

Key:

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

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

The Importance of Intimacy

Song 6:10–8:4

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Song of Solomon. We are continuing our verse-by-verse study of this book in our series. And we are nearing the end of this “greatest song in the history of songwriting,” written by a great songwriter, Solomon.

And speaking of great song writers, let me relay the following lyrics to you, and you try to guess the lyrics that follow. This song is about 50 years old.

*Your beauty is beyond compare
With flaming locks of auburn hair
With ivory skin and eyes of emerald green
Your smile is like a breath of spring
Your voice is soft like summer rain
And I cannot compete with you
Jolene*

Now that song, unlike what we're looking at this morning doesn't celebrate the goodness of monogamy. It's a lament! It bemoans sadly the lack of fidelity and commitment in a sexual relationship. It involves one woman begging another woman to stay away from her man.

Now, interestingly there are other women involved in the Song of Solomon. There's the Shulamite. There's her husband. There's Solomon as author and foil. And then there are the virgin daughters of Jerusalem. But they aren't trying to steal her man. They aren't really trying to do anything nefarious in the book. They are instead a kind of dialogue partner for the Shulamite.

But in our passage today, they do make their most invasive and divisive comment to the Shulamite. We will see that in the text just before the Shulamite's husband makes an extensive statement about his wife's beauty.¹

But let's start in 6:10.² And let's start with the first scene. In the first scene of our passage, we observe...

1) The Shulamite's **internal battle** for identity (6:10–13)

Here's what I mean by that. Look with me at **chapter 6**. When we last looked at this chapter, the husband was admiring his wife from 6:4–9. And that ended with **verse 9** when he said,

¹ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 99–100: “The Bible is a very balanced book. It warns about the demise and danger of beauty. The demise: ‘Beauty is vain’ (Proverbs 31:30). The danger: ‘Do not desire [the adulterous woman’s] *beauty* in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes’ (Proverbs 6:25). However, the Bible also notes (and likely values) beauty, especially feminine beauty. Abraham’s wife Sarah was ‘a woman *beautiful* in appearance’ (Genesis 12:11); she was ‘*very beautiful*’ (Genesis 12:14). Isaac’s wife Rebekah was also ‘*very beautiful*’ (Genesis 24:16, NIV). Other women in the Bible who were called ‘beautiful’ include Rachel (Genesis 29:17), Abigail (1 Samuel 25:3), Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1), Esther (Esther 1:11; 2:7), and the daughters of Job (Job 42:15).”

² Some church fathers and reformers see this passage as descriptive of eschatological Jewish conversion. For example, JOHN COTTON: “This chapter, to the end of 8:4, describes a fourfold estate of the Jewish church, when they shall be converted to the Lord: first, as it shall be gathered and established (7:1–5); second, as it shall be grown up to her full stature and maturity (7:6–7); third, as it shall be further enlarged by the access of the Gentiles (7:8–10); fourth, as it shall multiply and stretch itself into the country villages, and throughout the land of Israel (7:11–8:4).” Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 405.

My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, pure to her who bore her. The young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.³

Now there's some debate with what comes next. The ESV thinks that the man is still speaking in **verse 10**. That's possible. I actually think the virgin daughters of Jerusalem are speaking in **verse 10**. They were invoked in **verse 9** ("The young women saw her and called her blessed"), and now they start speaking.

Either way, the person being described is the Shulamite. And here's what is said about her.

¹⁰ "Who is this who looks down⁴ like the dawn, beautiful as the moon,⁵ bright as the sun,⁶ awesome as an army with banners?"⁷

This is the Hebrew equivalent to Shakespeare's,

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?

*It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.*⁸

But this isn't Juliet in **verse 10**. It's the Shulamite. And she is beautiful. And she is sunshiny.⁹ And she is terrifying—she is "awesome as an army with banners."

If this is the chorus of the virgin daughters, then they are affirming what the man said already about the Shulamite—she is awesome and terrifying (**Song 6:4**). She is beautiful and lovely. She is a sight to behold!

And the speaker shifts in **verse 11**. Now the Shulamite speaks. And she doesn't say, "**You're right, I am beautiful. You're right, I am awesome like an army with banners.**"

And she doesn't say,

*O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?*¹⁰

She says,

¹¹ I went down to the nut¹¹ orchard [or "the garden of the walnut tree"] to look at the blossoms of the valley,

Here's a picture of a walnut tree or the Latin *Juglans regia*.

³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 119: "If the language of Song 6:9 sounds familiar, it is because it is borrowed from Proverbs 31:28, the description of the ideal wife. Here in the Song of Songs, the daughters and the other women take the place of the children and the husband in the poem from Proverbs by praising her unique attributes and envying her blessedness."

⁴ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 143: "looks down. שָׁקַר means 'to look down from above,' as when God, or justice, looks down from heaven (Pss 14:2; 85:12). The dawn sends its rays down to the earth. Although the usual expression is that the dawn rises (Gen 19:15; 32:25)."

⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 229: "This verse looks back to Song 1:5–6, where the woman says she was darkened (שְׁחֹרָה) by the sun because of the anger (גִּזְרִי, from the root חָרָה, 'to be hot') of her brothers, yet was still beautiful (יָפָה). Here, she looks down like the dawn (שָׁחַר), is beautiful (יָפָה), and is as dazzling as the sun (כְּהַקֵּדָה, literally 'like the heat')."

⁶ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 102: "His bride is as awesome as the sun and as beautiful as the moon, the two great heavenly lights. She is out of this world!"

⁷ The quotation marks are curious in the ESV. If this is just a continuation of what the man was saying, as the heading above 6:4 shows, then wouldn't the entire passage be in quotes (or not in quotes). It seems that the ESV is unsure about the speaker too with the insertion of quotation marks.

⁸ From Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2.

⁹ AUGUSTINE: "The church is the sun and the moon and the stars, to which it was said, 'Fair as the moon, bright as the sun.' By it our Joseph is adored in this world as in Egypt, when he is raised from humble to high estate." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 355.

¹⁰ From Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2.

¹¹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 231: "Although a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible, the meaning 'nut' (or more specifically, "walnut") is well established for אֵגוֹז from postbiblical Heb. and from cognates."



Walnut Tree

Latin: *Juglans regia*

Hebrew: תְּאֵנָה (‘ēgôz)¹²

This may indicate a single tree that is surrounded by a garden, or it may be a kind of orchard with various walnut trees inside it along with garden fruits and vegetables. Either way, there is a Garden of Eden allusion in this statement. Eve is going to find her Adam, so to speak, in the garden.

