

THE PASTOR'S STUDY

Exercising The Mind || Igniting The Heart || Preparing The Hands
A free quarterly paper for rural pastors.

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Welcome

Welcome to this issue of *The Pastor's Study*—the first issue of 2026. This magazine is designed to help pastors in their study of the Word and in subjects that support a broad, instructive, and effective teaching ministry.

In this issue, we have prepared a wide range of material on the Song of Solomon, from devotional material to help for sermon preparation, practical theology, and deeper study. The Preacher's Workshop includes some help in understanding Scripture typology. Reading and understanding the Song of Solomon and the descriptive poems may require more careful thought, but it will pay off.

Dr. Stephen Myers provides a clear and helpful approach to the Song of Solomon, and we've included an article on talking about sex by Mr. James W. Beeke. Another article in the Practical Theology section draws lessons from the book that will help with biblical courtship or dating.

We have also prepared an edition of Henry Law's verse-by-verse devotional commentary on the Song of Solomon at www.krapfproject.org.

May this Lord bless this issue to his own glory.

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

EDITORIAL: THE GOSPEL UNPACKS OUR BAGGAGE (SONG OF SOLOMON 1:2-7)

None of us comes to Christ whole. We come broken, and we bring with us a lot of baggage. Our fallen nature, past sin, our losses and crosses, and the bumps and bruises we pick up along the road of life. Some of us bring great and open sins like Rahab the prostitute, or Saul of Tarsus, the religious agitator and murderer. Others bring deep personal spiritual oppression, like Mary Magdalene, or the woman of Samaria who had a string of failed marriages.

Jesus invites those struggling under the burden of life's baggage to come and find soul-rest (Matthew 11:28). There is no baggage that the gospel can't unpack, and this is the story of the Shulamite through the Song of Solomon.

When we first meet her, she is timid and insecure. She compares herself with others and is filled with a sense of unattractiveness (vs. 6). Despite her weakness, the Shulamite teaches us what to do when we are burdened with the haunting baggage of the past.

Look at the expression of divine love (vs. 2)

A wounded spirit can often shut out the reality of God's love. We were "kissed" by God when Christ became flesh, and he continues to kiss us through his written Word. Look to him who loves you and gave himself for you (Galatians 2:20).

Lean into the influences of divine love (vs. 4)

Proverbs 18:14 tells us that a crushed spirit is difficult to bear. The hurts of life can paralyse us, cause us to recoil and think that we are safest in our own shell. But we need to lean into the Lord, allow him to exercise his influence over us, to draw us to him, and cause us to run after him.

Listen to the voice of divine love (vs. 7)

Allow the Lord Jesus to be your pastor.

Listen to him and let him speak to you in the ministry of his Word, where he feeds his sheep.

LOVING THE JESUS WHO LOVES HIS CHURCH

Dr. Stephen Myers

Many modern commentators dismiss the idea of interpreting the Song as “allegorical.” In an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, every detail in the biblical text is assumed to represent something else, and thus we can read elaborate meanings into seemingly straightforward passages. The obvious problem with such interpretations is that it is easy for the reader to make a passage mean whatever he wants it to mean.

James Durham, a seventeenth-century Scottish commentator, anticipated this criticism. He made a distinction between “an allegoric interpretation of scripture, and an exposition of allegoric scripture.” In the first, a man takes Scripture that was never intended to be allegorical, and he interprets it as an allegory. He has abused the Scriptures and read his own ideas into God’s Word. But there is, correctly, “an exposition

of allegoric scripture, ” because some Scripture was written allegorically and meant to be interpreted allegorically.

In the mind of Durham and other Reformed interpreters, the Song of Solomon was of this second variety. To them, the Song clearly was an allegory. Given the pervasive biblical connection between Jesus’s relationship with His people and marriage, the proper interpretation of the Song had to be an interpretation that saw the Song speaking about Christ and His church.

