

GOD WITH US
Part 4: The Life and Writings of Solomon
Love and Longing – Song of Solomon

Message 13 – The Marriage
Song of Solomon 5:2-8:14

Introduction

After every wedding comes a marriage, and I have not yet seen a marriage that does not encounter significant challenges requiring an immense amount of determination and work. It is nice to know that even the seemingly idyllic marriage between Solomon and the Shulamite was not so perfect after all. *“There is realism in the Song that merits our respect. The course of true love seldom runs smoothly for long. For every moment of ecstasy, there seems to be the moment of hurt and pain. The openness that lovers experience with each other makes possible both extremes. Not even love can guarantee perfect performance in personal relationships.”* (Dennis Kinlaw, *Song of Songs, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol.5, p.1232*).

The Shulamite’s 2nd Dream: 5:2-8

The Shulamite’s 1st dream (3:1-5) reflected her fear of losing connection with Solomon. Yet, she was able to find him and hold on to him in the end. Her 2nd dream seems to reflect some similar tension in their married life, yet this time she is *unable to find him*. In the dream, Solomon comes to her room late at night, presumably desiring to make love to her.

“I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: “Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night” (5:2).

Still dreaming, she was unwilling to get up from bed and allow him to come in. She had reasons as to why she could not open up to him:

“I have taken off my robe - must I put it on again? I have washed my feet - must I soil them again” (5:3)?

She sees Solomon passionately trying to open the door himself

from the outside. Seeing his striving, her heart changed and she felt moved to arise from her bed and let him in.

“My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the bolt” (5:4,5).

She was too late, however, for when she opened the door, her lover was gone!

“I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure” (5:6).

Still in her dream, she arose and ran about the entire city searching in vain for Solomon. She was met by the watchmen of the city (as in the previous dream). This time, however, she was beaten and bruised by them – perhaps symbolizing her self-condemnation for having refused his movement toward her.

Just as the previous dream ended with the Shulamite’s charge to the daughters of Jerusalem (3:5), so this dream ends with an adjuration similar in form, yet different in content:

“Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you - if you find my beloved, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love” (5:8).

The difference in the two adjurations may be accounted for by this: In the first dream, she *found* Solomon and held fast to him; thus she asked them not to hasten or disturb the process of their love. In the second dream, she *did not find* him, and was heartsick over it; thus she charged them that *if* they found him they were to tell him that she was longing to see him.

So, what is the overall impression given by this dream? There is tension in the marriage. Whereas earlier in their relationship, nothing could keep the two lovers from being together, now certain issues are cropping up that, at times, keep them separated in soul and body. It is not clear what those issues are (this is a dream, after all). We can, however, make some guesses as to the possible causes of tension in their marriage:

- Solomon may have been demanding sex at unexpected and unreasonable times. She, in turn, felt he was being uncaring of her feminine heart. At times, she felt guilty for saying No to him.
- The Shulamite may not have felt securely connected to Solomon

on a soul level and, therefore, she was unwilling to allow him to enter her body. They were not spending enough quality time together.

- She may have been (understandably) worried about Solomon's relationship with the *many other women* in his harem. Was she really unique and valuable to him? Was her rebuff born of marital protective jealousy for their unique love relationship?

- She may have been fearful of raising *any* of her concerns over a number of different issues. Would Solomon pull away from her? Reject her? Be angry and retaliate against her?

Whatever the precipitating concerns in her heart, the dream seems to indicate that *she felt badly, perhaps even 'guilty' about pushing Solomon away*. Thus, when she awoke, she determined to find him and reconnect with him.

There are SO MANY DIFFERENT TENSIONS that enter into a marriage: tensions over money, work, children, extended family tensions, etc. So, the question is: What's a couple to do when tensions build up and create problems in the relationship? 1) Self-awareness: Building a healthy marriage requires that we know what is going on inside of us. What are the tensions that we really feeling deep inside? What are our fears? What are our needs? IF we don't know what's going on inside, there is NO WAY we will be able to bring another person into our true reality. Self-awareness is key! 2) Courage: We must bring our true selves into the open (out of shameful or fearful hiding) with the other person. We cannot expect our spouse to "read our mind." We must speak directly, honestly and respectfully about what is going on in our hearts, minds and bodies. 3) Listen: We must cultivate our ability to receive what our spouse wants to say to us, without reacting, or becoming defensive? What are the issues in you (self-protective measures) that keep you from being able to receive what your spouse is trying to tell you (about you or about them)? 4) Resolve: We need to find ways to resolve the tension. How can we meet in the middle," so to speak. How can we lovingly meet one another in a place that brings mutual satisfaction? 5) Mediate: Call in a mediator or counselor if necessary. Don't be afraid to get some help! We get help with every other area of our lives. Why are we so afraid to go and get some advice on how to resolve tensions in our marriage?

Describing Solomon to the Daughters of Jerusalem: 5:9-16

The daughters of Jerusalem ask the Shulamite to describe her

beloved to them. (This could be occurring still within the dream; but many scholars see here a transition back into the wide awake world of the Shulamite.)