¹¹ I went down to **[the garden of the walnut tree]**¹³ to look at the blossoms of the valley,¹⁴ to see whether the vines had budded, whether the pomegranates were in bloom.¹⁵

That right there is a cryptic reference to more than just her sexuality... that’s a reference to her fertility.¹⁶ She’s exploring the possibility for rekindling her love for her mate.¹⁷ But she’s also conscientious about the creation mandate. She wants to reproduce like the flowers and the plants of the field reproduce.¹⁸

Look at verse 12.

¹² Before I was aware, my desire set me among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.

In other words, her prince comes calling. But this is not King Solomon. Heavens, no! This is her husband. And this is not the cold, dark, scary room that was locked to him previously in her dream. No, this is an open field, a garden of fertility. She’s desirous of him here. And he’s desirous of her.

¹² Yzmo, “TicinoTree,” photograph, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TicinoTree.jpg>, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>.

¹³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 232: “The metaphor of the garden almost always refers to female sexuality (e.g., Song 4:12–5:1), and some evidence indicates that the walnut, like the apple, symbolized sexuality in the ancient world.”

¹⁴ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 144–5: “A תְּאֵנָה is a streambed or wadi. It is a gully formed by rainwater flowing down from higher to lower ground. After the rainy season, when it is still moist, vegetation appears in and around it (1 Kgs 18:5).”

¹⁵ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 144: “Walnut trees, grapevines, and pomegranate trees, cultivated in separate areas, all blossom in April or May.”

¹⁶ JOHN COTTON: “The Jewish synagogues are called a ‘garden of nuts’ because of the hardness and blindness of their hearts, like a hard nut shell surrounding the kernel. ‘To see the fruits of the valleys.’ Valleys lying in the shade between two mountains bring forth their fruit late; so the Jews are late in bringing forth fruit for Christ. ‘To see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.’ The Jews are like a garden of nuts because of the hardness of their hearts, but when their conversion shall be wrought, they will be like vines and pomegranates, bringing forth sweet and wholesome fruits for the refreshment of God and humankind.” Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 404.

¹⁷ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 119: “She went down to the nut garden, hoping perhaps to find a few blossoms that had survived the frost of her coldness. What she discovered when she got there was awe and wonder, a friendship that was still on fire, a love that was still burning with white-hot intensity.”

¹⁸ O’Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 104: “She is investigating whether the time is ripe to arouse and awaken desire. The answer to that inquiry is hinted at in 6:12 and answered clearly in 7:9b–8:4. There the answer is twofold. Is it the right time to arouse and awaken passion? Yes, it is for us (7:9b–8:3), but not yet for you, O daughters of Jerusalem (8:4).”

And here's where the battle of her mind gets interesting. Look at **verse 13**. Look at the statement of the chorus.

¹³ *Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look¹⁹ upon you.*²⁰

In other words, **“Don’t go, Shulamite friend. Stay with us. Be single again, if just for a day. Be like you were when we were all virgin daughters of Jerusalem.”**

It’s an interesting request.²¹ In fact, the words **“return, return”** are in the imperative mood in Hebrew. She’s been giving them oaths and demands the entire book. Now they give her a demand. **“Stay with us! Be one of us! You seem unsure of yourself! Come back to the single life. It’s better here. You don’t have to be beholden to some foreign man who doesn’t understand you. Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus. Stay with us!”**

And I think that the Shulamite is honestly conflicted. She’s had a wild back and forth with the daughters of Jerusalem for the last two chapters. She had a bad dream. She had miscommunication with her husband. She had these neurotic feelings of abandonment and misunderstanding. She had to remind herself why she loved her husband, her friend, her lover.

So if she’s on the fence, then the virgin daughters of Jerusalem make their feelings known: **“Come back to us if this is too difficult for you. Maybe marriage isn’t for everybody.”**

Now, look who intervenes in the middle of **verse 13**. Throughout this entire book, the Shulamite has talked to the virgin daughters of Jerusalem. And they have talked with her. But they haven’t talked to the husband. And the husband hasn’t talked to them. He’s talked only to his wife, the Shulamite.

But here he speaks to them for the first time. And he says,

*Why should you look upon the Shulamite, as upon a dance before two armies?*²²

In other words, he stops them in their tracks. He responds on behalf of his wife. **“Why should she go back to you? She doesn’t belong to you anymore! And why are you looking upon her and me as if we are two armies battling one another. We’re different, yeah. But we’re not enemies. We’re friends. And we’re lovers. And we belong to each other in holy matrimony.”**

In fact the word Shulamite is derived from the word for “peace.” There’s no city in Israel called “Shulam.” She’s not from Shulam. Her name is derived from the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (*šalom*) for peace.²³ Her name is probably also derived from Solomon. She is the embodiment of wisdom and peace that Solomon should have had.²⁴ But he didn’t. Hence this is his mea culpa describing a better way. And he describes it through the medium of a woman, a Shulamite, who chooses a better way.

¹⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 233: “The fact that תִּהְיוּ, ‘would you gaze,’ is masculine plural could imply that there is a male chorus that takes part in the Song. On the other hand, Hebrew is not consistent in its use of the second feminine plural but sometimes uses the second masculine plural form with a feminine plural subject (e.g., Ruth 1:8). More to the point, the Song never uses the second feminine plural form, even when women are clearly being addressed (Song 1:6; 2:7; 3:5; 5:8; 8:4). No male chorus is really indicated.”

²⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 234: “In the psychology of the Song, the chorus wants the woman to stay in their world, but she cannot do this because she has crossed the threshold from virgin to wife.”

²¹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 146 goes off the rails with her interpretation of this passage: “The Shulamite is not the female lover of other poems. (Since I take the book as a collection of separate poems, there is no reason to see the same characters in every poem.) The Shulamite is an exotic dancer. She is performing a solo dance before a group of male spectators who call out to her, urging her to keep dancing.”

²² Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 233: “Rather than leave her to answer for herself, however, the groom speaks up for his bride.”

