

Key:

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

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

The Real Prince Charming

Song 3:6–5:1

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to the book of Song of Solomon.

The classic love story—whether it's “Cinderella” or “Snow White” or “Sleeping Beauty”—involves first of all a damsel in distress. She has been raised in a home of poverty and struggle. She is beautiful, but overlooked. She is lovely, but unloved. And through a remarkable set of circumstances, she is noticed by a man who wants to marry her. Her Prince Charming comes calling. And he says to her, “Be my one and only.” And they kiss. And they fall in love. And they live happily ever after.

Something like that happens in our passage today, except Prince Charming isn't who you think he is. Because there's a pretender prince too—in fact, it's King Solomon. He's the wisest and smartest king who ever lived. He's the richest king in Israel's history. He's the famous son of the famous King David.

And this king comes a courtin'. But he doesn't say, “Be my one and only.” He doesn't say, “My beloved is mine and I am hers.” He can't say that. Instead he says, “Do you want to join my harem?” Instead he says, “Be my one and only... of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines!” Not exactly Prince Charming.

One of my favorite moments in that old cartoon, “Beauty and the Beast” is when Belle looks over towards the Beast and she sings, “He's not exactly Prince Charming.” That's an understatement!

Something like that could be said in this passage. King Solomon... not exactly Prince Charming.

Look with me at chapter 3, verse 6.

⁶ *What¹ is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?*

¹ The question here more specifically is “Who is this?” And the Hebrew for “this” (זֹאת) is feminine singular. This has led to divergent interpretations on who is speaking and what is being described in verse 6. Also there is debate about how this connects to the rest of the chapter in verses 7–11. The options for speakers are “the man/shepherd,” “the woman/Shulamite,” or the chorus of Jerusalemite daughters. From my perspective, this is inconsequential. One man is clearly speaking to his wife in 4:1, so whether the speaker in 3:6 is the man, his wife, or the chorus, the contrast painted between Solomon's public entourage (3:7–11) and the private communication between man and wife (4:1–5:1) is stark.

The bigger issues is what is being described in 3:6. Is “this” a woman in light of the feminine singular זֹאת? Maybe the Shulamite presented in contrast to Solomon's litter in 3:7–11? Is the “this” a reference to Solomon's “litter,” a feminine noun (Hebrew: שִׁטָּה)? Is the “this” a reference the scene itself which unfolds in 3:7–11? Is it Solomon's new bride in the litter? Is the woman inside the Shulamite or a random wife of Solomon? Is this even a wedding at all? The cryptic nature of what is being presented here is frustrating.

Again the stark contrast holds. Whether the זֹאת is a reference to the litter or the scene or the bride inside the litter (or even if it's a reference to the Shulamite who isn't in the litter at all but is contrasted with it), the pomp of Solomon's procession and the litter inlaid with the love of the daughters of Jerusalem is not the same as the private display of love, tenderness, and affection between man and wife in 4:1–5:1.

Since זֹאת is used elsewhere in the Song to describe a woman (6:10; 8:5), I think that the best way to translate this statement in 3:6 is “Who is this (woman)...?” In other words, I think the ESV is wrong here. But I'm not convinced that the “woman” is a reference to the Shulamite. Could it be a reference to another woman inside the litter? Maybe one of Solomon's brides who are being celebrated (see 3:11) and contrasted with the Shulamite and her groom in 4:1–5:1? The reason I don't think that this is the Shulamite in 3:6 being described in contrast to Solomon's bridal party in 3:7–11 (according to Berlin) is because 3:7 naturally answers the question asked in 3:6 (see Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 400). Although it answers it obliquely. Question: “Who is this (woman)?” Answer: “Behold, it's Solomon's litter!”

If you remember from last time, the Shulamite woman has just uttered her second challenge to the daughters of Jerusalem—**“Don’t awaken desire until it pleases.”** And she follows that up with an appropriate scenario where sexual love and feminine beauty might be compromised.

But the scene is not what you might think. It’s not a temptation towards premarital sex.² It’s actually a temptation for sex in the context of marriage... just not monogamous marriage.

Look at **verse 7**.

⁷ Behold, it is the litter of Solomon!

A litter is a “portable bed.”³ It’s a traveling coach with a couch. **So this is Solomon’s “portable love shack.”**⁴ And it’s well-guarded.

Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel,⁸ all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night.⁵

Solomon’s coach needs to be well-guarded, because Solomon’s an ancient king. He’s got enemies foreign and domestic. And Solomon needs a portable love shack, because he’s got lots of queens and concubines to service. And he’s constantly adding to their numbers.

And to add to the allure of this carriage, look at **verse 9**.

⁹ King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon.

¹⁰ He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple;⁶ its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.⁷

Solomon’s litter is incredibly ornate here. And he was probably carried into town on this carriage by his trusty servants.⁸ **So think of this carriage like a cross between a Rolls-Royce and the Ark of the Covenant.**

All of this sounds positive and inviting and fantastic, until you get to the end of **verse 10**.

its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.

If that last statement sounds a bit icky, that’s because it is. Solomon’s carriage is absolutely beautiful. He built it himself with the finest materials. But he didn’t build it just for one wife. He built it for his multitude of lovers.⁹

Interestingly Garrett changes his view on this issue from his NAC commentary (1993) to his WBC commentary (2003). His earlier NAC commentary identified the word ‘this’ as a neutrum referring to the whole spectacle in view (400). But in the later WBC commentary he sees it instead as a reference to the woman in the palanquin or litter (177).

² Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 91: “Purity before marriage is not an automatic guarantee of a great sex life within marriage, as though God owed some recompense for your obedience... Don’t simply assume that marriage plus affection equals great sex. Study the subject and learn to excel at it. If particular emotional or physiological issues make this a challenging area of your marriage, get counseling and assistance. Sex was intended by God to be a delightful and fun part of the marriage relationship!”

³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 178: “The word מִפָּה basically means ‘bed,’ but context demands that it be some kind of royal litter here since, according to v 6, it is coming up from the wilderness.”

⁴ THEODORET OF CYR allegorizes the bed as follows: “Let us understand the bridegroom’s bed to be the divine Scriptures. When the bride reclines on them, as it were, along with the bridegroom, and receives the seeds of teaching, she conceives, bears, is in labor and gives birth to spiritual benefit.” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 329.

⁵ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 69: “What is also obvious is that his coming is a big deal. There are sixty elite soldiers (nearly twice as many as King David had, see 2 Samuel 23:13–39)—armed and able to protect even at night, marching beside this carriage or palanquin.”

