was a metaphor for protection, not only in the Bible but also in the literature of the ancient Near East. She had worked in the sun (1:6), but now she enjoyed resting under his protection." Shade coupled with delight, however, suggests the light being close rather than protection.

The sweet taste of his fruit has been interpreted in several different ways, including sweet "knowledge of someone through intimate personal experience" (Deere, who points to "Taste and see that the Lord is good" in Ps. 34:8). He is "sweet, beautiful, and outstanding" (Constable), "fellowship with him was ever so sweet" (McDonald), a simple kiss (Constable), and oral sex (Dillow, cited by Constable). Constable points out that "'fruit' never appears elsewhere in the Old Testament as a euphemism for the genitals, and neither the Hebrew Bible nor the Egyptian love literature refer to oral sex" (Constable, who cites a note on this verse in the Net Bible). An explanation of sweet fellowship is preferred.

Public Expression "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (2:4). They have moved from outside (2:3) to inside (2:4), from the woods to a banqueting house. His banner over her signifies that "everyone could see that Solomon loved her" (Ryrie). "Just to be with him was like being in a banqueting house; always overhead was his banner of love" (MacDonald).

She "appreciated the fact that Solomon let others see his love for her. As the troops easily saw a banner (a military standard) as they marched, Solomon's love for his beloved was easily

seen by anyone who observed their relationship. He was not ashamed of her; instead, he delighted in her, which was evident to others. One way he showed this was by taking her to his banquet hall (*cf.* 'table' in 1:12) in the palace" (Deere).

Provision "Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick" (2:5). The Hebrew word translated "sick" means "weak, sick." She became faint from love and needed strengthening. "She felt exhausted from her love for her loved one" (Constable). "Overcome with thoughts of him, she calls for cakes of raisins and apples to refresh and strengthen her" (MacDonald). "Physically weakened, she needed stimulation from food such as raisins and apples. Perhaps "raisins" should be translated "raisin cakes," a Near Eastern delicacy (1Chron. 12:40; Isa. 16:7; Hos. 3:1)" (Deere).

"His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me" (2:6). Deere says that since verse 5 is a request, verse 6 should probably be translated as a request rather than a declarative statement. "Let him draw me to him with entire affection" (Barnes). The woman is expressing a desire for him to meet her physical and emotional needs. Gentlemen, there are times when your lady needs to be hugged.

"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (2:7). Pointing out that this identical statement appears again (3:5; see also 8:4), Constable says that Solomon is speaking and that this serves as an indicator that one periscope has ended.

"The gazelle is a member of the antelope family, and the hind (does) is a female deer. Both animals are skittish, and anyone who wants to get close to them must wait patiently. One cannot approach them aggressively. Similarly, a man cannot awaken a woman's love clumsily" (Constable). The point is, "Let love develop naturally; do not force it" (Ryrie; Constable). Be patient. Do not get in a hurry. Let love develop naturally."This adjuration … expresses one of the main thoughts of the poem, namely, that genuine love is a shy and gentle affection that dreads intrusion and scrutiny; hence the allusion to the gazelles and hinds, shy and timid creatures. The complementary thought is that of 8:6-7, where love is again described, and by the bride, as a fiery principle" (Barnes). "In other words, 'love is not a thing to be bought or forced or pretended, but a thing to come spontaneously, to be given freely and sincerely'" (MacDonald).

This refrain, spoken by the beloved to the daughters (inhabitants; cf. comments on 1:4) of Jerusalem, appears again in 3:5 and part of it in 8:4. In these three verses, the refrain serves as a structural indicator to mark the ending of one section and to introduce the next one. The meaning of the refrain is that love cannot be forced but must be patiently waited for. In other words, the beloved reminded all those desiring a relationship like the one she and Solomon enjoyed to wait patiently for God to bring it into their lives. Gazelles (2:17; cf. 2:17; 3:5; 4:5; 7:3; 8:14) and does are graceful, agile animals. It was natural for a beloved one, thinking of the fields and forests (2:1, 2:3), to make an oath by mountain animals" (Deere).

Summary: Love grows as the man pays attention to and affirms the woman and as the woman admires and appreciates the man.

"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" (Deere).

This sounds more like idealism and realism. Perhaps, when people are young, they have an idealistic view of the one and only, but human beings are not perfect; they are flawed. Hence the proverb, "love is blind, but marriage is an eye-opener.

Let me put it like this. This does not mean that there should never be a comment that points out a flaw. It does mean that the affirmations and admiration should not only balance such comments, but should also far exceed them. My wife says that all comments are like deposits in an account and that there should be 30 positive comments for every negative comment because every negative comment is such a huge withdrawal from the account.

ROMANTIC LOVE'S PROBLEM

A man and a woman meet, are romantically attracted to each other, fall in love, grow in their affection toward one another, and live happily ever after. Is that the way it works? Perhaps, ideally, but realistically, they encounter a problem or two in the process, even before they get married. Using a vivid figure of speech, Solomon describes this issue and indicates how problems in a romantic relationship can be resolved. What are the figures of speech and how do people in love resolve their problems?

His Invitation

His Coming "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" (2:8). The setting now shifts from Israel to the woman's home, which was evidently in Lebanon (4:8, 15; Deere; Constable). The intensity of the couple's longing for each other increases and their sense of intimacy grows (Deere). The Hebrew word translated "voice" means "voice, sound, noise." She hears him coming. She sees him leaping on the mountain and skipping on the hills. He is eager to see her (Constable). "On a fair spring morning, he solicits her company" (Barnes).

"My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice" (2:9). She excitedly describes him coming as a gazelle or a young stag, which emphasizes his attractive appearance, strength, and agility (Deere). He has "all the grace of a gazelle or a young stag" (MacDonald). He stands behind the wall of her parent's house, looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. He is anxious to see her (Deere).

His Invitation "My beloved spoke, and said to me: 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away'" (2:10). The expression "arise, my love, my fair one and come away" appears again in verse 13, thus bracketing a description of spraying "that was as much a feeling in Solomon's heart is a season of the year (Constable).

"For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone" (2:11). In verses 11-13, Solomon describes spring with a series of statements. "The elaborate description of spring was probably meant to do more than simply emphasize the beauty of the setting. It is likely that he was also describing their relationship. 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" (Deere).

The Hebrew word translated "winter" only appears here in the Old Testament and refers to "the cloudy season of March and April with its latter rains" (Deere). "The cessation of the latter rain occurred in the month Nisan, "corresponding to the latter part of March and early part of April" (Barnes).

"The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land" (2:12). Flowers appear in the spring, "adding delightful colors to the landscape and causing people to sing for joy" (Deere). Doves announce spring's arrival (Deere).

"The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away!" (2:13). Fig trees blossom in the spring (Deere). Great vines also blossom, giving off a sweet-smelling fragrance, just before the grapes appear (Deere). "So spring stimulates the senses of sight, sound, taste, and smell" (Deere).

Spring is my favorite time of the year. Leaving winter behind, something is refreshing and invigorating about spring. I particularly like to hear the birds sing. So, it is appropriate for Solomon to use spring to describe his love relationship.

"O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely" (2:14). Solomon has been looking through the window (2:9), but she has been hiding like a dove in the cleft of a rock or in a crack in a cliff (Deere: Doves hide in rock crevices, reluctant to leave). So Solomon asked to see her lovely face and hear her sweet voice.

If love is to grow, a couple must be together alone, a truth often forgotten by people who are married. As a married couple, to carve out some time in their busy schedule to be alone with each other, Haddon Robinson and his wife Bonnie made a date to go to breakfast every Saturday morning.

Her Response

The Problem "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes" (2:15). The speaker changes ("us"). The speaker has been taken to be the woman (Barnes; Deere; Constable), her brothers (MacDonald), and both Solomon and the woman (Ryrie). Foxes were notorious for their destruction of the vines in the vineyard, "so her reference to those animals probably suggested some problems in their relationship metaphorically" (Deere). "She was evidently urging Solomon, poetically, to deal with some problems in their relationship.… All couples encounter some potentially destructive situations in their relationships that need dealing with occasionally. Often the woman senses these first, as here, but the man should take the initiative in dispelling them and thus protect his loved one" (Constable). "Both resolve to keep anything from spoiling their relationship" (Ryrie).

"The foxes represent as many obstacles or temptations as have plagued lovers throughout the centuries. Perhaps it is the fox of uncontrolled desire that drives a wedge of guilt between a couple. Perhaps it is the fox of mistrust and jealousy that breaks the bond of love. Or it may be the fox of selfishness and pride that refuses to let one acknowledge his fault to another. Or it may be an unforgiving spirit that will not accept the apology of the other. These foxes have been ruining vineyards for years and the end of their work is not in sight" (Glickman, pp. 49-50).

Some problems are deal breakers. One discovers that the other is seeing an old flame and, perhaps, having an affair. One wants to have children and the other doesn't. One wants to get married and the other keeps putting it off. I know a young Christian lady who dated an unbeliever and, even though she was greatly attracted to him, she broke off the relationship because she knew the Scripture taught that believers should not marry an unbeliever. Those are big problems. They are deal breakers.

Some problems are minor, not major. There is an old adage to the effect that the number one cause of divorce is he squeezed the toothpaste in the middle instead of rolling it up at the end. Solomon is not warning against roaring lions, growling bears, or man-eating tigers. He is cautioning us to beware of little foxes that spoil the vine. It's the little things, such as selfish acts, little irritations, and unkind words. It's that pound of flesh between your teeth (James 3).

1. Unmet expectations. My wife, Patricia, says, "You do not know what some of your expectations are until they're not met." Expectation produces frustration, which produces anger that results in bitterness. Resentment is a candle snuffer. It can extinguish the flame of romantic love.
2. A request is made that is repeatedly not done. It could be something as simple as, "Ask so-and-so about such and such."
3. Differences of opinion, such as politics, can become an issue. One is a Republican and the other is a Democrat. That can be a minor problem or a major problem, depending on the issue and how strongly each feels about it.

D. L. Moody said, "Selfishness spoils love, discontents spoil joy, anxious thought spoils peace, impatience spoils long-suffering, bitter words spoil gentleness, indolence spoils goodness, doubts spoil faith, pride spoils meekness, and love of pleasure spoils temperament" (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/29/1975).

The Reassurance "My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies" (2:16). Deere suggests that the use of the personal pronouns mine, his, and he indicates this is a soliloquy. These are her thoughts. Yet the next verse is addressed to him. "Though they had some problems in their relationship, the beloved knew that her lover belonged to her and she belonged to him. They were committed to each other. She could rest in the shepherd-like quality of his love despite the struggles they shared" (Deere). "Even though they faced problems, the Shulammite rejoiced in the security of her beloved's love and in the assurance that he would take care of his responsibilities to her" (Constable).

The Request "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether" (2:17). She requests he return ("turn") in the "evening" (Delitzsch), when the day breaks the shadows flee away with the strength and agility of a gazelle or young stag. "Bether" is not a translation; it is a transliteration. The Hebrew word means "cleft" (BDB), "cleavage" or "separation" (Deere; Constable). The phrase "the mountains of Bether" seems to refer to a mountainous region in Palestine, but such a site is unknown (BDB). Translating the phrase "the mountains of cleavage," some take this to mean the woman's breast (Deere; Constable). It is preferable to render this phrase "the mountains of separation," referring to the foxes of the previous verse (but see 8:14). "She said to him, in effect, 'Come back again sometime in the cool of the evening, when the shadows have flown away. Return with the speed of a young stag over the mountains of Bether (or Separation, i.e., the mountains that separate us)'" (MacDonald).