²³ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 149: “One widely held explanation is ‘the woman of/from Shulem.’ Either she was from a place called Shulem (unidentified) or this is an alternate spelling of Shunem (the interchange between *nun* and *lamed* is attested in Semitic languages); women from Shunem include Abishag (1 Kgs 1:15), whom a few commentators identify as the Shulamite, and an anonymous woman in 2 Kgs 4:12. Alternatively, since Jerusalem is called Salem (שָׁלֵם, Ps 76:3), our woman is ‘the (Jeru)salemite’ (Ibn Ezra and others). A second explanation (Oxford Anonymous Commentary and other medieval Jewish exegetes) takes the word from the root שָׁלַם, ‘perfect’ and the form as meaning ‘the perfect one.’ A third line of thought sees this as a feminine form of שָׁלֵם, Solomon, the female counterpart of the ‘Solomonic’ lover.”

And so when the husband says,
Why should you look upon the Shulamite,

This is him essentially saying nicely to the virgin daughters of Jerusalem, **“Beat it! She’s with me! Why should you look on her?”**²⁵ This is him saying to them, **“I liked it, and I put a ring on it. Yeah, maybe we’ve got conflict. Yeah, maybe she’s awesome like an army. Yeah, she’s formidable and a little bit terrifying. But we are not at war with one another. We’re at peace. And we are one in marriage.”**

And notice next what he says to his wife. He doesn’t say, **“Come with me! You belong to me!”** Neither does he give her a **1 Corinthians 7** argument about conjugal rights. Look what he says. **Men in the room, take note.**

And let me just remind you, she expressed her desire for intimacy already. She went down to the garden of the walnut tree to see if “the vines had budded” and “the pomegranates were in bloom.” That is about as suggestive a euphemism as Solomon can muster up. She’s desirous of her husband.

So he doesn’t need to come on too strong here. He just needs to add to her incentive. And here’s what he’s going to do. He’s going to espouse his commitment to her and his desire for intimacy.

Write this down as #2 in your notes. We saw previously the Shulamite’s internal battle for identity. How there is...

2) Desire for intimacy **asserted** (7:1–9a)

And this is asserted by the husband, just so we’re clear. Look at **7:1**.

¹ *How beautiful are your feet in sandals,*²⁶ *O noble*²⁷ *daughter!*

Now let me point out a few things here. This poem is a conversation between a man and his wife. And their love for each other will be re-consummated in a few verses. But it’s not their honeymoon. Okay.

So what time of life is this describing right here? Well, I’ll say somewhere between their honeymoon and the grave!²⁸ What follows here is a picture... this is an ideal of what sex in marriage should look like... between the honeymoon and the grave. **Johnny Cash was wrong when he sang, “We got married in a fever, hotter than a pepper sprout. We’ve been talking bout Jackson ever since then the fire went out.” It doesn’t have to go out. It shouldn’t go out! Don’t let it go out!**

And secondly, men, notice this. Notice the man is talking in verse 1. And he talks about his wife for six verses, and he doesn’t lay a hand on her. He doesn’t explicitly express his desire for sex until about verse 6. He just compliments his wife from her feet all the way to her head.²⁹ **Take a note, men in the room. You start with talk.**³⁰

²⁴ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 131: “He calls her *Shulamite*, which some have taken to be her name, or the place where she is from. But I think it is better understood as a title drawn from the word *shalom*, which means ‘peace’ or ‘wholeness.’ She is the perfect one for him, the one who brings him peace and wholeness (see Song 8:10).”

²⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 232: “The groom issues a mild rebuke to the women to the effect that they should not call on her to stay so that they can continue to look at her.”

²⁶ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 151: “Sandals were ordinary footwear, made of a leather sole secured to the feet at the ankle by a leather strap (King and Stager, 272). They are considered alluring or attractive in Greek and Hellenistic Jewish descriptions of women: “Her sandal ravished his eyes, her beauty captivated his mind” (Jdt 16:9).”

²⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 151: “She need not be from the nobility. This may just be an appreciative epithet, like calling a woman ‘a princess.’”

²⁸ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 8: “God has a much different desire for marriage. In His plan, the romance continues throughout the marriage. In fact, it builds and grows into a loving and passionate marriage that is even more wonderful in its latter stages than in its beginning. A marriage that cools and grows stale is not biblical! It is worldly wisdom that makes it acceptable. Rebel against such error!”

²⁹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 421: “His praise of her beauty moves generally from bottom to top, the reverse of 4:1–5.”

³⁰ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 135: “He doesn’t have to examine her from the perspective of a judge at a modeling agency in order for the poem to have power. She doesn’t have to be Helen of Troy—beautiful to all who behold her. She simply has to be beautiful *to him*.”

By the way, in terms of genre, this is what's referred to in the ancient world as a *wasf*. It was an elaborate description of a woman from the top of her head down to her feet, which he's done before in **chapters 4 and 6**. But now he reverses direction. Now he goes from her feet to the top of her head.³¹

And let's see what he says,

¹ How beautiful³² are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter!

“Even your feet are beautiful! You are royalty to me.”

Your rounded thighs³³ are like jewels,

That's not the kind of thing you say on a first date. You don't comment on a woman's thighs until you put a ring on that finger.

By the way, “roundness” was more of a virtue in Hebrew culture than it is in our American culture. **I heard a pastor say once about this verse that most of us men should avoid the adjective “rounded” altogether when we're talking about our wives. That's wise advice.**

Probably a better translation here is “curved.”

Your [curved] thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.

Did you catch that reference to God right there? The master worker! Some people have assumed that **Song of Solomon** has no references to God in it.³⁴ That's not true as we'll find out next week in **chapter 8**.

But even here in **chapter 7**, there's an oblique reference to God. Who's the “master” in **verse 1**? Who made the woman into a masterpiece?

Here's a great thing to say to your wife, husbands. You can say, “God has made you beautiful. You are the work of a master hand.”³⁵ And that's true. She's a masterpiece.

People say all the time that man is God's last and best creation. But technically, that's not true. In Genesis 2, God made the woman after the man. So woman, not man, is God's last and best creation.

Look at **verse 2**.

³¹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 133: “She is a living, breathing, awe-inspiring piece of God's handiwork from the soles of her feet to the top of her head.”

³² O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 100: “The word ‘beautiful’ is an important word in the Song. It occurs sixteen times in the book, four of which are here in our text (6:4, 10; 7:1, 6).”

³³ ESV's “thighs” is a good translation here. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 421n165: “יָרֵךְ properly is the thigh, buttocks, or lower abdomen region; it is not the entire leg.” Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 151: “The יָרֵךְ may be the thighs or the buttocks (Exod 28:42; Num 5:12, 27), or ‘hips’ (Gen 32:26; Hess). It is the place on the body where men place their swords (Exod 32:27; Song 3:8).”

