

A Marriage Characterized by Love
Inspired Wisdom from Solomon's Love Song for Marriage

We've been studying a **Church Characterized by Grace**. Today we will conclude this series by talking about a Marriage Characterized by Love.

This message comes on VALENTINES Day! I can't remember when I preached a sermon on February 14. There are VARIOUS traditions regarding VALENTINES DAY: One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men — his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Another story suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl — who may have been his jailor's daughter — who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed 'From your Valentine,' (<http://www.history.com/content/valentine?page=history>)

So, we're not going to find much help on marriage and the God-given beauty of romance in the annals of ancient history. But we should not despair, because there is a much older, more romantic source of information to help us understand romantic love. And best of all, it is inspired by God!

Let's look to the SONG of SOLOMON. I must admit that I've never preached a SERMON on the Song of Solomon. The reasons are obvious.

There are several reasons why it is difficult to preach on this book. It can be very sensuous, especially when it is taken literally, as it should be. I will be careful today to refer to those portions of the book that will not cause our unmarried people, and young people to wander inappropriately in their thinking.

It is also difficult to preach on this because not everyone here today is married. Notwithstanding, the message of Song of Solomon is important for all of us, especially in today's culture that has perverted the beauty of God given romantic love.

For those who are single, for those who are widowed, for those who are experiencing the hurt of an unfaithful spouse, the Song of Solomon is provides needed God given perspective on the beauty of marriage. All of can rejoice at God's gift, even if we do not enjoy the gift at the present time. It's still part of His plan for the human race. We should understand what God has to say on the matter and be prepared to proclaim the beauty of His plan, regardless of whether we

are married, single, divorced or waiting to see our husband or wife when we get to glory.

The CONTENT of Song of Solomon caused various interpretation:

Some taught this as ALLEGORY, claiming hidden meanings in the text that could only be deciphered by the interpreter.

- Origin believed that the Shulammitte's "being dark" referred to our sin
- Some said the cooing of the doves was a reference to the preaching of the apostles.
- Some said the "garden" in 5:1 is a reference to believers celebrating Communion (Jack Deere, The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Some taught that the Song of Solomon was as Typology, with Solomon a picture of Christ and the beloved a picture of the church.

For MANY, the Song was too sensuous to be read or studied in public! Jewish Rabbi's forbid **single men under the age of 30** to read the Song of Solomon (Brian Bill, "Singing a Love Song," Sermon at Pontiac Bible Church, 2/10/08)

Whenever we study the Song of Solomon, we must take into account that while the meaning is literal, the terms and poetry is unfamiliar to us. We are not used to talking like Solomon, and we even find some of the phrases extremely strange. I doubt that any man would ever tell wife that her "neck is like a tower," or that her "eyes were like a flock of goats." In fact, that would be a sure path to a cold dinner! But these are phrases that were terms of endearment in this agricultural society in the year 1,000 BC!

We are also taken back by the bluntness and directness of the conversation. It may seem "racy" to us, and we certainly do not talk with these terms in polite cultural settings. But let us remember that this is the love song of the Bible. It is quite possible that it is meant *primarily* as a guide for the emotional and physical intimacy between husband and wife, and not to be dissected in public analysis. We are following this guideline in reviewing the overall theme and message of the book and not studying every intimate detail expressed between Solomon and his wife. Those details are best left for the context of the marriage relationship, perhaps in written form, perhaps in a marriage class.

As an overall survey of the book, this is Solomon's song about "The Beauty and Development of Marital Love." There is nothing impure about the words here. All Christians should accept that marital love is beautiful and special, even though only those who are married can participate in the physical union of marital love. As we survey the book, we will look at three points of summary:

Patterns to follow

Problems to overcome

Virtues to praise

Patterns to Follow

The **first observation** from the Song of Solomon is the **honesty in the communication** between Solomon and his wife. One example is in Song of Solomon 1:5-6 "*Dark am I, yet lovely, O*

daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected."

The bride is concerned about her dark skin. This is not a racial issue. Being dark skinned was a reflection of working out in the fields, rather than living in the palace. The Phillippines is a place where the sun will darken your skin quickly. In my trips there, I have observed that most people, especially the ladies, count it a high value to stay out of the sun and to keep their skin as light as possible. The darker your skin, the more likely that you will be thought of as a field worker, and not a person of society.

The Shulammitte shares her concern over her complexion. In this she is completely honest about something very personal. Marriage must be built on honest communication.

Another pattern to follow is the **praise that both lavish on one another**. The book is FILLED with mutual praise..