⁶ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 180: “The significance of אַרְגָּמָן, ‘purple,’ is that the item in question was made of material dyed purple with the secretions from certain mollusks found in the eastern Mediterranean (any one of four species of mollusks could be used). Tyre and Sidon were the principal sources of this material. The color was highly prized, and items colored with this dye were extravagantly expensive (it required some eight thousand mollusks to produce a single gram of this dye, according to *ISBE* 3:1057, ‘purple’). It goes without saying that one would not normally use this dye for upholstery.”

⁷ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 71: “The bed of the man and the woman in the poem is not purple but verdantly green, while the beams and rafters of their bed are made not out of gold and silver, but out of simple cedar and pine (1:16–17). While these construction materials may be simple and natural, they nonetheless have an enduring quality that will last long after Solomon’s artificial glory has faded away.”

⁸ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 91: “Carrying-chairs for the elite are known from representations in tombs from Egypt’s Fourth dynasty of the Old Kingdom, ca. 2500BCE.”

Let me say it this way—this five-star hotel room is exquisite. This is like a trip to the Caribbean on the private yacht of a Hollywood celebrity. It’s wonderful. It’s dreamy. The only problem is that there’s more than just one girl who has experienced it with this celebrity.

Look at verse 11.

¹¹ *Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother [Bathsheba] crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.*

There’s some debate as to who is talking here in **verse 11**. I actually think this is the Shulamite woman talking. And I think this is a reiteration of the warning she gave in **verse 5**. She said there,

⁵ *I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,*

Now she says, ironically in **verse 11**, **“Go out there, daughters of Zion! Go see King Solomon. He’s impressive. He’s got his crown. He’s got his gilded carriage. He’s got his sixty guards. He’s wise and he’s rich. And maybe he’ll invite you to be his wife. Or maybe, you’ll just be one of his concubines. It’s every young woman’s dream—wealth, security, happiness, and fame. There’s just one itty-bitty little catch—you’ll be one of a thousand girls. You’ll be part of his harem, if that’s what you want.”**

Write this down as #1 in your notes. We’re going to see two scenes in the passage today. Two contrasting options. First of all there is...

1) Solomon’s Pomp: The **Counterfeit** (3:6–11)

I find it interesting that after Solomon’s death, the leaders of Israel came to his son, Rehoboam, and said, **“Give us some relief from these excessive tax burdens that your father instituted” (1 Kgs 12:1–4)**. And you might wonder, why was the financial situation in Israel so bad after Solomon’s death? Didn’t Solomon make gold and silver abundant in the land (**1 Kings 10:27**)? Didn’t he travel around by sea and bring all kinds of riches to Israel (**1 Kings 10:22**)?

Yes, he did. But also, Solomon had expensive tastes. And you don’t materially support 700 wives and 300 concubines in the kingdom without a little thing called taxation.

I remember hearing some citizens of the UK complaining about this recently. They were frustrated about how much the British government spends taking care of the Royal Family every year. And I sympathize with that. But what if King Charles had 700 wives and 300 concubines? And what if he was asking the British people to finance that for him? That might be just a little burdensome.

But the issue presented here in **Song of Solomon** is really about the cost associated with another royal wedding. The issue here is this—what’s the better way for the young women of Israel? As a young woman in Jerusalem, do you want the riches and the security of being a royal bride? Or do you want something *simpler*? Something *poorer*? Something less *fantastical*? You might still have to shepherd your own sheep, but at least you’ll have one man to yourself.

Go ahead and write this down as a second point in your notes. Here’s the contrast.

2) The Shepherd’s Devotion: The **Covenant** (4:1–5:1)

Watch the contrast starting in **4:1**.¹⁰ Notice that the plural of “the daughters of Zion” becomes the singular of “you” and “my love” and “my bride.”

¹ *Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves¹¹ behind your veil.¹²*

⁹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 96: “There may be a wink at Solomon’s sexual conquests, if we retain the MT reading that the Jerusalem women paved his palanquin with love.”

¹⁰ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 74: “In Song 3:6–4:8, we have two contrasting and competing views of what love and marriage are about. On the one hand, we have Solomon’s version of love and marriage that is thoroughly self-centered. It is all about him.”

¹¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 188: “It seems that the point of comparison is that her eyes are partially hidden behind a veil, much as a dove hides in the cleft of a rock (see Song 2:14 and Jer 48:28). He finds the way her eyes seem to be hiding behind her veil to be very alluring.”

¹² Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 188: “The sixteenth-century Spanish Hebraist Luis de León argued that Jerome was using a euphemistic paraphrase, because צִמָּה actually refers to female pudenda (J. Barr, ‘Luis de León,’ 231–33). This interpretation is possible in light of Isa 47:2, a taunt of the ‘virgin daughter of Babylon,’ where גְּלִי צִמָּתָךְ could be taken to mean ‘expose your pudenda’

Now notice a few things here. The scene has completely shifted in **chapter 4, verse 1**. Solomon and his love shack aren't mentioned again. And the speaker changes too.

If you have an ESV Bible, you see "HE" above **verse 1**. And that's correct. And that "HE" isn't Solomon. We know from the use of language in the passage.

Notice the statement "my love" in **verse 1**. That's the word רַעֲיָתִי that I gave you last week meaning "my friend" or "my companion." This is the word that the shepherd husband uses for his shepherdess wife.¹³ She's his friend. She's his love. She's his one and only.¹⁴

Solomon doesn't get to use that term רַעֲיָתִי ("my friend"). He's not friends with his 700 wives and his 300 concubines. He might know their names. He might know which children of his they bore. But he's not their friend, and they are not his friends.¹⁵

Notice also the word "my" and "you" in **verse 1** are singular. This is the language of exclusivity and monogamy. In fact, just notice the words "your" in the following verses: "your eyes" (4:1), "your hair" (4:1), "your veil" (4:1), "your teeth" (4:2), "your lips" (4:3), "your mouth" (4:3), "your cheeks" (4:3), "your neck" (4:4), "your two breasts" (4:5). Every single one of those possessive pronouns is singular. This is one man admiring over and over again his singular love, his one bride.

And his admiration is the admiration of a husband for his wife.

¹ Behold,¹⁶ you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil.

There may be allusions here to their wedding day, when she took her vows behind a veil. But this word "veil" could also be translated "locks."¹⁷ So this isn't *necessarily* their wedding night. This could be just another Saturday night together.

Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.

Gilead is a mountainous region just east of Israel and the Jordan River in modern-day Jordan. And goats in Israel were black not white. Keep that in mind with the next statement.

² Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young.

rather than 'take off your veil.' The first clause of Isa 47:3 is תגל ערוותך, 'your nakedness will be exposed.' But it is almost impossible to make sense of the line עיניך יונים מבעד לצמחק, 'your eyes are doves behind your,' in the Song with this interpretation of the word צמח.

