

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Simple Life, Simple Love

Song 1:2–2:7

Let's take our Bibles together and turn once again to the Song of Solomon. Last week we introduced this great book of Scripture. Today we begin the Song starting in verse 2.¹

Sanja and I got married in Longview, Texas in December of 2000. And within a year, we moved to Chicago for seminary. We lived in downtown Chicago for about seven years total. I went to school and worked. Sanja worked. We lived in a 500 sq. ft. apartment. Alastair was born in Chicago. He slept in the same room as us for the first year of his life (we only had one bedroom).

We weren't poor, but we weren't rich. We didn't have much, but we had each other. We were young. We were newly married. We were figuring out life together. And we were *incandescently* happy.

I can't tell you how many couples I've talked to over the years who have said something similar to that. It's not as if they were unhappy later in life. That's not the case. But life gets complicated as you age and start piling up the stuff of earth. And so many couples we've known over the years will say, "Ah the good old days. When we had nothing. When we were poor. When life was simple. When we simply had each other."

It's quite a contrast from Solomon in the Bible. Solomon had everything. He had too much. He had enough wives and concubines to fill a large battalion of soldiers. And if you read the book of Ecclesiastes carefully, you realize that didn't exactly make him happy.

But Solomon, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shows us a better way. Let's look together at Solomon's song. Look at chapter 1, verse 2.

² Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!² For your love is better than wine;³

Wow! Okay! Not your typical book of the Bible. It's as if we've stumbled onto an already developing scene.⁴ It's as if we started watching a movie that has already been running for 30 minutes!⁵

Who's talking? Who's this person talking to? Who's asking to be kissed? And who's being told to kiss?

There's really no way to know, other than to keep reading. But we know from the grammar of what is being said that the speaker is a woman.

¹ In terms of structure for the Song, I follow Duguid and Hess. The recurring refrain in Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4 is an important marker of the Song's literary divisions. This refrain closes the opening unit (1:2–2:7). See Duguid, *Song of Songs*, xxi–xxii and Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 35–36.

² Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 36: "One can feel the wetness of the kisses and their intoxicating effect... These kisses are romantic or sexual. They are not the more usual kisses of greeting or leave-taking or of veneration. Romantic kissing is uncommon in the Bible."

³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 125nb: "LXX, followed by OL and Vg., perhaps implies that the man, not the woman, sings v 2b. It reads, 'For your breasts [μαστοί] are better than wine,' reading the noun 77 here. Of course, it is possible that the LXX translators imagined the woman singing these lines, but that would be very strange. There is no reason, however, to adopt the LXX reading here."

⁴ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 4: "It plunges right into its subject matter without introducing the characters, setting the stage, or anything else, with the breathless declaration of the woman: 'Oh, that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!' (Song 1:2). Like love itself, the Song of Songs catches us in the midst of life and steals our breath away."

⁵ According to O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 28, the medieval monk Bernard of Clairvaux said that verse 2 is a beginning without a beginning. "We are introduced to this theme of physical love, but we are not told about the love story. Who is speaking? Who is her man? What is their history? Are they married?"

If you have an ESV Bible, you see the heading “SHE” above this verse. That’s not in the original Hebrew. It is helpful that English Bibles do that. If there’s a place in the ESV where I disagree with their assessment of who’s talking, I’ll tell you.

But I will tell you this, this woman here is the main speaker in **Song of Solomon**. She speaks more than 50% of the time.⁶ **She talks almost twice as much as the man. Sometimes that happens in marriage.**

You should also note that because this is Hebrew love poetry, there’s no mistaking the fact at this point that she is talking to her husband... or at least her husband to be!⁷ This is not some random woman asking a random man to kiss her. No way!

I told you last week that there’s no such thing as love poetry or romantic poetry for the Hebrews in the abstract. The only kind of love and romance that they would countenance would be marital love and romance. Anything other than that would be a violation of the seventh commandment (**Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18**).⁸ So this is not a woman speaking to the object of her adulterous affair. And this is not one of Solomon’s brides, or a member of his harem, speaking to Solomon. Not a chance!⁹

Some scholars have noted that “love” here, the Hebrew דֹד (dôd), could be translated “lovemaking” instead of “love.”¹⁰ If that is true, then this song gets off to an even racier start than we realize. An ancient Hebrew, reading this verse, would immediately think, “husband and wife.” Or in this case, this is a wife speaking to her husband. We don’t know much about what’s going on yet. But it’s at least that.

Let’s keep reading. Look at **verse 3**.

³ your anointing oils are fragrant;¹¹ your name is oil¹² poured out; therefore virgins love¹³ you.

⁶ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 29: “This woman, about whom we will learn more in the next study, is the main speaker throughout this Song—though we never learn quite as much about her as we would like. (There is poetic intention to the vague character descriptions: This woman and man represent every woman and every man who have ever been in love; if you say too much about a character, you limit his or her appeal to a broader audience. This couple appeals to all.) She speaks 53 percent of the time, the man 34 percent, and the others, including the ‘daughters of Jerusalem,’ 13 percent of the time.”

⁷ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 7: “The woman is neither a feminist nor a traditionalist. In contrast to our wider culture, which depicts women as equally sexually aggressive as men, she does not dream of grabbing her man, planting a kiss on his lips, and dragging him behind her into her bedroom. She wants *him* to kiss her, and *him* to sweep her off her feet. Yet neither is she a shrinking violet who will pine away in silence, waiting for the man to figure out her interest in him. She expects and longs for the man to provide the leadership in their relationship, while at the same time she is not shy about communicating her own hopes and desires.”

⁸ See Van Pelt, “The Message of the Song of Songs,” lesson 3: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/foundations/essentials-the-song-of-songs-ot265/marriage-and-intimacy-ot265-03>

⁹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 7–8: “The vision of sexuality that is presented in the Song is a long way both from the picture in our culture and from the image that has often been presented in the church. In our culture, any kind of sexual love between any two consenting adults is regarded as good and proper, something to be celebrated whatever their gender or relationship. You don’t have to be married or even to be in a long-term committed relationship to engage in intercourse: sex is just sex. Nor is sex just for men and women in our culture: it can be for men and men or for women and women. That is not the perspective that the Song celebrates, as we will see. It glorifies as the ideal human relationship a single-hearted, lifelong, devoted, and exclusive relationship between one man and one woman.”

¹⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 128: here refers more to ‘caresses’—making love—than to the mental state of being loving, although the latter is obviously not excluded. For analogous usage, see Prov 7:18 (נְרוּה דְדִים עַד־הַבֹּקֶר, ‘Let us drink in lovemaking until morning’), Ezek 16:8 (וְהָנָה עֵתָךְ עִת דְדִים, ‘indeed, your time was the time of lovemaking’ [i.e., you had attained sexual maturity]), and Ezek 23:17 (לְמִשְׁכַּב דְדִים, ‘to a bed of lovemaking’).”