Understood in this way, the Song of Solomon became a powerful and popular instrument for Reformed devotion. Particularly among the Puritans, there was an intentional desire to present biblical truth in such a way that it both ministered to the mind and penetrated into the heart, impacting not only the intellect, but the affections, as well.

The Song of Solomon did precisely that. The Song was uniquely able to speak to the

hearts of God's people and stir them up to warm love for their Saviour. As a result, the Puritans wrote treatises on the Song, preached sermons from the Song, and bathed their conversation and writing with imagery drawn directly from the Song.

Today, we should allow our Reformed ancestors to challenge our understanding and our use of the Song of Solomon. Undoubtedly, the Song has much to teach us about human love and marital intimacy, and we should not neglect that very "practical" use of God's Word.

However, we must also realize that marriage is meant to reflect the love between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32). The Song of Solomon is discussing marriage, so the Song of Solomon is ultimately about the love between Jesus and His blood-bought Bride. If we miss that meaning, we have emptied this book of its greatest theme and impoverished our own spiritual lives. Under the imagery of a king and his beloved Shulamite woman, God is painting in vivid

colours the love between Jesus and His people.

The imagery reminds us that being a Christian is not, first and foremost, about believing a set list of truths. It is about loving and being loved by a Person. The Person of the Husband. As a person, you do not fall in love with doctrinal statements and systems; you fall in love with a person. Your heart gets wrapped up, and your soul gets entwined with a person. Not a list of attributes, but a person who makes those attributes sing.

That Person is Jesus. In the Song of Solomon, we are reminded that Jesus is radiant. We are reminded that our greatest duty dissolves into our greatest joy as we pursue after Him, and as we love Him.

As our Reformed ancestors remind us, in the Song of Solomon, God has given us a book that helps draw us out to love not only the Truth of God, but also the God of Truth. May

God be pleased to fill all of us with love for Jesus.

Adapted from The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth, MARCH/APRIL 2017, Vol. 25, No. 2, pages 64–65. Used by permission.

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HOW SHOULD WE READ THE SONG OF SOLOMON?

There are three basic approaches to the Song of Solomon.

Literal (or Physical) Interpretation

Introduced by Theodore of Mopsuestia (circa 350–428), who denied that the author was speaking of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the Church. He suggested that the Song of Solomon is instructional rather than devotional. Many who hold this view today see the Song of Solomon merely as a “sex manual.”

Spiritual (or allegorical) Interpretation

This interpretation sees everything in the story as representing some spiritual meaning. The most influential Christian commentator on the book was Origen, from Alexandria (about 184–254 AD). Origen was influenced by Jewish allegorical interpretation, and his contribution to our

understanding of the book has been significant.

First, he agreed with the Jews about the danger of giving this book to a young or an unsanctified reader. Second, his chief concern was for theological and spiritual relevance, not historical reality. Third, Origen saw a more personal relationship than between the Church and Christ, or, as the Jews held, between Yahweh and Israel, and identified the Shulamite bride with the individual soul and its relationship to Christ. The Reformed Church has held to the allegorical method and rejected the literal approach.

Typical Interpretation

The typical interpretation maintains the historical accuracy of the book and its characters, but sees the Song of Solomon, just the same as the stories of David and Goliath or of Noah and the ark, as real stories that point to Christ.

Summary

The literal interpretation should be rejected because it does not see Christ in the text. Jesus said that the Scriptures testify of him (John 5:39). The allegorical interpretation gets to the application of Christ much more quickly, but it can give too much scope to the individual imagination. The typical interpretation, just like the allegorical interpretation, gets to Christ, but it ensures the consistent use of the Wisdom literature and the intent of Scripture. It recognizes the historical setting of the marriage relationship, keeps the preacher grounded in Scripture, and focuses on Christ.

COMMENTARY: THE STORY OF THE SONG OF SONGS

The Song of Solomon is the best of all Solomon's 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). It is a love story of an unlikely marriage between a young rural girl, called the Shulamite, and Solomon, the King of Israel. The story follows them through three main areas of the relationship—dating [or courtship] (1:2–3:5), marriage (3:6–5:1), and, finally, as they deal with the difficulties of settling into married life (5:2–8:14).