Summary: A woman in love may resist the invitation of the man she loves because of some small problem and she invites him to take the initiative to resolve it, but she is confident that it will be resolved.

"The beloved was asking her lover to take the initiative in solving the problems that were potentially harmful to their relationship…. Even in ideal courtships and marriages, most couples encounter some potentially destructive problems. Their willingness to solve them together is evidence of their maturity" (Deere).

When problems arise in a romantic relationship, there are ways to resolve them. M. R. De Haan said, "Many a Christian who can slay lions of temptation will go down before a handful of ants" (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/16/1960). Do not let the little foxes defeat you.

1. Address it. Talk about it; don't stuff it and let it simmer. That does not mean that you should necessarily do it immediately, especially if it's emotional at the moment. It might be wise to wait for an appropriate time to bring it up. It needs to be dealt with because little irritations trigger resentment.
2. Approach the problem calmly and reasonably. Even in the midst of the discussion, if it gets too emotional, take a break, even if it is just a bathroom break.
3. Agree to disagree. Couples do not have to agree on everything to be happy in their relationship. Settle for clarity and not consensus. 1 Cor. 13.
4.

Many years ago, my wife, Patricia, attended a program called "Super Camp." The curriculum was designed for high school and college students and covered virtually everything. One of the things she learned was how to confront a problem. They called it "out the front door." Each letter of that phrase stood for what to do. The "o" of "out" stood for observation. The "t" of "the" stood for thought. The "f" of "front" stood for feelings. The "d" of "door" stood for desire. In other words, first make an observation, then tell what you thought about it and how you felt about it, followed by what you would desire in the future.

For example, if he was late without a good excuse, she should say I noticed you were late (observation). I was worried about you. I thought you might be hurt (thought). I also felt disrespected because you've done it so many times before (feeling). In the future, would you be so kind as to text me when you are going to be late (desire)?

It is important to remember that little foxes can do big damage. "A huge tree in Colorado fell to the ground with a resounding crash after having stood majestically on a hill for more than 400 years. A mere sampling when Columbus landed in San Salvador, over the centuries, it had been struck by lightning 14 times, braved great thunderstorms, and even defied an earthquake. In the end, however, it was killed by some little beetles! Boring under the bark, they chewed away at its mighty fiber until one day that lordly king of the forest came thundering down" (*Our Daily Bread*, 6/18/1973).

ROMANTIC LOVE'S NIGHTMARE

One of my favorite love songs is not King Cole singing in "When I fall in love."

When I fall in love, it will be forever
Or I'll never fall in love
In a restless world like this is
Love is ended before it's begun
And too many moonlight kisses
Seem to cool in the warmth of the sun

When I give my heart, it will be completely
Or I'll never give my heart
And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
Is when I fall in love with you.
And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
Is when I'll fall in love with you

That is the way people feel when they fall in love, especially women. Women in love dream about the wedding, the house they will live in, the children they will have, the life they will live, the grandkids, and the rest of their lives they will live together.

It is also possible that when she is asleep at night, one of her dreams is a nightmare. Because there is such devoted love built into the bosom of a woman in love, there is also a fear buried in the bosom of every woman. If love is the *dream*, fear is the *nightmare*. What do women who are in love fear? What is the fear that is a nightmare?

The Nightmare

The Dream "By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him" (3:1). The expression "by night" means "in the night hours" (Barnes). This woman who is in love relates an experience she had "on her bed," namely a dream (Deere; Constable), just before her wedding (Ryrie). In the dream, she searched and sought diligently to find Solomon, but she could not find him.

"When a person loves another person deeply, it is natural to fear losing him or her. In her dream she lost her lover and sought to find him. The repeated expression the one my heart loves (once in each of these four verses) revealed the depth of her love for Solomon" (Deere).

When I fall in love, it will be forever
Or I'll never fall in love

When I give my heart, it will be completely
Or I'll never give my heart

The Distress "'I will rise now,' I said, 'and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.' I sought him, but I did not find him" (3:2). In her dream, she searched for the one she loved throughout the city (Deere: "either a town near her home or Jerusalem"). She searched in the streets. She searched in the square, but she was unsuccessful. She could not find him. She is distressed. She is distressed. She is frantic. She is having a nightmare.

The Desperation "The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, 'Have you seen the one I love?'" (3:3). The watchmen were the men who guarded the city at night (Deere). In her dream, instead of her finding the one she loved, the watchmen of the city found her wandering around in desperation. She asked them if they had seen her beloved and they had not (see the next verse).

The Discovery "Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me" (3:4). In her dream, soon after her conversation with the watchmen, she found the one she loved. She grabs him, holds him, and squeezes tight. She would not turn him loose until she brought him to her mother's house (see 6:9, 8:2). She takes him to the most secure place she knows, her mother's bedroom (Deere; Constable).

The deep devotion of her love for her beloved comes through in the recurring phrase "the one I love," which appears in each of the first four verses of this chapter. That is the basic fear and the question, "Will we get married?"

Perhaps there are exceptions, but as a general rule, this is a feminine characteristic. It is perhaps clearly seen in a mother's love for her children. She is constantly concerned about their safety. It seems to me that this is the female, motherly instinct built into every woman.

When I was growing up, every time I left the house, my mother would say to me, "Be careful." When I was a teenager, Sears sold a motor scooter that had a top speed of 30 miles an hour. I was old enough to drive one legally, but I was not old enough to drive a car. Since I had a job, I had the money to buy one and my mother let me do it.

One day I was driving down a road that did not have curbs on the side of the road. Instead, there was gravel on the edge of each side of the road. A rather large dog darted across the street. When I hit the dog, I was falling through the gravel. I spent the night in the hospital for them to dig the gravel out of my arm. After that, my mother was so concerned about my safety that she permitted me to buy a car because she felt that I would be safer in a car. Keep in mind I was not old enough to have a driver's license to drive a car, but her concern over my safety overrode that. That's a small sample of a woman's fear of losing a loved one, which is rooted in love.

The Charge

"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (3:5). The charge the woman gives her friends concludes her nightmare and the end of the section on courtship (Constable). Her counsel is to be patient. Do not force love. Let it happen naturally. This identical statement has appeared before (2:7) and will appear one more time in this book (8:4).

As was pointed out in the comments on 2:7, "The gazelle is a member of the antelope family, and the hind (doe) is a female deer. Both animals are skittish, and anyone who wants to get close to them must wait patiently. One cannot approach them aggressively. Similarly, a man cannot awaken a woman's love clumsily" (Constable). The point is, "Let love develop naturally; do not force it" (Ryrie; Constable). Be patient. Do not get in a hurry. "This adjuration … expresses one

of the main thoughts of the poem; namely, that genuine love is a shy and gentle affection which dreads intrusion and scrutiny; hence the allusion to the gazelles and hinds, shy and timid creatures. The complementary thought is that of 8:6-7, where love is again described, and by the bride, as a fiery principle" (Barnes). "In other words, 'love is not a thing to be bought or forced or pretended, but a thing to come spontaneously, to be given freely and sincerely'" (MacDonald).

This refrain, spoken by the beloved to the daughters (inhabitants; cf. comments on 1:4) of Jerusalem, appears again in 3:5 and part of it in 8:4. In these three verses, the refrain serves as a structural indicator to mark the ending of one section and to introduce the next one. The meaning of the refrain is that love cannot be forced but must be patiently waited for. In other words, the beloved reminded all those desiring a relationship like the one she and Solomon enjoyed to wait patiently for God to bring it into their lives. Gazelles (2:17; cf. 2:17; 3:5; 4:5; 7:3; 8:14) and does are graceful, agile animals. It was natural for a beloved one, thinking of the fields and forests (2:1, 2:3), to make an oath by mountain animals" (Deere).

Summary: Romance love's nightmare is the fear of losing one's beloved.

When women first fall in love, they need reassurance.

Many years ago, a Christian psychologist/counselor named Larry Crabb wrote a book entitled *Effective Biblical Counseling* (1977). One of the major sections of the book was what you need to know about people in order to be effective in counseling. One of the chapters in that section was entitled "Personal Needs: What Do People Need to Live Effectively?"

In that chapter, he wrote, "I believe that before the fall, Adam and Eve were both significant and secure. From the moment of their creation, their needs were fully met in the relationship with God, unmarred by sin. Significance and security were attributes or qualities already resident within their personalities, so they never gave them a second thought. When sin ended their innocence and broke the relationship with God, what formerly were attributes now became needs. After the fall, Adam hid from God, fearing his rejection. They both blamed each other for their sin, afraid of what God might do. They were now insecure. The earth was cursed and Adam was instructed to work by the sweat of his brow. It was now a struggle between man and nature. Would Adam have the strength to handle the job? He now was wrestling with threatened insignificance" (Crabb, p. 61).

"My experience suggests that although men and women need both kinds of input, for men the *primary* route to personal worth is significance and for women, the *primary* route is security" (Crabb, p. 62, italics his).

Later in the chapter, Crabb explains, "Significance depends upon understanding who I am in Christ. I will come to feel significant as I have an eternal impact on the people around me by ministering to them. If I fail in business, if my wife leaves me, if my church rolls drop, if I work in a menial occupation, if I can afford only a small house and one used car, I can still enjoy the thrilling significance of belonging to the Ruler of the universe, who has a job for me to do. He has equipped me for the job. As I mature by developing Christlike traits, I will enter more and more fully into the significance that belongs to and serving the Lord.

"My need for security demands that I be unconditionally loved, accepted, and cared for now and forever. God has seen me at my worst and still loved me to the point of giving His life for me. That kind of love I can never lose. I am completely acceptable to Him regardless of my behavior. I am under no pressure to earn or to keep His love. My acceptability to God depends only on Jesus' acceptability to God and on the fact that Jesus' death is counted as full payment for my sins. Now that I know this love, I can relax and be secure in the knowledge that the

eternal God of creation has pledged to use His infinite power and wisdom to ensure my welfare. That's security. Nothing can happen to me that my loving God doesn't allow. I will experience nothing He will not enable me to handle. When problems mount, I feel alone, insecure, and afraid. I am to fill my mind with security-building truths that at this moment a sovereign, loving, personal, infinite God is absolutely in control. In this knowledge, I rest secure" (Crabb, pp. 70-71).

Notice he said that security not only depends on understanding who I am in Christ but that I will come to feel significant as I have an eternal impact on the people around me. There is a sense in which God meets our need for significance and security through our relationship with other people. In that sense, a husband will be significant (or should feel significant) as he does his part to make his wife feel secure.

Dr. John Perkins pointed out that a man was made to find his cave with a bear in it and drive out the bear to take over the cave. A woman was made to find her security in the love of a strong man. When that relationship exists, there are secure, growing children.

The bottom line of all of this is that our ultimate significance and security are rooted in our relationship with the Lord, but in the marital relationship, the husband needs to feel significant, and the wife needs to feel secure in her relationship with her husband. Husbands, take note. Wives do likewise.

THE WEDDING

Weddings come in all shapes and sizes. I have officiated at weddings in my office with only one or two people present. I have conducted weddings on the sands of the beach with the Pacific Ocean at my back. I once performed a wedding ceremony under a tree with only the bride, the groom, and one witness present. I have been the officiant at a wedding estimated to have cost between $75,000 and $100,000.