¹¹ Tommy Nelson, *The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says About Love, Sex, and Intimacy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2023), chapter 2: “In Solomon’s day, men rarely bathed. They used scented oils and ointments on their bodies, both to keep their skin from drying out in the desert climate of the Middle East and to give a pleasing fragrance to their bodies. We do the same today with our aftershave lotions, colognes, and scented deodorants. There is attraction in fragrance, and the woman was openly complimenting the object of her attraction... But notice another part of that same verse: ‘Your name is ointment poured forth.’ Here is the real key to godly attraction. The woman was attracted to the man physically and spiritually. She was attracted to his reputation for godliness.”

¹² Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 38: “The same sound-play on ‘oil,’ שֶׁמֶן, and ‘name,’ שֵׁם, is found in Eccl 7:1, ‘A good name is better than good oil.’”

¹³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 130: “The woman’s twice-repeated refrain, that the girls rightly love the man, establishes her position vis-à-vis the other girls. She has come to a passage in her life that they desire. Thus, there is a touch of rivalry

In other words, **“You smell good. You look good. And your character is good. It’s so good, that all the single ladies out there are jealous of me.”**

A person’s name is oftentimes a metonymy of that person’s character and reputation in Scripture (**Ruth 4:14; 1 Sam 25:25; Prov 10:7; 22:1; Eccl 7:1; Rev 3:1**). So if you have a good name, that means that you are an honorable and righteous person—a man or woman of integrity.

Oftentimes God is referred to simply by his name (**Ps 20:1, 7; 54:1; Prov 18:10; Isa 30:27**).¹⁴ **We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit (Matt 28:19)**. This woman says of her man, **“You’ve got character. You’ve got integrity. Your name has a good reputation. Your name is like oil poured out.”** She’s attracted to that. **Make a note of that, young men in the room.**

Women might be attracted to the bad-boy trope for a time. But that gets real old, real fast. Women don’t want to be married to Peter Pan who never grew up. They want to be married to a man who has character and integrity and a good name.¹⁵

Look at **verse 4**.

⁴ *Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers.*¹⁶

Despite what our modern culture might tell you, this is not something a woman says to a man after a first date. There is no hint here of sexual immorality. This is a woman who wants her man. She sees him like the king. Forget King Solomon! She’s got her own king. And she desires him.

And then the song moves out of the bedroom. **It’s as if the camera pans out of the room.** And instead of taking us up close pornographically with what happens next, there’s this voiceover. And the voiceover comes from the virgins who were referenced earlier.

She said about those virgins, the daughters of Jerusalem, that they admire her and are jealous of the love that she has for her man. And that’s true. But it’s not a sinful jealousy.

They say,

We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine;

And then another voice says, possibly the narrator,

rightly do they love you.

Rightly do the virgin daughters of Jerusalem love you.¹⁷ The word “they” here is plural. “They” refers to the virgins. But the “you” is singular referring to the man.

Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes. The first thing that we see in the first three verses of this song is a celebration of...

1) The **goodness** of monogamous, heterosexual **love** in marriage (1:2–4)

in the lyrics. She has a man whom they all admire with a fervency that drives them to envy her success. She is embarking on a journey they have not yet begun. Their position in the Song of Songs is set from the outset: they are observers who will interact with her as she enters the world of love. They represent the world she is leaving, but, for the most part, they do not seek to hold her back because they, too, desire to experience love someday.”

¹⁴ This is why the Name of Jesus is such a powerful thing in the NT (see Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10–12; 16:18; Phil 2:9–11).

¹⁵ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 34–5: “To marry someone who lacks character—‘but she’s so stunningly beautiful,’ or ‘he’s so filthy rich’—is just stupid. Don’t be stupid. Young ladies, you are to look for a man who *now* emulates the characteristics of the godly husband in Scripture: a man who is ‘understanding’ (1 Peter 3:7), ‘not ... harsh’ (Colossians 3:19), sacrificially loving like Christ (Ephesians 5:25, 28), and able to lead and nourish you in your faith (Ephesians 5:23, 26–29). Young men, you are to look for a woman who *now* emulates the characteristics of the godly wife: a woman who has a submissive spirit (Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22, 24; 1 Peter 3:1, 6), is pure in conduct (1 Peter 3:2), and values the internal ‘beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit’ more than external beauty (1 Peter 3:3, 4).”

¹⁶ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 31: “See how she shifts from addressing her lover in the third person to addressing him in the second—‘him’ has turned into ‘you.’ This occurs in the middle of verse 2 and remains until verse 4a. This slight grammatical alteration, a common device found in Hebrew poetry, is used to enhance the intimacy of the scene, an intimacy that grows with each verse.” Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 35: “The move from ‘he’ to ‘you’ in v. 2 is jolting; is the lover present or not? This shift in grammatical person, called *enallage*, is a rhetorical figure and is not uncommon in biblical poetry, especially in Psalms, which often shift between speaking about God and to God (Pss 92:2; 93:1–2; 140:13–14; 142:2–4), and also in ancient Near Eastern love poetry.”

¹⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 43: The Jerusalem women reappear in 2:7; 3:5, 10; 5:8, 16; 8:4 (and ‘women of Zion’ in 3:11). Whenever they are addressed (in 3:10 they are not addressed), it is the woman who addresses them; the man never does.”

I wish I didn't have to clarify this first point with the word "monogamous." But that needs to be said. People in Solomon's day especially needed that.

And I wish I didn't have to clarify this first point with the word "heterosexual." But people *in our day* need that. Like I've said before from this pulpit, the Bible is an equal-opportunity offender. It transcends cultural contexts. In Solomon's day, polygamy was culturally acceptable. But that's not God's way. In some cultures in Solomon's day promiscuity through the use of prostitutes was culturally acceptable. The world's oldest profession. But that's not God's way.

Similarly in our day, we've got our own cultural values that transcend this. We embrace sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, pornography, promiscuity, homosexuality, voyeurism, and other expressions of sexual sin and sexual immorality. That's not God's way. God's way is one man and one woman in the covenant of marriage enjoying love and lovemaking as God intended it. And that's what the culture should celebrate.

And that's what the virgins here in **Song of Solomon** are celebrating. Look at **verse 4** again.