But this is more than an earthly love story; it is a song of divine love, the love of Christ for his Church, and it is the story of how the Church (and the Christian), through the struggles of life in a fallen world, responds and lives in union and communion with Jesus, the “lover of my soul.”

It is the story of how Jesus graciously pursues his Church and cultivates his relationship with us, how patiently he waits for us, draws us and causes us to love him (1 John 4:19, see also Luke 19:10). It is the story of how Jesus' love for us persists and protects us from our own folly and indifference (5:2ff, see also Luke 22:32), and seals us in an everlasting union (8:6, see also Jeremiah 31:3).

To understand the rich spiritual lessons of the Song of Solomon, we need to work through its language and imagery and draw out its narrative plot.

Falling in love with the Saviour (1:2–3:5)

This section of the story deals with the courtship of Solomon and the Shulamite. She comes to the relationship with emotional scars, deep hurts from her brothers have made her cautious and distrusting (1:5). She is shy and recoiling. She hides, and she raises barriers that keep him away, and many little things come between her and the one she loves (2:14–15). To him, however,

she is the “most beautiful among women” (1:8; 5:9; 6:1; “no flaw” 4:7). He pursues and wins her heart.

Healing for a bruised Saint (1:2– 7).

Bruised and hurt as we are in a fallen world, the believer has tasted the love of the Saviour and nothing else satisfies, his love is better than the joys of wine (vs. 2; also Psalm 34:8). We pray for his kisses (vs. 2), for his drawing power over us (vs. 4), and for his speaking voice (vs. 7, Psalm 35:3b). See page 3.

A dynamic spiritual experience (1:8– 2:17).

The back-and-forth between Solomon and the Shulamite in this section shows that contemplative prayer is the greatest remedy for our spiritual insecurities. As we talk to God in prayer and listen to him in his Word, our love for him, and our zeal to pursue him are increased, for in him alone we find peace in this changeful life (3:1–5).

United in Love with the Saviour (3:6-5:1)

As the wedding procession begins, the bride is overcome by the luxurious wealth, unrivalled beauty and absolute security that she finds in her bridegroom (3:6–11). As he sees her coming, all he can say is “you are beautiful, my love... there is no flaw in you” (4:1,7). He calls, “Come with me” (4:8).

She responds by inviting him to take possession of “his garden” (4:16), and the quick succession of verbs shows the happy consummation of the marriage union; “I have come... I have gathered... I have eaten... I have drunk” (5:1).

This picture of the royal wedding shows the sacred intimacy in our relationship with our Saviour. It highlights the bond of our relationship with Jesus and the pleasure that he has in us.

The bond of union with Christ.

“My sister, my spouse,” points to a love among equals (sister), and at the same time, the intimate love of marriage. The repetition of “my sister, my spouse” (9, 10, 12)

confirms the nature of this relationship—it is a marriage union bound by siblinghood.

The pleasures of union with Christ.

The image of the garden speaks of the beauties and pleasures of the Church—“the planting of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:3; Psalm 1:3). It is a place of mutual intimacy, fellowship and enjoyment (see John 15:4).

Living in Love with the Saviour (5:2-8:14).

Life for the married couple is not as smooth as anticipated. Indifference, complacency and lethargy bring about a refusal of the advances of her new husband (5:1–6:3). He withdraws, but leaves the smell of his fragrance on the door to draw her out.

Panicked by the thought of losing him, the Shulamite sets out to look for him (5:2–8). Fellowship is joyfully restored, and she discovers him again in “his garden” (6:3). His girl is unique, his undefiled, “is singular” (6:4–10).

Her pursuit of him is rewarded with surprising joy, and she is so taken up with her beloved that the others call her to “come back” (6:13a)—four times. But she is out after her beloved. They ask him also, “what do you see in the Shulamite?” (6:13b).