³⁴ There was a lot of debate when the OT was being canonized as to whether or not Song of Solomon should be included as part of the canon of Scripture. And one of the arguments against its inclusion was that there was no direct reference to God or to his Hebrew covenant name, Yahweh. But when you look a little closer you realize that God is there all throughout as the unmoved Mover, as the uncreated Creator of man, woman, and sexuality.

³⁵ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 102: “Giovanni Leone got the idea right but overstated it when he said, ‘The strongest evidence to prove that God exists is a beautiful woman.’ More broadly and Biblically I would say it this way: all creation, especially the beauty of the human body, points to the beauty of the Lord, our Creator.”

² Your navel³⁶ is a rounded bowl³⁷ that never lacks mixed wine.³⁸

Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.³⁹

Now let me help you with **verse 2. Men, you can get in a lot of trouble with this verse if you recite it to your wife.** The husband is speaking in metaphor here. A “heap of wheat” is a good thing.⁴⁰ It intimates a good harvest.⁴¹ And what he’s saying to his wife is **“Your character is pronounced, and you are a delight to me. My life has been inordinately blessed by you.”**⁴²

There might be allusions to fertility here too, just like we saw earlier in the garden of the walnut tree. A heap of wheat and a bulging belly both indicate the same thing—fruitfulness.⁴³

Look at **verse 3.**

³ Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

In other words, **“you are tender and gracious. And I will treat you graciously and tenderly.”** These are not the words of a groper. These are the tender words of a lover.

⁴ Your neck is like an ivory tower.

³⁶ George M. Schwab, “Song of Songs,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III, Garland David E., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 419: “שָׁרֶךְ (*šarērek*, ‘your navel’) is a *hapax legomenon*. Possible cognates include שֹׁר (*šōr*) from Ezekiel 16:4, ‘umbilical cord,’ and שָׂרִיר (*šārîr*) from Job 40:16, which can be glossed ‘loins.’ (Proverbs 3:8 is ambiguous.) The Arabic *sirr* can mean ‘coitus.’ As a vessel of juice, the vulva is a more likely candidate than the navel.” Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 421n166: “A number of commentators suggest that ‘navel’ is a euphemism for the vulva on the grounds that this meaning better suits the movement of the upward-moving description of the woman’s body and parallels Arabic usage. If such is meant, however, it is the secondary aspect of a double entendre; ‘navel’ makes sense as the primary meaning (Carr, *Song*, 157, and Pope, *Song*, 617–18). Being full of mixed wine properly is a function of the cup, not of the woman’s ‘navel’ and should not be taken as some kind of strange sexual metaphor. ‘Wine’ is simply a metaphor for pleasures generally, which is what she gives him. Murphy (*Song*, 182) takes it as meaning ‘valley’ and thus a euphemism for the female genitals.”

³⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 152: “זֶבֶן is a large bowl or krater with two handles in which wine was mixed before it was poured into drinking bowls or cups.”

³⁸ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 239: “Her navel is exposed to him in v 3. Thus, it seems, the woman in this *wasf* is portrayed as having little or no clothing. But, of course, a song is not always consistent about these things.”

³⁹ AMBROSE gives us an example of allegorizing: “Small, too, are the navel and belly of the soul that ascends to Christ. Therefore it is praised in the words of the spouse, who says, ‘Your navel is like a round bowl never wanting wine, your belly is like a heap of tiny wheat among lilies.’ It is polished by all kinds of learning, and it is a spiritual draught never failing in fullness and in the knowledge of heavenly secrets. The belly of the soul is mystic, like the navel, and it receives not only strong food to strengthen hearts but sweet and fragrant food by which it is delighted.” Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 359. This continued with the reformers as per the example of MELCHIOR HOFFMAN: “I understand the navel to be faith, which causes the inner person to grow. For just as children in their mothers’ womb receive what they need to grow through the navel, so also do the spiritual children of God through the spiritual navel, that is, faith, which the elect have without end for eternity, which the roundness signifies.” Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 406.

⁴⁰ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 132: “The man describes her belly as a rounded heap of wheat (Song 7:2)—the exact opposite of the flat stomach for which modern women and men so often strive. Wheat and wine were staple foods for the population, so an abundance of these things signifies the rich blessing of fertility. The Hebrew word for *belly* also indicates the womb, and it would appear that here, as in many other cultures, ancient tastes preferred women to look well fed and slightly pregnant rather than as though they were in imminent danger of starvation.”

⁴¹ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 8: “Solomon admired her fruitfulness. Both wheat and wine are signs of harvest—wheat is harvested in the spring and wine is the result of a fall harvest of grapes. Solomon was conveying, ‘From beginning to end, you have been fruitful and diligent in your giving to me and to others.’ She was indeed the crown of a proud husband.”

⁴² Tommy Nelson, “The Doctrine of Romance,” sermon in the series *Maximum Marriage*, Denton Bible Church, January 25, 2004, <https://dentonbible.org/sermon/the-doctrine-of-romance/>.

⁴³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 130: “Interpreters of the more allegorical persuasion have read this passage and talked about the woman’s belly as representing the fruitfulness of the church in producing offspring for Christ and her breasts as symbolizing the good food of the Word with which those children are sustained.”

There were no ivory towers in Israel.⁴⁴ Ivory was too expensive to be used that way.⁴⁵ So this fanciful description of his wife speaks of her exquisite beauty and her class and her dignity.⁴⁶

And also, an ivory towered neck speaks of the strength and the formidableness of her femininity. The neck protects the rest of the body. Nobody gets past the fort of her neck, visually or physically unless invited. The tower protects the kingdom, and only friends are allowed in.

Look at the middle of **verse 4**. And by the way, the man describes five parts of her body below her neck (feet, thighs, navel, belly, breasts).⁴⁷ And then he describes five parts of her body from her neck upward (neck, eyes, nose, head, and hair), adding up to a perfect ten.⁴⁸ **To him, she's a perfect ten!**

Your eyes are pools⁴⁹ in Heshbon,⁵⁰ by the gate of Bath-rabbim.

Notice he's worked himself right up her body from her feet all the way to her eyes now. And he says your eyes are pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim. The pools of Heshbon were a place of rest and relaxation in Israel. This man finds peace and rest and serenity in the eyes of his wife.

For me there is no more precious moment than to come home and to fix my gaze upon the eyes of my wife. My wife communicates kindness and tenderness and love simply with her eyes.