We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine;

Wine to the Hebrew... that's like one of God's great gifts (**Ps 104:14–15**)! These daughters of Jerusalem extol monogamous love (or "lovemaking") in marriage as better than wine. Now that's saying something!¹⁸

And notice, the virgins never celebrate Solomon and all of his wives and concubines. Yes, that's in the Bible. But it's not like God ever says it's a good thing. In fact, Solomon's actions are directly in conflict with what God told kings not to do in **Deuteronomy 17**: "You may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother... And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold" (**17:14–17**).

Solomon's actions are directly in conflict with that. They are also in conflict with **Genesis 2**, where God said that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife... not his wives! (**Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6**). **In this way, Song of Solomon** is a kind of mea culpa for Solomon. He writes about a better way than what he experienced.

Let's continue with the song. Look at **verse 5**.

⁵ *I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.*

Okay, now we're getting some biographical material on the main character in the song. Now we find out something about her. She's dark, but lovely. And she's talking back to the "daughters of Jerusalem."

They said to her husband in **verse 4**,

we will extol your love more than wine;

And she says back to them in **verse 5**,

⁵ *I am very dark, but lovely,*

Duane Garrett has imagined this as a kind of opera where there are different singers on the stage.¹⁹ The woman is the soprano. She's the main voice. And the daughters of Jerusalem are singing back and forth to her like an antiphonal chorus.²⁰

We also have a man in **verse 8**. And we also have a narrator who I'll refer to as Solomon. More on that in a moment.

But let's pick up the details of this woman who is autobiographically telling us about herself.

⁵ *I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.*

In other words,

¹⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 150: "In the Song, wine often connotes or is associated with lovemaking, especially kisses (1:2, 4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:3 [ET 2], 10 [ET 9]; 8:2)."

¹⁹ See Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 13–122.

²⁰ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 6: "These are not strictly 'virgins,' as the ESV translates it, but rather young women who have recently reached the age of sexual maturity and are thus ready for marriage, the people who in every culture tend to be the arbiters of what constitutes male desirability."

⁵ I am very dark [like the tents of Kedar], but lovely, [like the curtains of Solomon]

Feel the parallelism here. Kedar is a reference to an Arab Bedouin tribe. Their tents were made of tanned animal hides and were dark in color. Those tents had to be tough to withstand the rigors of wind, sand, and heat in the desert.²¹

Solomon's curtains on the other hand were colorful and beautiful and lovely. So she's saying here, **"I'm tough as nails, but I'm also pretty."**

Look at **verse 6**.

⁶ Do not gaze at me because I am dark,²² because the sun has looked upon me.²³ My mother's sons were angry²⁴ with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!

In ancient society, where people had light skin, or olive-colored skin in the case of the Hebrews, darkened skin was a sign of hard labor.²⁵ **It wasn't like in our day where people go off to the tanning bed to look darker on purpose. That would be inconceivable in ancient Israel.**²⁶ And if you were a woman of privilege, you would stay indoors and away from the sun. **That was true even in Victorian era England.**²⁷

But this woman is not a woman of wealth or privilege. And she's not like the princesses in King Solomon's harem. I bet those ladies never had to work a day in their life in the vineyard!²⁸

²¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 132: "[The tents of Kedar] must have been very sturdy since they had to withstand the rigors of the wind, sand, heat, and the occasional storm as the only shelter these travelers would possess. They may have been proverbial as tough, reliable tents."

²² Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 46: "The root ראה meaning 'to look at, gaze at,' is normally followed by the preposition ב-, as in 3:11 and 6:11a. She is not saying "Do not gaze/stare at me because I am dark" (NRSVue, NIV, and others). Rather, she wants 'the women of Jerusalem' to not regard her as black, to not perceive that her beauty is diminished."

²³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 132: She uses a number of wordplays to describe her situation. She asks the girls not to stare (ראה) at her, but says that the sun has 'gazed' (שָׁחַף) on her. Her wordplay makes use of the fact that שָׁחַף means to 'gaze' at but שָׂחַף means to 'scorch'; it is all the more effective a wordplay because of the common interchange of ט and ט, a phenomenon often observed in Aramaic. She then says that her brothers "burned [חָרַהּ] with anger" toward her, using an obvious synonym of שָׂחַף."

²⁴ Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 57: "She uses a form of the verb meaning 'to burn, be angry' (*hrh*) to describe how they became angry. This is the idiom of burning in rage. Thus the wordplay of verbs connects the fire of her brothers with the heat of the sun to produce her dark skin. And the sun's stare couples with the critical gaze of her companions to tie together the whole picture."

²⁵ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 14: "She is dark (Song 1:5), which here is not a racial feature but a social feature: it comes not from her birth and ethnicity but from having been forced to work outside in the vineyards, where the harsh glare of the sun has darkened her complexion... After the industrial revolution, however, when poor people grew pale from working in factories for sixteen hours a day, the rich had to find a new way to distinguish themselves, and the concept of a 'healthy tan' was born."

²⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 133: "Modern Caucasian Europeans and North Americans regard tanned skin as attractive and healthy looking, and readers from this culture are naturally puzzled that she would be defensive about this feature. In agrarian societies, however, dark skin is ordinary and is a sign that one is a member of the peasant class. Tan women in such a society are common and are not the stuff of male fantasy or female aspiration. Indeed, almost every society tends to regard the different as exotic and therefore alluring. The Japanese geisha, the ideal contrast to the farm woman, had astoundingly white skin (or wore white makeup). In an era when even the average European peasant woman would have been fairly tan, lean, and muscular, contemporary artists depicted the sensual woman as pale, soft, and plump"

²⁷ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 14n1: "Anthropologist Marvin Harris studied the historical use of parasols, and he observed that royalty and wealthy 'nobles' from Rome to northern Africa were seen being shaded from the effects of the sun with celebratory umbrellas and parasols, while common people were forbidden from using such devices. This was connected to pallid skin being seen as a marker of upper-class status. See Kerry Segrave, *Suntanning in 20th Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 8."

²⁸ The church fathers almost universally interpreted this section of Scripture allegorically for Christ and the church. A rare exception is THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA. Although his interpretation of this passage is suspect: "[Solomon] took Pharaoh's daughter as his wife. But ... she was dark, as all the Egyptian and Ethiopian women are.... The Hebrews and their beautiful wives, and the other princesses as well, ridiculed her on account of her unseemliness, her small height and her dark complexion. To avoid any irritation on her part and so that no hostility would result between him and the Pharaoh, Solomon exclusively built for her a house of valuable stones [and decorated it] with gold and silver. During the meals he chanted [the Song of Songs] in her presence in order to honor her, and he made known with it that she was dark yet beautiful and loved by him." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 299–300.