From these questions, a beautiful exchange between Solomon and the Shulamite develops, in which she gives with an open declaration of longing and love (7:10–8:4). It begins with verbs; urgent and action-packed, (“let us go...” 7:11–12) which sets the scene for a settled and rewarding marriage (7:13).

Despite our fixed creeds and confessions, the lived experience of the Christian is a series of ups and downs. The refusal, restoration, and reward in this story are mirrored in the spiritual life of the Christian over and over again, as they were in the life of Israel (see the book of Judges).

What we learn about ourselves— Our changeful nature

Just as the Shulamite changed throughout the book, so also we should see our own tendency to spiritual ups and downs, as well as our spiritual laziness and indifference. It should also instill in us a sense of urgency to be diligent in our walk with our Saviour (1 Peter 4:7, 5:8).

What we learn about our Saviour — His unchanging nature

The Shulamite learns that her beloved has not changed. The love he expressed at the beginning remains the same; it has sealed the relationship, and nothing can destroy it. Like the relentless power of death, which overcomes all and everyone, it holds tenaciously like the grave (8:6–7).

Conclusion

The book ends with commitment, in a dialogue between the girl and her beloved. She has learned to rest in the truth that she belongs to him and his heart desires her (7:10). She has come then to “dwell in the garden,” suggesting that she permanently and happily resides there (8:11–14).

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP

EXEGETICAL NOTES (Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

1:1 “Song of Songs” = the best of all songs, see “Lord of lords,” “King of kings,” etc. “he grazes among the lilies”—expressing a mutual relationship. This expression is found twice again, with variations in 6:3 and 7:10, to show a relationship with the “lilies” (the girl).

2:5 (also 5:8) “sick” is the same word that is used of the sickness of sinner-ship or total depravity (Isaiah 1:5 “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint”). We should remember that total depravity remains even after conversion.

The term “sister-spouse” is used only in this section (see 4:9, 10, 12), highlighting the intimacy of this marriage.

4:1–7 is one of four descriptive poems, called Wasfs (or description). One describes the male's body (5:10–16) and three the female's body (4:1–7; 6:4–7; 7:1–7). 4:8 “with” is found twice here and nowhere else in the book. He has already said “come away” (2:19), but here it is “come with me.”

4:9 The word “ravish” (KJV) means to fill with strong emotion, especially joy; to seize or take captive, to overwhelm.

4:9 “one of your eyes” (KJV) or “one look of your eyes” (ESV). He refers to the power of the eyes in 6:5 also (see Luke 22:61, where Jesus looks at Peter).

PREACHING NOTES (Points for explanation and application)

Christ's love for us is a love that seeks us and causes us to seek him also (compare Luke 19:10 and Matthew 6:33, 7:7).

Love-sickness: three simple components to lovesickness.

- Intense love
- Absent (often due to her indifference)
- Longing

Saving grace is not for the individual alone; it must invite others in and share with those around us “draw me, we will run” (1:4); “.... that we may seek him with you” (6:1). See also Mathew 5:16.

The Shulamite begins as uncertain, shy, and insecure (1:5), hiding from him (2:14). By the end of the book, she has developed into a thinking, articulate, and confident woman in his love for her and her love for him (8:6–7; 8:14).

4:12 The garden is locked; it is closed to the public, as our hearts should be places of love reserved only for the Saviour, not places where we play the harlot, as we read of Israel (Hosea 2).

7:10–12 “come” (11a), “let us go forth” (11a), “let us lodge” (11b), “let us get up early” (12a), “let us see” (12b). These were the commands he gave her at the beginning (1:8; 2:10-13). We see a change in the girl’s confidence, and it should be so in our experience with the Lord.

Preaching Christ from the Song of Solomon

One of the most accessible devotional commentaries on the Song of Solomon available today is Henry Law's little work, first published in 1879. Rev. Law (1797–1884) was an evangelical Anglican clergyman. He wrote his verse-by-verse commentary for families, he says in the Preface, to cultivate warm Christian affection for the Lord Jesus and to encourage prayerful communion with Him.