Are there spiritual lessons to be learned from a wedding? The Bible contains references to weddings and marriage, but most people are unaware that one passage of Scripture describes an ancient Jewish wedding. The Song of Solomon 3:6-11 describes an ancient wedding in Israel (3:11).

There were three parts to a wedding in ancient Israel. First, the parents of the groom selected a bride. The selection included obtaining the permission of the bride's parents, the bride, and the groom. Second, on the wedding day, the groom, accompanied by a group of his friends, went to the bride's house, and the groom escorted the bride to the wedding ceremony site. The groom accompanied the bride to their new residence after the ceremony, and their friends accompanied them. The marriage was consummated on the first night in their new home. Third, the couple feasted with their friends, usually for seven days following the wedding (Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539, July-September 1978, pp. 241-252). "The wedding feast is not described in the Song of Songs, but both the wedding procession (3:6-11) and the wedding night (4:1-5:1) are presented in some detail."

"Weddings in Israel took place in front of the local town elders, not the priests (Ruth 4:10-11). They transpired in homes, not in the tabernacle or temple (or synagogue, in later times). They were civil rather than religious ceremonies" (Constable). "Marriages in the ancient Near East were usually sanctioned through civil contracts rather than through religious ceremonies" (Deere).

The Question

From the Wilderness "Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders?" (3:6). This verse asks a question the next verse answers. The person who is coming is Solomon (3:7). He is described as coming out of the wilderness. The wilderness is the pasture-land in contrast with the cultivated districts and garden-enclosures around the city (Barnes, who says see Jer. 23:10; Joel 2:22; Isa. 42:11; Ps. 65:12).

From a Distance From a distance, the processional coming with Solomon looked like a great column of smoke (Deere), a reference to the smoke "rising from the burning incense used in the procession bringing Solomon to his bride" (Ryrie). "Frankincense and other perfumes are burned in such abundance round the bridal equipage that the whole procession appears from the distance to be one of moving wreaths and columns of smoke" (Barnes). "The fact that the incense was made from all the spices of the merchant emphasizes the costly nature of this display" (Deere).

After all, this is the wedding of a King. Not everyone can afford the wedding of a king, but the wedding can be significant and special.

The Answer

Solomon "Behold, it is Solomon's couch" (3:7a). The author invites his readers to "behold" Solomon. Actually, the author says Solomon's couch is coming. The "couch" was an enclosed litter or traveling throne (Ryrie on 3:9; Barnes: royal litter or palanquin; NIV: carriage; see "interior" in 3:9). The point is that Solomon is the one who is coming. In ancient Israel, the center of attention was the groom; today, it is the bride.

The Bodyguards "with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel" (3:7b). Solomon is accompanied by sixty valiant (Hebrew: strong, mighty) men of Israel. The groom's friends usually accompanied him on this processional (Constable). While these men might have been his chosen friends (Constable), in this case, they were his bodyguards (3:8; Barnes; Constable).

"They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night" (3:8). The mighty men who accompanied Solomon carried swords. They were trained soldiers. They were the most experienced soldiers in Israel, probably Solomon's royal bodyguard (Deere). Their job was to protect Solomon and his bride against any danger that might lurk in the night. With such protection, the bride felt secure.

"The king was taking no chances with the safety of his bride. If bandits would appear at night and terrorize the bride, the soldiers were ready for them. The lesson is valid today for a would-be husband. He should give proper thought and planning to protect his bride. One form this takes is providing economic security for her" (Deere).

The Carriage "Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin: he made its pillars of silver, its support of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem" (3:9-10). Solomon's traveling throne was made out of wood from Lebanon. It had pillars of silver, supports of gold, and a seat of purple upholstery. The carpeting was woven with loving care by the daughters of Jerusalem.

"The carriage was adorned with the most expensive materials, silver… gold, and purple (representing royalty) fabric. Solomon offered his bride the best he had. And his love for her brought out the best in him" (Deere). "Solomon provided his bride with the best he could afford. This self-sacrificing attitude shows his genuine love for her" (Constable).

The description of Solomon's wedding at this point reminds me that weddings can be very expensive. "According to Guinness World Records, the most expensive wedding ever officially recorded took place in Versailles, France, in 2004 and racked up a $55m price tag. The happy bride and groom were Vanisha Mittal and Amit Bhatia."

(https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+most+expensive+wedding+in+history&sxsrf=ALiCzsZ22l7jIXLMqwUxZ6MwCqTejjwZXg%3A1661315312968&ei=8KgFY9TbOrvdkPIPlYSm-A8&oq=what+is+the+most+expensive+wedding+dress+in+history&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EBJKBAhBGABKBAhGGABQAFgAYABoAHABeACAAQCIAQCSAQCYAQCgAQY&gs_ivs=1&sclient=gws-wiz#tts=0).

"Serena Williams, the tennis pro, takes the cake with her wedding ball gown! Her Alexander McQueen dress, designed by Sarah Burton, complete with a cascading cape and sweetheart neckline, makes history as the most expensive wedding dress of all time at a whopping $3.5 million price tag. And this wasn't even Williams's only dress. She made two other changes over

the course of the night" (https://www.brides.com/story/the-most-expensive-wedding-dresses-of-all-time).

Princess Diana's wedding cake cost $40,000. In 2020, the average cost of a wedding was $20,300, which was a $4400 decrease from 2019.

Today, the parents of the bride usually pay for the wedding, which means that if you have a daughter, start saving for the wedding the day she is born.

The Invitation

A Special Crown "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart" (3:11). The citizens of Jerusalem ("Zion;" Barnes: the friends of the bride are always called "the daughters of Jerusalem) are invited to come see the wedding procession. Again, the attention is called to Solomon. This time, attention is directed to the crown resting on his head. It was not a royal crown (Constable). It was a wreath of flowers, which was usually worn by the couple during the wedding festivities (Patterson, cited by Constable).

This crown was special. When Solomon became King, the high priest placed the crown on his head, so to speak. (see 1 Kings 1:32-48). This crown was given to him by his mother, Bathsheba, just for this occasion.

A Day of Joy Solomon's wedding day was a day that filled his heart with joy. It was a day of shared gladness (Ryrie).

Summary: A wedding should be a special, public occasion of great joy.

The elements of this wedding are not necessarily meant to be universally applied. After all, this is the wedding of a king and, therefore, was expensive. Some passages of Scripture are merely descriptive, not prescriptive, meaning they describe a unique situation that is not a model for everyone to follow. Nevertheless, some principles in this passage apply to all weddings.

A wedding should involve preparation (3:9-10). To suggest that a wedding involves a great deal of preparation is preaching to the choir of those who have gone through the process. The preparation should include a detailed plan and a budget. Then, work the plan and stick to the budget.

A wedding should include a personal touch (3:11). In my personal opinion, in today's environment, the wedding day ought to be the bride's day. She should be allowed whatever personal touch she wants to on the wedding. My advice to her would be not to try to please anyone else.

A wedding should invoke a public celebration (3:11). The key here is that a wedding should be a time of great joy. A wedding should not be private; it should be public. For the family and friends of the bride and groom, a wedding ought to be a day of great celebration.

Be all that as it may, as I said in the introduction, "Weddings come in all shapes and sizes." As a pastor, I have officiated at weddings from one extreme to another. My conclusion is that the wedding ought to be, first and foremost, something meaningful to the couple and, second, a special day of joy. With that in mind, here are some suggestions. 1) Elope! That is the least expensive way to go. It could save a lot of money. 2) Have a private ceremony and sometimes later a public wedding. I once performed a wedding of a couple who wanted to live together. His father objected. So, they had a very private ceremony. Later, I officiated at their very public wedding ceremony. 3) Have a small wedding, including the families and the public ceremony

later. 4) Have a modest ceremony to save expenses. I know of a couple who were told by her father that here is the amount of money I have for your wedding. You can use it however you wish. They spent 50% on the wedding and used the other 50% to make a down payment on a house.

You may not have the money for an expensive wedding, but you should make that day a special day of great joy. “The pomp and beauty of this procession were wholly appropriate in light of the event’s significance. The Scriptures teach that marriage is one of the most important events in a person’s life. Therefore, it is fitting that the union of a couple is commemorated in a special way. The current practice of couples casually living together apart from the bonds of marriage demonstrates how unfashionable genuine commitment to another person has become in contemporary society. This violates the sanctity of marriage and is contrary to God’s standards of purity” (Deere).

My wife, Patricia, said the best wedding she had seen was the couple getting married on the beach because it was just about them and their love for each other and not the ceremony and the party. Only four people were present: the bride, the groom, me, the officiant, and Patricia, my wife, as the witness. To the couple, it was deeply meaningful.

THE WEDDING NIGHT

Many are surprised to discover that a book of the Bible describes the romantic love between a man and a woman. It is, of course, the Song of Solomon. To those just discovering that, there is probably an even greater surprise. The book begins by describing what we would call the dating life of the couple, after which is a description of the wedding ceremony. Then comes the big surprise. The Song of Solomon describes the wedding night in intimate detail. I am tempted to say, "parental discretion is advised." The fact that Solomon called her my bride five times (4:8-12) confirms that verses 1-16 depict their wedding night (Deere).

The Groom's Awe (Part 1)

Her Eyes "Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil" (4:1a). The Hebrew word translated "fair" means "fair, beautiful, handsome." Solomon is telling his beloved how beautiful she is (see also 4:7 and 1:10).

Women did not ordinarily wear veils except at their weddings. The wedding veil was removed in the wedding chamber (Deere). Lifting the wedding veil, Solomon extols her eyes. They are like a dove's eyes, "soft, sparkling beauty" (Ryrie). A dove's eyes were known for their tranquility. "Since one's eyes are 'windows of his soul' reflecting his character, Solomon was praising her calm and innocent character (cf. 1:15)" (Deere).

Her Hair "Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead" (4:1b). "Mount Gilead was a mountain range east of the Jordan River in Gilead known for its fertile pastures and many flocks" (Deere). To us, this does not sound like a compliment. It is obviously a metaphor. The question is, "What is the meaning of the metaphor?" Glickman says the special kind of metaphors in this passage gain much of their meaning from the feeling associated with them (Glickman, 1976, p. 13). Thus, the emotion associated with the metaphor is the clue to its meaning (Glickman, 1976, p. 14). He goes on to say that, from a distance, the individual goats of a flock bend together to form a dark stream flowing smoothly down the mountain. The flowing movement of the flock reminded Solomon of the long flowing hair of his beloved. It was almost hypnotic to him (Glickman, 1976, p. 14). Other commentators agree. Seen from a distance, the dark hair of the goats was beautiful (Deere). Her hair was "long and flowing" (Ryrie). Her "long black locks (were) rippling and tumbling freely" (Constable).

Her Teeth "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them" (4:2). Her teeth are evenly matched (Constable). None are missing (Ryrie). They are white, regular, and complete (Barnes).

Her Mouth "Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely" (4:3a). Her lips were a beautiful shade of scarlet, making her mouth lovely.

Her Temples "Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate" (4:3b). Her temples, which probably included her cheeks (Ryrie; Deere), were ruby red (Ryrie). Women wore cosmetics (Carr, cited by Constable).

