

## **LOVE STRENGTHENED**

### **Song of Songs 3:6–6:3**

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The Song of Songs, a little book in the Bible tucked away between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah. I'd like to take a moment to review where we are in Song of Songs, since interpretation is so critical to the meaning of this book. I indicated last week that there are so many views about this book. It is somewhat difficult for any person to stand up before a group and say, "This is the way to interpret the Song of Solomon." I indicated that it evidently pleased the Holy Spirit to allow a variety of interpretations about this book to exist in the Church for centuries. He's not displeased with its variety, or He would not have allowed it. As a Christian who studies the Scripture, I make it a rule of thumb to be firm in those areas in which the Scriptures are firm and to be charitable in those areas where the Scripture itself is charitable and allows a variety of viewpoints. Therefore, I would not in any way stand before you and tell you, "I have the last word on the Song of Songs." But I, as one the Lord has found worthy to be a servant of His, simply share this book with you, and we will look at it in a particular kind of fashion.

One of the important things to assess as we look at the Song of Songs is authorship. Authorship has a great deal to do with how we interpret it. Obviously, last week I was espousing an interpretation of Song of Songs which is rather hard on King Solomon. It might have raised a question in your mind, "If this book is as hard on King Solomon as you say that it is, how then could the book have been written by Solomon?" My own personal persuasion is, and again I share this freely, that the book was not written by Solomon. It is a book which opens with the phrase, "the Song of Songs which is Solomon's." That's the literal Hebrew translation. That can mean either "the Song of Songs which is by Solomon" or "the Song of Songs which is about

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Solomon.” I have taken the latter point of view—it is a book about Solomon and very critical of him. It is a judgment on his lifestyle and his moral profligacy. Nowhere in the Song of Solomon are we told that Solomon is the author. If we hold to the interpretation that Song of Songs was written by Solomon, then we would have to adopt what is called the two-part drama view of Song of Songs—that Solomon became married to a northern girl, an Israeli girl from the north. And we would have to believe that the Song of Songs is a celebration of sexuality within marriage, but it is not a celebration of fidelity, of loyalty, or of exclusiveness, because Solomon lacked all these things in his relationships.

If we take a three-part drama view as we have done toward the Song of Songs, this viewpoint then allows a taking into account a later opinion towards Solomon. Solomon’s reign was a mixed bag. On the one hand, he was blessed in the useful days of his kingdom by being given great wisdom. When God gives a gift, as Paul says in the Roman letter, it is irrevocable. “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” So, it’s a gift of wisdom to Solomon that God never withdrew.

On the other hand, as we read the Scripture, we find great statements and hints at how displeased the Lord was with Solomon’s reign. Even though Solomon was the person responsible for building the great religious institution of the temple, God found Solomon’s heart deficient in his relationship with Him. Solomon appears to have had the kind of administration where he squelched the prophetic word, but kept the priestly function. That is, the ceremonies in the temple went on. But as you read during Solomon’s time and search for the prophets, you will not find them but with rare exception.

There is, however, one prophet who especially prophesies during Solomon’s later years, and his name is Ahijah. We come across him in 1 Kings 11 as Solomon was nearing the end of his reign.

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Ahijah comes to a general in Solomon's army by the name of Jeroboam and says to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molech the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon's father, did'" (1 Kings 11:31–33, NIV). There is the final prophetic pronouncement on Solomon.

I see the Song of Songs as a discrete prophetic protest to Solomon's lifestyle. That's the view I'm taking. I realize it's arguable. The three-part view of the Song of Songs allows us to take this book as an indictment against lust, polygamy, and infidelity. It celebrates permanence of a relationship between a husband and wife. It celebrates a love, which is exclusive in its relationship and does not involve other lovers. As the writer says in the shepherd's words toward his bride, "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain" (Song of Songs 4:12, NIV). In those words he is celebrating the exclusiveness of their relationship and the fact that their relationship cannot be purchased.

