

THE LOOKOUT

SEPTEMBER 2023

Unit: Song of Songs Theme: Speaking of Love

Overview: Long before Gary Chapman’s book *The Five Love Languages* (words, time, gifts, service, and touch) from 1992, there was the Song of Songs (or literally, “The Finest Song”). It also is known as the Song of Solomon. This is sexual wisdom literature at its most holy eroticism. The book of romantic love poetry was placed in the Writings section of the Old Testament. It was written by Solomon or dedicated to him. It certainly is a strange book to be in the Bible unless God’s love for our souls is likened to the strong love between husband and wife. Students will learn of a woman’s love for her husband, the husband’s love for his wife, the watchful celebration of their love by the couple’s attendants, and the Lord of love whose love is the basis for all other loves.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 3, 2023

LESSON AIM: Wives pursue, admire, and delight in your husband and view yourself as his own.

LESSON TEXT: Song of Songs 1:1-2, 12-14, 16-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Colossians 3:14; Ephesians 5:22-33; Matthew 19:4-6

STUDY

THE DILYMMATE WOMAN SPEAKS
BY GABRIEL SCOTT

It is a bit disingenuous to be generous to women who are not really women at all. They are just a collection of words and phrases that are used to describe a woman who is not really a woman at all. They are just a collection of words and phrases that are used to describe a woman who is not really a woman at all. They are just a collection of words and phrases that are used to describe a woman who is not really a woman at all.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

CANEY'S FIVE THINGS
BY DAVID FAUST

What are the five things that you should do in your marriage? Here are five things that you should do in your marriage. Here are five things that you should do in your marriage. Here are five things that you should do in your marriage. Here are five things that you should do in your marriage. Here are five things that you should do in your marriage.

APPLICATION

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. HALEY

1. How do you feel about the fact that you are not really a woman at all?
2. How do you feel about the fact that you are not really a woman at all?
3. How do you feel about the fact that you are not really a woman at all?
4. How do you feel about the fact that you are not really a woman at all?
5. How do you feel about the fact that you are not really a woman at all?

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 17, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Honor marriage in your community by spurring your friends on to desire and love their spouses.**

UNIT: Song of Songs

THEME: Speaking of Love

LESSON TEXT: Song of Songs 1:4b-8; 3:1-11

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Hebrews 10:23-25; 13:4

THE FRIENDS SPEAK

BY MARK SCOTT

They call them the best man, the maid of honor (or matron of honor), and the witnesses for a reason. The people who stand by a bride and groom in a wedding witness firsthand that the couple loves each other and are making a commitment to one another. When people notice an elderly married couple holding hands in the mall, they usually assume the right things (i.e., that one needs the other to avoid a fall—just kidding—they really witness the couple's love for one another).

The husband and wife in the Song of Songs have friends (it would seem mostly female friends) who watched them and helped them. They were known by various titles. Maybe they were the wife's female wedding guests, or ladies of the king's court, or perhaps even concubines. More likely, they were simply any of the females of Jerusalem (since they are called *daughters of Jerusalem* or *daughters of Zion*). Not only did the wife admire her husband, and not only did the husband describe his wife, but the friends of the couple also spoke about the couple's love for one another.

They Witness Her*Song of Songs 1:4b-8*

The friends of the woman affirmed her love for her husband. They *rejoice* (exult or be glad) and *delight* in her (and maybe for her). They realize the love she has for her husband is better than *wine*.

This affirmation brings out a self-disclosing paragraph from the woman. She confessed that she was thoroughly suntanned from having to work outside. Today, that complexion is greatly desired. People who work outside in the Middle East do not need tanning booths. But long ago, untanned skin was cherished. The woman told her friends that because her brothers made her work in the vineyard (to the exclusion of being able to work in her own vineyard), her skin was as dark as the *tents of Kedar*. These tents were made from black goat's hair and were as dark as the *curtains of Solomon* inside the temple.

She suffered some insecurity because of this. As she searched for where her man fed his sheep, she did not want to have to veil herself (and thus her dark skin). Veiling might have implied prostitution. The woman's friends were real friends, however. They told her where she could find her husband, which was by the *tents of the shepherds*.

They Witness Desire*Song of Songs 3:1-5*

Dreams can be vehicles of God's revelations. Dreams can be silly and meaningless. Or dreams can coincide with our longings and desires. It may not have been the case, but it makes sense to suggest the woman told her friends about a dream she had. After all, the chapter starts, "*All night long on my bed.*" Perhaps she dreamt she could not find her husband. The phrase, *the one my heart loves*, occurs four times. In her dream she looked and looked—even going up and down the *streets and squares*. In desperation, she asked the *city watchmen* if they had seen him.

Moments later, she found her husband. She held him tight and would not let him go. She brought him to a safe place (her *mother's house*). Even if it was just a dream, she instructed her friends (the daughters of Jerusalem) not to bother the couple until they finished their love-making. Via the dream, the friends witnessed the desire she had for her husband.

They Witness Him*Song of Songs 3:6-11*

In light of how verse 6 begins, it would seem the woman's dream has ended. The narrator turned his attention to Solomon himself. He was described in incredible ways. And he was coming to get his bride. He came from the *wilderness like a column of smoke*. But he looked strong and smelled good (*perfumed with myrrh and incense*) from spices that he had purchased from other lands.