But this woman, the Shulamite, works the field. She takes care of her family's vineyards. And her lousy older brothers were tough on her, **"Get out there and work, little sister!"**²⁹ **This is like a Cinderella love story, except the stepsisters are replaced by brothers.**

And the result of this is her testimony here:

but my own vineyard I have not kept!

In other words, **"I don't look like a beauty queen. You might think of me as a catch, daughters of Jerusalem, but I don't think of myself that way. I'm lovely, yes. But not as lovely as I could be."**

Queen Esther, if you remember, had twelve months of beauty treatments before she was presented before King Ahasuerus (**Esth 2:9–12**).³⁰ This woman's had nothing like that. In fact, she's had to work the farm. **Who's got time for beauty treatments when you've got to milk the cow and prune the vines!**

But this woman does have something that she's proud of. Look at **verse 7**.

⁷ *Tell me, you whom my soul loves,*³¹

Who is she talking to here? Who's this "whom" in **verse 7**? I'll give you a hint, the "you" here is singular.³² She's not talking to the daughters of Jerusalem in **verse 7**.

Who's she talking to? She's talking to her man!

⁷ *Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?*

Okay, now we get a sense of who the other main character is in this song, this drama. And it's not Solomon. Solomon wasn't a shepherd. Solomon's dad, David, was a shepherd. Solomon wasn't.

And this relationship has all the hallmarks of a rural, hardscrabble existence. She's working the fields. He's tending the sheep. If this is a description of their courtship, which is possible, **then they aren't living high on the hog.**

And she says in **verse 7** basically, **"I want to come to work with you. I want to be near you."**³³ **But I don't want to be around your lousy friends."**³⁴ **Has a wife ever said that to her husband?**

In ancient society, not just in Jewish society, married women and women of marriageable age would wear a veil or a head covering in public. Rebekah put on a veil before she met her future husband, Isaac (**Gen**

²⁹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 43: "There is the beautiful young girl forced to labor in the vineyard, work that according to Isaiah 5:2 entailed digging ditches, clearing stones, planting vines, building a watchtower, hewing out a wine vat, picking grapes, and sometimes driving away thieves and wild animals, such as foxes (Song 2:15) and boars (Psalm 80:13, 14)."

³⁰ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 43–4: "Unlike Queen Esther, she hasn't been getting her twelve-month beauty treatments—her skin softened with oil of myrrh for six months, and then spices and ointments for another six months (Esther 2:12). She has a working-class complexion, *and* her hair is undone, *and* her attire is unattractive. She has been on her feet all day pruning vines or picking grapes, shooing away sneaky foxes. And when she gets off her shift, she calls it a day. No time for a manicure and pedicure, and certainly no time to powder her sunburnt cheeks."

³¹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 48: "The woman refers to her lover as שְׁאֶהְבָּה נָפִשִׁי, the one I love, or 'love of my life.' This appellation for the lover recurs four times in 3:1–4 when the woman is seeking her absent lover. The man calls her הַיָּפִיָּה בְּנָשִׁים, most beautiful of women, an appellation that appears again in 5:9 and 6:1 when the women of Jerusalem address her."

³² Just to be clear, the "you" here in English is singular. The Hebrew is constructed differently. English is confusing because "you" can be either singular or plural. Long gone are the days when English speakers had "thou" and "thee" for the singular and "ye" and "you" for the plural. Technically there is no "you" pronoun here in Hebrew. But the verb for "pasture" (רָעָה) is second person masculine singular, which clarifies that she's addressing her man (i.e., her husband).

³³ Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 60: "The mood of the female's address has now shifted from one of rapturous description of her relation with her lover to one in which she seeks a practical means to be united with him during the day. Gone from this verse is any sensual description of the physical love that the two might enjoy. In its place there is an immediate concern for a realistic means to facilitate the desire of the female and so to bring the couple together."

³⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 138: "The companions are not necessarily good (Dan 2:13) or evil (Isa 1:27); they are simply an association of men, and as such represent a domain in which the woman is uncomfortable and perhaps feels threatened. For her, the 'shepherds,' here representing the world of men, are a foul, dirty, lice-ridden lot."

24:65). It was a display of dignity and propriety.³⁵ But you wouldn't need to wear a veil if you are alone with your spouse.³⁶

And so she's saying here, **"I want to be alone with you. I don't want to have to put on my head covering in public. I don't want to be around a bunch of sweaty, smelly, shepherd men. Just tell me where you are."**

And now the man speaks. And this guy is a charmer. I mean that positively. Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ *If you do not know, O most beautiful among women,*

She sees herself as sun-scorched and homely. She says about herself, **"I haven't been able to take care of myself like I want."** But he says, **"No, no, no, sweetie! You're beautiful. You're the most beautiful among women. Solomon can have his Moabite and Ammonite and Edomite princesses. You're my princess! You're my one and only."**

And then he tells her what to do. Look at the middle of **verse 8**.

follow in the tracks of the flock, and pasture your young goats beside the shepherds' tents.

She's in charge of vineyards, but she's also in charge of goats. This lady is industrious.³⁷

⁹ *I compare you, my love, to a mare³⁸ among Pharaoh's chariots.*

That might not seem like a compliment—calling one's wife a horse—but it is! A horse to the ancient Hebrews was a rare, powerfully built beauty. **And a horse among Pharaoh's chariots was like a Ferrari or a Lamborghini in today's world.** What he's saying to her here is, **"You, my love, are choice! You're a rare and beautiful creature."**³⁹

Look at **verse 10**.

¹⁰ *Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels.*

¹¹ *We will make for you ornaments of gold, studded with silver.*⁴⁰

³⁵ According to Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 50, Tamar didn't cover herself with a veil so that she would look like a prostitute, but so that she would not be recognized. Additionally Judah thought she was a prostitute because she was sitting at the entrance to a town, not because she was veiled.

³⁶ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 387: "The question, 'Why should I be like a veiled woman?' means that if she does not know precisely where he is to be found, she will have to put on her veil and go from pasture to pasture looking for her beloved."

³⁷ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 2: "We have other examples of hardworking women in the Scriptures. Consider Ruth the gleaner, Rachel the shepherdess, Zipporah the shepherdess, and the woman in Proverbs 31 who 'strengthens her arms.' I tell young men routinely, 'Marry a girl with some grit in her!'"

³⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 144: "To a modern reader, it is somewhat bewildering that the man would compare his beloved to a horse. The point is not that she looks like a horse. Instead, she is likened to a horse among pharaoh's chariots in that she, like the horse, is magnificent to look upon. The only point of actual visual similarity is that both she and the mare attached to pharaoh's chariot are adorned in splendid ornamentation. Egyptian artwork depicts the horses of the royal chariots with headdresses and finery (e.g., the chariots of Tutankhamen, *ANEP*, 60; see also Keel ([1994] 57, fig. 13)."