Law took a very deliberate approach, avoiding technical, linguistic, and historical analysis, and focused on practical devotional lessons. The framework for Law's reading of the text is allegorical; he says, "allegory follows on to allegory." What makes Henry Law's commentary so indispensable, however, is its Christological depth.

First, Law's fundamental premise is that the Holy Spirit intentionally gave the Song of

Solomon to reveal Christ. For Law, the vivid imagery of kisses, the garden imagery, the natural beauty in the descriptive poems, and the mutual love were tools of the Holy Spirit to help us focus on Christ.

Second, Law interprets the Song of Solomon primarily through the lens of marriage. The image of the bridegroom and the bride in the Song of Solomon depicts “how Christ loves the Church and gives himself for it; and how the Church loves Christ and gives herself to him.”

Third, using this marriage relationship, Rev. Law develops it in two directions. First, he emphasises the beauty and excellence of Christ and his intense love for his people. He speaks of the offices of Christ, the attributes of Christ’s holiness and love, and his tenderness towards his people.

Fourth, Law highlights the believer’s deep experiences and relationship with the Lord Jesus, their knowledge of the covenant union, and the importance of feeling that

union. He draws out their inexpressible joy in his nearness, their spiritual longing for communion and closeness with the Lord, and the intense longing felt in his absence.

This commentary is available on our website at www.krapfproject.org and has been edited for modern readers.

A PASTORAL APPROACH TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON

It is the duty and pleasure of the pastor to bring his people to feast on Christ each Lord's Day. The Song of Solomon presents a beautiful picture of the love of our Saviour for his Church, and how the Church should respond in love to the Saviour.

But there is also, in the lives of Solomon and the Shulamite, a rich and instructive example of how the husband is to be Christ-like and love his wife as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5:25).

It is helpful to see this in three stages in our interpretation (See fig. 1). **First**, the real-life story, in this case, the love story of Solomon and the girl. Here, you will do all the necessary grammatical–historical exegesis to understand the plotline of the story. What is the meaning of the story that is being told?

Then, **second**, there is what the story symbolised to the people in the moment. What did the event represent or symbolise to the original readers? The ark of Noah was a symbol to the people who looked on God's deliverance from judgment. The sacrifice of Abraham represented faith in God. The Exodus was a symbol to any observer of God's deliverance from bondage and slavery. The tabernacle was a symbol to the Israelites that God dwelt among them. The office of the king in Israel was a symbol that God reigned over them. To those who first read the Song of Solomon, this was a symbol of the ideal marriage.

Third, and finally, we need to ask what the story pointed to. What did the story typify? These Old Testament stories, people, events, and things all pointed forward, in the purpose of God, to the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

We need to find Christ in these stories, or we have failed in the great purpose of the Scripture to testify of Christ (John 5:39).

“The union between Christ and believers is very often represented as a marriage. This similitude is much insisted on in Scripture—how sweetly is it outlined in the Song of Songs!”

American Puritan, Jonathan Edwards
(1703–1758)

God's Unfolding Story of Redemption

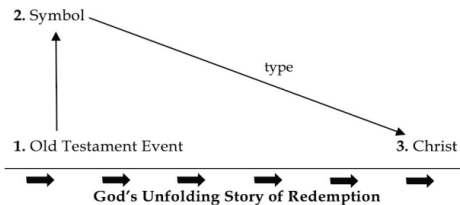


Fig. 1. Typology

(Adapted from Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 1999, page 258)

Symbolism and Typology of the Song of Solomon

The Old Testament Story		The New Testament
The event (shadow)	The Symbol	The type (substance)
The story ... King Solomon & The Shulamite Bride	The story is a symbol of the Ideal Marriage	The only ideal marriage is ... Christ the King & His Bride, the Church (or the individual Christian)
Application	{ The Song of Solomon taught the Israelites ... The marriage between Yahweh and Israel How to live wisely in a marriage that glorifies God (in the OT).	The Song of Solomon teaches the Church ... Spiritual marriage between Christ and the Church How to live wisely in a godly marriage (today).