¹³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 71: "Solomon's lovemaking to the many daughters of Jerusalem in these opulent surroundings contrasts dramatically with the exclusive love of the man and his 'darling' (4:1) in the simpler surroundings that the rest of the poem celebrates."

¹⁴ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 71: "Indeed, the pageantry of Solomon's postwedding procession (vv. 6–11) and his love life in general are used as an ironic contrast to the unspectacular, single-minded, committed love of this couple."

¹⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 401: "Solomon is also a foil since young lovers really do not need the trappings of glory, as Solomon did; they have each other (see 8:11–12)."

¹⁶ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 77: "Behold [or 'Wow,' we might translate it]."

¹⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 102: "While many ancient, medieval, and modern commentators translate צמח as 'veil' or 'kerchief,' there are precedents for 'locks, tresses' in Ibn Ezra and KJV, 'within thy locks'... There are several reasons to question the meaning 'veil.' That the Bible elsewhere uses a different word for 'veil' (צעיף, Gen 24:65; 38:14, 19) is not in itself a compelling objection, for the Song often employs rare terms. But why would the woman's eyes and cheeks be veiled when her hair, lips, and teeth are not? If anything, her hair should be covered, not her eyes (1 Cor 11:5–15; Susanna 32). But in the very next phrase he admires her long, flowing hair."

In other words, you've got all your teeth and they are beautiful.¹⁸ They are white and sparkly like freshly washed female sheep.¹⁹

And the whiteness of her teeth is a perfect contrast with the darkness of her hair.²⁰ Remember, this is a Jewish girl. So she's got long, dark, wavy hair. And her black hair is dark and beautiful like a goat's, and her teeth are beautiful and white like sheep. That's high praise from a shepherd!²¹

Notice too that he's going from the top of her head all the way down her body. And the use of color is emphasized again in **verse 3**.²²

³ *Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.*

Scarlet lips. Red cheeks like a pomegranate. Black hair. White teeth. This woman is a masterpiece in the eyes of her beloved. And you might say to this cynically, **"Yeah, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder."** To which I would reply, **"Touché."** That's true. And this beloved beholder is beholding true beauty.²³

Look at **verse 4**.

⁴ *Your neck is like the tower of David,²⁴ built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields,²⁵ all of them shields of warriors.²⁶*

Let me help you with that one. She's wearing a necklace that bears the resemblance of a strong tower with weapons hanging off of it.²⁷ But he's saying more than you look like a strong tower. He's saying of her that

¹⁸ AUGUSTINE and his allegorizing are comical here: "The teeth of the church are those through whom she speaks. Of what sort are your teeth? 'Like a flock of sheep that are shorn.' Why 'that are shorn'? Because they have laid aside the burdens of the world... 'Whereof every one bears twins.' What twins? Those two commandments, whereupon hang all the law and the prophets." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 332. Several of the reformers follow suit and "find the imagery of teeth a fitting representation of the church's leadership, which masticates the Word of truth (Melchior Hoffman, Martin Luther, Johann Gerhard)" (Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 373).

¹⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 189: "This may seem like a rather droll bit of praise to the modern, Western reader, but we live in an age of highly sophisticated dentistry and orthodontics. Until very recently, a beautiful, healthy smile with no missing teeth was hardly something people could take for granted."

²⁰ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 103: "Sheep's wool is a common symbol for whiteness (Isa 1:18; Ps 147:16), and washed wool is even whiter than unwashed wool. As in the metaphor for her hair in v. 1, here, too, the movement of the sheep produces a 'video' effect: the sheep come up from the washing pool in an orderly line."

²¹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 103n17: "עִזִּים is used generically for 'goats' or 'female goats' ... There were two types of goats in ancient Israel, long-haired (raised for its hair; similar to Angora goats) and short-haired (raised for its milk)."

²² Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 72: "If the dominant colors in the first strophe are the black goats and white sheep, then the second strophe is dominated by the color red. The woman's lips are like scarlet thread, while her cheeks are like the blush-red halves of a pomegranate (Song 4:3). Pomegranates were associated with fertility on account of their many seeds, a theme never far below the surface of this poem."

²³ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 77: "She is not blind to her imperfections. But he is. It's blind love at its best. The blemish here and the bulge there he notices not. Instead, to him her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, and breasts—those *seven* (!) body parts (she's perfect)—represent her complete beauty. She's "altogether beautiful." She's his realized eschatology!"

²⁴ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 404–5: "He does not mean that her neck is outlandishly long. What is striking in this analogy is the military terminology. The picture of a tower of David, Israel's great warrior king, adorned with the shields and weapons of mighty men, cannot but convey a sense of unassailable strength. No man could "conquer" her, and her suitor is awed by the dignity she carries. Her love is a gift; it could never become plunder."

²⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 191: "The language of Ezek 27:11 is very close to that of this verse. There is a kind of beauty associated with military hardware, but it is a beauty that connotes strength. Applied to walls and towers, this language connotes impregnability. The man's adoration of the woman arises in part from the fact that he cannot take her at will. He speaks tenderly to her, hoping that she will give him willingly what he cannot take by force. Furthermore, his words imply respect for how she deports herself and possesses her beauty. She is not weak in her beauty but strong."

²⁶ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 78: "The key to understanding these metaphors is to understand the language as sensory and emotive. We are not so much to see what he sees but to feel what he feels."

²⁷ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: "Women's necklaces at that time were often made of coins or hammered flat pieces of metal, row upon row like a multiple strand of pearls. The woman's necklace might very well have looked like David's tower, and she might very well have been like all that the tower symbolized—ready to spring into action to defend what she knew to be hers, and equally ready to be at complete peace with the man she loved."

her neck, as an entry point to the rest of her body, is a well-defended fortress. Nobody's getting past her neck, visually or otherwise. Her purity and her commitment to him are something that he treasures.

Look at **verse 5**.

⁵ *Your two breasts are like two fawns,²⁸ twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies²⁹*

We've seen these terms (deer and gazelle) used before for masculinity and femininity. The breasts of the woman are described with the young feminine terms for deer and gazelles.

By the way, this isn't the only place in the Bible where language like this is used. Solomon wrote something similar in **Proverbs 5:15–20**: “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?”

We'll talk more about intoxication in just a moment. Look at **verse 6**.

⁶ *Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.³⁰*

Now **verse 6** might not seem to be related to **verse 5**, but it is. Last week I told you about “cleft mountains” or “cleavage mountains” in **2:17**. The woman in that passage invited her man to join her on her body and enjoy love and sex as God created it.

In this verse, we have the man admiring the woman's body. And he refers to her two breasts as gentle and delicate like fawns grazing among lilies in **verse 5**. Then in **verse 6**, he refers to her breasts as Mt. Myrrh and Frankincense Hill.