Last week in chapters 1:1–3:5, we looked at the first act—"Love Tested." The first scene was in the harem. The northern girl had been brought there. She was soliloquizing—talking to herself about her love for her shepherd. She was longing for his love. The harem begins to praise Solomon. The Shunammite begins to reflect upon her own beauty and lack of self-esteem. On the one hand, she says, "I'm dark, burnt by the sun—not fair and beautiful like the others in the harem." But on the other hand, she is satisfied with herself. She says that she is lovely. The

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harem scorns her, and when Solomon approaches her the first thing he does is compare her to one of his horses.

Scene two involves a reverie at a banquet table in chapters 1:12–2:17. Solomon has invited the shepherd girl as his honored guest at dinner. But she continues throughout this dinner to contrast the palace banquet with the moments she has spent outdoors on the green grass in the countryside of the Lebanese foothills, perhaps in a picnic-like setting under the cedars and firs, with her shepherd boyfriend—when they pledged their love to one another. That whole dreamlike sequence is a reverie—a dreamy, misty-eyed girl who is remembering the true loyalty she had with her shepherd boyfriend. She remembers the romantic day they had together.

Then chapter 3:1–5 takes us to the third scene of the first act of the drama. That is a moment when the Shunammite girl (called that because she is from Shunem, which is a place in northern Israel) dreams she has lost her shepherd friend. She gets up to go find him. It is a dangerous situation for her, and she does not know whether she will ever be successfully reunited with him or not.

The plot intensifies tonight as we come to the second act. Again, the New International Version has taken the liberty to put dramatic parts by the verses. So, you'll see in the NIV it says "Lover" or "Beloved" or the like. I want to remind you again, that is the view of a translator. Those words are not found in the original text. They are a committee's opinion. As we go through the Song of Songs, we're inserting other parts because we are seeing the drama in a different way.

This second act I am calling "Love Strengthened." It involves an intensification of the conflict in the book. Solomon now makes a very direct approach to the Shunammite. The Shunammite in this passage remembers the words her shepherd has spoken to her in the days when they pledged their love to each other. She remembers how she anticipated her wedding day, and she treats it as

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an experience which has already come. Even as the first act ended in a dream in which her lover had gone from her, the second act ends in a similar dream sequence. Only that dream sequence is one that is even more frightening. In looking for her shepherd friend through the city in the dream, she is beaten by the night watchman.

#### **I. The first scene in the second act we will call “Solomon’s Palanquin Procession.”**

That word is used in older translations of this text. It is found, for example, in verse 7, “Look! It is Solomon’s palanquin.” We now use the English word “carriage.” A palanquin is a conveyance, which consists of an enclosed litter, born on the shoulders of men by means of poles. If you haven’t traveled to a third-world country which uses this kind of conveyance, perhaps you’ll need to envision a palanquin. This is the situation with Solomon in verses 6–11 of chapter 3. The palanquin, his sedan chair, is being carried into the city and into the proximity of the shepherd girl. We are introduced to that scene. Various onlookers are commenting on the procession that is arriving. One says, “Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?” (Song of Songs 3:6, NIV). The first things that attract you as you look at Solomon’s palanquin in the distance are its sight and its smell. It looks like a column of smoke, and it radiates the presence of aroma. To the Asiatic, visual and aromatic impressions are important.

“Look!” the second speaker says, “It is Solomon’s carriage [or palanquin], escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel” (verse 7, NIV). It not only took four people to carry a palanquin, but Solomon was an important person. The more people you had attending you, the more your importance was shown. Solomon has sixty people—sixty strong men—in this procession. The noblest of Israel—all of them wearing the sword, all of them experienced in battle, each prepared for the terrors of the night. This is Solomon’s secret service.

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A third onlooker says of the palanquin which is nearing the harem, “King Solomon made for himself the carriage [had it made or designed]; he made it of wood from Lebanon [Lebanese wood was always the best kind of wood because it was in the mountains. It was cedar or fir, most likely cedar]. Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem” (verses 9-10, NIV). In other words, he had some custom work done on it.

The final onlooker says, “Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced” (verse 11, NIV). Solomon’s mother was Bathsheba. The crown may refer to a laurel wreath. Every time Solomon got involved in another wedding, he had another laurel wreath to go with it. The women onlookers are noting that Solomon has another wedding approaching, or he is wearing the remains of his initial wedding. It’s simply calling our attention to the visual imagery of Solomon arriving on sight.