Her Neck "Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men" (4:4). Solomon compares her neck to the tower of David, which suggests her long neck gave a stately appearance (Constable), one of "strength and

dignity" (MacDonald). "She bore herself regally and with the strength of character" (Ryrie). "By comparing her neck to the tower, Solomon was emphasizing not so much her neck's symmetry and beauty as he was making a statement about her person. She had a queenly bearing and appearance as awesome and majestic as King David's tower" (Deere). In the ancient world, a long neck may have been a mark of beauty (Kinlaw, cited by Constable).

It was customary for soldiers to hang their shields on the tower of the one to whom they pledged their loyalty (Ez. 27:11; Deere). "Her neck would hold much of the jewelry that a woman might wear. Such jewelry was often layered, where strands of jewelry were placed one on top of the other. This formed a layered appearance that could ascend from the shoulder and reach as far as the top of the neck" (Hess, cited by Constable).

"The warriors probably referred to David's elite corps of men (2 Sam. 23:8-39)" (Deere). "The idea is that many of the best people loved and stood by the bride. She enjoyed popular acceptance by Solomon's subjects" (Constable).

Her Breast "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies" (4:5). This is another metaphor where the emotion is the clue to its meaning. "The baby deer is soft and gentle and everyone seeing these little deer longs to pet them and play with them. Thus, when the king compares her breasts to two fawns, he is really saying that he longs to caress her soft and tender breasts (Glickman, 1976, p. 13). Again, others concur. Her breasts were "soft and youthful" (Ryrie), "soft and lovable" (Constable), like "delicate and tender beauty" (Barnes). "Looking at the soft coat of a little fawn makes a person want to stroke it. Solomon wanted his bride to know that her soft and gentle beauty had kindled his desire for her, and he wished to express that desire with his caresses" (Deere).

"Probably Solomon drew comparisons between his bride and things common in pastoral settings because rural life was her background and was dominant in Israel. She would have understood his meaning easily" (Constable).

"Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (4:6). Some commentators say that at this point, the woman is speaking, not Solomon. For example, Delitzsch says, "She longs to be forth from Solomon's too ardent eulogies; she says that, as soon as it is dark, she will escape to the blooming aromatic fields of her native home, where she hopes to meet with her beloved shepherd…The modest Shulamith shuns the loving words of praise, for she requests that she may be permitted to betake herself to the lonely places planted with myrrh and frankincense near the king's palace, where she thinks to tarry in a frame of mind befitting this day till the approaching darkness calls her back to the king." There is, however, no indication in the text that there is a change of speaker. Solomon is still speaking (see "your" in verse 5, "I" in verse 6, and "you" again in verse 7).

"The 'mountain' and 'hill' are also metaphors for the girl's breasts. Myrrh and frankincense were expensive perfumes, so Solomon may have meant his wife's breasts were precious to him as well as attractive" (Constable).

"At this point, Solomon was overcome with desire for his bride and resolved to fulfill her silent request (see comments on 2:17). The mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense refer to the beloved's breasts. The primary point of comparison was not in the visual area but rather in the realms of function and value. Myrrh and incense were used to perfume the body as well as the bedroom to make a person and the surroundings more attractive (cf. 3:6). They would give their love to each other till the morning. Myrrh (see comments on 1:13) and incense (lit., 'frankincense,' a balsamic gum that exudes from the wood of shrubs and trees of the genus *Boswellia*) were not native to Palestine. Both were luxury items that had to be imported at

considerable cost. A mountain of myrrh or a hill of frankincense would have been greatly valued. To Solomon, therefore, his bride's breasts were attractive and of great value to him" (Deere).

Solomon praises eight parts of his bride's body: her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, temples (cheeks), neck, and breasts. "The metaphors and imagery that Solomon used in praising his beloved were drawn from a pastoral setting: doves, goats, sheep, pomegranates, fawns, gazelles, mountains, hills. Solomon's bride, having been raised in the country, understood and appreciated these images. Praise drawn from this well-known realm would have created a sense of peace and security in her on the anxious night when her new life began in new surroundings. Later (7:1-9), after she became accustomed to 'royal living, Solomon drew on royal imagery (as well as pastoral scenes) in praising her beauty" (Deere).

"You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you" (4:7). Solomon concludes his description of her loveliness by expressing his love and admiration "in the sweetest and tenderest terms" (Barnes). Deere says, "Solomon summarized his praise by ascribing perfect beauty to his bride. She had no flaw or physical defect. She was perfect in appearance. (Later, she called him "my flawless one," 5:2.)."

To Solomon, his beloved had a lovely face. That does not necessarily mean that she was a beauty queen. Many women have a lovely face, but they may not win a beauty contest. Some women have an appealing appearance and charm that's all their own. In the final analysis, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Constable says, "Perhaps she was not really as perfect as Solomon claimed here (cf. 1:5-6). 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' She was perfect to him."

"Compared with this lavish praise of the beloved's beauty, some wives today may feel uncomfortable about their own appearance. However, one must remember that initially, the daughters of Jerusalem did not seem to regard the beloved as a beautiful woman. Unlike the other royal ladies, she was not fair-skinned, a preeminent sign of beauty in the ancient world (see comments on 1:5-6). Yet, in her lover's eyes, she was beautiful, even though she did not meet the objective standards of beauty in her society. In other words, though few people in any age meet their own particular culture's standard of beauty, a woman is beautiful in the eyes of her lover simply because he loves her. Every husband who genuinely loves his wife can say, "To me, you are beautiful and there is no flaw in you" (Deere).

The Groom's Invitation

"Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards" (4:8). For the first time, Solomon calls his beloved his spouse (Barnes). In his invitation for her to come from Lebanon, apparently her home (Ryrie), he mentions several mountain peaks in the same range. Amana (Abana, 2 Kings 5:12) overlooks Damascus. Senir is another peak in the same range. Hermon is on the northeastern border of the holy land. These mountains contained lions and leopards.

"Solomon appealed to his bride to put all thoughts of her former life away. These included both pleasant thoughts—such as those of the beautiful mountains of the Anti-Lebanon and Hermon range in Lebanon, from which she had come—and fearful thoughts, such as those of wild animals. He urged her to give him her attention on this their wedding night" (Constable). "The lions and leopards may represent fearful places or circumstances. In other words, Solomon was asking his bride to leave her thoughts of home and put her fears behind her to concentrate completely on him, as he had done for her" (Deere).

The Groom's Awe (Part 2)

Her Look "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace" (4:9). Responding to Solomon's invitation (4:8), his bride looks at him with a gleam in her eye. Calling his bride his sister, an affectionate term for his wife (Deere; Ryrie), Solomon tells her that with one look, with one glance at a piece of her jewelry, his heart is ravished. His heart melts; he is smitten.

Her Love "How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!" (4:10). The word love refers to the physical expression of romantic love (see the next verse; Deere; Constable). The scents of her perfumes are more pleasant and pleasing to him than all the spices he has ever smelled. Their physical relationship is better than wine.

"Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon" (4:11). He tells her that her passionate kisses are sweeter than honey and her garments are as appealing to him as the fragrance of Lebanon. Lebanon was fragrant because of the cedar trees that covered its hills (Constable).

Deere says, "The verse might be more accurately translated, 'How delightful are your kisses. How much more pleasing are your caresses than wine.' Her physical expressions of love had a more refreshing and intoxicating effect on him than wine, just as *his* expressions had earlier affected *her* (cf. 1:2). Even her perfume added to the excitement of their love. The senses of sight, touch, smell, and sound were involved in their lovemaking" (Deere, italics his).

Her Purity "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (4:12). Again addressing his bride with the affectionate term sister, Solomon compares her to a garden "barred against intruders" (Barnes), a spring that is closed, and a fountain that is sealed, suggesting "inaccessibility" (Deere). "Gardens were walled to keep out intruders (cf. Isa. 5:5; cf. 'wall' in Song 2:9). Springs were sometimes covered, and fountains were sealed on the sides with clay to indicate private ownership" (Deere).

A closed garden, a shut-up spring, and a sealed fountain are metaphors depicting "virginity and purity" (Ryrie; Deere; Constable). Ryrie adds, "In this extended metaphor, Solomon expresses his desire to consummate his marriage (using the imagery of coming into a garden). "The most obvious feature of the Song of Songs is the sexually explicit nature of the material, sensitively guised in figurative language" (Tanner, cited by Constable).

"Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices" (4:13-14). Solomon compares his bride to pleasant, pleasing, fragrant plants, to "a rich exotic garden, with rare and valuable plant life" (Constable). Constable says this garden includes, "fruits, flowers, plants, trees, and spices," Deere explains: Pomegranates were a delicacy. Henna is a flower with white blossoms. Nard is a fragrant plant. Saffron is a powder from the pistils of a plant. Calamus is possibly a sweet cane. Other perfumes included cinnamon and aloes.

Barnes elaborates: "Seven kinds of spices (some of them with Indian names, e. g. aloes, spikenard, saffron) are enumerated as found in this symbolic garden. They are, for the most part, pure exotics that have formed for countless ages articles of commerce in the East and were brought at that time in Solomon's ships from southern Arabia, the great Indian Peninsula, and perhaps the islands of the Indian Archipelago…. The beauties and attractions of both north and

south—of Lebanon with its streams of sparkling water and fresh mountain air, of Engedi with its tropical climate and henna plantations, of the spice-groves of Arabia Felix, and of the rarest products of the distant mysterious Ophir—all combine to furnish one glorious representation, 'Thou art all fair!'"

This was an "unusual garden, valuable for its pleasant tastes, sights, and smells. Similarly, Solomon valued his bride for her pleasing attractiveness" (Deere). It was desirable (Constable).

"A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (4:15). The plants in this garden were well-watered "by abundant streams" (Barnes). "The water is pure and wholesome, like flowing water streaming down from Lebanon and is now accessible to Solomon.… The progression from a garden fountain to a well to "water streaming down" indicates that his beloved more than quenched Solomon's desire for her and fully satisfied him. As mountain streams are refreshing, so she refreshed him" (Deere).

The Consummation

Her Invitation "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits" (4:16). The bride invites the groom to enjoy *his* garden. "In poetic language, she tells him to come to the garden and claim it as his own" (MacDonald). She invites Solomon to take her completely. She called on the winds to carry the scents to which Solomon had referred so he would find full satisfaction" (Constable). She wishes "to be his with her charms as available as fruit on a tree" (Deere).

His Response "I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk" (5:1a). Solomon partakes of his garden and proclaims the experience as sweet as honey and as pleasant as wine. "The metaphors used to express the fully satisfying nature of his sexual experience" (Constable).

His Invitation "Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!" (5:1b). The speaker here has been taken to be God (Deere), the author (Glickman), and Solomon (Constable). "Solomon exulted in the joy that union with his beloved had brought him, and he commended it to others" (Constable).

"Biblically, when a lover gives himself to his beloved as these two have done, the relationship of each has changed to all the rest of the human race. That is why traditionally, in our culture, a wedding cannot be performed without witnesses. That is the reason behind the publishing of wedding bans [i.e., proclamations]. The taking of a woman by a man is a public matter. 'Furthermore, what one does with one's sexuality is of concern to God (Ex. 20:14). Likewise, it is a concern to everyone else. The woman now belongs to the man and the man to the woman. This changes all other personal relationships. Thus, the witnesses present at weddings represent the larger society. This is why weddings are considered legal matters. Self-giving love between the sexes is of social significance. Society must know. How else can marriage be a witness and testimony to the relationship of Christ and the church? One Savior, one spouse!" (Kinlaw, cited by Constable).

