

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, 6-17

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

STUDY

THE DILYMMATIC WOMAN SPEAKS
BY GABRIEL SCOTT

In a 21st-century culture in general, women are often portrayed as the more powerful sex. In the Song of Songs, however, the woman is the one who is pursued, admired, and delighted in by her husband. This is a beautiful and powerful message of love and devotion. The woman in the Song of Songs is not just a passive object of affection; she is an active participant in the love relationship. She is the one who initiates the love, who pursues her husband, and who views herself as his own. This is a powerful message of love and devotion that is still relevant today.

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

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

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APPLICATION

CANEY'S FIVE THINGS
BY DAVID ALBERT

What are the five things that a husband should do for his wife? This is a question that has been asked for centuries. In the Song of Songs, the husband is portrayed as the one who pursues, admires, and delights in his wife. This is a beautiful and powerful message of love and devotion. The husband in the Song of Songs is not just a passive object of affection; he is an active participant in the love relationship. He is the one who initiates the love, who pursues his wife, and who views her as his own. This is a powerful message of love and devotion that is still relevant today.

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. HALEY

1. How do you feel about the fact that the woman in the Song of Songs is the one who pursues her husband?
2. How do you feel about the fact that the woman in the Song of Songs views herself as her husband's own?
3. How do you feel about the fact that the woman in the Song of Songs is the one who initiates the love?
4. How do you feel about the fact that the woman in the Song of Songs is the one who is pursued, admired, and delighted in by her husband?
5. How do you feel about the fact that the woman in the Song of Songs is the one who is the basis for all other loves?

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

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Contemplate Jesus' epic and exuberant love for his people, and worship him.**

UNIT: Song of Songs

THEME: Speaking of Love

LESSON TEXT: Song of Songs 1:1-8; 2:4, 16-17; 8:6-7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 10:11, 28-29; 15:9-17; Revelation 19:6-9

THE LORD SPEAKS

BY MARK SCOTT

It was not uncommon for God to elevate the conversation. Jesus would often do this to take the conversation where he wanted it to go. For instance, when speaking with the woman at the well, Jesus offered her living water. She didn't understand, so she replied, "You have nothing to draw [water] with" (John 4:11). But Jesus essentially told her there were two different kinds of water. He offered her spiritual water (i.e., salvation). Consider Caiaphas. He wanted to kill Jesus so that the whole nation would not die (John 11:50). But God took his words and made them prophetic of Jesus' death for all the children of God.

The conversation can be elevated in the Song of Songs, as well. For centuries scholars have wrestled with the "natural" meaning of the book. Is its meaning to be understood literally or figuratively? It clearly contains both. The question is, "Can the meaning of the book be extended?" An earlier voice from church history must have thought so. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) preached from this book for 16 years and got only to chapter 3. That can be done only by extending the meaning to a higher level (e.g., the love God has for his people is likened to the passionate love a husband and wife have for each other).

With this book of the Bible, we can reason from effect to cause (though the utmost care must be taken—lest the author's intended meaning be compromised). If human love is joy unspeakable, then it must have come from somewhere beyond itself (i.e., God himself). So, the Lord can speak through the voices of the man, the woman, and the friends. While Song of Songs 1:1-8 and 2:16-17 have been studied in previous lessons, they are used again here in their extended meaning.

How Sweet It Is (*Song of Songs 1:1-4*)

There probably is nothing sweeter than love. That sweetness can be likened to a kiss. A doctor once remarked, "Do you know how many germs are transferred when people kiss?" The patient responded, "What a way to die." Twice in these verses love is likened to the sweetness of wine; a third instance likens the sweetness of *perfume* to love. The woman desires to share that love with her husband in *his chambers*.

God's love is also sweet. The psalmist said, "Thy loving-kindness is better than life" (Psalm 63:3, *King James Version*). Paul taught that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that he has given us (Romans 5:5). Ah, the sweetness of the Holy Ghost becoming our holy guest.

Not Worthy! Not Worthy! (*Song of Songs 1:5-8*)

When an athlete makes a great play, teammates will sometimes bow down and cry, "Not worthy! Not worthy!" They are feigning humility to say they are not worthy to play beside such a fine athlete. The woman in the Song of Songs suffered from a similar poor self-image. She was especially conscious of her suntanned skin. Her dark skin color was the result, of course, of working outside all day long. This being her lot in life, she felt unworthy of the king's love.

All believers in Jesus surely have felt the same way. Paul reminded the Roman Christians that Christ had died for them when they had felt most unworthy. In fact, it was while they were still sinners that Christ died for them (Romans 5:8). The worthiness was in the lover—not in the loved.

PDA (*Song of Songs 2:4, 16-17*)

More than one high school or college student has been charged with PDA (or public display of affection). There is a time and place for everything, of course, and while proper decorum needs to be observed, sometimes love just needs to be declared publicly. The woman wanted everyone at the king's banquet table to know that the king's banner over her was love. It is not wrong (and it actually is proper) to cry out in public, "Hands off. This woman belongs to me." She wanted him to come to her in the presence of others.

God's salvific act on our behalf did not occur in a corner (Acts 26:26). He publicly displayed his love for all people (Galatians 3:1). A cross at the crossroads outside of Jerusalem was hard to miss.