### **II. The second scene which begins in 4:1 and extends to 5:1, I will call “Two Proposals and a Response.”**

The first proposal, if we may call it that, is basically Solomon indicating his interest in the Shunammite. The first proposal is from Solomon, verses 1–7. The second is from the shepherd, verses 8–15. The response is given by the Shunammite girl in verse 16. Then the shepherd responds in 5:1.

Let’s look at Solomon’s proposal. Solomon is caught up with the dynamic, physical beauty of the Shunammite girl. Being the Hebrew that he is, he thinks in terms of their significance numerically. He communicates seven beautiful characteristics of the girl.

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First he says, “How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!” (4:1, NIV). Then he begins with a physical description. First of all, he looks at her eyes. “Your eyes behind your veil are doves” (NIV). That is, they are bright, alert, soft, innocent, and fetching. “Your eyes behind your veil are like doves.”

Second, he notes her hair. “Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead” (NIV). For the eastern mind, that was a compliment. There was no more beautiful sight than to see a flock of black woolen goats tip-toeing their way down a mountain incline or slope. It was a certain kind of beauty reflected against the skyline—the green mountain landscape. It was a word of beauty.

He next notes her teeth. “Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn [This means they’re even. He didn’t see any buck-eyed teeth in the Shunammite], coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone” (verse 2, NIV). In days before dentists, that was important. He’s saying, “You have no gaps in your teeth. Each tooth, upper and lower, has its twin. They all match.” He sees her million dollar smile. Her teeth have a gleam to them.

He next notes her lips. “Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely” (verse 3, NIV). He notes the delicate, beautiful, red line of her lips.

Fifth, he notes her temples which probably also included her cheeks. “Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate” (NIV). Again, that may not seem like adoring language to our western minds, but it is a beautiful physical characteristic of having red and healthy cheeks and temples.

He then describes her neck. “Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors” (verse 4, NIV). Solomon is reaching into his repertoire of romantic language. For something to be described as David’s tower in biblical

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language—a neck, for example—reflected character. A bent over neck reflected humiliation. The Scriptures also talk about a stiff-necked person, and that would be a symbol of stubbornness. The neck referred to the tower of David—the tower of David was a military fortress. No doubt the most prominent military fortress that was in the environment. That military fortress had on the outside shields of war which stood for the fact that there had been past exploits in battle that had been won. It was sort of the national hall of fame. Maybe, what we might describe as the hall of heroes—if you were a hero in battle, you could get into the museum of the great. Your shield was hung on that tower. Symbolically, it represented something that gave you a great sense of pride. It stood for the integrity of the nation. It stood for its strength. It was a very dear thing. As Solomon looked at the Shunammite’s neck, he is saying, “To me, it is what the tower of David portrays to the nation—a sense of confidence, esteem, and well being.”

Here is final attribute of the Shunammite that he compliments, “Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies” (verse 5, NIV). He is thinking of her in terms of playfulness and caresses, noting that aspect of her person which is appealing to him.

Solomon is looking forward to their wedding day. He says, “Until the day breaks and the shadows flee” (verse 6, NIV). Remember, we looked at that particular phrase last time and noted it is a phrase which is spoken during the daytime. It is “until the day breaks,” or “until the day breathes” is an alternate translation. An eastern day in the summer is a very hot day, and there is a time at night when the dust settles and the day, so to speak, breathes. The late twilight hours are a time of elongated shadows. When the shadows all flee away is when there is darkness and no more shadow to be seen. He is looking forward to the evening of their marriage. He is saying that until late evening he will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense. Some take this as a

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sexual reference here. I understand it to mean, “Until the night we are married, I am going to go soak myself in aromatic senses so that I am appealing to you. I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense and prepare myself so I smell good.” That shouldn’t surprise us if you look at the Book of Esther. You see how important this kind of cosmetic process was to the eastern mind. Esther is told in 2:19, “Before a girl has a turn to go to the king, she has to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for women—six months with oil and myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics. Twelve months of saturation before coming to the king.” So Solomon notes that prior to their wedding night, he is going to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of incense.