Summary: On their wedding night, Solomon is in awe of the beauty and purity of his bride, invites her to join him, she accepts, and they consummate their marriage.

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

This passage may be teaching the validity of an old adage that says men are sexually stimulated by sight and women by touch and words. Women warm up with words.

The New Testament discusses the sexual relationship between a married couple. Paul adds, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband." The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And, likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Cor. 7:3-4). At marriage, each partner acquires authority (today we would say "rights") over the body of his mate. This is not at all one-sided. Paul takes pains throughout this passage to point out that this is mutual. He labors the point, referring to both husbands and wives. Each time he mentions one, he mentions the other (1 Cor. 7:2, 3, 4).

Each spouse is to render due affection to the other partner. Affection refers to sex. "Due" means "debt." It is used in the New Testament of financial debt (Mt. 18:28). Sex in marriage is not a favor; it is the payment of a debt (Robertson and Plummer). It is an obligation.

These statements by Paul have led Bible teachers to the conclusion that some at Corinth were saying that sex in marriage made marriage a less holy state than celibacy, and perhaps some were going so far as to insist that married people separate (Hodge). Paul counters that concept with the thesis that sex in marriage is a debt.

"Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:5). The word "deprive" is the Greek word for "defraud." Refusal to pay one's marital debt amounts to fraud, withholding of what is owed (Robertson and Plummer). Even today, some super-spiritual saints decide that they are so holy they should not participate in the physical side of marriage. Paul's message to them is, "You are not spiritual; you are a thief." Toussaint translates this: "Stop defrauding."

There are exceptions. There can be temporary abstinence for spiritual purposes. Paul piles one particle upon another (Greek: "if," "maybe," "perhaps"), indicating that this advice is very tentative. This is definitely the exception and not the rule (Robertson and Plummer). Nevertheless, for fasting and prayer, married partners may abstain from sex provided: 1) it is by mutual consent and 2) it is temporary. The phrase "for a time" implies a definite period.

After the agreed-upon, temporary interruption for spiritual purposes, the two must "come together again." The phrase "come together" is all one word in Greek and implies cooperation. Marrieds are to cooperate with each other in sex. That has profound ramifications. It should not just be the act, but the proper attitude should be present.

The stated purpose for this return and cooperation is that Satan not tempt these two because of their lack of self-control. If the state of abstinence is continued, people's lack of self-restraint may make them vulnerable to immorality.

In putting these two passages together, I am suggesting that there is a sexual debt, an obligation, between married people and that it should be paid, as Paul says, by cooperating with one another and, as Solomon says, with romance. Remember, men are stimulated by sight and women are stimulated by touch and words. If you were married, enjoy sex biblically.

THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

No matter how deeply in love two people are, there are times when they drift apart. What do you do when that happens?

The married love of Solomon and his bride is not without its share of problems. In the next several chapters, the king and his bride work through them, providing insight into dealing effectively with basic marriage difficulties. "Here we are given the beloved's perspective (Constable). "Of the 111 lines, 80 in this section are the words of the girl. This is really *her* book" (Carr, cited by Constable).

"This section of the Song of Songs deals with the growth of the couple's marriage. The intimacy, joy, and physical desire of their wedding night did not fade as is often common in many marriages. They nourished their life together so that the joy of their married life increased rather than decreased. This does not suggest, however, that they did not encounter problems potentially harmful to their relationship. This section opens with the problem of indifference and offers a paradigm for the successful resolution of a serious marital problem" (Deere).

Some time has, no doubt, elapsed between the wedding night (4:1-5:1) and the next scene, which begins in the Song of Solomon 5:2. Between the two events, "a transient cloud of doubt or estrangement is now passing over her soul" (Barnes). "The couple should no longer be regarded as newlyweds" (Deere). The honeymoon is over, so to speak.

The Drifting Apart

His Request "I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, 'Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night" (5:2). Again, the woman is dreaming (3:1-4). In her dream, her husband is outside; his head and hair are covered with the dew of the night, which is heavy in Israel (Deere). She hears her husband's voice asking her to open the door to let him in the house.

They address each other with fictional terms. She calls him "my beloved;" he calls her "my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one."

Her Reluctance "I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?" (5:3). In her dream, she says to herself that she has retired for the night having washed and put on her pajamas. She asked herself if she should get up, put on her bathrobe, and get her feet dirty to let her husband in the house. Ryrie says she is refusing to let him in, but it would be more accurate to say she was hesitant. As MacDonald says, "She hesitated to open to him because she had already bathed and retired for the night. Constable comments, "She may have had a headache." Nevertheless, it demonstrates that she was not as quick to respond to him as she once was. "This trivial excuse for not opening the door revealed her indifference or apathy toward her husband. Somehow, she had grown cool toward his advances" (Deere, who calls what she did "indifference").

In other words, it seems that the wife is the one who is upset with her husband. Obviously, that is not always the case. At the same time, there is a sense in which men are males and, by the nature of that species, they are rather simple creatures. As part of premarital counseling, I've

often said to the bride, “Men are simple creatures. To make them happy, you need to do three things 1) burp’m, 2) bolster’m, and 3) bed’m. Translated: they are hungry; freed them. The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. They have an ego; praise them when appropriate. Ladies, if you want to keep your husband in the palm of your hand, praise him in front of other women. They have a sex drive; take him to bed.

Compared to men, women, being the female of the species, are more complicated. Many men have concluded that their wife is never satisfied. Now, obviously, that is not true of all women. Nevertheless, it is not just women who have said that.

Recently, my wife sent me something by Joyce Meyer. Here is what Joyce Meyer said to a group of women. Keep in mind that a woman sent this to me; a woman is the speaker, and she is speaking to a group of women, all of whom burst out laughing when they heard it. So, don’t stop reading (or listening to this message) because you think this is a male prejudice.

The Husband Store

A store that sells new husbands has opened in New York City, where a woman may go to choose a husband. Among the instructions at the entrance is a description of how the store operates:

You may visit this store ONLY ONCE! There are six floors and the value of the products increases as the shopper ascends the flights. The shopper may choose any item from a particular floor or may choose to go up to the next floor but cannot go back down except to exit the building!

So, a woman goes to the Husband Store to find a husband. On the first floor, the sign on the door reads:

Floor 1 These men Have Jobs. She is intrigued but continues to the second floor, where the sign reads:

Floor 2 These men Have Jobs and Love Kids. “That’s nice,” she thinks, “but I want more.” So she continues upward. The third-floor sign reads:

Floor 3 These men Have Jobs, Love Kids, and are Extremely Good Looking. “Wow,” she thinks, but feels compelled to keep going. She goes to the fourth floor and the sign reads:

Floor 4 These men have jobs, love kids, are drop-dead good-looking, and help with housework. “Oh, mercy me!” she exclaims, “I can hardly stand it!” Still, she goes to the fifth floor and the sign reads:

Floor 5 These men have jobs, love kids, are drop-dead gorgeous, help with housework, and have a strong romantic streak. She is so tempted to stay, but she goes to the sixth floor, where the sign reads:

Floor 6 You are visitor 31,456,012 to this floor. There are no men on this floor. This floor exists solely as proof that women are impossible to please. Thank you for shopping at the Husband Store.

That was the end of the story Joyce Meyers told. I’ve read what I found on the Internet. The Internet version, however, added something.

PLEASE NOTE: To avoid gender bias charges, the store’s owner opened a New Wives store just across the street.

The first floor has wives who love sex.

The second floor has wives who love sex, have money, and like beer.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth floors have never been visited.

"My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him" (5:4). She hesitated, but Solomon, at first, did not give up; he tried to open the door himself. Hearing his attempts to get in melted her hesitation. She yearned to be with him. Deere says, "The Hebrew expression translated my heart began to pound for him (NIV) is used elsewhere to express pity or compassion (e.g., Isa. 16:11; Jer. 31:20). It was not used to express sexual arousal as some scholars have maintained."

Her Response "I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock" (5:5). Perhaps realizing that she had erred in not responding more quickly, she got out of bed to open the door. Ryrie says, "The king had left *myrrh* on the door as a reminder that he had been there."

Her Realization "I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone" (5:6a). When Solomon realized her hesitation in responding to him, he became discouraged and "turned away." When she opened the door, she realized he was gone.

Her Reaction "My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer" (5:6b). Standing at the door, she sought him by calling to him, but there was no answer. He was gone. Her indifference caused the temporary absence of her husband (Deere).

Her dream demonstrates the drift that can occur between couples who are still deeply affectionate to each other. "Sometime after the wedding, the Shulammite failed to respond encouragingly to Solomon's demonstration of affection. This led him to withdraw from her. Shortly after that, she realized that a gap had opened up between them. They were no longer as intimate as they had been" (Constable).

Prior to this, the Song of Solomon mentioned the little foxes that spoil the vines (2:15). At that point, we discussed such things as 1) unmet expectations, 2) a repeated request that is not done, 3) differences of opinion that can become an issue. There are little foxes that spoil the vines. Those are minor problems. As described here, it seems to be more serious. They are apart. Married couples who are still in love with each other can drift apart.

Victor William Harris, a professor at the University of Florida, has written an article entitled "Three Stages of Marriage" (https://ifas.ufl.edu/media/smartcouplesifasufledu/docs/pdfs/Three-Stages-of-Marriage.pdf). In it, he says, "Most marriages go through at least three distinct stages: 1) romantic love, 2) disillusionment and distraction, and 3) dissolution, adjustment with resignation, or adjustment with contentment (Larson, 2003)."

Harris describes the three stages in more detail. "Stage 1 typically occurs prior to marriage and within the first several years after couples tie the knot. It is characterized by passion and strong feelings of romance. Stage 2 unfolds when couples may become disillusioned with the reality that it takes hard work to make marriages and families happy and stable. Distractions such as balancing school, work, finances, children, and extracurricular activities can decrease the time couples have to spend with each other to communicate and nurture their marital friendship. Stage 3 inevitably occurs as couples contemplate whether or not they would like their marriages to continue. The reality is that more than 40% of couples eventually decide to dissolve their marital unions. The rest decide to adjust to marriage with contentment or resignation—the latter resigning themselves to the fact that their marriages probably aren't going to get much better. However, a growing number of married couples have decided to work on their marital friendship by gaining new relationship knowledge and skills. These couples tend to adjust to the realities of long-term marriages with contentment. In fact, two independent statewide studies found that of the people surveyed who considered their marriages to be in serious trouble at some point (i.e.,

who faced Stage 3), more than 90% said that they were glad they were still together (Johnson et al., 2002; Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & George, 2003)."

So, what should a couple do when that happens?

The Desperate Search

Her Run-In "The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil away from me" (5:7). She got dressed and began to search the city to find her husband. Mistaking her for a criminal (Ryrie), the watchmen of the city stopped her, struck her, and stripped her of her veil to see who she was. Constable makes the suggestion that "the fact that in her dream the watchmen beat her may indicate that she subconsciously felt that someone should punish her for refusing him."

Her Request "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick! (5:8). She requested that her friends help her find her beloved and if they do to tell him that she is lovesick for him. The Hebrew word translated "sick" means "to feel weak, to be sick, grieved, sorry." Constable says that "lovesick" describes the frustration from sexual abstinence rather than the exhaustion from sexual activity.

When you have drifted apart, you may need help in getting back together.

Summary: As soon as you realize you and your beloved have drifted apart, seek to be reconnected.