O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 45: "Think of the classic book *Black Beauty*. Or think of the movie *The Black Stallion* as the boy watches this untamed creature run along the shore in the moonlight. That horse is beautiful. Similarly, this young woman is a black beauty. She is dark, and she has this unkempt quality about her, like a wild horse with long, healthy, glossy black hair."

³⁹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 52: "Horses, especially stallions, were admired for their strength, speed, and courage. They were used in battle and for riding and display (Esth 6:8–9) and are associated with kings or rich people (according to Eccl 10:7, nobles should ride on horses while servants walk). Egypt was famous for its fine horses, thoroughbreds, and was a source of horses for Israel (Deut 17:16; 1 Kgs 10:28–29; 2 Chr 9:28; 2 Kgs 18:23–24; Isa 31:1, 3; and Hos 14:4, where "ride on steeds" refers to horses from Egypt)."

⁴⁰ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 54: "Gold was highly valued in Israel but had to be imported. Egypt was a source of gold; it came from mines in the eastern and Nubian deserts (King and Stager, 170). In Egypt, gold seems to have been more readily available, and hence less expensive, than silver, which had to be imported from a greater distance."

Verse 11 is the “daughters of Jerusalem” talking.⁴¹ And they say, “We’ll accentuate your beauty. We’ll make sure you look beautiful even though you’ve had to scratch out an existence in the field and can’t do beauty treatments. We’ll make you look good with ornaments of gold studded with silver.”

Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. The second thing that we see celebrated here is the...

2) The **beauty of committed partners** in marriage (1:5–11)

Before Sanja and I started dating years ago, I got some good advice from some married friends. They said, “Don’t just go out and wine and dine her. Don’t make every date this elaborate, unsustainable experience. Spend time together in ordinary ways. Run errands together. Do laundry together. Have a meal of bread and soup. And if you guys can have fun and enjoy each other’s company in that setting, then you’ll enjoy each other through half a century of marriage.”

And you know, I found that to be some of the best wisdom I received as a single man. Not that there aren’t times for wining and dining and romantic getaways. That’s important too. But life can’t always be like that. And some couples start their relationship in the artificial Petri dish of fine dining and elaborate dates, capped off by an expensive wedding. And then five years later, you’re doing dishes, changing poop diapers, and trying to get enough sleep at night to survive.

What’s *remarkable* about this description of this Shulamite shepherdess and her shepherd beau in chapter 1 is just how *unremarkable* their existence is. It’s especially unremarkable in ancient Israel. And yet, they love each other. And yet, they want to spend time together. And yet, he says of her, “O most beautiful among women.” And she says of him, “[O] you whom my soul loves.” **They don’t have much, but they have each other.**

Let’s keep going. Things are going to start to heat up in verse 12.

¹² While the king was on his couch,⁴² my nard gave forth its fragrance.

¹³ My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh⁴³ that lies between my breasts.

These two might live a simple life without a lot of elaborate pleasures. But they know how to get romantic when the time comes.

The scene totally shifts in verse 12. They were just out in the fields a moment ago. But now, they are in the bedroom. “The king is on his couch.” That’s not King Solomon.⁴⁴ That’s the king of the house.⁴⁵ And his queen smells good.⁴⁶

my nard gave forth its fragrance.

Nard or spikenard is a kind of ancient perfume like myrrh or frankincense. But myrrh came from tree resin. Spikenard came from the oil of an aromatic plant.⁴⁷ It actually comes from the underground stems of the spikenard plant.

⁴¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 142: “One can argue, as many interpreters do, that Song 1:11 also belongs to the man, but the plural verb implies otherwise, and the interpretation of the wider context validates ascribing this verse to the chorus.”

⁴² Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 55: “מִשְׁכּוֹ is his couch on which he reclines when dining. This couch is not a bed for sleeping, for which there are other words: מִטָּה, (3:1), מִשְׁכּוֹ, (1:16), עֶרֶשׁ (3:7; a bed or couch)... The association of food and sex is an erotic motif.”

⁴³ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 56: ‘Myrrh, *Commiphora (abyssinica or guidottii)*, is native to East Africa, Arabia, and the Indian subcontinent. Oily resin exudes from the branches and stems of the tree. It was used in cosmetics, medicines, and incense (Song 3:1–6). It is in liquid form (infused in oil) in Song 5:5, 13; here it is a powder held in a small bag worn around the neck (“between my breasts”). Myrrh (and other scents) is part of the preparation for having sex in Ps 45:8; Prov 7:17; and Esth 2:12–13; and it appears in a lovemaking context or as a symbol of lovemaking in Song 4:6 and 5:1.”

⁴⁴ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 48: “Solomon is the author but not the beloved. Her man is a shepherd (1:7), whom she repeatedly views as a king when it comes to the lovemaking scenes.”

⁴⁵ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 32: “She calls her lover a ‘king.’ She will describe him as a shepherd in 1:7. He could be a king and a shepherd literally, like King David. But it is more likely that he is a shepherd literally and a ‘king’ metaphorically.”

⁴⁶ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 32: “In the Orthodox Church today, the bride and groom are called ‘king’ and ‘queen’ for their wedding day. I remember attending a wedding of a childhood friend, and the Orthodox priest placed a crown upon the groom’s head, and then all the men surrounded him and congratulated him as king. King for a day! It’s a wonderful, Bible-based tradition.”



Spikenard (Latin: *Nardostachys jatamansi*)⁴⁸

It makes you smell good. And it stimulates a man's olfactory sense. A good smell, as most of you know, is a potent aphrodisiac.⁴⁹

Her statement in **verse 13** is deliberately suggestive. She treasures her beloved. She is close to him now. As close as a pouch of myrrh that lies between her breasts.

Look at **verse 14**.

¹⁴ *My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi.*

Okay, let me help you with that. That's more complimentary than seductive. Engedi was a lush oasis in the middle of the Judean wilderness, next to the Dead Sea.



The Oasis of Engedi⁵⁰

Its springs supported abundant vegetation and agriculture despite the surrounding desert. Henna blossoms were rare in the desert. **This is like finding a desert rose in the middle of West Texas.**

So she's saying here, **"I've found a needle in a haystack. My beloved is one in a million. I've found my knight in shining armor."**

And by the way, henna blossoms smell wonderful.⁵¹ Here's a picture of a henna blossom, a כַּפֹּר (kō·pēr) in Hebrew.