Stronger than Spinach (*Song of Songs 8:6-7*)

For decades, parents have tried to get their children to eat spinach by telling them it will make them strong like Popeye. No kid bought it. But love is powerful (certainly more powerful than the effects of spinach). Love is as strong as a government seal, as strong as death itself, and as strong as a blazing fire. No amount of water can wash love away. No wealth comes close to the value of real love.

The hymnwriter said it strongly, "Could we with ink the ocean fill; And were the skies of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill; And every man a scribe by trade; To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry; Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky" ("The Love of God" by Frederick M. Lehman). ■

APPLICATION

IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

BY DAVID FAUST

Beauty is hard to define. Tastes and opinions vary greatly when it comes to music, art, and ice cream. As garage sales prove, one person's trash is someone else's treasure. A widely known adage reminds us "beauty rests in the eye of the beholder."

Why does one person visit a crowded city and exclaim, "What a fascinating place!" while someone else mutters, "I wouldn't live here if you paid me a million dollars"? Why does one person blissfully stroll on an ocean beach while another hates getting even a single grain of sand in their shoe?

What Do You See in Each Other?

Have you ever looked at a married couple who seemed a bit mismatched and privately wondered, *What does she see in him?* or *Why does he consider her attractive?* Some say love is blind—but I disagree. Real love can see quite well, but it chooses to accept (or graciously overlook) the loved one's imperfections.

Love isn't blind; it's honest and realistic. But it's also merciful. Benjamin Franklin advised, "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards." As time passes, marriage partners are wise to look past their spouse's faults and remember what attracted them to each other in the first place.

Fierce, Unrelenting Devotion

In the Song of Songs, the bride and groom display fierce devotion to one another. Whether anyone else agrees with his assessment or not, the groom considers his bride beautiful beyond words. Likewise, the bride declares, "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away" (Song of Songs 8:6-7).

On its surface, the Song of Songs is a vivid portrayal of married love, but many Bible students also view it as a poetic illustration of Christ's fierce, unrelenting devotion to his bride, the church. Matthew Henry wrote, "No waters can quench Christ's love to us, nor any floods drown it. . . . Nor will life, and all its comforts, entice a believer from loving Christ. Love of Christ will enable us to repel and triumph over temptations from the smiles of the world, as well as from its frowns."

What does the Lord see in his bride, anyway? Doesn't he see our glaring imperfections? If you want to find fault with the church, it's not difficult to do. For many today, "church hurt" is all too real. Some believers who formerly held the church in high esteem now openly despise it, while others have decided to quietly walk away.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the Lord Jesus must have very tender eyes. Doesn't he see all the ugliness and harm done in the name of his church? How could he look at the church and see beauty there? How could he look at our foolish ways and see a bride without blemish, spot, or wrinkle? How could he see anything worth dying for?

We're all flawed and eccentric, marred by inner ugliness no makeup or stylish clothes can hide. The Song of Songs declares, "Love is as strong as death" (8:6), and the cross proves it is true. Only fierce, unrelenting devotion would motivate the Lord to lay down his life for us—and motivate us to lay down our own lives, too.

Personal Challenge: Read the "Love Chapter" of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13. In verses 4-7, insert your own name each time the word *love* appears. "_____ is patient, _____ is kind. _____ does not envy, _____ does not boast," and so on. Then read these verses again and insert the name of the church where you are involved. How well are you and your congregation displaying the unrelenting, sacrificial love of God to others? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Reply to one or both questions:

- How have you encouraged an engaged or married couple, or a single person, in our church or in other relationships?
- How did you help someone search for and find God last week?

2. What does total devotion to something or someone look like to you?

Ask two people to read aloud **Song of Songs 1:1-8; 2:4, 16-17; 8:6-7** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. In his Study on this section of Scripture, Mark Scott writes about “extending the meaning to a higher level (e.g., the love God has for his people is likened to the passionate love a husband and wife have for each other). . . . If human love is joy unspeakable, then it must have come from somewhere beyond itself (i.e., God himself).” Previously, we studied two sections from these passages at a more literal, natural level. In this study we will examine these passages at a figurative, spiritual level. How do you see the love spoken of in these passages as God’s love for us and our love for him?
4. Like the woman (in 1:5-7), how do people sometimes feel unworthy of God’s love and grace?
- Though we all “fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), we “are justified freely by his grace” (v. 24). How does God’s grace and love give you worth as a follower of Jesus?
5. As you look at this passage figuratively/spiritually, what do you learn about God?
- What do you learn about yourself?
6. What do you learn from this couple’s devotion for and commitment to each other that you can apply to your human relationships?
- To your relationship with God?
7. The woman likens the strength of love to several conditions and elements (8:6-7). How is God’s love for you like those things? (*Also see Romans 8:31-39.*)
8. The woman wanted to declare her love for her man and his love for her publicly, for all to hear (e.g., 2:4). How will you go public with your love for God and his love for you this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. The woman said, “Your love is more delightful than wine. . . . Your name is like perfume poured out” (1:2-3). Use this as a template for worship: “Lord, your love is more delightful than _____. Your name is like _____.”

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 2:1-4, 14-15, 22-24, 29-32, 36-42** as we begin a new unit with the theme, “The Church Begins.” You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■