How is that done? The following passages answer that question, but there are some suggestions in this passage. A desire must be present. See, "and my heart yearned for him" (5:4). If there is desire, the drift will continue. An awareness must take place. When she went to the door, she realized he was gone (5:6). A decision must be made. See "I sought him" (5:6). Somebody has to start. In this case, it was the wife. That may mean just start acting differently. It also may mean confronting the issue in conversation. If that's the case, make sure it's done in the right way at the right time. Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (Jn. 16:12). Help may be needed. She sought the help of the daughters. (5:8).

The article I mentioned earlier says, "Researchers have found that couples utilize at least four general strategies (Duncan, Childs, & Larson, 2010): 1. Read relationship enhancement books together. This is one of the easiest ways we can improve our marital friendships." The article lists a number of books, including a Christian book. It says, "For information regarding sexual intimacy, The Act of Marriage by Tim and Beverly LaHaye…. 2. Use helpful couple relationship websites…. 3. Attend community/religious-sponsored classes…. 4. Take advantage of marriage counseling. All couples hit some snags as they seek to nurture their marital friendships throughout their lives. Rather than waiting until a snag becomes serious, wise couples seek help early."

The wife in the Song of Solomon did that. As soon as she realized there was a problem, she delt with it immediately.

RENEWING THE ROMANCE

All married couples experience it, but not all couples know what to do about it. All couples drift apart. They become emotionally distant. The problem is some couples don't know how to renew their affection. What must couples do to restore their romance? Where do they begin?

Step One: Remember How Valuable

Her Description

The Questions "What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?" (5:9). The bride has asked her friends to help her find her missing husband (5:8). In essence, they say, "What is so great about him?" (Constable). "What is so special about him?" (MacDonald). "This question gave her an opportunity to praise her husband, which helped rekindle her former feelings of love" (Deere). It "laid the foundation for their reconciliation (Deere).

His Complexion "My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand" (5:10). "When reminded by the daughters of Jerusalem of how much Solomon meant to her, she bursts into an ecstatic description of him" (Ryrie). "She raves about his complexion, head, locks, eyes, cheeks, lips, hands, body, legs, countenance" (MacDonald). His complexion was white and ruddy (Hebrew: "red"), the kind that was most admired in youth (Barnes). She extols his complexion as 'chief among ten thousand (MacDonald). We would say, "He is one in a million."

His Head "His head is like the finest gold" (5:11a). His bearing is "regal" (Ryrie), "in the sense of noble and precious as fine gold" (Barnes).

His Hair "His locks are wavy, and black as a raven" (5:11b). He has wavy black hair, as black as a raven. This was also his description of her hair (4:1).

His Eyes "His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set" (5:12). She is comparing his eyes to milk-white doves sitting on a stream of water (Barnes), or she is picturing the dark pupils of his eyes set off by the whiteness of his eyes (Deere). At any rate, he has beautiful eyes. Looking into his eyes is like looking at the tranquil scene of swans floating on the water. His eyes are "peaceful and gentle" (Deere; see 1:15, 4:1). They have a calming effect.

His Cheeks "His cheeks are like a bed of spices, banks of scented herbs" (5:13a). His cheeks are as attractive to her as spices and scented herbs. They are as delightful and as desirable as perfume (Deere).

His Lips "His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh" (5:13b). His lips are as appealing as the fragrance of flowers. They are "soft and beautiful" (Deere).

His Hands "His hands are rods of gold set with beryl" (5:14a). Like his head (5:11), his hands are as valuable and precious as gold.

His Abdomen "His body is carved ivory inlaid with sapphires" (5:14b). The Hebrew word translated "body" means "belly" (see "abdomen" in the NASB). Barnes says, "The Hebrew term applies to the whole body, from the shoulders to the thighs." His abdomen is as hard as smooth ivory and is as handsome as sapphires. (Deere).

His Legs "His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of fine gold" (5:15a). His legs were strong and sturdy as pillows of marble set on a base of fine gold.

His Appearance "His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars" (5:15b). The Hebrew word translated "countenance" means "sight, appearance" (see "appearance" in the NASB, NIV, ESV) and the one rendered "excellent" means "chosen, selected" (see "choice" in the NASB, NIV, ESV). His appearance is like a choice cedar from Lebanon. In his "overall appearance," he is tall, like the imposing cedars of Lebanon; he is breathtaking (Deere). His "entire appearance" is as impressive as the cedars of Lebanon (Ryrie).

His Mouth "His mouth is most sweet" (5:16a). His mouth, including his speech and his kisses, is sweet.

His Relationship "yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem!" (5:16b). The Hebrew word translated "lovely" means "desirable, pleasant" (see "desirable" in the NASB, ESV and "lovely" in the NIV). He is "handsome in every way" (Deere). She concludes her description by saying that she desires him; she wants him; he is her beloved and friend.

In response to the question from her friends, she describes her beloved's physical appearance and her relationship with him. He is strikingly handsome to her, exceedingly valuable as gold, her dear friend and the one she loves. She wants him back. "The comparisons illustrate his value and attractiveness to her, more than just giving us a picture of his actual physical appearance" (Constable). "The metaphors in Song 5:11-15 were not meant to be taken as visual comparisons for the most part. They indicate her husband's value and attractiveness" (Deere).

Her Desire

The Questions "Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?" (6:1). Having convinced her friends that her love for her husband is "deep and genuine" (Constable), the friends of the woman agreed to search for Solomon with her. So, they asked more questions (5:9). "The cause of the couple's separation (the indifference of the beloved) was overcome, as evidenced by her praise of her lover (5:10-16). Yet they were still separated at this point. The question of the daughters (5:8) concerning his whereabouts (6:1) addressed the problem of their being apart. Having heard of his handsome appearance, the daughters were now anxious to help find him. Which way did he go? they wanted to know" (Deere).

The Answer "My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies" (6:2). She knew where to find him. "Perhaps the catharsis of verbalizing his praise had healed her emotional estrangement, and in her dream, the knowledge of his whereabouts popped into her mind" (Constable). "This indicated that their separation was more in the emotional realm than in the spatial for she apparently had always known his whereabouts" (Deere). He is gone there to feed his flock and to gather lilies. He buried himself and his work! He went into his "man cave."

"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies" (6:3). She adds he may be buried in his work, but I love him, he loves me, and we belong to each other. "Her statement of mutual possession is the inverse of her earlier passionate declaration (2:16; cf. 7:10). This indicates that the emotional distance had been overcome on her part and she was confident that it had also been overcome on his part. All that was needed for a complete reconciliation was a statement of forgiveness or acceptance from the lover" (Deere).

To sum up, the first step in renewing romance is to remember how much your beloved, and the relationship the two of you have, means to you. The help others give is asking you to remember your beloved.

Reminisce often. The next time you're steaming over his dirty socks on the floor, take a moment to replay a happy time you shared together. Even better, mention it to him. Taking a walk down memory lane can help jolt things into perspective and remind you why you love him so darn much, smelly socks and all.

Step two: Return to Praise

Barnes entitles this paragraph, "Renewed declaration of love after brief estrangement."

His Praise

Her Beauty "O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners!" (6:4). At this point, she finds her beloved, who is in his garden (6:2-3) and his first words to her are words of praise. He pays her the same compliments he gave her on their wedding night (4:1-3; Ryrie). "By using some of the same flattering comparisons he had employed on their wedding night (vv. 5-7), he assured her that his love for her had not diminished since then" (Constable; Deere).

He tells her how beautiful she is to him. She is as beautiful as Tirzah, a city known for its beauty (Ryrie) and as lovely as Jerusalem, a city called "the perfection of beauty" (Lam. 2:15). These two cities were two of the fairest cities of the land (Barnes). He tells her she is beautiful and "awe-inspiring" (Barnes) of a marching army. "Solomon felt weak-kneed as a result of gazing on his wife's beauty, as he would have felt facing a mighty opposing army" (Constable). Her beauty was so awesome that it "unnerved" him as if he faced an army with banners (Deere).

Her Eyes "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me" (6:5a). Her eyes (4:1) are so "stunningly beautiful" they "overwhelm him" (Deere). They "unnerved him" (Constable).

Her Hair "Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead" (6:5b). Her hair (4:1) is long, black, and beautiful.

Her Teeth "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep which have come up from the washing; every one bears twins, and none is barren among them" (6:6). Her teeth (4:2) are as white as washed sheep. They are evenly matched (Constable on 4:2) and none are missing (Ryrie on 4:2). They are white, regular, and complete (Barnes on 4:2).

Her Temples "Like a piece of pomegranate are your temples behind your veil" (6:7). Her temples (4:3), which probably included her cheeks (Ryrie; Deere on 4:3), were ruby red (Ryrie on 4:3). Women wore cosmetics (Carr, cited by Constable on 4:3).

Her Uniqueness "There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her" (6:8-9). Some commentators say the "sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins without number" (6:8) refer to members of Solomon's harem (Delitzsch; Ryrie). Others say they are women who frequented his court (Constable; Patterson; Carr, cited by Constable). "Solomon used these women for comparison to show how highly not only he but many other people regarded his beloved" (Constable). She is unique (Ryrie; Deere).

As far as Solomon is concerned, she's perfect (Hebrew: complete, perfect) and he is not the only one who thinks so. Being the only child of her mother, she is her mother's favorite, but it is not just her mother and Solomon who think she is special. Other women who see her call her blessed and women from queens to concubines praise her.

Solomon's love and appreciation for her have grown since their wedding night; "he assured her that she was totally unique," an opinion shared by her mother, maidens, queens, and concubines (Deere).

"Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?" (6:10). Solomon tells her that these other women praise her "by stating that she was as fair as the dawn… the moon… the sun, and the stars" (Deere). "The glorious beauty of the bride bursts upon them like a second dawn, as she comes forth to meet them at the commencement of another day" (Barnes). She is as beautiful as a full moon on a dark night and as bright as the sun on a cloudless day. Some take her awesomeness as an army with banners to be a reference to the stars (NIV; Deere).

Her Response

The Garden "I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine had budded and the pomegranates had bloomed" (6:11). The speaker is the woman (Barnes; Constable; Deere). "She had gone down to Solomon's garden (v. 2), more to see if his love for her was still in bloom than to examine the natural foliage" (Constable). Deere says, "As a person would look in the spring for new growth, buds on grape vines, and pomegranate blossoms, so she looked for fresh evidence of their love. When she found him there, his first words were words of praise (6:4-10), indicating that their love was, in fact, flourishing."

The Chariot "Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people" (6:12). Deere says this is one of the most difficult verses in the Bible to interpret. He adds, "The Hebrew can be translated in several ways. One translation that has much to commend it is this: 'I became enraptured, for you placed me on the chariots of the people of the prince.'" He also says, "When the husband's first words in the garden were words of praise, she 'became enraptured;' she was beside herself with joy. He then placed her on his own chariot at the head of his entourage." Ryrie agrees, "The meaning seems to be this: Before she knew it, Solomon had placed his wife in his own chariot, a sure sign of their reconciliation.

Her Friend's Reaction

The People "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you!" (6:13a). As Solomon and his wife left, people ("we") begged her to stay. The intensity of their desire is indicated by the fact that they ask her to return four times (Deere; see also Ryrie). The people they passed called out to her to come back, so they might look on her beauty (Constable).

Solomon "What would you see in the Shulamite; as it were, the dance of the two camps?" (6:13b). This is Solomon's response to the plea of the people. "To the women's request to gaze upon the Shulamite, Solomon observes that they like to gaze on her as if they were watching a festive dance" (Ryrie). "They gazed at her and her beauty, he said, as if they were viewing a graceful dance" (Deere).