⁴⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 55: "Nard, or spikenard (also called muskroot), is found in the Hebrew Bible only in the Song (also at 4:13–14). This aromatic oil, extracted from the *Nardostachys jatamansi*, of the Valerian family, is native to the Himalayan mountains and came to the ancient Near East via India."

⁴⁸ Plantagenet, photograph of cultivated spikenard (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), June 1, 2026, Wikimedia Commons, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

⁴⁹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 30: "Sexual attraction, as perfume companies well know, comes as often through our noses as through our eyes. Her lover would have worn perfumes to mask his natural body odor. So the oils of the perfume and the oils of his body likely produced a scent that was uniquely his, a scent that now represents his very person."

⁵⁰ Dawn Yoder, "Hidden Waterfall at En Gedi," photograph, *Public Domain Pictures*. Public domain.

⁵¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 146–7: "Henna, a bush that grows to ten feet (three meters) in height, has clusters of white, fragrant flowers that apparently were used for perfumes. This verse places it among the vines of the vineyard, where it adds beauty and fragrance to the vineyard. Engedi, an oasis located west of the Dead Sea, is known to have been the location of carefully tended vineyards from at least the seventh century B.C.E. (Keel [1994] 67)."



Henna Blossom (Hebrew: **כַּקֵּר** [*kō-pēr*])⁵²

So he says to her, **“You smell great.”** And she says back to him, **“No, you smell great.”** Her olfactory sense is charged. His olfactory sense is charged. Are they speaking literally or metaphorically? I don’t know. Maybe both.

And then he says something in **verse 15**. He’s not going to be outdone in compliments by his wife.

¹⁵ *Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.*

Doves symbolized purity and tenderness in the ancient world. Eyes like doves are eyes that are soft and gentle and lovely.⁵³ And eyes are the window of the soul. So these eyes are gentle and inviting to him.

Look at **verse 16**. This is the woman talking back to the man.

¹⁶ *Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.*

“You’re beautiful, darling!”

“No, you’re beautiful, sweetheart.”

“You’re delightful, my love.”

“No, you’re delightful.”

What is this? This is mutual admiration and affection leading towards consummation.⁵⁴

Because look at the end of **verse 16**.

Our couch is green;

Hello! What does that mean? It means that the couch... or the marriage bed... or the sofa, if you like... is ready to fulfill the creation mandate of **Genesis 1**. They’re ready to reproduce. They’re ready to procreate.

And notice, there’s nothing crass or smutty about this. There’s euphemism. There’s suggestive language. We know what they’re talking about, but their talk is cloaked in poetry and discretion.

Look at **verse 17**.

¹⁷ *the beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are pine.*

In other words, we’re enjoying intimacy in the safety of our house. And our love for each other is like a house made of oak. This house is strong and stable.⁵⁵ **This is not a house made of popsicle sticks.**

By the way, sex outside the safety and covenant of marriage is wildly overrated in our world. It’s not as gratifying as some people make it out to be. A one-night stand can actually be pretty unsatisfying.

I’ve seen research my entire life that suggests that married people have more frequent and satisfying sex than unmarried people who sleep around.⁵⁶ Hollywood won’t tell you that or present that in their movies. But I’ll tell you that.

⁵² Sugeesh, “Lawsonia inermis Flowers,” photograph, April 15, 2012, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lawsonia_inermis_Flowers.jpg, licensed under CC BY 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

⁵³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 148: “When one thinks of a dove, one thinks of soft cooing, fluttering wings, gentleness, and in the case of the white dove, brightness of color. Rather than bind the term in a metaphoric equation, we should perhaps simply take pleasure in the connotations.”

⁵⁴ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 49: “Mutual admiration in marriage is important. Husbands and wives are to *complement* one another by *complimenting* one another.”

⁵⁵ Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 74: “The cedar beams and juniper rafters describe the wood that the builders laid across the top of the four walls of ancient Israelite houses (v. 17). Taller trees, such as those described here, were used so that the beams would be of one piece and have strength and endurance. On top of such a lattice of wood, the branches, plaster, mud, and straw of the roof were placed.”

Let's keep going. This is getting interesting. Look at **chapter 2, verse 1**.

¹ *I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.*

Notice her entire demeanor has changed from before. She was down on herself before. But now this woman feels celebrated. "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." **She sounds like Maria in "West Side Story." "I feel pretty, Oh, so pretty!"**

The Sharon Plain is a fertile plain along Israel's Mediterranean coast. It was a place where roses or wildflowers like the crocus and narcissus were common.⁵⁷ And lilies were common in the valleys. She says I am a rose of Sharon. I am a lily of the valleys—perhaps indicating one of many.

The man affirms her beauty. But he modifies what she says. Look at **verse 2**.

² *As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.*

You're not just a lily in the valleys. You're a lily among brambles.

Lilies (or lotuses), as most of you know, are soft and beautiful and fragrant.⁵⁸ Brambles are not. Brambles are noxious, thorny weeds. And this man isn't insulting the other women of the world. Not really. He's just saying, **"You're the one for me, darling. All the other women of the world might as well be thorns. Because you are my rose. You are my lily."**

And she responds in **verse 3** with an appropriate masculine metaphor for him.

³ *As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

She's the lotus of the valley to him. He's a big, strong, fruitful, shade-giving apple tree to her.⁵⁹ She rests underneath his limbs. She delights in his protection. She's comforted by him. And his fruit is sweet to her taste.⁶⁰

If that last statement seems a little sexually suggestive, that's because it is.⁶¹ Look at **verse 4**.

⁴ *He brought me to the banqueting house [literally the house of wine], and his banner⁶² over me was love.*

When I was a kid, we used to sing a song that went like this. This was at the Baptist church I grew up in.

"He brought me to his banqueting table"

⁵⁶ Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization* (New York: Broadside Books, 2024). See also W. Bradford Wilcox and Nicholas H. Wolfinger, *Men & Marriage: Debunking the Ball and Chain Myth* (Institute for Family Studies, 2017), 3, <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/men-and-marriage-research-brief.pdf>; Grant Bailey and Brad Wilcox, "The Sex Recession: The Share of Americans Having Regular Sex Keeps Dropping," Institute for Family Studies, August 30, 2025, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-sex-recession-the-share-of-americans-having-regular-sex-keeps-dropping>.

⁵⁷ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 390: "The 'rose of Sharon' probably is a crocus, daffodil, or narcissus."

