

Song of Solomon: Love Unquenchable

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Prayer for Illumination

O God, your Word is more precious than fine gold, and sweeter than the purest honey. As we turn to your Scripture, send your Holy Spirit to infuse your Word with truth and grace—so that the good news of your love would shine before our eyes and delight our senses—so that we cannot help but respond with wonder, faith, and trust. Amen.

Background

We're continuing our wayfare through the Word—and our morning's book is literally a little embarrassing at first blush. It goes by several names: *Song of Solomon*, *Canticles*, or *Song of Songs* (meaning "The Greatest of All Songs").

The *Song of Songs* sings about love with a litany of literary techniques that would make your high school English Lit teacher salivate: word play, repetition, metaphor, puns, and double entendre.

Lots of double entendre. Even triple entendre. The *Song of Songs* is a feast for the senses. In these 117 verses, we're given a tour of all kinds of poetic landscapes:

- gardens, vineyards, palaces
- cliffs, mountains, the wild and other exotic getaways
- and romantic rendezvous

You don't just hear *Song of Songs*—you see, smell, taste, hear, and touch it. The *Song of Songs* seems to almost take us back to the days in the garden of Eden—when Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed, before the fall.

And so the *Song of Solomon* is about the redemption of sexuality. What it should be like. And by God's grace we can reclaim the innocence of it all—no matter what our past is.

A first-century rabbi commented on the book saying, "All of Scripture is holy, but the *Song of Songs* is the most holy of all."

So let's hear now God's Word to us from:

Scripture: Song of Solomon: 2:1-17 (REB)

Bride

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily growing in the valley.

Bridegroom

A lily among thorns is my dearest among the maidens.

Bride

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among young men. To sit in his shadow is my delight, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He has taken me into the wine-garden and given me loving glances. Sustain me with raisins, revive me with apples; for I am faint with love. His left arm pillows my head, his right arm is round me.

Bridegroom

I charge you, maidens of Jerusalem, by the spirits and the goddesses (*meaning daughters*) of the field: Do not rouse or awaken love until it is ready.

Bride

Hark! My beloved! Here he comes, bounding over the mountains, leaping over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. There he stands outside our wall, peering in at the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke, saying to me: 'Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away. For see, the winter is past! The rains are over and gone; the flowers appear in the countryside; the season of birdsong is come, and the turtle-dove's cooing is heard in our land; the green figs ripen on the fig trees and the vine blossoms give forth their fragrance. Rise up, my darling; my fair one, come away.'

Bridegroom

My dove, that hides in holes in the cliffs or in crannies on the terraced hillside, let me see your face and hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, your face is lovely.

Companions

Catch the jackals for us, the little jackals, the despoilers of vineyards, for our vineyards are full of blossom.

Bride

My beloved is mine and I am his; he grazes his flock among the lilies. While the day is cool and the shadows are dispersing, turn, my beloved, and show yourself a gazelle or a young stag on the hills where aromatic spices grow.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – Song of Solomon: *Love Unquenchable*

*Set me as a seal upon your heart
For love is as strong as death,
Passion fierce as the grave,
It's flashes are flashes fire,
A raging flame
Many waters cannot quench love
Nor can floods drown it.
Inhale deeply ...*

Ahhhhh yes, love is in the air! *Do you feel it?* I'm so glad the *Song of Songs* is in the Bible.

It's the Bible's only love poem. And it speaks about the unabashed glory of being head over heels in love. The book is dominated by two voices—the Lover and the Beloved. But nearly twice as many verses are from the woman than the man. The woman's feelings, experiences, and perceptions take center focus.

That's what's unique about the *Song of Solomon* compared to much of the Bible—the woman takes the lead. She's the initiator, the outspoken one. This book is a healthy counterpoint to very different perceptions of women in most other portions of the Bible.

It reminds of a story about the end of days. The line to the Pearly Gates is ridiculously long. To help expedite the process, Peter instructs all the men to form two lines. The first line is for all the men whose wives took the lead in the marriage relationship, where the woman called the shots. The second line is for the men who took charge in the relationship—who were the head of the household, made the important decisions, and their wives followed them every time.