A. The Bride to her HUSBAND

1. (Song of Solomon 2:3) "*Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.*" Here she praises the INTIMACY she enjoys with him. She expresses her joy at his unique characteristics. An "*apple tree in the forest*" would be something noteworthy. Unique. Special. She has eyes only for him. He stands out from everyone else.
2. She mentions that she will ***sit in his shade***. This is a reference of their the COMMUNION they share together and the COMFORT she receives from him.
3. Song of Solomon 2:4 "*He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.*" A banner was a military standard to identify one's loyalty. It is a sign of military power and protection. To be under someone's banner meant that the full protection of the nation was afforded to that person. The Shulammitte receives from Solomon what every woman desires from her husband, PROTECTION.

This is more than just someone who wakes up in the middle of the night to investigate the strange noise coming from downstairs. Wives need the emotional protection of their husbands. They need to know that he will not hurt her, privately or in public. She needs to know that he will protect her name, her reputation, her honor, her children, her dreams, her fears, her confidentiality.

4. Song of Solomon 2:5 "*Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.*" 2:5. Raisins and apples refer to the INTIMACY in marriage. This is the romantic part! Every woman desires to be romanced by her husband, even after the honeymoon is long over!

B. The Husband to his WIFE

1. Song of Solomon 1:9 " *I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh.*" Guys, don't try this line at home! Solomon is not calling his wife a horse! He is telling her of her uniqueness. To him, she is a prized possession!
2. Song of Solomon 4:1 " *How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.*" Again, these phrases may seem strange to us, but to shepherds, these were terms of endearment and beauty.
3. Song of Solomon 4:2 " *Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.*" 4:2. *Teeth like a flock of sheep*
4. Song of Solomon 4:4 " *Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.*" A tower was a place of stability and power. He valued her for who she was. He saw beauty in her that all would admire. People would draw strength from her. **He was proud of her!** Proverbs 31 describes this kind of woman.

A third observation from the Song is the Unity between them. Following God's command for marriage in Genesis 2:24, both of them left their father and mother and were clinging to their spouse. There are no apron strings attached. There is no interference from the in-laws. They are committed to one another and reserved for each other. Song of Solomon 2:3-6, the ties to home have been broken.

Throughout the entire song, we see the depth of their intimacy, verses we will leave for your personal study.

Another pattern is the patience demonstrated between them. In 2:7 we read, "*do not awaken love until it so desires.*" This was a reference to allow their love to develop at its own pace, without pressure, without attempting to follow someone else's rules or expectations.

Problems to Overcome

As the book develops, we see several points of reality. No relationship, not even this one came without difficulties, Notice how these problems are handled.

Insecurity is met with praise. We see the insecurity. 1:6-7 (her darkened skin, an indication of a common outdoor worker). We also see her insecurity over her upbringing as she was forced to work by her brothers or possibly step-brothers. This insecurity is met with the praise of her lover. This is how we should address the insecurities of our husbands and wives. We get enough criticism and correction in the world. We should offer praise in our homes! (1:9-10)

Little foxes with commitment.

Song of Solomon 2:15 " *Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*" The couple was committed that nothing would interfere with their marriage. The little foxes are the seemingly small things that can build up. They would not

allow those annoyances and problems to derail their marriage. **It doesn't take an army to destroy a marriage. It only takes a little fox!**

- The little fox of hidden secrets
- The little fox of bitterness
- The little fox of in-law interference
- The little fox of over spending
- The little fox of grudges
- The little fox of neglect
- The little fox of not keeping your word

Now Solomon failed in this principle. Later in his marriage, for political convenience, he took foreign wives for himself, violating the Lord's command against foreign wives, and violating the one flesh principle of marriage. Had he kept his love for his bride, the kingdom would not have been divided by his sons.

Let's look at the third problem that we see overcome in this beautiful love song:

Indifference is overcome with forgiveness and reassurance

A major section of the Song of Solomon addresses a moment between Solomon and his wife where she refuses his love. Solomon departs after her rejection, and the Shulammitte experiences the regret of knowing that her indifference turned away his love. Song of Solomon 5:6 *"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."*

When she realizes that he has gone to a favorite spot, she pursues him and they express forgiveness. (Song of Solomon 6:2) *"My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies."*

The love song continues with their expression of love and their reassurance. (Song of Solomon 6:4-10) *"You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners. Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing. Each has its twin, not one of them is alone. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines, and virgins beyond number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her. Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?"*

It is encouraging to know that this marriage, like every other faced difficult times. When the Shulammitte recognized that their relationship was hurt by her indifference, she quickly sought her husband, even being mistaken by the town watchmen as a vagrant. They both refused to allow hurt feelings to destroy their relationship. Their reuniting is expressed in the following passage: (Song of Solomon 6:11-12) *"I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth in the valley, to see if the vines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people."*

Conclusion

In the Song of Solomon, these Virtues are Praised:

- Marital love
- Restraint
- Physical intimacy
- Purity in marriage
- God's blessing.

God loves marriage and desires that while here on earth, it is the highest joy of human relationship. We too should honor our marriages enough to keep the marriage bed sacred, and enough to preserve our marriages.