He then concludes with this overall compliment of her beauty, “All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you” (Song of Songs 4:7, NIV). She is a stunning woman in her physical characteristics.

If we understand that the words which follow are the words spoken by the shepherd, this means that basically all Solomon does in his proposal is rave about the physical looks of the Shunammite. He doesn’t note other descriptions of her character that have to do with her inner being. He is simply stuck on her external beauty. Given Solomon’s lifestyle, we are not surprised that this would be the case.

The shepherd now comes into the situation. These are his words to his Shunammite girl, “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Descend from the crest of Amana . . . from the lion’s dens and the mountain haunts of the leopards” (verse 8, NIV). It’s very possible that what is being referred to is Solomon’s harem in the north, rather than in Jerusalem. Maybe that is where the shepherd girl is. The shepherd boy, at this moment, is thinking of his girl’s captivity in the northern palace. She is in an inaccessible place—the top of Lebanon. It’s

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difficult to get to her, and not only that—it's dangerous. It is a place where there are lions and leopards. This describes the inaccessibility he has in getting to his Shunammite girlfriend. He is commenting on that. And perhaps again, the girl is dreamily reminiscing. It may be an actual event or a reverie again on the girl's part. But first, he is urging her to escape from this situation. He is sick with love in regard to her. "You have stolen my heart [or, "You have ravished my heart"], my sister, my bride...with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!" (verses 9-10, NIV).

Notice how he describes her—not simply as a physical object as Solomon does. But he has already called her his sister twice. There is a camaraderie—a sense of family already in their relationship. "Come with me...How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon" (verses 8,10-11, NIV). Milk and honey, in the biblical mind, was the sign of prosperity. Remember when the children of Israel were called to go to the Promised Land, the Promised Land was a land flowing with milk and honey. The shepherd boy says of his girl at this point, "You are to me the Promised Land. What the Promised Land meant to the people of God, you are to me." Isn't that a wonderful compliment in terms of a relationship?

He goes on to talk about her fidelity and loyalty to him—the fact that she exclusively is his. "You are a garden locked up, my sister [three times he has called her "sister"], my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain" (verse 12, NIV). Gardens and vineyards in Palestine were surrounded by rock walls to prevent the intrusion of strangers. Only the lawful possessor of the garden could enter it. He is comparing his bride to a garden with a wall around it. She is a private

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person. They have an exclusive relationship. Not only is she a garden wall, but she is a spring sealed. In the biblical world, water was scarce. The owners of fountains frequently sealed them with clay which quickly hardened in the sun. That was a mark of ownership. That clay seal was not to be broken by anyone else. That sealed fountain was designed to give water only to its rightful owner. Therefore to the shepherd, she is a person who is reserved exclusively for him. She has not been possessed by anyone else. Nor is she to be regarded as anyone else's possession. For the shepherd, she is a garden paradise. He notes that. "Your plants [the expressions radiating out of her personality] are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits" (verse 13, NIV). The shepherd regards his Shunammite girl as a garden paradise of delightful fruits, fragrant flowers, colorful blossoms, towering trees, and aromatic spices. Every branch of her personality is scintillating, flavorful, enchanting, and aromatic. She is not only a Garden of Eden to him, but she is cool and fresh water to him. "You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon" (verse 15, NIV). Cool because it's coming down from the mountains. He mixes his metaphors having called her first a garden and then a fountain. He says, "You're a fountain within the garden to me."

The Shunammite then responds to this invitation of love. Again, we may be dealing with a dream sequence. She says to her shepherd boyfriend, "Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits" (verse 16, NIV). At this point, she is uncertain as to where her shepherd friend is. So, she calls for the winds to blow and spread her fragrance to wherever he is, so that he might know where to find her. "Come, north wind." If he's to the south, the north wind would waft the aroma of her presence to him there. If he is in the north, the south wind would waft her presence there. It's a poetic metaphor. "Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad.

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Let my lover come into his garden and taste his choice fruits.” She is not reticent at all about describing the delight that she looks forward to on their wedding night when their personalities will fully come together, and they will celebrate the joy God has placed in the marriage relationship.