Now she can express anger with those eyes too! She is formidable. But more often than not her eyes are a place of peace. She's my Shulamite. She's my place of peace!

Look at the end of **verse 4**.

Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon,⁵¹ which looks toward Damascus.⁵²

There's that tower language again.⁵³ Let me help you with this one too.

⁴⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 241: "It goes without saying that the usage does not refer to the arrogant and aloof scholar implied in the English term, 'ivory tower.'"

⁴⁵ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 153, n28: "Towers were not constructed of ivory, nor is it likely that they had ivory decorations, as Keel (235) supposes. This is not a reference to a real tower."

⁴⁶ George M. Schwab, "Song of Songs," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs–Isaiah (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III, Garland David E., vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 418: "Her neck is likened to a military installation, a tower like a tusk of ivory. Her nose is an outpost that monitors Damascus, a military threat in Solomon's time. Her eyes are the tactically advantageous pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath-Rabbim, part of the city's defenses. These images highlight the formidable presence of the lady. She is best approached with caution."

⁴⁷ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 100–1: "He also includes, for the first time, her thighs, navel, and belly. Those are body parts that only a husband *would* see in an ancient Near Eastern culture and that only a husband *should* see in our culture, and certainly in the Church. So it is a comprehensive and intimate description."

⁴⁸ Iain M. Duguid, *Song of Songs*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 132.

⁴⁹ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 242: "The eyes suggest pools of water to poets because they are moist and reflective and have depth. A reservoir also connotes the drinking of water, and thus the line may imply the idea of drinking in her beauty."

⁵⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 241: "Heshbon was located in the Transjordan west of the northern edge of the Dead Sea. It is identified with Tell Hesban."

⁵¹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 422: "To the Western reader, the description of her nose hardly seems complementary... the point is neither that her nose is large or that she is superhuman. Viewed from a distance, a mountain (or tower) adds symmetry and comeliness to an otherwise nondescript horizon. Her nose complements and sets off her facial beauty."

⁵² Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 8: "Solomon referred to her nose as a tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus. Damascus was the seat of power for Assyria, a major enemy to the Israelites throughout Bible times. Solomon regarded his wife as always being on the alert to the things that might bring trouble to him. In our terms today we might say, 'She looks out for her husband.' She wasn't about to let another woman get his attention or draw him away. She wasn't about to let someone willingly hurt her husband or damage his reputation. The wife no doubt was also looking out for her husband through intercessory prayer on his behalf. She was aware that he had enemies—both in the natural and in the spiritual realms— and she set herself to be his foremost lookout post."

⁵³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 242: "A tower can add great symmetry and beauty to a landscape and will focus a viewer's attention on itself. In the same manner, the woman's nose perfectly sets off the symmetry of her face and elicits the man's admiration."

In Israel the tower of Lebanon was focused on Damascus because enemies would always invade from the north, from Damascus.⁵⁴ They typically wouldn't come from the west, because that was the direction of the sea (the Mediterranean Sea). They typically wouldn't come from the south, because the desert is southward. They'd come from the north and from the east. They'd come by way of Damascus—the Arameans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians.

So what he's saying here is, **"You as a wife bring security into our marriage. You are a faithful bride. All the enemies are kept out. But I'm allowed in."**

Have you told your wife something like that, men? Have you praised her and extolled her for her faithfulness to you? You should! You are a tower!

Look at **verse 5**.

⁵ *Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple;*

Here's a picture of Mount Carmel in northern Israel.⁵⁵



Mount Carmel

Hebrew: הַר הַכַּרְמֶל⁵⁶

Carmel is actually a mountain range just south of modern day Haifa.⁵⁷ And you can see the purplish hue of the mountains at sunset in this picture. It's a kind of Hebrew purple-mountain majesty!⁵⁸ And the head of the woman is crowned like Carmel. Her dark hair has a purplish hue, possibly due to sunlight.

And...

*a king is held captive in the tresses [i.e., her long, unbound locks of hair].*⁵⁹

Please don't read that as King Solomon. Yeah, maybe King Solomon would be held captive by her tresses. But she doesn't belong to King Solomon. She belongs to her husband. And he is her one and only. **He's the king, and she's the queen.**

Look at **verse 6**.

⁶ *How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights!*⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 237: "פני דמשק would normally mean 'the face of Damascus,' but here פני seems to be short for לפני, 'toward' or 'facing.'"

⁵⁵ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 242: "The name *Carmel* means 'orchard' or 'vineyard,' but the word is not used as a common noun in the Song. The region has fertile ground for olives, grain, and grapes, which makes it all the more fortuitous as a representation of the woman... Mount Carmel is not especially tall (about 550 meters [1800 feet]), but its prominence above the plains and the sea make it all the more strikingly beautiful... the comparison suggests her fecundity as well."

⁵⁶ Chadner, "Caibadner – mount carmel," photograph, 2008, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caibadner_-_mount_carmel.JPG. Public domain.

⁵⁷ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 101: "This mountain range sits above the plains and juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, making it 'strikingly beautiful,' and this striking beauty is noted several times in the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 1:2; 9:3). Here the poet uses it as just the right image for her majestic beauty and grace, which to him distinguishes her above all others."

⁵⁸ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 133: "Purple was the most precious of ancient dyes, since it was derived through a costly process of collecting and crushing tiny sea snails. Her hair is almost an active part of her, able to hold a king captive in its flowing tresses (v. 5)."

⁵⁹ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 156: "Her hair is captivating. The man is, as it were, caught in her braids."

Remember what I said last week, men? Men are like microwaves; women are like crockpots. The best way to have a great 9:30pm at night is to start about 5:30pm.⁶¹ Help her with the dishes. Help her put the kids down. Send some signals her direction. And here's some counsel from the Song of Solomon, you slowly work yourself up to intimacy with words of affirmation and words of admiration.

A lot of men will try to treat sex in marriage like masturbation. "Let me just try to instantaneously gratify myself." It doesn't work like that. And Hollywood has so perverted this ideal that many of the ideas of sex and marriage that are portrayed in movies are just as farfetched and fictional as the craziest science-fiction movies that come out.

In many ways it's the simple difference between love and lust.⁶² Marriage is not an outlet for your lust. Instead here's your ideal, Christian. Here's what God has to say about this. In Song of Solomon, we have a man who is speaking tenderly to his wife. And he is anticipating the benefits of self-sacrificial sex inside of the marriage.

Now after six verses of thoughtfully extolling his wife and her virtues, in **verse 7**, the man hints at his desire for sexual intimacy.