To sum up, the second step in renewing the romance is to return to praising the positive, not nag the negative.

My wife and I once counseled a lady whose marriage was in deep trouble. After listening to her for only a short time, I concluded that apart from a miracle of God, their marriage was not

repairable. The reason I concluded that was that there was no foundation whatsoever for their marriage. There had never been a romance for them to recapture. She had never been in love with him, nor had she ever really loved him at any level. As a teenager, without really being in love with him, she got pregnant by him, and when that happened, her father insisted they get married. So, from day one, there was no romance. When I heard that and listened to the rest of her story, I knew the marriage was beyond hope, humanly speaking.

Step Three: Reunite Physically

Constable says, "This section, which provides a window into the intimate relationship of Solomon and his wife, shows how their love had matured since their wedding (cf. 4:1-11)." Deere says, "This section portrays the maturing of the couple's marriage. The progress in their love is revealed in two ways. First, the imagery in these verses is much bolder and more intimate than the imagery the lover used on the wedding night (4:1-11). Such an increase in sexual freedom is a normal part of a healthy, maturing marriage. Second, the climactic nature of the refrain in 7:10 also speaks of this maturation."

Her Physical Beauty

Her Feet "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter!" (7:1a). Although not of royal birth, Solomon addresses his beloved as a prince's daughter. To him, she is his princess. He says her feet are beautiful "in sandals," indicating he's not talking about her bare feet. Barnes suggests that her feet are seen in motion in a dance.

Her Thighs "The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman" (7:1b). "Curves of your thighs" is a literal translation (see NASB: "the curves of your hips;" NIV: "graceful legs;" ESV: "your rounded thighs"). Barnes says the word "curves" might be rendered as "circling movements." Her thighs reminded him of the work of the skilled artist.

Her Navel "Your navel is a rounded goblet; it lacks no blended beverage" (7:2a). The Hebrew word translated "blended beverage" means "mixed wine." Solomon compares her navel to a well-shaped goblet full of mixed wine. If this is to be taken literally, the point is that wine "rising to the brim adds to the beauty of the vessel and gives a more pleasing image to the eye" (Barnes). Deere says if this is taken as a visual comparison, it is grotesque. If taken figuratively, the meaning is that her body is as intoxicating as wine (see 4:10; Deere; Constable; Ryrie).

Her Wrist "Your waist is a heap of wheat set about with lilies" (7:2b). Taking the comparison at face value, Barnes says, "The contrast is one of colors, the flowers, it may be, representing the purple of the robe. 'The heap of wheat is not seen because it is covered by the lilies.'" Deere says that if this comparison is to be interpreted visually, it is absurd. He adds, "Wheat was one of the main food sources in ancient Palestine … Thus his wife was both his 'food' (wheat) and 'drink' (wine) in the sense that her physical expressions of love nourished and satisfied him."

Her Breast "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle" (7:3). Earlier Solomon said, "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies" (4:5). See the comments there: her breasts were "soft and youthful" (Ryrie), "soft and lovable" (Constable), like "delicate and tender beauty" (Barnes). "Looking at the soft coat of a little fawn makes a person want to stroke it. Solomon wanted his bride to know that her soft and gentle beauty had kindled his desire for her and he wished to express that desire with his caresses" (Deere).

Her Neck "Your neck is like an ivory tower" (7:4a). Earlier, Solomon said, "Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men" (4:4). As was suggested before, her neck gave her a stately appearance, one of strength and dignity. Being made out of ivory, made it beautiful as well.

Her Eyes "Your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim" (7:4b). Heshbon, a Moabite city, was famous for its water reservoirs (Constable). Her eyes were as sparkling as water in a pool (Ryrie). "The soft glance of her eyes reflects the peace and beauty of the Heshbon pools" (Lehrman, "The Song of Songs," cited by Constable).

Her Nose "Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus" (7:4c). "The tower of Lebanon was evidently a beautiful tower that marked the unusually attractive city of Damascus. Similarly, the Shulammite's nose attractively represented her total beauty" (Constable).

Her Head "Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel" (7:5a). Mount caramel was known for its beauty (Ryrie). It was majestic (Constable). "She had a queenly bearing that was majestic and awesome" (Deere).

Her Hair "And the hair of your head is like purple; a king is held captive by your tresses" (7:5b). A woman with purple hair today would strike us as odd. Solomon doesn't say she has purple hair; he says her hair is like purple. "In his day, people considered purple threads "the most beautiful, precious, and regal" (Constable). "The beloved's hair (cf. 4:1; 6:5) was so beautiful that the powerful monarch Solomon was held captive by its beauty.

Solomon is captivated by her charm. He admires her from foot to head.

His Desire

Her Beauty "How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights!" (7:6). In verses 1-5, Solomon compared his beloved to "famous places in his far-flung realm: Heshbon, Bath Rabbim, Damascus, and Mount Carmel…. [now] he sees her as a stately palm tree, and would like to embrace her" (MacDonald). In other words, Solomon continues to talk about his beloved but begins to talk about his desire for her. (7:10). The Hebrew word translated "fair" means "beautiful, fair." To him, she is beautiful, pleasant, and delightful. Solomon is attracted to his beloved.

Her Breast "This stature of yours is like a palm tree and your breasts like its clusters" (7:7). Her stature is like a stately palm and her breasts are like a cluster of dates (Deere).

"I said, 'I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches.' Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine" (7:8a). Seeing her breast excites Solomon. His desire is aroused; he wants to hold her breast. He speaks "of his desire for her breasts, comparing them to desirable and tasty clusters of grapes" (Deere).

Her Breath "the fragrance of your breath like apples" (7:8b). He is close enough to smell the fragrance of her breath. Her breath is sweet-smelling like apples (Deere).

Her Kisses "And the roof of your mouth like the best wine" (7:9a). Her kisses taste like the finest wine.

Her Response

Her Desire "The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of sleepers" (7:9b). Without introducing her as the speaker, the author gives her "eager response" (Constable). She interrupts him, finishing his sentence (Barnes). "The rapid interchange of speakers (the beloved is not introduced as the speaker in 7:9) 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 voice" (Deere).

She uses the same image of wine (see 7:9a), which she describes as moving gently over the lips and sliding smoothly down the throat. She expresses her desire to satisfy his wish for her (Deere).

Her Abandonment "I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me" (7:10). She exalts "in her complete abandonment to her husband and in his complete satisfaction with her (2:16; 6:3). These joys increase through the years of a healthy marriage" (Constable).

To sum up, the third step in renewing romance is to reunite physically. As he tells her how attractive she is to him, his desire is aroused, he kisses her, and his words and kisses arouse her.

Summary: To rekindle romantic love in marriage, remember what your mate means to you, return to praising each other, and reunite physically. Revisit the wedding night.

As was illustrated before in the Song of Solomon, this passage emphasizes again that men are sexually aroused by sight, and words and kisses sexually arouse women.

When couples drift apart, getting connected again can be difficult. The temptation is to start the blame game. It is to focus on what went wrong, which degenerates into who was wrong. There are times when a problem needs to be addressed. There are also times when it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to resolve a difference. Whatever happens, as quickly as possible, renew the romance.

The best illustration I know of what I think is the formula in this passage renewing love is something Jesus said in Revelation 2. He told the church at Ephesus, "You have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). Notice He did not say they lost it; He says they left it. Then He says, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works" (Rev. 2:5). That's the formula for renewing your love for the Lord and your romantic love for your spouse: remember, repent, (return), redo re-do what you did at the beginning.

KEEPING THE ROMANTIC FIRE BURNING

The Song of Solomon is a song that traces the drama of a romantic relationship, from dating to the wedding and the wedding night, from drifting apart to renewing the romance. The challenge for a married couple is to keep the romantic fire burning so there's no more drifting apart. The book seems to end with suggestions of how to do just that.

Analyzing this passage (7:11-8:14) is difficult because, for one thing, the speaker keeps changing. To arrive at a proper interpretation, start by isolating the various units within the passage. Then, determine the message for each of those units. After that, to determine the overall message of the whole passage, take the message of the whole book into consideration. Such a process leads to the conclusion that since the previous person has dealt with renewing romantic love, the book includes how to keep the fire of romantic love burning.

Runaway Together (Take a Trip)

The Trip "Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom" (7:11-12a). She invites Solomon to visit several different places, including a field, villages (plural), and a vineyard. The buds, blossoms, and blooms indicate that it is springtime. "Signs of spring were budding vines of grapes, blooming pomegranates, and fragrant mandrakes" (Deere). "Apparently, a year has elapsed since their courtship, for it is spring" (Ryrie). "The references to spring suggest the freshness and vigor of love" (Constable). "Spring is a universal symbol of 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 (2:10-13)" (Deere).

The Thought "There I will give you my love" (7:12). She is taking "the initiative in lovemaking" (Ryrie). Secure in her love, she now feels free "to initiate sex directly rather than indirectly as earlier (1:2a; 2:6)" (Constable). "In the preceding unit (7:1-10), the husband took the initiative in their lovemaking; in this unit (7:11-13) she took the initiative. This is the first time in the Song where the beloved made a direct, unambiguous request for sex. Previously her desire had been expressed in the third person (e.g., 1:2; 2:6). Now, having grown more secure in the love of her husband, she felt free to initiate the lovemaking" (Deere).

"The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved" (7:13). Mandrakes were a fruit resembling small apples; they were considered an aphrodisiac (Constable, who refers to Gen. 30:14-16; see also Deere). "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" (Net Bible, cited by Constable).

"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 is old" (*Bible Exposition Commentary*).

Retain Affection

In verses 1-4, she reveals a *growing desire* for greater intimacy (Deere). Her desire for him *continued to increase* throughout their marriage (Constable).

Public Affection "Oh, that you were like my brother, who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised" (8:1). It was "improper" for a married couple to express affection in public (Ryrie), but not between closest blood relatives" (Constable). Thus, she wishes her husband were her brother that she might "embrace and welcome him everywhere without restraint or shame" (Barnes) at any time" (Deere). "Clark suggested that she wishes her husband were her *little brother* and that she might treat him in a more affectionate manner in public, including kissing him without suspicion. Solomon once called her his sister.

Playful Affection "I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, she who used to instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate" (8:2). The Hebrew word translated "leave" means "to drive, lead, guide, conduct." Deere says it "is always used of a superior leading an inferior and even the role of the mother." Thus, she pictures herself "playfully leading her husband as an older sister or mother would lead a younger brother or son" (Constable). She "playfully assumes the role of an older sister" (Deere). As the lady of the house would serve wine to her guests, so she imagines serving wine to her husband. They were "close friends as well as lovers (5:1, 16)." They "had a multifaceted relationship" (Deere).

Physical Affection "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me" (8:3). Deere says the Hebrew of this verse may be translated as "May his left arm be under my head and may his right arm embrace me" (2:6). She is in his arms. She desires his caresses (Constable).

"I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (8:4). With the addition of "by the gazelles or by the does of the field," this refrain has appeared twice before in this book (2:7, 3:5). It marks the end of a section. Solomon was speaking in the first instant, and in the second, the woman was the speaker. Here, she is the speaker.