We then see the lover responding. It’s as though the girl sees, in this moment, her wedding has already come. He responds to her, “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk” (5:1, NIV). He then describes their wedded love as a beautiful garden he has enjoyed and as a great feast he has celebrated.

At that moment, a voice enters the scene, “Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers” (NIV). The question arises interpretively as to who speaks this. Where does this voice come from? I personally would hold to the dramatic view that it is God speaking on their wedding night, saying to them, “Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.” They have regarded each other with proper chastity and reverence, and now on their wedding evening, God is saying to them what he said to the first Adam and Eve, “It is not good that a man or woman should be alone. I will make a helper for him and for her.” God saw all that was made, including the creation of man and woman as husband and wife, and He saw it as very good. I would see this voice now as God speaking in the situation and putting His stamp of approval on their relationship—which is what we always seek in Christian marriage. We believe that Christian marriage carries with it the approval of God himself, and the sexuality within marriage is God’s idea and not man’s at all. It is the world that has perverted the whole concept of what God designed for sexual experience, and the world has robbed it of its richness and its meaning. Sex has become profane in the world. But God restores it to its rightful place and honors the married

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relationship. “Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.” In a day where the concepts of fidelity, loyalty, and purity are laughed at and scorned, here is God’s Word celebrating a couple who has maintained purity in thought and deed. The shepherd girl has had this dreamlike sequence of the wedding invitation from her shepherd and the wedding day, and she has anticipated it and dreamed of it as though it has already occurred.

### **III. We then come to another scene in this second act I’ll call “A Frightening Dream,” found in chapter 5:2–6:3.**

She is once more dreaming, as she did in an earlier chapter when we closed last time. We noticed her dream in 3:1–5. This time her dream is set in the context of after their marriage. She has been reunited with him—a thing which is now physically impossible because she is in Solomon’s court. She dreams, “I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: ‘Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night’” (5:2, NIV). Of course, this would describe him if he was a shepherd. He has been out with his flocks in the evening. The dew has settled heavy upon the ground as it does in the springtime or fall or even in the summertime in Palestine. He has been out with the flock. Now he is asking for entrance to the room. She responds, “I have taken off my robe—must I put it on again? I have washed my feet—must I soil them again? My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer” (Song of Songs 5:3–6, NIV). Here is a classic story repeated in so many marriages. It’s one of a love that once glowed with romance and ardor, but now it comes up against a moment of inconvenience. The shepherd, as

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far as the Shunammite was concerned, came to her at an inconvenient moment. She had prepared for bed. She had washed her feet. To walk across the dirt floor again would be an inconvenience. He models a tremendous characteristic of love in a man—not insisting on his own way. When she does not answer to his call, he leaves discretely. Every married couple would do well to ponder the roles that are here—the reticence of the wife and the charming discretion of the husband. On the one hand, we have the sin of being unwilling to be inconvenienced. And on the other hand, we could have seen the sin of insisting on your own way. She dreams this sequence in which she has turned aside the one she loves. She rises now in the evening to search for him. “The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me” (verse 7, NIV). A terrible moment in a dream, and we’ve all had dreams where we’ve had dire things happen to us. She cannot find him when she goes out looking, and the watchmen beat her. Perhaps there is something deep and psychologically profound that is being stated—when there is a creeping in of complacency in a marriage, the immediate effect is a wound to the parties involved; a damaging or a hurting.

She turns in her dream to the harem and says, “O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my lover, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love” (verse 8, NIV). She says, “If anybody finds him, tell him that I am sick with love.” They respond to her sarcastically, I think. “How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you charge us so?” (verse 9, NIV).