Fig. 2. Illustrating the symbolism and typology of the Song of Solomon

WHAT ABOUT THE DESCRIPTIVE POEMS?

There are four descriptive poems in the Song of Solomon. One describes the male (5:10–16) and three the female's body (4:1–7; 6:4–7; 7:1–7).

These descriptive songs are called Wasfs, an Arabic word for a descriptive love song. These are deeply rooted in the culture of an Ancient Near Eastern wedding. In August 1861, Dr. J. G. Wetzstein was a guest at a wedding celebration in Damascus, Syria. Wetzstein wrote about his experience, and it was later published in the commentary of his friend Franz Delitzsch of Keil & Delitzsch.

The question is, how are we to understand these poems and use them in our interpretation of the book? They are not intended to be a visual of the details of the woman's body or the man's body, but simply to capture the whole beauty. Like the petals of a flower, the beauty is not in the individual

items (the petals) but as they are seen together in the whole.

Commentators have dissected these body parts, and their comments are a grotesque distraction from the stated purpose of Scripture, which is to focus on the person of Jesus.

Three General Observations

First, these descriptions are between a man and his wife, in the context of a marriage ceremony. They are not the random and lustful expressions of loose morals.

Second, these descriptions speak of a clothed body. Notice the jewels on the neck (4:4) and shoes on the feet (7:1a). This point serves to highlight the fact that the general beauty of the subject is in view, not the individual parts of the body.

Third, the imagery used often highlights the character of the person rather than the physical frame. The last poem, for example

(7:1–9), more than any of the others, highlights characteristics of her noble personality (prince's daughter, Vs. 1), elegant posture (tower of ivory, Vs. 4; palm trees, Vs. 8), and strength of character (tower of Lebanon, Vs. 4).

Fourth, it is best to view this vivid poetic imagery in the Reformed and Puritan tradition as symbols of spiritual realities.

We need to keep the symbolic connections closely in line with Scripture. Henry Law says that the natural beauties help us see the beauties of Christ and nourish our faith.

THE CHURCH AS A GARDEN

The idea of a garden to represent the beauty and pleasure of the Church has been used since the time of the Church Fathers. Many have developed this theme throughout the history of the Church. The English Puritan, John Owen, said that the “souls of the saints are the garden of Jesus Christ, the good ground... a garden for delight.” (2:41).

Human history began in a perfect garden, but that garden was destroyed by sin. Jesus was in a garden when he began his suffering to reverse what happened in the first garden (Matthew 26:36). Adam ran and hid from judgment in the garden's trees, but in Gethsemane, Jesus stood and faced judgment for his people, gave himself into the hands of the soldiers, to bring us again to the paradise of God.

As though it anticipates the restoration of paradise, the Bible associates the garden with quiet pleasure and rest; the ultimate blessing and pleasure (Isaiah 58:11; 51:3;

Genesis 13:10; Ezekiel 28:13, 31:8ff). They were often complex garden developments (Jeremiah 39:4; 2 Kings 25:4), but were also protected by walls or hedges (Nehemiah 3:15).

In 2:7, the first hint of the garden theme appears, which develops throughout the book. There she delights to sit in his shade and enjoys his sustenance. In 8:13, he speaks about her who “dwells in the gardens,” indicating a more permanent dwelling place.

The Church is the “planting of the Lord” (Isaiah 61:3), a place of sustenance and healing, a place of hidden mysteries and pleasure (“wells” 4:15) in contrast to the howling waste of the wilderness outside (Deuteronomy 32:10).

The writer uses the image of a garden to convey Christ’s intense love for his Church. In 4:12–5:1, he describes her personally as his garden. She is not just in the place of delight, she is delight itself—she is his

garden, his cultivated possession (6:2–3). The consummation of the marriage is described as his coming into his garden (5:1).