As was pointed out before, the point is "Let love develop naturally; do not force it" (Ryrie; Constable). Be patient. Do not get in a hurry. "This adjuration … expresses one of the main thoughts of the poem, namely, that genuine love is a shy and gentle affection which dreads intrusion and scrutiny; hence the allusion to the gazelles and hinds, shy and timid creatures. The complementary thought is that of 8:6-7, where love is again described, and by the bride, as a fiery principle" (Barnes). "In other words, 'love is not a thing to be bought or forced or pretended, but a thing to come spontaneously, to be given freely and sincerely'" (MacDonald).

"This section (5:2-8:4) that began with estrangement ends with the lovers entwined in each other's arms" (Constable).

Reminiscence

The Question "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? (8:5a). The scene shifts to her birthplace (see "there your mother brought you forth" in the latter part of verse 5; Barnes). It begins with a question being asked by the villagers with whom she grew up as they see the couple approaching (Ryrie; MacDonald; Constable says these are the words of the daughters of Jerusalem). As they approach her mother's house, she is leaning on the arm of her

beloved (Barnes). "No answer is given to the question because none is needed. (In 3:6 the question was asked of the groom, 'Who is this coming up from the desert?')" (Deere).

The Wilderness "The wilderness or desert had two symbolic associations in the Old Testament. First, the wilderness was associated with Israel's 40-year period of trial. In their love, the couple had overcome trials that threatened their relationship (e.g., the insecurity of the beloved, 1:5-6; the foxes, 2:15; and indifference, 5:2-7). Second, the desert or wilderness was used as an image of God's curse (cf. Jer. 22:6; Joel 2:3). The couple coming out of the wilderness suggests that, in a certain sense, they had overcome the curse of disharmony pronounced on Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16)" (Deere).

The Speaker They have returned from their "wilderness" to their apple tree. "I awakened you under the apple tree" (8:5b). In the Hebrew text, "you" is masculine. Thus, following the Hebrew text, some commentators say she is the speaker (Deere; Constable). The majority of church fathers assign these words to the king (Barnes), but some commentators say that he is the speaker (Ryrie, MacDonald).

The Awakening Some commentators take "awakened" literally. When he first met her, he found her under an apple tree (Constable). Other commentators take it figuratively as "the new life or rather a new way of perceiving life, which her love had brought to him" (Deere).

This is a reminiscence of their first meeting (Ryrie), the places where their romance began (MacDonald), their first meeting when he found her sleeping under an apple tree (Constable), or where she awakened him to love (Deere). In ancient poetry, the apple tree was a symbol of love because of its beauty, fragrance, and sweet fruit (Constable).

"There your mother brought you forth; there she who bore you brought you forth" (8:5c). His love was awakened, "Much as he was the product of his parents' love and was brought into the world by physical birth, the lover had now received a second 'birth' or 'awakening' through the love of his beloved" (Deere).

Reflect on the Value of Love

The Request "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm" (8:6). The "seal" was an engraved stone used for authenticating a document or other possession. It could be suspended by a cord around the neck (over the heart; Gen. 38:18). "Seal" could also refer to a 'seal ring' worn on the hand. It was highly precious to the owner. In other words, she asks Solomon to regard her as a prized seal and treasure her (see Constable). Deere explains it this way: "A seal was used to indicate ownership of a person's valued possessions. So the beloved asked to be her lover's most valued possession, a possession that would influence his thoughts (over your heart) and his actions (over your arm). "She wants to be her husband's most treasured possession" (Ryrie). Such a demanding request requires an explanation (Deere). She describes the love they shared (Constable).

The Explanation She explains ("for"), "for love is as strong as death" (8:6b). It is "as universal and irresistible as death" (Deere).

Her second explanation is "jealousy as cruel as the grave" (8:6c). "'Jealousy' is here another term for 'love,' expressing the inexorable force and ardor of this affection, which can neither yield nor share possession of its object" (Barnes). Love is as "exclusive and possessive (in the sense of being genuinely concerned for the one loved) as the grave" (Deere). It is as controlling as the grave (Constable). "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" (Longman, cited by Constable).

She adds, "Its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame" (8:6d). Love is as "passionate" as fire (Constable; Deere). "And all this is true because love is supported by the Creator, who possesses all power. The words like a mighty flame are, literally, "like the very flame of the Lord" (cf. NIV marg.). Thus, the Lord is portrayed as the Source of this powerful love" (Deere).

She goes on to say, "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (8:7). "Love cannot be quenched" (Ryrie). It overcomes all opposition (Barnes). It is as "invincible and persevering as many waters and rivers" (Deere).

"If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (8:7b). True love cannot be bought. "To attempt to buy it is to despise it" (Ryrie). "It is priceless. All one's wealth would be totally inadequate to purchase such love. In fact, such money would be … scorned because love cannot be bought. Any attempt to "buy" love depersonalizes it. If love is priceless, how then can it be obtained? The answer is that it must be given. And ultimately, love is a gift from God. The epilogue explains how the beloved received this priceless gift of love" (Deere).

The Love they shared "was as powerful as death, as controlling as the grave, as passionate as fire, as irresistible as a river, and priceless. Such love comes from God and is 'the flame of the Lord' (v. 6)" (Constable).

Love is irresistible as death, possessive as jealousy, passionate as burning fire, invincible as a flood, and priceless. It is valuable, powerful, possessive, passionate, permanent, and priceless.

It has been said that "these verses [8:5-7] summarize the theme of the book" (Constable). "This section sums up the message of the Song of Songs with an enigmatic picture of love (8:5) and the following explanation (8:6-7).

"She was prepared to be a loyal and faithful wife, but Solomon ultimately had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). No wonder she, not he, delivers the moral lesson of the book. He was totally unqualified to speak on the issue of godly, dedicated love. He knew the physical side of it, but apparently, he did not know the love she cherished" (Tanner, cited by Constable).

Remember How Special Your Mate is

The Question "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for?" (8:8). Obviously, the speakers in this verse are the brothers of the bride ("our sister"). Equally obvious is the fact that they were speaking about her when she was young because they say she had "no breasts," but when she got married, she had fully developed breasts (1:3; 4:5; 7:3, 7:7-8; 8:10). Therefore, verses 8-12 are a flashback (Constable). They reveal the brothers' attitude toward their sister when she was young (Ryrie). The brothers are asking themselves what plans they should make for her marriage ("the day she is spoken for").

The Possibilities "If she is a wall, we will build upon her a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar" (8:9). The brothers answer their question figure to the language. They contemplate two possibilities. Either she will be a wall or a door.

One possibility is that she will have been a wall when it is time for her to get married. She will have "resisted temptation" (Ryrie), will have been "steadfast in chastity and virtue"

(Barnes), "chase, pure, and faithful" (MacDonald), will have "displayed good character and judgment" (Deere). In that case, they will reward her (Ryrie), "give her a silver dowry" (MacDonald), will "allow her a large measure of freedom and reward her" (Deere, who adds "Towers of silver may be translated 'a turret (sing.) of silver,' referring to a beautiful, much-valued head ornament, or it may simply refer figuratively to their adorning her as people adorned defense towers with silver").

Another possibility is that she will have been a door when it is time for her to get married. She will have been loose (Ryrie), "light-minded and accessible to seduction (Prov. 7:11-12)" (Barnes), "promiscuous and accessible as a door" (MacDonald), "reckless and prone to immorality" (Deere). In that case, they will "be strict with her" (Ryrie), "provide against assailants the protection of a cedar bar or panel" (Barnes), "hide her away in seclusion" (MacDonald), "restrict her freedom (figuratively spoken of as enclosing her with cedar panels**,** like barricading a door with planks)" (Deere).

Her Virtue "I am a wall, and my breasts like towers; then I became in his eyes as one who found peace" (8:10). Now, as an adult, she can say I have been a wall, not a door. Therefore, she did not need the restrictions her brothers suggested (Deere). She can also say her breasts have developed; they are like towers. She has become a great delight in the eyes of Solomon (Constable). "Having grown up and matured physically, she was then pure for her husband, which enabled her to give him (Solomon) contentment. The Hebrew word for contentment provides an interesting wordplay because it sounds much like Solomon's name" (Deere).

His Vineyard "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon; he leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for its fruit a thousand silver coins" (8:11). Solomon leased his vineyard at Baal Hamon (location unknown) to keepers (Deere and Constable: her brothers) for a thousand silver coins. Her brothers put her to work in it (1:6) and there she met Solomon (Deere; Constable).

Her Vineyard "My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand, and those who tend its fruit two hundred" (8:12). Her vineyard is her person (1:6; Deere; Constable), "her beauty and virtue faithfully guarded by these same brothers in time past" (Barnes). "Each tenant was to grow enough grapes to make 1,000 shekels (about 25 pounds) of silver for the landowner. And each tenant would receive 200 shekels (about 5 pounds) of silver as his wages" (Deere). All she had to give was herself. "She freely chose to give herself to Solomon. Even her possessions (including her income, 1,000 shekels) were his" (Deere).

Their Voice "You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen for your voice; let me hear it!" (8:13). Solomon is the speaker (Deere; Constable). He is saying to her, "Who dwells in the garden?") that he is listening for her voice (2:14). The last two verses recall their earlier passionate request during their courtship days, which shows their love has not lost its intensity (Deere); they reveal their "final mature love" (Constable).

"Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices" (8:14). She is the speaker (Deere; Constable). Earlier, she said, "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether" (2:17). She changes the phrase "the mountains of Bether" to the "mountains of spice." "She no longer thinks of the possibility of separation (the mountains of Bether.… His haunts and hers are henceforth the same (4:6)" (Barnes).

Some commentators interpret the earlier reference to mountains as speaking about her breast (Deere; Constable), but there and here, the point she is making his return with the speed of a young stag coming over the mountains (but see "mountains of spices).

"In their courtship, she had longed for him to take her as his bride (see comments on 2:17). Now, in their marriage, she longed with the same intensity for his strength and agility. Like the "hills" in 2:17, the mountains in 8:14 may refer to her breasts. Being spice-laden means they were perfumed (see comments on some of the spices mentioned in 4:13-14)" (Deere).

Many expositors have noted the similarity between the way this book ends and the way the book of Revelation ends: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20; Constable). "As separated lovers long to be reunited, so the church longs to see her Bridegroom (Rev. 22:20)" (Ryrie).

Summary: To keep the romantic fires burning, 1) Run away, 2) Retain affection, 3) Reminisce 4) Reflect on the value of love, 5) Remember how special your mate is.

"In a world awash with the debris of broken homes, crushed spirits, and fractured dreams, God's people need the message of the Song of Solomon as never before. The Song is a righteous antidote to a licentious society that has prostituted the sacred nature of human love. Hope exudes from its pages. If ever a book was written with a message more salient for a later generation, Solomon's ode is that book" (Patterson, cited by Constable)

"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" (Deere). When I was a teenager, a popular love song was "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing," sung by the Four Aces. The words form a fitting conclusion to the love song in the Bible.

Love is a many splendored thing.
It's the April rose
That only grows in the early spring
Love is nature's way of giving
A reason to be living
The golden crown that makes a man a king
Once on a high and windy hill
In the morning mist
Two lovers kissed
And the world stood still
Then your fingers touched
My silent heart and taught it how to sing
Yes, true love's
A many splendored thing
Once on a high and windy hill
In the morning mist
Two lovers kissed
And the world stood still
Then your fingers touched
My silent heart and taught it how to sing
Yes, true love's
A many splendored thing

Therefore, if you have it, keep the flame of romantic love burning brightly!

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