She is not reluctant to answer that question about how her shepherd—now husband—is better than all others. She describes him in this way, “My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand [ten thousand is a Hebrew idiom meaning “nobody is to compare”]. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water

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streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels [she is really capable of poetic expression to describe the iris of the eye set in a bed of white]. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume [she's no doubt talking about his beard]. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars [Lebanon would be a reference to height]. His mouth is sweetness itself [talking about his speech. Whenever he speaks to her, he speaks in a way that builds her up]; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song of Songs 5:10–16, NIV). Notice in their relationship, he is not simply her lover. He is her friend. “This is my lover, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

She responds when asked to describe her loved one by saying in the vernacular, “He is tall, dark, and handsome. But he is more than that—I love the way he speaks to me.” Isn't it possible in marriage to speak lovingly in a public context, but to say quite the opposite in private—things you would never be caught dead saying in front of witnesses? I confess to that sin. I would be embarrassed if you ever heard. There is safety in a marriage relationship, but sometimes you feel confident to say things you shouldn't. But she compliments him on his tremendous control. What a model she puts for other husbands. She compliments him on the way he has consistently spoken to her. She says, “He is altogether lovely.” We use that phrase to refer to Christ when we want to describe Him.

The harem asks, “Where has your lover gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn, that we may look for him with you?” (6:1, NIV). She really doesn't want their help. It's only a dream. She lets us know in verses 2 and 3 that it was a dream. In the dream she lost him, but in verses 2 and 3, she knows where he is. She never lost him at all. It was only in the

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dream that she lost him. She says when she awakened, “My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse [or to pastor his flock] in the gardens and to gather lilies” (verse 2, NIV). “I know where he is—taking care of his responsibilities where he usually is. He is not lost, wandering out there. I am my lover’s and my lover is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies. I know where I can find him.” She closes her statement here in verses 2 and 3 by restating the exclusiveness of their relationship with each other. “I am my lover’s, no one else is. And he is mine, and no one else is.”

What are some applications we can look at here? I think it’s important to look at the narrative first in order to derive the principles.

**A.** Regarding courtship and marriage, I think in comparing the proposals of Solomon and the shepherd, we would have to say that one is superior to the other. One proposal looks upon the heart and the personality, while the other looks exclusively on the outward impression. Solomon had money, popularity, and position—he had much to offer economically. But he really did not have what was the most important to offer—loyalty, fidelity, and trust. He did not convey a sense of the importance of another human being isolated from their external pleasure and what she could do for him.

**B.** The second application to courtship and marriage is this: We must establish in our hearts that we are to be exclusively the possession of our life partner alone. That fact is celebrated in phrases like, “You are a garden walled, you are a spring sealed up.” Or, “I am my beloved’s, and he is mine.” Here we see the value the Lord puts on the exclusiveness of a relationship. Virginity in our culture has become a bad word. It has become a word which stands for a sort of reprehensible moral innocence and naiveté. But it is not so in God’s eyes. Virginity, loyalty, and fidelity in the Lord’s eyes are valued, esteemed, and praised. What is celebrated in this psalm is

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the establishment in the heart of the shepherd and the Shunammite. They have determined to be exclusively for one another.

**C.** The third application for courtship and marriage is this: Shun the trauma within a marriage relationship which comes through indifference or selfishness. We saw that modeled in the dream sequence this evening. On the one hand, as the bride to her shepherd husband, she was indifferent. On the other hand, he modeled unselfishness rather than selfishness. Shun the trauma and the wounding that occurs within a relationship because of indifference, and also be unselfish. What can be applied to our relationship with Christ? We have not treated this book as an allegory. That is, we have not sought to find in every word and phrase some mystical meaning which celebrates Christ's relationship with His church. But because we have not taken an allegorical view, that does not mean there's not legitimate application here. I think there is. I would draw some applications from their relationships—the shepherd and the Shunammite—to our relationship with Christ. We as the bride, and Christ as the bridegroom. Christ as the shepherd, and we as the Shunammite.

**D.** The first application I would ask in the form of a question: do we know the rejoicing of the bridegroom over us? God has a love affair with His people. "God so loved the world." God so loved you and me that Christ Jesus came into the world. He deeply loves us. We have feelings of worthlessness. He sees within our lives that which is lovely, and He sees what He can make lovely and graceful. We, as His bride, are to see ourselves as a delight in His eyes. Christ died for people whom He loved. He came for people who, in His eyes, He regarded as beautiful and worth winning and worth bringing to His eternal palace. He thinks enough of you and me that He wants us to live with Him forever. I think that's a pretty high view. The gospel of Jesus Christ has an extremely high view of mankind. It is the humanists who have the low view. Christ looks

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at people in terms of their true worth, being, and identity. Isaiah 62:5 says, “As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” Mirrored in the wedding is the relationship the Lord, as bridegroom, has with you.