He's perhaps reminiscing about their sexual delights in the past. He's perhaps anticipating another invitation to join her on her body! Stay tuned for her response.

In fact, one way to translate **verse 6** is “I will go to that which is mine... the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.” Up to this point, it was you, your, and yours. Now it's “**I want to visit that which belongs to me.**” **Can a man say that to a woman? Is that allowed? It depends. It depends on whether there's a ring on that finger and vows in their rearview mirror... not vows forward through the windshield, but backward in the rearview, if you catch my drift.**

And to cap things off in **verse 7**, he sums up his bride in one encapsulating statement.

⁷ *You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.³¹*

I bet someone else could find a flaw in this girl. She found some flaws in herself in **chapter 1**. But this man sees her as flawless. Once again, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And this beloved beholder is beholding true beauty.

²⁸ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 73: “Fawns are shy and rarely observed, while gazelles are graceful: both qualities therefore provide a fitting comparison here, as in Proverbs 5:19 [A lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love].”

²⁹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 78: “Her breasts are tender, young (recently matured), symmetrical, round, sprightly, and playful.”

³⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 192: “The breasts are here given the names ‘Myrrh Mountain’ and ‘Incense Hill’ obviously because their shape is mountainlike but also because they give exotic pleasure, much as spices do. In addition, the Israelite bride may have literally perfumed her breasts with myrrh and incense; in Song 1:13, the woman describes the man as a pouch of myrrh between her breasts, a metaphor that may reflect an actual bridal practice. In saying that he intends to get himself to these mountains ‘until the day comes to life and the shadows flee,’ the man means that he intends to make love to her all night long. The language of love is often hyperbolic.”

³¹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 108: “Her absolute beauty is emphasized by first stating it positively—every part of you is beautiful—and then negatively—you have no imperfection.”

By the way, just a typological *nota bene* here. Jesus, our eternal groom, sees us, his church, as flawless.³² Not because we don't have blot or blemish.³³ We do. But he sees us as flawless, because he covered over those blemishes with his grace.³⁴

Write this down as a subpoint. Let me give you a, b, and c for “The Shepherd’s Devotion.” First of all, we see devoted delight.

a) Devoted **Delight** (4:1–7)

Let’s observe the contrast between **3:6–11** and **4:1–7**. Solomon can offer riches. He can offer security. He can offer safety. He can offer fame. Maybe he can even offer delight—he’s an experienced lover. He’s had lots of practice. His traveling bed is famous and “inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.” But he can’t offer “devoted delight.” He can’t offer friendship and loyalty and exclusivity like this shepherd offers his shepherdess.

Will the real Prince Charming please stand up? It’s not Solomon. Solomon didn’t say this:

⁷ *You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.*

This guy is absolutely charming. He might not be “*Prince Charming*.” More like “*Shepherd Charming*.” He doesn’t have the wealth and reputation of King Solomon. But he’s got plenty to offer his wife.³⁵

And speaking of loyalty and commitment, write this down under b. This shepherd offers her Devoted Delight, but he also offers her...

b) Exclusive **Intimacy** (4:8–15)

Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ *Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon.*

Notice in **verse 8**, this is the first time that the shepherd calls the shepherdess “my bride.” And some commentators think that’s because **chapters 3 and 4** intimate a marriage ceremony. They were dating in **chapters 1 and 2**. They get married in **chapters 3 and 4**. They have conflict and resolution in **chapters 5 and 6**. And then, they reenact their honeymoon in **chapters 7 and 8**. That’s not my view, but I understand why people hold to that. It’s because “my bride” becomes explicit here.

My view instead is that they were always married. The language from **chapter 1** of this book was the language of a married couple. A wife says to her husband in ancient Israel, “let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (1:2). **You don’t get to say that to a person unless you have a ring on your finger already.**

And so when I see “my bride” here in **4:8**, I don’t see a new development in the Song. I just see another term of endearment. This has been true all along, but he’s making it explicit here. And the author³⁶ is contrasting the exclusivity of their relationship with the inclusivity of Solomon’s harem in the previous passage.³⁷ Which way looks better to the daughters of Jerusalem? Choose wisely, young ladies.

Notice too in **verse 8** he’s asking her once again to come away with him.

³² O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 78–9: “I think about God’s ‘blind’ love for us in Christ. It’s called the doctrine of forensic justification. Not a beautiful name, but it is a beautiful reality: You and I are made beautiful through Christ’s bloody atoning death. Oddly enough, one of the places this doctrine is illustrated is in Ephesians 5:25–30, which speaks of the mystery of marriage between Christ and the Church and how through Christ’s sacrificial love he will present the Church to himself ‘holy and without blemish.’ Yes, Christian, in him you and I are ‘altogether beautiful.’”

³³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 92: “When Jesus Christ calls you to himself, he doesn’t just say to you, ‘I love you for now; let’s see how this works out as we go along. If you are holy enough and devout enough over the next fifty years or so, then maybe I’ll take you to heaven when you die.’ No! When God calls you to himself, he legally binds himself to you in a covenant relationship, permanently and unbreakably.”

³⁴ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 78: “In reality, even in the best of marriages you will discover that she is not ‘altogether beautiful’ and without flaw—and neither are you. We are all deeply broken.”

³⁵ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 77: “She thereby becomes a true partner with him in building a lasting and loving house together—a house that may lack Solomon’s material wealth and vast progeny but that has a splendor of its own that Solomon in all his glory cannot match. On this model, marriage is two people’s becoming one flesh: a single unit that rises and falls together, and that sticks together for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health, till death parts them.”

³⁶ Again, I see the author as Solomon. This is his mea culpa. He’s showing the people of Israel (especially the daughters) a better way than what he’s experienced. And he’s showing them a better way than what his brides and concubines have experienced.

⁸ *Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.*

In the tenth century BC, Lebanon was a mountainous, remote region north of Israel. These mountain peaks are found near there—Amana, Senir, Hermon.³⁸ And in those mountains, there were dens and lairs for big cats.³⁹

Here's a picture of Mount Hermon today, which is right near the border of Israel, Syria, and Lebanon.



Mount Hermon⁴⁰

Now he's not asking her to go to Lebanon with him. He's asking her to come down from Lebanon. Why is she in Lebanon? Well, she's not literally in Lebanon.⁴¹ This is akin to him asking her, his dove, to come out of the crevices in the rocky cliffs. He is saying, **"Don't be aloof and remote, darling! Don't hide out away from me. Come with me, my bride. Come to me! Let's be together!"**

Why? Because... look at **verse 9**.

⁹ *You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride;*

Literally, "you have hearted me my sister bride." **"You have pierced my heart like an arrow through a deer."**⁴² This guy is lovestruck. He's thunderstruck. **She's gutted him in a good way.** And he can't get over it.