⁵⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 149: "We should also observe that a number of psalms are set to the tune of 'lotuses' (על־שִׁשְׁבִּימִים). These include Pss 69 and 80, but the most interesting example for our purposes is Ps 45, the wedding psalm. The superscript not only sets it to the tune of עֶלֶי־שִׁשְׁבִּימִים but also calls it a "love song" (שִׁיר יְדִידָה). It may be that the tune or musical style called "lotuses" was chosen for Ps 45 because the music was associated with love poetry (Pss 69 and 80 are psalms of lament; we cannot say if there is any significance to these psalms also having this music, although the music may have been in a style appropriate both for tenderness and for mourning)."

⁵⁹ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 2: "Roses and lilies are rare flowers in the Middle East. They bloom quickly and appear only for a brief season. They are beautiful and highly valued. In like manner, apple trees are not frequently cultivated in the Middle East. They are rare and highly prized. An apple tree has fruit that neither a fir nor a cypress tree has."

⁶⁰ Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 78: "The third line (of 2:3) begins with 'its shade' and continues with 'I delight,' 'I sit.' The fourth line begins with 'its fruit' as something desirable to the female. Together these descriptions portray the female's relation to her lover as one who provides an abiding physical closeness and refreshment and as one whose physical touch and taste is a heady sweetness."

⁶¹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 49: "In 2:3–6 she is likely describing foreplay or sex. But again notice the modesty, and notice that she doesn't focus on the physical as much as she does the emotional. 'His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!' is an erotic picture. The exclamation point in the ESV is appropriate. But her focus is on joy and protection. She is in this safe place with the man she trusts with her body (the body that she wasn't too thrilled with a minute ago.)"

⁶² Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 150: "Later in the Song, the woman as virgin is a walled city (6:4) and is surrounded by guards. The man has not conquered the city but has come to her in peace and has been freely admitted (see, e.g., Song 8:10). Understood in light of this metaphor, the line 'his banner toward me is love' becomes comprehensible; the man is a 'king' who comes as an ally and not an enemy. He has approached her in peace and not to conquer."

His banner over me is love.”

It was a fun song that was meant to celebrate Jesus’s love for us. And I’m fine with that in theory. I advocated last week for the literal/typological interpretation of this book. That’s consistent with that.

But it wasn’t until I was older that I realized, “O wow, this is in the Song of Solomon.”⁶³ And also, we sang “He brought me to his banqueting table.” We didn’t sing, “He brought me to the house of wine.” That wouldn’t have gone over well in a Baptist church in Sunday school.

Look at verse 5. This is the woman still speaking with her husband. And she says,

⁵ *Sustain me with raisins;*⁶⁴ *refresh me with apples,*⁶⁵ *for I am sick with love.*⁶⁶

Raisins or “raisin cakes” are love enhancers in the ancient world. And apples have sexually suggestive undertones. She’s not asking for a picnic.

When David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, he sent all the people home with raisin cakes. That was so that they might procreate together and grow the kingdom (2 Sam 6:12–19).

⁶ *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!*⁶⁷

⁶³ To make the matter even more confusing, many of the church fathers take the speaker here to be the bridegroom not the bride, hence Jesus not the church. For example, JEROME interprets as follows with a particularly egregious example of allegorizing: “[Christ] himself says in the Song of Songs, ‘I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley.’ Our rose is the destruction of death, and [that rose] died that death itself might die in his dying.” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 311.

⁶⁴ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 2: “Raisin cakes were highly regarded love enhancers in Solomon’s time... King David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem with much fanfare and celebration. At the time the ark finally was placed in Jerusalem, the nation was at peace and united both politically and spiritually. There were joy in the land and a growing sense of prosperity. The kingdom had been established, righteousness was prevailing, and the covenant with God (established through Moses) was expected to be enjoyed. It was a time for men in military service to settle down and raise families...After David had finished making burnt offerings and peace offerings to God in thanksgiving for the safe arrival of the ark, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Then he distributed among all the people—both to women and to men—a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins, and then he sent each person back to his own home. (See 2 Sam. 6:19.)... A cake of raisins was considered to be an aphrodisiac. The raisins were considered to be ‘seeds’ that could increase the ‘seed’ of a couple so that conception was enhanced. In very broad and general terms, David was sending his soldiers home to have a nice dinner and then share good and productive sex with their wives. Raisin cakes were used also in pagan fertility rituals with the expectation that children would result. (See Hos. 3:1.)”

⁶⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 150: “Classical evidence for the association of apples with women and sexuality is fairly strong; the woman’s claim that the man is to her like an apple tree is in keeping with this motif. She speaks of taking pleasure in his shade and his fruit and abiding with him. As in the myth of Atalanta and Melanion, she is the virgin who finds the apples to be irresistible.”

⁶⁶ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 65: “She is not fainting or in a swoon or temporarily overcome with emotion, as quite a few modern translations have it. The woman is sick with erotic desire.”

⁶⁷ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 151–2: “The dyad ‘right hand’ and ‘left hand’ also appears in the Sumerian love poetry, but the usage there is more erotic. In one of the Sumerian songs, the woman asks the man to place his left hand at her head and his right hand at her nakedness, that is, her genitals (CS 1:541). Here in the Song, the right-hand-left-hand dyad only implies affection and support, not genital stimulation.”

Verse 6 is the language of passion. It's the position of lovemaking.⁶⁸ These two lovebirds essentially melt into each other's arms. They are enjoying the gift of sex that God has given them. And they are happy in each other's embrace.

And then the scene closes. Then the tone completely shifts. And in **verse 7**, she's not talking to her husband. She's not extolling his virtues. No!

She turns to her admirers... she turns to the unmarried women who are desirous of what she is experiencing with her husband. And she lectures them. She warns them.

⁷ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,

"I call you to an oath!" "I challenge you!"

by the gazelles or the does of the field,⁶⁹ that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

"Until it desires!" "Until it's right!"⁷⁰

In other words, **"What I have right now is worth waiting for, ladies. Solomon can have his wives. And other people can have their sin and their little thrills. But this is worth waiting for."**⁷¹

Go ahead and write this down as #3 in your notes. The third thing that we see here is...

3) The **delight** of **lovemaking** in the context of marriage (1:12–2:7)⁷²

⁶⁸ More egregious allegorizing is found among the church fathers here. For example, GREGORY OF ELVIRA: "These two hands are the two covenants of the old law and the gospel. When it refers to his left hand, it indicates the old covenant, but the right hand is the preaching of the gospel. The old covenant is inferior because it is placed beneath the head of the church, who is Christ, whereas the right hand embraced the church, meaning that old sins were covered by the sacraments of the gospel. Whoever goes forth in faith, therefore, and serves Christ with devotion, leaves the old person beneath himself and embraces anew the body of Christ, which is the church." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 314.