“How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you so charge us?” (5:9).

The Shulamite launches into a head-to-toe description of the handsomeness of Solomon (5:10-16). *“This is one of the few poems that has come down to us from the ancient world in which the female gives an inventory of the male’s features.”* (Kinlaw, p.1233.) In her eyes, Solomon is ***“outstanding among ten thousand” (v.10)***. She concludes:

“This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem” (v.16).

The lovers reunite: 6:1-13

The daughters of Jerusalem ask the Shulamite *where* her lover has gone. She immediately replies with a very clear answer:

“My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine; he browses among the lilies” (6:2,3).

The clarity and confidence in her answer seems to indicate that *the fears she experienced in her dream were different from the reality she was experiencing*. In “real life” she knows that Solomon has gone down to one of his favorite places – his garden – and that they are very much in love with one another. (Yet, her inner psyche harbors fears and discomfort with their relationship.)

When she meets Solomon, he immediately praises her from head-to-toe (6:4-9). He seems to be unaware that she has had a troubling dream concerning their love. Or, if she did tell him about her dream, he comforts her fears with his words of love, culminating with his statement as to her incomparable worth:

“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 young women saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her” (6:8,9).

One of the best things we can do in marriage is to bring our true fears out into the open. Only in this way can our spouse truly KNOW us for who we really are, and enter into our journey toward healing and wholeness. Ironically, it is FEAR of being judged or rejected that keeps us from bringing our hidden fears (or hopes, or longings, or needs) out into the open. If your spouse IS trying to explain to you some of her/his inner fears, it is important to listen in order to understand, and NOT to jump to try to talk her/him out of those fears or to “fix it.” Your spouse first needs to be heard and understood. Only after this has happened will she/he feel the freedom to pursue inner healing for those long-concealed hurts and fears. Note: OPC’s Transforming Prayer Ministry is designed to help with these issues.

The Song of Solomon, with all of its figurative language, is difficult to interpret on the whole. Yet, 6:10-13 brings the interpretation problem to a head. There is no consensus among biblical scholars as to *what* is going on here, or even *who* is speaking at different points. Of course, the original readers would have understood the meaning, as they were familiar with the language, the poetic forms and the cultural customs. For modern readers, however, these verses remain obscure and mysterious.

“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. Come back, come back, O Shulammitte; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you! Why would you gaze on the Shulammitte as on the dance of Mahanaim” (6:10-13).

If the overall *context* provides any clue at all it is this: Solomon is passionately describing his wife’s beauty and charm right before this section (see 6:4-9) and after it (see 7:1-9). Therefore, it is quite conceivable that 6:10-13 is describing something very positive, not negative; perhaps a romantic garden encounter between Solomon and the Shulamite. When the daughters of Jerusalem call her to come back so that they may again gaze on her beauty (vv.10,13), Solomon replies that *now is not the time* for them to be gazing at his wife’s beauty. *He was busy doing that very thing!* He is saying: *Leave us alone!*

Romance in the countryside: 7:1-13

Solomon launches into yet another praise of his wife’s physical

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beauty (7:1-8), this time working from her feet and ascending to

beauty (7:1-8), this time working from her feet and ascending to the crown of her head. He concludes by stating (in figurative terms of course) his desire to make love to her.

“How beautiful you are and how pleasing, my love, with your delights! Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.’ May your breasts be like clusters of grapes on the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine” (7:6-8).

Here, instead of spurning his advance (as in her dream), she makes Solomon an offer he could hardly refuse: a romantic adventure in the countryside, with lovemaking of course!

“May the wine go straight to my beloved, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – there I will give you my love. The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my beloved” (7:9-13).

The Shulamite uses *strong* language to describe Solomon’s “desire” for her (v.9). The Hebrew word for “desire” is used only 3 times in the entire Old Testament (here, Genesis 3:16 and 4:7). It refers to an “overpowering urge.” She recognizes that Solomon wants and needs her. She responds to him with openness.

Creativity in romance: new and old. Romantic interludes and getaways help to keep a marriage healthy and exciting. Solomon was often the one initiating the romantic escapes. Here, however, it is the Shulamite that is doing the inviting. An interlude can be as simple as ordering a carryout meal and having an in-home date. It could be a 24-hour getaway to a bed-and-breakfast in a nearby town. Or, it can be as exotic as a week away at your favorite resort. Take some time with your “beloved” to discuss your next “journey to the countryside.” Keep the romance alive!

Final expressions of love and longing: 8:1-14

Scholars consider chapter 8 to be the most important chapter in the Song of Solomon. Here, the Shulamite takes center stage and makes defining statements about the nature of true love. Whatever

else this figurative song has taught us, the main lessons come to the fore in her defining monologue. There is little doubt that her deepest longings were *never met* by Solomon (who went on to accumulate 700 wives and 300 concubines). It is the Shulamite's grasp of the meaning of love that makes her the true heroine in this book, worthy of occupying the stage *alone* in the final scene.

- Longing for open, unashamed love.