She said she was sick with love in **2:5**. Now he says he's pierced by love in **4:9**. She's lovesick; he's lovestruck.

These two have it bad for one another. They are hopelessly hung up on one another. It would be embarrassing and unforgiveable, if it weren't for the fact that they are married and it's adorable.

By the way, this is one of the reasons that you don't give yourself over to someone you're not planning to marry. Breakups are unbelievably painful. I've seen people go into a complete tailspin because their boyfriend or girlfriend of six months or a year dumps them. That's incredibly painful. You'd be better off guarding your heart and waiting emotionally and physically for the person that you never have to break up with. Be lovesick! Be lovestruck! By the person you're going to share life with.

³⁷ Some people might object and say, "Well, Solomon's wives could be called 'my bride' by Solomon." That's true, but not all of Solomon's harem were brides. He also had 300 concubines. And the language of 3:10 doesn't "inlaid with love by the wives of Solomon" but "inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem."

³⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 192: "According to Deut 3:9, Hermon and Senir are one and the same mountain."

³⁹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 109: "Elsewhere in the Bible, the Lebanon is an icon for the biggest and farthest place in the world, with the most and the best trees and animals."

⁴⁰ This picture is part of a collection called "Galilee of the North" by Todd Bolen and A.D. Riddle. Used here with permission. For more pictures like this, see <https://www.bibleplaces.com/>.

⁴¹ CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: "This teaches us the bride's place of origin, that she comes from worship of idols. For Mount Lebanon is full of idols, whence you come, it says, hastening past through the law. Without knowing the law, you were taught the mystery of Christ." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 333–4.

⁴² Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 84: "The phrase 'You have stolen my heart' (Song 4:9) means something different in Hebrew than it does in English. In the West, we think with our heads and feel with our hearts. As a result, we call someone who has lost his ability to love *heartless*, while an unthinking reaction is *mindless*. In Hebrew, however, the heart is where you think, so the person who has lost his heart is a person who cannot think straight, someone who in our parlance has 'lost his head.' In effect, the man is saying, 'You drive me out of my mind.' This is the mirror image of the woman's earlier declaration that she is "sick with love" (2:5)."

Then you can say this positively not negatively. This is positive here in **verse 9**.

⁹ *You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride;*

Sister Israelite, not sister-sister.⁴³ **This is not an Abraham and Sarah kind of thing.**

you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

Man, this guy has fallen hard. He's smitten. I know what that's like.

¹⁰ *How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love⁴⁴ than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!*

"Love" could be translated lovemaking here. And wine was treasured by the ancient Israelites, especially good wine. To say that her love is better than wine, or that her lovemaking is better than wine... that is saying something as a Hebrew.

This statement about the "fragrance of your oils" is confusing and ambiguous. But obviously something sexually suggestive is meant there. I hesitate to speculate.

Speaking of sexually suggestive. Look at **verse 11**.

¹¹ *Your lips drip nectar,⁴⁵ my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue;⁴⁶*

I don't think that verse needs a lot of explaining.⁴⁷ **The reference to honey and milk is fascinating. Her body is a wonderland, and her body is the Promised Land.**⁴⁸
the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

Wow, this Lebanon must be an amazing place. I need to check that place out.

¹² *A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.*

Wait, why is she locked? Why is she sealed? I thought they were married.

Well, he doesn't say this as a negative thing. He's not saying that she's a prude and a cold fish when it's time to get intimate. He's talking about her purity here. He's talking about her commitment to him.⁴⁹ **Her**

⁴³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 84: "She is not merely his bride but his sister. This is where the language turns metaphorical, using a term of endearment well attested in ancient Near Eastern love poetry. She is not *literally* his sister. Rather, the word indicates that the friendship in their marriage is like that between a brother and a sister, the closest bond that was possible with a person of the opposite gender in antiquity."

⁴⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 186: "For MT הָיָה, 'your caresses,' both times LXX has μαστοί σου, 'your breasts,' reading הָיָה; cf. Vg. See *Comment*."

⁴⁵ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 85: "The phrase 'Your lips drip nectar' (Song 4:11) exactly parallels Proverbs 5:3, where it describes the kiss of the adulterous woman."

⁴⁶ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: "What we would call a French kiss although it was nineteen hundred years before France was a nation."

⁴⁷ THEODORET OF CYR allegorizes as follows: "'Your lips distill a honeycomb, bride; honey and milk are under your tongue.' Here it refers to the teachers of the church, offering religious teaching and, as it were, carrying honeycomb of bees on its lips, and distilling drops of honey, containing not only honey but also milk, and providing to each the appropriate nourishment, both suited to the infants and adapted to the mature. Now, honeycombs borne on the lips of the teachers are the divine Scriptures, which contain bees that make honeycombs and produce honey, the sacred prophets and apostles. These latter fly about the meadows of the Holy Spirit, as it were constructing the honeycombs of the divine Scriptures, filling them with the honey of doctrine and dispatching them to us for our benefit. The letter resembles the honeycomb, while the sense hidden in it resembles the honey; the lips of pious teachers release the drops of this honey. Also, milk flowing from their tongue reaches those in need of milk." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 337–8.

⁴⁸ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 85: "The presence of honey and milk under the woman's tongue to evoke a comparison between her and the Promised Land."

⁴⁹ THEODORET OF CYR allegorizes as follows: "He calls her 'a garden,' not as though bearing a single fruit of piety and virtue, but as one producing many and varied fruits; and 'locked' as though sealed off and proof against intrigue.... She is also 'a fountain sealed.' She is not available to everyone but to those thought worthy of these streams; the Lord in the sacred Gospels also says of this fountain, 'Whoever drinks of the water I shall give will not thirst forever, and instead there will be in them a spring of living water gushing up to life eternal.' Properly, then, he refers to her as 'a fountain sealed' for not being available to everyone but to those thought worthy. The divine sacraments, after all, are available not to the uninitiated but to the initiated, not to those wallowing in iniquity after initiation but to those living an exact life or purified through repentance." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 337.

“locked garden” is protected from intruders.⁵⁰ Her love and her body are reserved for him. She’s locked, and only he has the key.⁵¹

Look at **verse 13**.

¹³ *Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard,*

Goodness gracious, I don’t even know what that means. I’m afraid to hazard a guess.⁵²

¹⁴ *nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes,⁵³ with all choice spices⁵⁴—*

This is the Hebrew equivalent to “sugar and spice and everything nice.”