⁷ *Your stature is like a palm tree,⁶³ and your breasts are like its clusters. ⁸ I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples,*

You might say, **"That's pretty racy, Pastor Tony."** You don't even know how racy that is.⁶⁴ That man is saying essentially, **"I want to climb on top of and inseminate my wife."**⁶⁵ There's no allegorizing that away from its original context. Please don't try to allegorize that. You'll end up in a weird place.

You know through this book I've talked about euphemism and how some of the particulars concerning sex are protected and guided by euphemistic language. But here's a place where the euphemism is thinly veiled.

What's he talking about in **verses 7 and 8**? What could he possibly mean by this? Okay, well, if I need to explain it to you, you probably aren't ready to get married.

But I will say this—this is not presented negatively in the slightest. This is wholly positive and holy positive from start to finish. This is God-glorifying sex in the context of marriage.⁶⁶ It's not prude; it's not crude. But this is in the Bible. And it's a good thing. A man desirous of his wife and sexual intimacy that is exclusive between them is a good thing. This is commitment, and desire for intimacy, asserted by the husband.

⁶⁰ O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 103: "Notice that in 7:6 he moves from seeing to touching (and smelling and tasting!): 'How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights!' He says not simply, 'How beautiful is your body,' but 'How beautiful are your delights,' that is, what her body does to him. He's talking about lovemaking."

⁶¹ Nelson, "The Doctrine of Romance."

⁶² Stephen Arterburn, *When You Love Too Much*, 169 said this: "Love is personal; lust is impersonal. Love is concrete, focused on a particular object; lust is unfocused, capable of fixing on almost any available object. Love tends toward faithfulness; lust is a wanderer. Love seeks stability; lust is short-lived and mercurial. Love is an affair of the mind and heart; lust is an affair of the emotions and the hormones. Love is a matter of giving; lust is a matter of taking."

⁶³ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 244: "The fruit of the date palm is sweet, and it is the fruit that especially draws people to the tree. So also the breasts of the woman give pleasure and strongly attract the man. Also, individual dates are rather small, but the date clusters that grow on date palms are rounded in a manner that somewhat resembles a woman's breast."

⁶⁴ AMBROSE gives us an example of typical allegorizing by the church fathers: "The laurel and palm are emblems of victory. The heads of victors are crowned with laurel; the palm adorns the victor's hand. Hence the church, too, says, 'I said: I will go up into the palm tree, I will take hold of the heights thereof.' Seeing the sublimity of the Word and hoping to be able to ascend to its height and to the summit of knowledge, he says, 'I will go up into the palm tree.' So he may abandon all things that are low and strive after things that are higher, to the prize of Christ, in order that he may pluck its fruit and taste it, for sweet is the fruit of virtue." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 360.

⁶⁵ Nelson, *The Book of Romance*, chapter 8: "A strong sexual expression is evident here. To pollinate a palm tree, one would climb the tree and seize the flowers."

⁶⁶ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 130: "God is not embarrassed by such subjects, and neither should we be embarrassed by them. Equally, though, the Word of God is not crass and crude when it talks about sex. It treats the body with an appropriate poetic modesty and restraint that we should try to respect."

Now watch what happens in **verse 9**. The wife is finally going to speak. The husband says in **verse 8**:
your breath [is] like apples

Then he says in **verse 9**,

⁹ *and your mouth⁶⁷ like the best wine.*

But then, she interrupts him in mid-sentence.⁶⁸ **Sometimes that happens in marriage.**⁶⁹ I don't think this man minds being interrupted.

She says,

It goes down smoothly for my beloved,⁷⁰ gliding over lips and teeth.

She describes herself like a smooth and crisp glass of wine to her husband. She's described his lovemaking like wine before (**1:2, 4; see also 4:10**). Here she does it again. Probably she's referring more specifically to his kisses at this point. She says, **"I taste like wine to him."**

And then she says in **verse 10**.

¹⁰ *I am my beloved's, and his desire⁷¹ is for me.*

There's that vow again! There's that affirmation of exclusivity in the marriage relationship. And notice the particular way that she frames it here. "I am my beloved's." She's said that before, and she says it here almost as a way of offering herself to him, because, in a sense, she belongs to him. She doesn't see that as a negative thing.

And also, she says, "his desire is for me!"⁷² **Is it a good thing for a husband to desire his wife? Does this wife see it as a good thing that her husband desires her? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. She enjoys her husband and she relishes in their intimacy. But she also enjoys her husband relishing in her.**

Write this down as #3 in your notes. In this previous scene we saw the husband's desire for intimacy asserted. Now we see the wife's...

3) Desire for intimacy **reciprocated** (7:9b-8:3)

Look at **verse 11**.

¹¹ *Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages;*

"Did you know it's OK to spend the night in a hotel even after you're married? It's OK. Hotels aren't just for your honeymoon."⁷³ You can get away. And not just to go to some function involving your kids.⁷⁴ Get away and enjoy yourself.

⁶⁷ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 159: "As in 5:16, the passage ends with the palate, the locus of taste. And in both passages the mouth does not belong to the person doing the tasting, but to the person being tasted."

⁶⁸ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 423: "The woman interrupts the man and completes the thought of this verse."

⁶⁹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 133: "The man doesn't have to ask twice; in fact, the woman is so eager to oblige him that she breaks into his speech and finishes his sentence for him. She doesn't roll her eyes and say, 'Stop thinking about sex all the time.'"

⁷⁰ Garrett, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, WBC, 243: "Therefore, line 9B should not be translated 'O loved one, delightful daughter' (so Murphy, 80), but in context as '(You are) love with all its delights.' He does not simply use the abstract אהבה as a concrete noun, as 'O loved one' would have it. Rather, he asserts that the abstract quality of love is made concrete in the woman's body. She is, for him, the incarnate form of the delights of love."

⁷¹ Schwab, "Song of Songs," EBC, 420 makes a noble attempt to correlate the contexts of Genesis with Song of Solomon: "The Song uses *l'sûqâ*, 'desire,' elsewhere found only in Genesis 3:16, 'To your man is your *l'sûqâ*, and he will rule over you,' and in 4:7, 'To you is its *l'sûqâ*, and you should rule over it.' Sin's desire is for the man as the woman's desire is for her husband, and the man is to master it and rule her. In both verses the issue is mastery and desire. In the Song the girl says, 'His *l'sûqâ* is for me ...' and to the reader acquainted with Genesis the thought begs to be completed, '... and I will master him.' ...If the use of *l'sûqâ* is an intentional commentary on the judgment of Genesis 3:16, the Song demonstrates that in love the judgment is mitigated and is not the last word on relationships. Throughout Genesis, women are seen using sex to get what they want from men (Lot and his daughters, Leah and Jacob, Tamar and Judah). In each case, the man's desire was for the woman; they did not know what has happened to them, and the women consequently bested them. The judgment of Genesis 3:16 is not the last word on the subject of male-female relations in Genesis; women have power over men invested in their femininity."