TALK ABOUT SEX?

James W. Beeke

God created us male and female (1:27) and brought Eve to Adam to be his wife (2:22). He instituted marriage and stated that a husband and wife should be one (2:24–25). God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply (1:28). Human sexuality and marriage are gifts from God. Sexual intimacy within the safe and God-given, loving boundary of marriage is God-ordained. Marriage is an institution established by God in Paradise, even before sin entered the world. The Bible speaks a great deal about human sexuality and marriage. Therefore, it is not wrong to think or talk about human sexuality in God-honoring and appropriate ways.

When we misuse God's gift of human sexuality, however, and think and talk about, or engage in sex outside of marriage, then it is wrong. Sexual jokes and lewd comments, sexual advertising and pornography, provocative dress and flirting—in short, God

clearly forbids all sexual stimulation and activity outside of marriage. When we think and/or talk about sex in these ungodly ways, then we sin.

Many young women have been deceived and seriously hurt by thinking that a young man was attracted to them and loved them, but the truth was that he was interested in them for his own pleasure. Many young men have been deceived and seriously harmed by pornography. They thought that pornography was fun and exciting, but painful memories and destructive habits plagued their future lives and marriages.

God knows that we have sinful minds and hearts. To protect us, our Creator placed all expressions of sexual intimacy within the loving bounds of lifelong commitment in marriage. God plans that the gift of sexual intimacy be reserved for the one, special wife or husband God has provided, who has vowed before God, family, and community to love through all of life, including both health and sickness, until death separates us. Sex

is beautiful and special within marriage. But sexual intimacy outside this loving bond of marriage is sinful and destructive. To protect us, our Creator placed all expressions of sexual intimacy within the loving bounds of lifelong commitment in marriage. i

Allowing transgender identities also contradicts God's Word and is sinful. God has created us male or female. One's gender is not a person's choice. Same-gender sexual relationships contradict God's Word as well, and such acts are also sinful. God instituted marriage as a special union of one man and one woman and stated that therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and these two shall be one flesh.

Do you know the story about the goldfish who thought he wanted to enjoy the "freedom" of swimming outside of the fish tank that his owner had prepared for him? He tried to jump out many times, and finally, one day, he succeeded, but died on the floor.

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Robert Murray McCheyne on the Song of Solomon

No book in the Bible offers a better test of a man's depth of Christianity than the Song of Solomon. If a man's religion is all in his head, like a well-set form of doctrines, built like stone-work, but having no influence on his heart, this book can only offend him, for there are no doctrinal dogmas here on which his heartless religion may be built.

But if a man's religion is in his heart, if he hath not only doctrines in his head, but love to Jesus in his heart. If he has not only heard and read of the Lord Jesus, but has felt his need of him, and been brought to cling to Him, as the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely, then this book will be inestimably precious to his soul, for it contains the tenderest breathings of the believer's heart towards the Saviour, and the tenderest breathings of the Saviour's heart again towards the believer.

*Adapted from a sermon preached on August 14, 1836,
by Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne. Andrew A. Bonar,
Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne
(Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 431.*

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A GOD-GLORIFYING MARRIAGE

The Song of Solomon can be divided into three major sections: dating (1:2-3:5), wedding (3:6-5:1), married life (5:2-8:14). Let's consider the process of dating or courtship.

Develop the relationship carefully

The Shulamite met the king in his palace, but searched for him in the country. He is a property owner (8:12) and a shepherd (1:7), and she wants to see him at his place of work, perhaps to learn about him in the nuances of different environments.

Find space to process the relationship

Both the King and the Shulamite have time alone. This is important to process the relationship independently and over a period of time. Relationships should not form in a single and controlled environment; they need exposure to variation, new and different difficulties to tease out reactions

and responses. There are lessons learned in being apart as well as being together.