The same kind of allegorizing can be found among the Reformers. A stellar example of egregious but also unintelligible allegorizing is found in MARTIN LUTHER who at least begins by interpreting the passage literally: "'O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!' This, too, is a figure drawn from the love of bride and groom. It is a holy and lawful love, and therefore Satan hates it and tries to impede it even though it is the font of procreation and education. Furthermore, he includes here two special blessings belonging to this people: the kingdom, or government, which he calls the left hand, and the priesthood, or worship of God. These embraces, he says, make it possible for this rose to endure the thrust of wild beasts and brambles, since it is wholly within the embrace of God, whether you look at the church or the kingdom, for the Word of God is in both. This awareness, or better, this faith, Solomon would like to stir up in other men too."

⁶⁹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 65–6: "It is very strange to swear by animals. And it is even stranger to swear by one animal *or* the other: the gazelles *or* the wild hinds. Gordis (27–28) best explains the choice of these animals: their names are substitutes for the names of God that might be used in a real oath; 'Gazelles' (צבאות) = [The Lord of] Hosts (צבאות) and 'wild harts,' literally 'harts of the field' (אַיִלֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה) = El Shaddai (אל שדי).¹² The LXX's ἐν δυνάμεσιν καὶ ἐν ἰσχύσιν τοῦ ἀγροῦ, 'by the powers and forces of the field,' suggests that even in ancient times these animals were taken as substitutes for divine powers. In a similar vein, the Targum explains, in its allegorical interpretation, that Moses swore אֲרָעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְתַקִּיפֵי אֲרָעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל, 'by the Lord of Hosts and by the mighty ones of the Land of Israel.'"

⁷⁰ Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 83: "In the Song of Songs, which almost never refers directly to God, this suggests yet another divine blessing, that God's greatest gift of physical love comes according to his own timing and within the natural world that he has also created."

⁷¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 154–5: "She is telling them to avoid sexual experience until the proper time. A modern, Western reader might take this to mean 'Do not become involved in sexual activity until you are sure that you are emotionally prepared for it.' Such an interpretation would be quite out of character with the moral code of ancient Israel and the message of the Song. In this context, the exhortation can only mean that they should avoid promiscuity and save their virginity for marriage. This is not a matter of imposing Christian or bourgeois ethics on the text. To the contrary, ancient moral codes in this regard are far more conservative than modern Western codes. At the heart of the Song, moreover, is the event of a young woman marrying the man she loves and giving up her virginity. The passion of love and of the powerful emotions of the transition from virgin to sexually active woman are to be experienced with what the OT calls the 'husband of your youth.' The woman is simply telling the younger girl to wait until she finds and marries the man she loves... Because her man tenderly sustains her, she is at peace about 'awakening love' with him. A woman who awakens love with a man who is not giving of himself or prepared to sustain her will find herself bitter and desolate."

⁷² Hess, *Song of Songs*, BCOTWP, 83: "The appreciation of love as a gift from God is the traditional theological understanding of this book. This verse captures the counterbalance. The full appreciation of the joys of physical love can happen only when love comes at the appropriate time with the partner that love chooses. For the Christian, here are the beginnings of a powerful message of physical love as God's gift according to his will and timing. It is not a decision reached by the daughters of Jerusalem (any more than by the

The story is told that first-century Jewish rabbis actually warned young men of their congregation not to read the Song of Solomon until they were thirty.⁷³ I understand why rabbis in the first century, and pastors in the twenty-first century might suggest that. But I think that's a mistake. The delight of lovemaking in the context of marriage needs to be communicated to both young men and young women. In fact, there's good reason to suspect that the primary audience of this ancient book was indeed young, unmarried women, the virgin daughters of Jerusalem.

Let me reiterate, church, what I've said already in this series. Desire is not demonic. Eros is not evil. Sexual intimacy is not insidious. Sex... lovemaking... baby-making... this is God's gift to us, and this is presented in the Bible as a delight. The context has to be right. The expression of sex has to be right.⁷⁴ And when it is, it is holy and good and God-honoring.

Sex! Love! Marriage! Romance! Companionship! Partnership in marriage. These are good things for the church to teach and uphold.

One of the great privileges that I have as a pastor is to do weddings for our church. Weddings can be stressful. And they can be emotionally charged. But they are also fantastic. A man and a woman vowing to one another and to their family and friends. I can't think of a better event to be a part of. And oftentimes I'm the person in the wedding leading the couple through their vow-making ceremony.

But one of the things that I've always done as a pastor is try to communicate that something more important than the marriage itself is being foreshadowed in the marriage covenant. As amazing and as powerful as earthly marriage is, it is eclipsed... it is surpassed... by an even greater marriage.

And every time I do a wedding ceremony, I always ask the couple if they would allow me to share the gospel during their wedding. And every time, the couple has graciously agreed. And I'm thankful for that. Because weddings often bring people who have never heard the gospel.

And the gospel is this. I want to close with this. Let me tell it like a love story. The King of the Universe was separated from one of his beloved subjects—a woman. This woman was captured and held captive by the King's great enemy, a dragon. And she was lost forever. But the King sent his beloved son to go and slay the dragon, rescue the damsel in distress, and bring her back to his father King. And the beloved son not only rescued this fair maiden, but he also married her and brought her in to share in his kingdom and the kingdom of his Father forever.

Let me say that again, but let me say it without the fairy tale flourish, because this isn't a fairy tale. God the Father sent his son to save humanity that was lost and separated from him. God the Son came to earth, died on a cross as an atoning payment for the sins of people like you and me. And the Son, after rising from the dead, says, "Believe in me. Believe in my death. Believe in my resurrection. And you will have eternal life."⁷⁵

That is the gospel. That is the true and better marriage for eternity that earthly marriage foreshadows. And every single person in this room...young, old, rich, poor, married, unmarried,⁷⁶ widowed, divorced... has an opportunity to participate in that marriage that will never end.

Bow with me in a word of prayer.

sons) but one that must be received when and in the manner that God has decided."

⁷³ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 28.

⁷⁴ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 393: "The natural joy of sexual awakening is ruined by premature experimentation."

⁷⁵ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 10: "This is how the Song speaks to us today, whether we are looking for love, in love, out of love, forsaken and disillusioned by love, or totally confused about the whole subject. Our desire to love and be loved by a human being is at its core simply a reflection of our desperate need to love and be loved by the God who made us for himself."

⁷⁶ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 34: "While it's true that the human race would go the way of the woolly mammoth or the stilt-legged llama without sex, you individually would not. This is an important point. It's important because the most fulfilled human being ever—our Lord Jesus Christ—lived without it. And so did John the Baptist and many of Jesus' followers who came after him. Jesus was and is a virgin. That's an important reality to remind ourselves of today and every day."