¹⁵ *a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.⁵⁵*

There’s another reference to Lebanon.⁵⁶ In addition to having beautiful mountains and the best forests, Lebanon was also famous for its clear and good tasting water.⁵⁷

And this is where all of the imagery and euphemisms collide into a barrage of sights and smells and tastes. There’s so much going on here, I don’t even know where to begin. But the gist of what he’s saying is, **“You look great. You smell great. You taste great. You are a well of living water to me. I’ve got to have your love or I’ll die.”**

Listen, that’s not NT living water. Don’t allegorize this!⁵⁸ He’s not talking about eternal life like Jesus does in the book of **John**. He’s saying here, **“I need to be refreshed by your love and by your body. I will shrivel up and die if I don’t get that. I need it.”**

⁵⁰ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 114: “This garden, like ancient royal gardens on which it is modeled (cf. Eccl 2:5–6; Neh 3:15; and the Garden of Eden), has all manner of native and exotic trees and plants, and its own irrigation system. The garden is enclosed, as were ancient gardens (often by walls), for they were to be enjoyed only by their owners. They were protected from entry by intruders and wild animals and were sheltered from storms.”

⁵¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 196 sees this differently. This is part of his view that the wedding in 3:6–11 is followed by the wedding night of 4:1–5:1: “The point is not that she is locked to all others but open to him. Rather, it is that she is as of yet still virginal and out of even his reach. Like the prior metaphor of the goddess on a mountain, this strophe presents her as inaccessible. He appeals to her to open herself to him.”

⁵² Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 197: “The word here refers to the growth of plants generally and not to branches of a single plant... In short, the phrase ‘your growth’ does not refer to any parts of the woman’s body. Rather, it refers to the variety of plants found in her ‘garden,’ a metaphor for the pleasures of her lovemaking. This verse does not catalog parts of her anatomy under the metaphor of plants; still less does it focus on her vagina. It uses an assortment of aromatic plants to communicate the idea that her love gives manifold and diverse pleasures.”

⁵³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 194: “The metaphors here relate to sensations rather than to physical objects. Wine, perfume, balsam, honey, and milk all connote not the items themselves but their tastes and smells. Also, metaphors that are liquids rather than solids (such as towers, mountains, goats, or sheep) more readily lend themselves to the celebration of an action—her lovemaking—rather than to the praise of her physical body.”

⁵⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 197–8: “Nard originated in India; saffron came from regions around the Caspian and Black Seas. קנה basically means ‘cane’ or ‘reed.’ The calamus is a kind of aromatic reed and seems to be what is meant here. Jer 6:20 links aromatic cane to frankincense and says that it was imported from a distant land. Exod 30:23 indicates that it was used for cultic purposes and also links it to cinnamon. Calamus was probably a variety of sweetcane imported from northern India (cf. *ISBE* 1:573, ‘Calamus’), and cinnamon came from India and Sri Lanka. Frankincense p 198 came from southern Arabia, and ‘aloes’ probably came from the eaglewood, a tall, slender tree found in India and Malaya (*ISBE* 1:99, ‘Aloes’). Scholars have pointed out that the variety of plants described here is so diverse that it is hard to imagine how a single garden might contain them all. Thus it is sometimes regarded as a kind of fantasy garden.”

⁵⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 198: “In Song 4:12, the beginning of this strophe, the man had sung of her under the two metaphors of the garden and the spring. In vv 13–14 he focused on the garden, but he concludes here by turning to the spring.”

⁵⁶ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 117: “Springs and wells and rivulets of melted snow from the Lebanon mountains are all sources of fresh water... Lebanon is known, among other things, for its water.”

⁵⁷ This is not true anymore for Lebanon. They still have beautiful mountains, but most of the trees are cut down. And the water quality isn’t what it used to be.

⁵⁸ CYRIL OF JERUSALEM makes a valiant attempt to connect this to the NT: “Now who is the ‘fountain sealed,’ or who is signified by the ‘wellspring of living water’? It is the Savior himself, of whom it is written: ‘For with you is the fountain of life.’” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 341.

By the way, abstinence and chastity are expected of people who fear God *outside* the marriage. But the opposite of abstinence is expected of people who fear God *inside* the marriage. Inside the marriage covenant, sexual intimacy needs to be *consistent* and *frequent* when both parties are healthy and able.

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7, “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (7:3–5).

Paul said that as a single man! He said that to the married men and women of the Corinthian church, because he was looking out for them. He knew that sexual intimacy was a kind of “living water” to married couples. He knew that sexual intimacy needs to be *consistent* and *frequent* in the marital relationship, especially in a sexually immoral place like ancient Corinth. **And whatever could be said about ancient Corinth, can be said twice over about twenty-first-century America.**

And to that, some people in the room might say, “Okay, Pastor Tony. Sexual intimacy needs to be *consistent* and *frequent* in the marital relationship. Got it! But, how consistent? How frequent?” Well, there’s no way for me to answer that question without getting myself into trouble. But I’ll risk it.

Martin Luther said this, “Twice a week and 104 times a year, should give neither husband nor wife cause to fear.”⁵⁹ God bless you, Martin Luther!

And by the way, Martin Luther said that as a middle-aged man. He was a monk until age 41. He knew all about chastity and abstinence. And yet after marriage, he knew the importance of “coming together,” as Paul put it.

And use those numbers as a rule of thumb (i.e., Twice a week and 104 times a year). Okay! I understand that in marriage, complications sometimes arise. Trust me, I get it. Sometimes there are health issues. There are pregnancies. Sometimes there are extended periods of stress and mental anguish. Et cetera, et cetera. And so, sometimes intimacy isn’t possible. But this is a good goal. It’s a good rule of thumb.

Just so you know, whenever I meet with a fiancé who is a soon-to-be married man, I always ask him, and press him, “Okay, God forbid something happens, and your wife becomes a paraplegic. Your commitment to her needs to go beyond just your ability to have sex. You need to stay faithful to her throughout the duration of your lives, regardless of what happens. That’s part of what it means to vow in sickness or in health.”

And when I have that conversation with that man, he’d better not blink. Or else I’m going to start second guessing whether I should officiate the wedding. Because, yes, sex is important. It’s an important part of marriage. Song of Solomon says as much. But marriage is not sex. And the vows transcend sexual intimacy.

So, yes, the Bible talks about this. This is important. This is “living water,” to use the language of the husband in Song of Solomon. It’s living water *to the* husband and *to the* wife. But don’t confuse sex and marriage and equate them as if they are the same thing. They’re not.