Solomon's entrance and chariot got good press and a thorough description. Warriors accompanied the great king. There were *sixty* of them, and they were battle ready so as to protect the king. The *carriage* chariot itself was impressive. It was made from wood, silver, and gold. It was *upholstered* with purple, and then came this interesting phrase, "*its interior inlaid with love.*"

The friends were invited to gaze on the great king. His crown was garnered by his mother (cf., 1 Kings 1:1–2:19). He showed up to take his bride. The friends of the bridegroom realized the king and his bride must increase while they must decrease (cf., John 3:30). ■

WHAT WILL YOU BRING TO THE WEDDING?

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you noticed it's become less fashionable for wedding ceremonies to happen in church buildings? In recent years I have attended or performed weddings in parks, barns, hotels, banquet halls, houses, backyards, and even a public library, but fewer couples are exchanging their vows in church facilities. In America today, only about one wedding out of five takes place at a house of worship—a sharp decline from past practices.

Is this trend a big deal? Maybe not. After all, the Bible doesn't prescribe where wedding ceremonies should be held. But I wonder if the move away from church weddings says something about how both the church and marriage itself are viewed in our culture. Not to be a party pooper, but to be clear: the marriage covenant itself should always take precedence over the party.

Celebrations don't have to be complicated and expensive to be meaningful and memorable. In simpler times, paid wedding coordinators and destination weddings were rare. Friends and relatives dressed up, showed up, and spruced up the environment with flowers and music. The minister began by saying, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the sight of God" and a photographer took pictures. After the ceremony everyone ate cake, nibbled on mixed nuts, sipped punch, and cheered as the happy couple drove off to enjoy their honeymoon without incurring a huge debt to pay for all the festivities.

The Financial Cost

According to a recent survey, the average cost of an American wedding in 2022 was \$30,000, not including the engagement ring (average cost: \$6,000). Wedding prices ranged from an average of \$16,000 in Kansas to \$51,000 in New Jersey. Couples hired an average of 14 wedding vendors (caterers, florists, videographers, musicians, hair stylists, and others). The average wedding cake cost \$510, and a typical catered reception dinner cost \$75 per person.

Lavish weddings took place in New Testament times, often including a whole week of feasting. Guests received advance invitations and wore special clothes to the banquet. Jesus attended a festive wedding where he changed water into wine. As believers, we look forward to a glorious wedding supper the Lamb of God will celebrate with his Bride (Revelation 19:6-9).

The Covenant Commitment

The bride and groom don't come to the wedding ceremony empty-handed. They bring their unique personalities, strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, habits, and hang-ups. They often bring along some baggage from past dating relationships and from the example they observed in their parents' marriages. Ideally, the bride and groom bring their true selves to the ceremony as they humbly, wholeheartedly commit to lifelong faithfulness. Whether the future means better or worse, riches or poverty, sickness or health, they solemnly pledge to stay together until they are parted by death.

If you are an invited guest, what can you bring to the wedding? One important wedding gift doesn't cost any money at all. Will you pray—really pray—for the bride and groom? Will you ask the Lord to help them fulfill their vows when tough times test their commitment? Will you ask God to fill them with wisdom and the fruit of the Spirit? Will you be part of a community of supportive believers who encourage them for years to come?

Yes, newlyweds appreciate gifts like cash, silverware, and air fryers. But prayers for faithfulness, fruitfulness, and joy will bless them for a lifetime.

Personal Challenge: Do you know a couple facing tough times in their marriage or family? Write them an encouraging card or note to let them know you love them and are praying for them. Enclose a gift card they can spend at their favorite store or restaurant. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How have you loved others more like Jesus, our Bridegroom, this past week?
2. What predominant trait do you look for in friends?

Ask two people to read aloud **Song of Songs 1:4b-8; 3:1-11** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. As best as you can, discuss the conversations between the friends and the woman. (*Note that 3:1-5 is probably the woman telling her friends about her dream, and 3:6-11 may be the narrator describing the scene.*)
4. How would you describe the friends' involvement in the couple's relationship?
 - How can we encourage engaged and married couples, as well as singles, in our church and other relationships?
5. In the ancient world, sun-darkened skin was typical for commoners who worked outside, while fair skin was a sign of aristocracy. What insecurities was the woman dealing with in her relationships?
 - How do our insecurities affect our relationships with one another today?
 - How can our insecurities affect our relationships with God?
6. How would you describe the woman's search for and yearning to be with her husband?
7. Song of Songs illustrates the overarching biblical story of people seeking God and God seeking us. God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13; cf., Deuteronomy 4:29; Matthew 7:7-8; Acts 17:27). How would you liken the woman's search for her husband, King Solomon, with people's search for the King of kings today?
8. The friends helped the woman in her search. How will you help someone in your circle of friends or family search for and find God?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. In Song of Songs 1:4, the friends say to King Solomon, "We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine." End your time together by worshipping the King of kings with the same or similar words.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Song of Songs 1:1-8; 2:4, 16-17; 8:6-7**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■