Processes a proper self- awareness

The self-conscious and self- deprecating characteristics of the girl are not necessarily bad. They can, in fact, be healthy. It is an unhealthy relationship that begins with a sense of entitlement, an overabundance of self-confidence in one's own beauty and abilities. A young person who feels that they have the looks or talent to grab the attention of anyone they want will play fast and loose and may lack commitment.

The Shulamite is aware of her shortcomings and weaknesses, but these have not crippled her. She accepts herself for who she is and is not attempting to be something or someone she is not. Although conscious of her appearance, she is still there among the other women, strong enough to be in the presence of greater talent. She will later develop confidence of her own and a boldness within the security of the marriage relationship.

But the Shulamite is not against beautifying herself either; she wears jewellery (1:10; 4:4; see also Psalm 45:9), and accepts help from her friends also (1:11). It is a false godliness that remains plain, dowdy, shabby, and dull. Creation is witness to the fact that God loves variety and beauty. His temple was decked out with gold. God's people should keep themselves well-groomed and not be afraid to enhance their natural beauty without excess and immodesty (1 Timothy 2:9)."

Iron out difficulties

Despite her difficulties, the girl is wise and honest enough to recognize and admit that there are "little foxes" that threaten the relationship (2:15). It is wise to work through these before marriage. It may be easier to postpone or procrastinate, hoping that problems will iron themselves out or go away, or perhaps plan to deal with them after the wedding. There will be enough difficulties within marriage without carrying problems over from the courtship.

Respect sexual intimacy

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God, designed to avoid fornication (1 Corinthians 7:9), for procreation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3), and for mutual friendship and oneness in body and soul (1 Corinthians 6:16; Matthew 19:4–6). The Song of Solomon highlights the mutual enjoyment of the marriage relationship as the foundation for a happy home.

She loves him intensely, but she does not want to consummate the marriage prematurely, and she sends him away, perhaps in case she is tempted (2:16–17). He describes her as a “locked garden” (4:12), and she defends her purity against the misgivings of her brothers, assuring them that she is a wall and not accessible (8:10). Three times, also, she cautions the court women not to “stir up...” love until the appropriate time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4)

That Song of Solomon is the central Book of the Bible; it is the innermost shrine of divine revelation, the holy of holies of Scripture;

*and if you are living in communion with God,
you will love that Book, you will catch its
spirit, and you will be inclined to cry with the
spouse, “Make haste, my beloved.”*
London Baptist, C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892)

OUR LOVING SHEPHERD-KING

The Shulamite is the story of every Christian, struggling to respond correctly to the advances of “Jesus, lover of my soul.” Intellectually, we can accept that we are loved with everlasting love (Malachi 3:2), and sacrificial love (Galatians 1:4; Titus 2:14).

But it is often more difficult to translate that emotionally; to feel the truth of it and to rest in the comfort of it.

In contrast, the Song of Solomon gives a rich and beautiful presentation of our Shepherd-King and his enduring and pursuing love for us.

Jesus comes seeking

Read through the text and see how often the king encourages and invites (2:10, 13-14; 4:8), searches (2:8-9), comes to her (2:8; 3:6), and knocks at her door (5:2). He draws her in (2:4) and sustains her (2:5).

Jesus affirms his love

Every time the king speaks in the book, he is either telling the Shulamite how lovely she is or he is telling her how much he loves her. See for example, 1:8; 1:15; 4:1; 6:4; 7:1.

The phrase “My sister, my spouse” (4:9, 10, 11, 12, 5:1) speaks of the bond of love in marriage (intimacy), coupled with siblinghood (equality). There is a mutual love, we in him and he in us, (Ephesians 5:25–27, John 15:4–5, 9–10), a shared life not as a servant, but as a friend (John 15:15, also 14:2-3; 10:14–15, 27–28).

Jesus reveals his heart

One glance, shy and doubting though it may be, captivates the heart of our Saviour (4:9). Here, Jesus reveals the heart of love and affection that he has for his people. The Father gave his Son, the Son gave his heart.

In the end, the Shulamite was convinced of his love for her and could say, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me” (7:10).