And notice too, men in the room. Notice how this man is not demanding this of his wife. He’s not giving her an argument of “conjugal rights.” This is a man that is wooing and pursuing his wife. “You don’t just woo to marry; you marry to woo for the rest of your life.”⁶⁰ This guy in Song of Songs is

⁵⁹ Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 134n1: “William Lazareth writes: ‘As to the recommended frequency of marital coitus, the hale and hearty spirit (if not the actual words) of Luther’s sexual counsel is reflected in the humorous couplet traditionally ascribed to him: ‘Twice a week, hundred-four a year / should give neither cause to fear.’” Luther on the Christian Home (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 226.” See also John Piper, “Sexual Relations in Marriage,” 02-15-81: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/sexual-relations-in-marriage>.

⁶⁰ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: “At work, the man may be creative, passionate, zealous, ambitious, and a leader. At home, the same man may become placid, opinionless, a bad listener, vacillating, uncreative, uncommunicative, and humorless. The fact is, if he behaved at work as he behaves at home, he would never be promoted or rewarded. To the contrary, he would probably be fired.

continuing to woo. He's continuing to pursue. He's continuing to invite his wife into this sexual union as part of their marriage covenant.

And speaking of invitation to sexual union, write this down at c.

c) Mutual **Giving** and **Sharing** (4:16–5:1)

C.S. Lewis said once, “The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union.”⁶¹ **That's true. The covenant is the key. And after the covenant of marriage is instituted, you share everything together. You share your heart. You share your soul. You share children. You share a house together.**

You share joys. You share sorrows. You watch your parents age together. Her parents become your parents. Your parents become her parents. Your pain is her pain. Her happiness is your happiness. That is the mutuality of soul as God intended it.

And speaking of mutuality... speaking of giving and sharing... look at the end of **chapter 4, in verse 16**, the woman responds to her man.⁶² She's been wooed.⁶³ And she says,

¹⁶ Awake,⁶⁴ O north wind, and come, O south wind!⁶⁵ Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow.

The statement about her garden is a statement about her body. Let's just say that she is physically and romantically stirred by the words of her beloved.⁶⁶

Let my beloved

There's her word for him דוּלִי —“my beloved.” He calls her, “my friend,” “my love,” “my sister,” “my dove,” “my bride.” He's got lots of terms of endearment for her. But for her, he is almost universally referred to as “my beloved” (דוּלִי).

And she says quite provocatively to her beloved,

Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

This, friends, is the sweetest of invitations to come and enjoy the sexual delight of marriage as God intended it. This is not a woman who is just begrudgingly obliging her marital duty, abiding conjugal rights. This is a woman who loves her man and offers herself to him in mutual giving and mutual delight.

And here's what he says in **chapter 5, verse 1**. Here's how he responds. You probably anticipated this.

¹ I came to my garden, my sister,⁶⁷ my bride,⁶⁸

And yet many men fit this dual-personality profile. The counselor concluded that the wives of such men do not rebel; they are merely mad.”

⁶¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 104–5.

⁶² Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 198: “Sex is first the joining of two hearts and only then the joining of two bodies.”

⁶³ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: “She gets ready for sexual intimacy through what she thinks and feels, and to a great extent, she thinks and feels the way a man leads her to think and feel. Nothing calms a woman's fears and excites her passions as much as having a man tell her how wonderful she is.”

⁶⁴ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 87: “When she summons north and south winds to ‘arouse’ her garden, she uses the same verb that she used earlier when she warned the daughters of Jerusalem against arousing love too soon (see 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).”

⁶⁵ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 4: “The north winds are strong; the south winds are gentle. The woman wanted to be awakened completely in all her passion. She wanted to experience all of love there was to experience, and she wanted her husband to experience her fully. She delighted in sexual intimacy with her husband.” Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 117: “She does not summon the (hot) east wind, which is destructive (Gen 41:6; Exod 10:13; 14:21; Isa 27:8; Jer 18:17; Ezek 17:10; Jonah 4:8; Ps 48:7; Job 27:21), nor the west wind, which brings the rain (1 Kgs 18:44–45; the north wind is also said to bring rain—Prov 25:23; Ezek 1:4).”

⁶⁶ The confusion of the church fathers and their allegorizing approach is seen here in AMBROSE: “Recognize also the voice of the church inviting us when it says, ‘Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow through my garden and let my ointments flow forth. Let my brother come down into his garden and eat the fruit of his apple trees.’ For knowing even then, O holy church, that from these also you would have fruitful works, you promised to your anointed one the fruit from such as these. It was you who first said that you were brought into the king's chamber, loving [Christ's] breasts above wine.” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 341.

Notice “my garden.” They are one flesh. They have mutuality of soul and mutuality of physical bodies.⁶⁹ There is something proprietary in marriage. She belongs to him and he belongs to her. This is an expression of their exclusive and monogamous relationship.

I gathered my myrrh with my spice, I ate my honeycomb with my honey,⁷⁰ I drank my wine with my milk.

In other words, he’s feasted on the delight of sexual intimacy with his wife. He’s satiated. She gave the invitation, and he didn’t hesitate. And this is good. It’s actually encouraged.

Look at the final statement in **5:1**. The daughters of Jerusalem say approvingly—almost as a kind of rebuttal to the polygamous counterfeit of Solomon previously.

Eat, friends,⁷¹ drink, and be drunk⁷² with love!⁷³

Wait, wait, wait! Getting drunk is a good thing! In the Bible!

The Hebrew word used here שָׁכַר (*šā·kār*) means “get drunk” or “be intoxicated” (see **Ge 9:21; 43:34; Isa 29:9; 49:26; Jer 25:27; Lam 4:21; Nah 3:11**). It’s the same word that is used of Noah in **Genesis 9** when he drank the wine from his own vineyard and passed out drunk. Throughout the Bible, getting drunk is universally presented as a sinful thing and something to be avoided (see **Prov 20:1; 23:20–21, 29–35; 31:4–5; Isa 5:11–12, 22–23; 28:7–8; Hab 2:15–16; Luke 21:34; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–21; Eph 5:18; 1 Pet 4:3–4**).⁷⁴ Except for **Song of Solomon 5** and **Proverbs 5**!

But these two aren’t getting drunk on booze. They are “drunk with love.” They eat and drink deeply of each other, and then pass out in the bliss and inebriation of lovemaking. And it’s good. This is good. The daughters of Jerusalem celebrate this. Solomon can have his riches and his wives and his entourage. This is the better way.

⁶⁷ At least one time among the church father, JEROME hints that he understands the sexual nature of what is being described in the Song of Songs: “‘O my sister, my bride, come.’ Lest you associate anything base with the concept of bride, the word *sister* is adjoined to preclude any dishonorable love. Come, my sister: love is something sacred and for that reason I call you sister. My bride: I call you my bride that I may have a wife, and from you, my wife, beget sons in number, sons as many as clusters of grapes on the vine.” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 342. This makes me wonder if some of the church fathers knew all along that this describes something sexual between man and wife. Maybe they took that understanding as intrinsic to the text. But they wrote allegorical interpretations to move it beyond the sexual to the Christological for reasons of propriety and spirituality in the churches.