⁷² O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon*, 105: "In 6:12 she spoke of her desire, and here (although it's a different Hebrew word) she speaks of his."

⁷³ Nelson and Delk, *Better Love Now!*, 191.

⁷⁴ Tommy Nelson, "The Doctrine of Romance."

¹² let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

This wife says essentially, **“Let’s go rediscover our love again. Let’s reenact our wedding night.”** This woman is in no way falsely prudish or Victorian in the way that she interacts with her husband. She is passionate and she wants this man. She wants to delight herself with this man.⁷⁵

Years ago, when the sun never set on the British Empire, they used to tell young brides on their wedding night in England, “just lie back and think of Mother England.” In other words, “Endure it... Endure sex for the empire... so that we can have more babies to populate the empire.”

Now I’m all for fulfilling the creation mandate. But that is not a healthy approach to sexuality in marriage. And notice, that’s not this woman’s approach. She’s not just “enduring it” for the sake of the marriage. She’s engaged. She’s responsive.

Look at **verse 13**.

¹³ The mandrakes give forth fragrance,

Mandrakes are vegetables with roots that are shaped like the body of a man.⁷⁶ And mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiacal powers in the Hebrew world.⁷⁷ That’s why Rachel and Leah were fighting over mandrakes and the right to sleep with their husband in **Genesis 30:14–16**. That was a dysfunctional situation altogether. But that’s not the case in **Song of Solomon 7**.

¹³ The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old,⁷⁸ which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

You might ask, **“What does that mean? New as well as old?”** It means exactly what you think it means. It means that this wife has ways in which she can please her man that only she knows. Sexual intimacy is an exclusive thing, right? There are old ways that she knows, that she has learned over time. **But she’s got a few new tricks up her sleeve as well.** She’s committed to being a creative, innovative, responsive lover to her husband.⁷⁹

Look at **chapter 8, verse 1**.

Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother’s breasts! If I found you outside, I would kiss you, and none would despise me.

Now let me just explain that last verse because that might sound to some of you like a creepy rendition of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia. Why would she compare her husband to her brother and want to kiss him?

⁷⁵ Nelson and Delk, *Better Love Now!*, 193: “Guys, if you want a Song of Solomon wife, you need to be a Song of Solomon husband. That starts with cherishing your wife from the bottom of her feet to the top of her head. Tell her about her character, her beauty, and your love for her. And back up your talk with action in terms of being kind, considerate, and gentle.”

⁷⁶ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 162: “מַדְרָאִים, mandrakes, or mandragoras, belonging to the nightshade family, were also known as love-apples because they were thought to be aphrodisiacs (and also an aid to conception [Gen 30:14–16] and a narcotic). They ripen in May and have a distinctive and complex fragrance.”

⁷⁷ Schwab, “Song of Songs,” EBC, 423: “*dûdā’îm*, ‘mandrakes,’ is similar to ‘my lover,’ *dôdî*, and *doddîm*, ‘breasts.’ Mandrakes are associated with coitus in Genesis 30:14–16 and were regarded as an aphrodisiac.” Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 424: “The mandrake, a vegetable that from antiquity has been regarded as an aphrodisiac (Gen 30:14–16). While the text does not suggest that the couple will eat mandrakes for their alleged power, the implication of mandrakes giving their fragrance would not be lost on the ancient audience.”

⁷⁸ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 134: “For them as a married couple, sex is a delightful enjoyment of ‘choice fruits, new and old’ (v. 13), not just a routine exercise.”

⁷⁹ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 136: “In marriage are delightful treasures, new and old, that make (or at least ought to make) married sex far better than anything you can find outside of marriage. In marriage, you get to know and trust each other intimately and therefore can learn exactly what pleases the other person.”

What she's saying here is that she wishes she could display her affection for her husband in public, but she can't. She can't because in Jewish culture "public displays of affection" were frowned upon.⁸⁰ Those were the actions of a prostitute not a married couple.

Even today if you go to Israel, if you try to hold your wife's hand in certain places, you've got to be careful, because one of the Hasidic Jews might come along and thump you on the head. You don't do that in that culture.⁸¹

But if a young woman kissed her brother, no big deal. You can be affectionate in that case. You can be flamboyant even in your display of affection. This woman wants to be affectionate like that with her husband in public.

Look at **verse 2**.

² *I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother— she who used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink,⁸² the juice of my pomegranate.*

Wow! What does "juice of my pomegranate" mean? It means what you think it means. It means that she wants to enjoy the delight of sexual intimacy with her husband. As she should. As is her right as a wife. She's not doing anything wrong or sinful, and neither is he. **And let me just tell you that there is something so sweet and good about guilt-free, God-honoring sex in marriage.**

I think a lot of people in our day try to assuage their guilt concerning sex by justifying their actions. Or they use angry defensiveness. Or they try to militantly suppress cultural mores. It doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to try to merge sex and guilt and the justifying of sin. **That's like a hamster on a wheel!**

There is guilt-free, God-honoring sex. But it is only found heterosexually... it is only found monogamously... it is only found covenantally in the context of marriage.

And by the way, I think there is the suggestion in **verse 2** that **the mother taught her daughter the birds and the bees.**⁸³ And that's the way it should be. **Parents should convey the truths about love, sex, and marriage to their children. Why do we think the government should do that?**

Why do we think their elementary school teachers should do that? That's preposterous! Nobody should teach children these things except their parents, with the possible exception of extended family (when that's necessary) and the church family.

And listen parents, use wisdom in how you do that. You do that in age-appropriate ways all throughout their childhood. The cloak of euphemism gets removed in time as they get older and you get more specific. Do your job, parents! Others can help. The church can help. But this is on you.

Look at **verse 3**.

³ *His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!*

That's the position of passion right there. That's the position of lovemaking. These two are now enjoying the beauty and the serenity of human sexuality as God intended it.