After St. Peter's instructions, all of the guys start shifting into these two lines. Well, the first line of men whose wives ruled the roost went on forever! It was a massive line. But then, there was one guy, in the second line—all by himself. Peter was impressed. Wow! You're the only guy in this line! You exhibited firm leadership over your wife throughout your marriage. How did you get here to this line? The man looked quizzically at Peter, "I don't know, my wife just told me to stand over here." ☺

The *Song of Songs* is on to something. It teaches us some very important truths about the give and take of the marriage relationship. The love that flows between the couple in that sacred space.

What matters most isn't who's the boss or who's in charge. Instead, what's most important is how the couple can show one another deference, goodwill, generosity, honor, and service. Responsively, dynamically, sacrificially, and lavishly.

What frees the marriage relationship is when it becomes a competition—a "loving competition," where each partner seeks to outdo one another in love. A loving competition where both parties seek, as Paul says in Ephesians, "to yield to one another in love." Serving becomes more important than being served. Where we mutually say, "This is my beloved and this is my friend."

And so the *Song of Solomon* speaks to the cycles, seasons, and shifts that happen throughout the romantic relationship:

- Meeting and parting
- Seeking and finding
- Presence and absence
- Advances and being denied
- Enticement and surrender
- Waiting and welcoming

...

There are seasons in the marriage relationship: The honeymoon stage filled with goosebumps and starry-eyed gazes and pitter-pattering hearts. Other seasons where obstacles will test your love—those “little jackals” or “little foxes” of opposition that will hound and pester your love.

- Seasons of health and seasons of sickness—where one or both of you might be dealing with depression or illness or an ailing parent.
- Seasons of having more money and seasons where you’re barely scraping by.
- Seasons of refreshing monsoon rains, other seasons of dryness and drought.
- Seasons that are short, seasons that are long. Some easy, others excruciating. Some seasons are clear-cut, others blurry.

Love weathers the storms and the seasons. And then there are seasons of uprooting or dying—when we fail or our marriages fail. In those times we throw ourselves on God’s grace and hope to learn from our mistakes and regrets. And to move forward.

The *Song of Songs* reminds us to keep our marriages fresh and filled with play, pet names, perfume, and aphrodisiacs. As we read, we’re reminded that the human body is good, and that we’re fearfully and wonderfully made by our God. The people of God can revel in true love.

Sex is a gift, it engages all of you—body, mind, soul, and spirit. From the Lover and the Beloved we learn that our sexuality is included within our spirituality, not outside of it. The *Song of Songs* reminds us that sex is a sacred trust. Drink deep of love, but don’t jump into passionate relationships prematurely or promiscuously.

Use discretion or as the Beloved says:

*“Do not rouse or awaken love
until it is ready”*

That’s why sex is best in marriage—not in casual hookups. When the beloved says, “my vineyard is my own to give” she’s talking about discipline and healthy control.

You belong to the other in a way like no one else on the planet. And so the relationship should be exclusive, inaccessible to others, and private. Something that’s missing these days.

*A garden locked is my bride,
a fountain locked and
a spring sealed up.*

Author Rob Bell tells about a wedding he officiated. A couple had a simple outdoor ceremony. She wore a white summer dress and he wore a white linen shirt. Family and friends stood in a circle, and the bride and groom and pastor were in the middle. The ceremony lasted seven minutes. The couple were then each handed a cluster of helium balloons. These balloons were symbols of their past—past marriages, pregnancies they chose to terminate, and past infidelities.

As a picture of starting over, they wanted their first act as a married couple *to let these balloons go*. So the two walked alone to the grove trees as friends and family watched. The two held hands and exchanged words only they could hear. Then they raised their arms and let go of the balloons.

Everyone watched with tears in their eyes until the balloons could no longer be seen in the sky. It was unforgettable.

The word "forgive" in Greek is two words: "send" and "away." To forgive is to literally send away.

With Christ's love in our hearts, we can send away our hurts. We can forgive. We can let go. We can love again. That is grace and it's a gift of God.

Amen.

The *Revised English Bible* (REB) is not a translation, but a 1989 update of the *New English Bible* of 1970. As with its predecessor, it is published by the publishing houses of both Oxford University and Cambridge University.