⁶⁸ Again as part of his view, Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 193 suggests a wedding night culmination: “Finally in Song 5:1, at the celebration of their sexual union (as I interpret it), he calls her ‘bride’ for the last time. From that point forward, she is no longer a bride but a wife.”

⁶⁹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 87: “There are no fewer than eight first-person-singular possessives in verse 1 in the course of a mere sixteen Hebrew words, emphasizing the exclusiveness of their marital relationship.”

⁷⁰ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 113–4: “נֶחֱמֵת is the virgin bee honey that drips from the honeycomb. דְּבַשׁ may be bee honey or fruit syrup, mainly from figs, dates, grapes, and carob. Both epitomize sweetness and occur together in Ps 19:11 and Prov 24:13.”

⁷¹ The word for “friends” here is the Hebrew רֵעַ (*rēʿ*), which is etymologically related to the word that the husband uses for his bride, רַעֲיָה (*rāʿyā(h)*). That term is only used in the Song of Solomon and is always accompanied by the 1cs pronominal suffix, hence “my friend” or “my love” (Song 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4).

⁷² O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 81: “This is pure consummation—the ‘undefiled’ (Hebrews 13:4) and yet aflame marriage bed. This is God’s antidote for immorality! Drink it in. Eat it up.”

⁷³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 200: “It is difficult to tell whether דוידים is a vocative here meaning ‘lovers’ (parallel to רעים, ‘friends’) or is direct object of שָׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ and is an abstract pl. used for ‘lovemaking.’ The term often appears in the Song in the sg. with a pronoun suf. as a term for the man (e.g., דוּדִי, ‘my lover,’ in Song 1:16 and דוּדְךָ, ‘your lover,’ in 5:9). However, it appears six times in the pl. (Song 1:2, 4; 4:10 [2x]; 7:13; and here). In every other case where it is pl. it refers to lovemaking rather than to lovers.”

⁷⁴ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 118: “While intoxication in the Bible is often negative, here it is positive—a surfeit of lovemaking, like a surfeit of wine, is a pleasurable experience.”

Coincidentally, this is the center of the entire Song. We're halfway through this book, and Song of Solomon 4:16 and 5:1 are the epicenter of this poem. According to Ian Duguid, there are 111 lines of poetry before this, and there are 111 lines of poetry after this.⁷⁵

And the central point of this Song is made clear here in the center of the Song. And it's this—covenantal and monogamous sex in the context of marriage is delightful before the Lord. It's biblical!⁷⁶ It's celebrated in the Bible!

How biblical are you, church?⁷⁷ How biblically do you celebrate sex like God celebrates sex in the Bible?⁷⁸

I'll close with this and then we can take communion together.

When I lived in Chicago, I became good friends with a Christian brother from Africa. We were students at Moody together. And he told me the wildest story about his parents. He said that after his parents got married, they struggled with infertility for twenty years. And it was taxing on them. If you've been through anything like that, you know how painful that can be.

And he was from an African country where polygamy was perfectly acceptable. And so, my friend's dad was being pressured by his friends, his family, and even some Christian people at church to marry a second wife. That's what you did in that country if your first wife wasn't producing. You just get another one.

But this man resisted. He loved his wife. He made vows to her. And he was determined, "If God doesn't give me children with her, then God doesn't want me to have children. The end."

And this went on year after year. They were Abraham and Sarah, but there was no Hagar. And eventually, after two decades, she got pregnant and had a baby. Then she got pregnant again and had another baby. Then another baby. Then another baby. Then another and another and another and another. They had a total of eight children born to them after twenty years of infertility. And my friend—I can't remember what he said—he was either the seventh of eight or the eighth child born.

And you could tell, as he told this story, he was beaming with delight. He was proud of his parents. He was proud of his mom, of course. But he was especially proud of his dad—his integrity, his godliness, and his commitment to his mom despite pressure from people to desert her for someone else.

Now look, very few of us are going to be tempted towards polygamy the way that my friend's dad was or the way that women in Israel were tempted 3,000 years ago with Solomon. I don't see a lot of men or women falling into that right now.

But that doesn't mean that we are immune in our day to settling for less than God's best. We have temptations for sex outside of marriage. We have temptations for sex before marriage.⁷⁹ We have

⁷⁵ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 82 citing G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 127.

⁷⁶ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 407: "The poetry is discreet and restrained; it conveys the joy of sexual love without vulgarity; at the same time, the meaning is quite clear."

⁷⁷ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: "Planned Parenthood has determined from its polls that only 5 percent of the women who seek their services have ever had a parental conversation about sex. Even those parents who do prepare for sex-related talks with their children often discover that when they finally get around to having the discussion, they are a couple of years and a few experiences too late."

⁷⁸ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 5: "So many people within the body of Christ seem to be wounded and maimed emotionally and psychologically by issues and problems related to sexual intimacy, and yet nobody in the church wants to discuss these issues. Sex is off-limits, something we just don't talk about in polite company, much less the holy company of fellow saints."

⁷⁹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 81: "The world says, 'Sex means nothing. It's recreational. It's like sipping a caramel frappuccino, eating a hamburger, or going to the bathroom. It's no different than any other biological function.' But the Word says, 'Sex means unity.' It's an inexplicable act of mutual passion, possession, and submission: I give my total self to you, and you give your total self to me. You eat me up and drink me in, and I eat you up and drink you in. You become a part of me, and I become a part of you."

temptations for fantasy sex and lust in isolation—pornography, voyeurism. We have temptations for sinful heterosexual sex and we have temptations for sinful homosexual sex.⁸⁰ There is no shortage of ways to pervert what God has given us as a good gift.⁸¹

And so, there needs to be a resolution among God's people. There needs to be tenacity—**“I will not settle for less than God's best for love, sex, and marriage. I will not cave to the societal pressures around me... so help me God!”**

And if you or I have made mistakes in the past, God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is good. It's better than we deserve. But moving forward, there needs to be tenacity. We can do better. God help us! By his grace and for his glory, God help us all! Pray with me, church!

⁸⁰ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 82: “[This is] a very countercultural poem in a culture where we treat sexual desire just like any other biological appetite. Yet its emphasis on marriage as a garden of sexual delight was equally countercultural in its ancient context, which often regarded marriage as a means to the end of political and financial security, or simply as a method of controlling lust and producing progeny. As a result, this poem is countercultural in virtually every culture around the world: biblical wisdom almost always runs against the grain.”

⁸¹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 88: “God is not against sex. He invented sex, with all the intense physical and emotional pleasures that it brings. He deliberately designed all the intricate organs, nerves, and blood vessels that make sex so enticing.”