Miles Van Pelt gives the following summary of this book and he talks about this. He says, **"The Song of Songs teaches us that the covenant of marriage, as created and instituted by God in Genesis chapter 2, was originally designed to be rock-solid in terms of commitment and white-hot in terms of intimacy, and that marriages that work to maintain rock-solid commitment and white-hot intimacy can better navigate**

⁸⁰ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 424: "The point is that she wishes she were free to display her affection openly. In the ancient world this would have been impossible for a woman with any man except a father, brother, or other near relative, the kissing of whom would not be construed by the public as a quasisexual act. The freedom to kiss in public would not apply to her husband. Thus the wish expressed here *is not sexual* but is a desire to be free to show her love for the groom freely and openly."

⁸¹ Tommy Nelson, "The Doctrine of Romance."

⁸² Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 165: "I could give you drink. The Hebrew, יָקַח, forms a wordplay with יָקַח, 'I could kiss you' in v. 1."

⁸³ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 134: "This may put a whole new perspective on Paul's admonition in Titus 2:3–4 that the older women should teach the younger women!"

the ravages of sin in a post-Genesis 3 world and so better endure hardship, resist temptation, and promote wholeness.”⁸⁴

That’s reinforced by verse 3.

³ His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me!

That’s the “white-hot” side of that equation. But look at verse 4. Here’s the “rock-solid” side of that equation.

⁴ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.⁸⁵

Write this down as a final point.

4) The Shulamite’s **external plea** for purity (8:4)

This is the concluding refrain of this passage. This is the last thing she says after describing all this passionate desire for her husband and after enjoying the goodness of sex in the context of marriage.

⁴ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

Let me paraphrase it for you. Don’t have sex outside of marriage. Don’t awaken love until it’s the proper time. Because the way that God has created sex is beautiful in its proper place. The way that God has ordained sex is wonderful in its proper place.⁸⁶

The Shulamite is saying, **“I have enjoyed the wonder of sexuality as God intended it and I want you to experience that too!” Sexual intimacy is a divine gift. It’s a good gift. It’s intended for pleasure. It’s the responsible thing in marriage. And it’s an exclusive thing between two people. So don’t misuse it.**⁸⁷ **Make sure you enjoy it in its proper context.**⁸⁸

And speaking of misuse, there is a place in the NT where the goodness of monogamous marriage was misused badly. There was a woman who Jesus encountered in **John 4** who exchanged husbands again and again like air filters on an air conditioning system. She was married five times, and the man she was currently living with wasn’t even her husband. Scandalous! The fact that Jesus was even deigning to talk with her was scandalous.

And the truth of the matter was that she probably never read the **Song of Solomon**, because in her religious tradition, only the Pentateuch was considered Scripture. All the other books of the OT were part of the Jewish Canon, but not the Samaritan Canon.

⁸⁴ Van Pelt, “The Message of the Song of Songs,” lesson 1: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/foundations/essentials-the-song-of-songs-ot265/message-of-the-song-of-songs-ot265-01>

⁸⁵ Berlin, *Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, 166: “The oath in v. 4 differs from 2:7 and 3:5 by the absence of ‘by the gazelles or the wild hinds,’ and by using מִן instead of מִן.”

⁸⁶ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 134–5: “If you stir up love too soon, before there is an appropriate opportunity to follow through on those urges in a context of which even your mother would approve, the result will be either intense frustration or giving in to those urges outside of marriage. Like all other sin, sex outside of marriage leads to guilt and shame, rather than the joy and satisfaction that it pretends to offer.”

⁸⁷ Duguid, *Song of Songs*, 138: “Because our sexual sin is rooted and grounded in our hearts, it easily moves from our eyes and our minds to our bodies in various forms of promiscuity. Sometimes we pursue bodily attractiveness and sex as idols in themselves, while at other times we use them to feed our other idolatries. We may say to ourselves, ‘If people find me attractive and compliment my looks, then I am worthwhile,’ or ‘If I sleep with my boyfriend, then he will stay with me, and I will have that relationship that makes me a valuable person,’ or even ‘I slept with my girlfriend, so now I have to stay with her to prove that I am not a failure as a Christian.’ We may develop eating disorders or spend many hours at the gym as we pursue the body shape that our culture insists is most beautiful, or we may disfigure or hide our bodies because of fear of sex or to punish ourselves for past sexual issues. Because our sexual desires are so strong, and we live in a culture that excels in stirring them up in all kinds of contexts where they cannot be properly satisfied, it is hardly surprising that so many of us struggle with these things.”

⁸⁸ Luther makes an astute observation about the Song of Solomon, but then he follows it with his confusing and idiosyncratic interpretation concerning politics: “It is said that among the Jews it was forbidden for adolescents to read this book. There are some who suppose that this prohibition was designed to prevent adolescents becoming inflamed to lust by reading it. For myself, however, I think it was forbidden rather for its difficulty, for since it speaks politically throughout, it seems to be of no value to the young, who as yet have no use for worldly affairs.” Quoted in Fink and George, eds., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, RCS, 405.

And yet, despite her failures, and despite the weakness of her religious tradition, Jesus came to her, this Samaritan woman. He spoke with her. He challenged her. He convicted her. And he offered her grace.

It's a really memorable moment in the **Gospel of John**, because she became one of the earliest believers in Jesus. And she became one of the first, if not the first, non-Jewish evangelist for Jesus. What a privilege! Once she got ahold of that living water and the grace that covers over sin, she couldn't help but tell other people about it.

And that's the thing that we've got to remember about sex and the gospel. God gives us the paradigm... God gives us the playbook for God-honoring love, sex, and marriage. But a large majority of believers in the NT fall short of that standard. They fail.

It seems to me... let me just give you some quick math... it seems to me that at least 50% of believers have fallen short of God's standard for sexual purity. And they are sinners. And the other 50%, who don't fall into that sin, are usually guilty of pride. They Pharisaically look down on those who have sinned in that area.

And even if there is some pious soul out there who is guiltless in the area of sexual sin and is prideless in his or her interaction with those who have sinned sexually... I've met a few people like that... those people would be the first to tell you that they are not faultless before the holy God of the Universe.

And that's why we need grace. And that's why we need the cross. And that's why we need a Savior to save us from our sin, sexual or otherwise.

And wouldn't you know it, we have a Savior. The Samaritan woman at the well believed in him. And you can too.

Look, sexual intimacy is good. I hope I've made a strong case for that today. Guiltless, God-glorifying sex is fantastic. But God's grace is better. Salvation from sin is better.