**E.** Do we honor the exclusiveness of our relationship with the Lord? Do we see our fundamental loyalty of life as being committed to Him? Are we to Him a garden walled, a spring sealed? Or is it possible in our spiritual relationship, we have become so enamored with other pursuits that our relationship really becomes adulterated—the exclusiveness, the fidelity, and the setting of the right priorities has been set aside because we are chasing other gods. The exclusiveness of the relationship of the Shunammite and the shepherd is meant to model the exclusiveness of the relationship of Christ and His people. We’re called upon to honor the exclusiveness of that relationship and to see our own lives as the garden in which the Lord delights to walk. The fruit of our lives being that which brings Him pleasure. The water of our lives, which He has placed within us by the Spirit, being that which assuages His thirst for interpersonal relationship. Do we honor the exclusiveness of our relationship?

**F.** Are we alive to the beauty of our Lord? The Shunammite is really alive to the beauty of her shepherd. When she celebrates her handsome shepherd in 5:10–16, it’s really a marvelous parallel to how John describes Jesus in Revelation 1:12–18. John runs through a set of characteristics of what his Lord is to him, and he is unabashed in his declaration of loyalty and love for Jesus Christ. He is speaking in poetic metaphor, even as does the Shunammite here. She says of her shepherd, “He is the fairest of ten thousand. He is altogether lovely.” Therefore, it is fitting when we describe our Lord we may say of Him those same kinds of things. Love allows liberty of language. It is alright to speak of Jesus as the Lover of our soul, as a beautiful Savior, and a wonderful Lord. He is altogether lovely.

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**G.** Are we ready to be inconvenienced for His sake? Have we settled down in the safety of a relationship with the Lord that has become commonplace? Might He be standing anew at our door, knocking for entrance? Perhaps at that moment of our life, it's inconvenient to respond to His call. It's inconvenient to follow Him where He wants us to go. We have settled down. We're unwilling to invest that extra amount of energy which would make it possible for us to respond to the Lord's call. I pray in my own life (and for you as well) that I won't come to a place in my Christian experience where Christ would be found knocking at the door of my life, and I would simply say to Him, "Lord, I hear what You're saying. I know that's important to You. But it's inconvenient now to respond. I'm doing other things. Would You let me go about my way? And if You'll go about Yours for awhile, we'll meet again at some later time." We need to develop our inner life of response to Christ so we can be sensitive—so what He says, we'll do. When He puts within us some response He wants, we'll say, "Here am I at your disposal. Send me." I pray that we'll be believers so in love with our Lord that we cannot be inconvenienced at His call.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, again we thank You for the beauty that is in Your Word as we share it tonight—for the model of the love relationship which points us to the model of our relationship with You.

There are other voices in this world which attempt to point to our worth as human beings. People with viewpoints like Solomon to the bride. Those voices attempt to get us to have a human assessment of ourselves, but it is only in You that we find our true worth and significance. When we enter into that relationship with You which is wholesome, You then seek all of our other relationships that are somehow bent, destroyed, and rusted. We pray for the healing of relationships with You which may be injured. We pray for the creation of a relationship with You where such a relationship may not exist.

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Also, we pray for the young people in our midst who are looking forward to their moment of marriage. I pray that each of them would live by the values on human life You taught. We pray that You would save them from this world that celebrates the things that are wrong and destroys the things that are right.

And for us as believers, we pray our purity, fidelity, and loyalty would be as You intended them to be—words to be treasured and experiences to be celebrated. We pray that You would create within each marriage a safe place—a walled garden, a spring to be used in an exclusive sense, a personal relationship that is resting, that is comforting, and that is alive with color, vitality, and aroma.

May we be a sweet smelling savor to You and to our world—that there will be wholeness and beauty attributed to Your work of grace in our hearts.

I pray for the healing of marriage relationships where there is hurt—where there has been selfishness or inconvenience. I pray You would minister to each person.

We take these moments to delight in Your presence, and to express our love for You once more.

We honor Your name and bless You. In Jesus' name. Amen.