“If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother’s breasts! Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me” (8:1).

She longs to be free to express her love to Solomon *anywhere* and *anytime*, without fear of what other people are thinking or saying. (Oh that the harem of 60 other queens would just disappear!) She longs for the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed . . . alone and undisturbed.

- Longing for endless alone, undisturbed time.

“I would lead you and bring you to my mother’s house – she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates. His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” (8:2-4).

She wished they could escape the complicated palace-life and return to her mother's home in the country. There, they could pursue love and romance any time they wanted, without fear of being interrupted or hurried by outside forces. The “little foxes” (2:15) would never destroy their vineyard (love) in their secret getaway!

- Longing for a scrapbook full of romantic memories.

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved? Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth” (8:5).

She pictures Solomon and herself blissfully strolling back into town, she leaning her head on his shoulder, after a romantic encounter under “the apple tree.” The onlookers stare and wonder at the two lovers. (Recall, she had called him “an apple tree in the forest” earlier on – 2:3.)

- Longing for exclusive devotion.

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for 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” (6:6-7a).

Here, the Shulamite utters “a strongly poetic request for ‘until death do us part’” (Kinlaw, p.1241). She states that marital love has an element of righteous, even fiery jealousy for the complete devotion of the spouse. Such holy jealousy is akin to God’s jealous desire for our complete devotion to Him (Exodus 20:4-6). God desires that we have no other lovers that we put before Him. The Shulamite longs to be Solomon’s one-and-only love.

- Longing for a spouse that values love as much as she does.

“If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned” (8:7b - NLT).

The Beatles sang: *Money can’t buy me love.* Yet, the Shulamite was the first to express this sentiment. There is great irony here, for Solomon was the richest man on earth in his day. Yet, the Shulamite says to her husband (and to us), that *love is more costly and precious than ALL the wealth in the world.* If a man tried to buy love, everyone would scorn him, for love has no purchase price. The apostle Paul uttered a similar sentiment in his most famous love chapter: “*If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1Corinthians 13:3).*

- Longing for sexual purity and wholeness.

‘We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?’ ‘If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.’ ‘I was a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment’ (8:8-10).

The Shulamite has experienced the joys of marital love. Her purity, prior to marriage, has brought Solomon great contentment. Now, there is concern for a younger sister. (Opinions differ as to who is speaking here.) If the younger sister is promiscuous (a door), she will need to be protected from those who would gladly take advantage of her. If, on the other hand, she protects her own

purity (a wall), then her overseers would celebrate her as an example for others. Speaking of herself, the Shulamite recalls that she had protected her own purity. This, in turn, was a gift that she gave to Solomon and it brought him great happiness. May this happen with the younger sister as well.

- Longing to preserve a healthy sense of self-identity.

“Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit” (8:11,12).

Solomon had a massive vineyard operation involving many workers and much money. The Shulamite uses the vineyard analogy to refer to her own dignity. She “owned a vineyard” that was hers to give away to whomever she chose (the giving of her complete self - body, soul and spirit – see also 1:6 where she refers to her body as “her own vineyard.”). She was delighted to give herself to Solomon, but she also recognized the importance of acknowledging those special friends that had helped her to arrive at such a favored position in life and love.

- Longing for a lifetime of love.

‘You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!’ ‘Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains’ (8:13,14).

The closing lines take us back to the beginning of the song where the two new lovers were basking in the warmth of a newfound romance. Now, at the end of the Song, Solomon calls out to the Shulamite: *Let me hear YOUR voice arising from among the throng of friends around you.* She concludes with a familiar invitation (see 2:7,9,17) to her lover: *Be like a gazelle . . . come and sweep me away in your arms and let us flee to our love nest!*

Epilogue: Unmet longings?

At the time of their marriage, Solomon already had 60 wives and 80 concubines. He went on to accumulate a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines. There is, then, a deeper lesson hidden between the lines of this great love song. This deeper lesson does not arise from an allegorical interpretation of the Song. Rather, it arises from a realistic historical/emotional reading of the Song in light of

the larger context of Solomon's life. *He could never have fulfilled the Shulamite's deepest longings for love.* He would have been a constant disappointment and heartache to her, even IF he showed up at the door of her private room every now and then. His vast harem would daily remind her that his springs (love and sexuality) *were dispersed throughout the streets,* and that he was *NOT intoxicated exclusively with her love (see Proverbs 5:15-20).* In reality, marriage to Solomon was for a short while the most blissful time in the Shulamite's life. In the long run, however, it had to be the most painful thing she ever experienced.

Like all of us, the Shulamite would have to find her deepest fulfillment in her relationship with God, the truest lover of her heart. Jesus said to the woman at the well (who had tried 5 husbands, and was still searching for love): *It is only ME who can satisfy your deepest longings to love and be loved (see John 4).* To the Shulamite woman, sitting alone in her royal chamber night after lonely night, God must have whispered: *Come away with Me, My bride, My lily. My banner over you WILL be LOVE.*

The Shulamite's Fears and Longings

Additional Notes to Message 13 - The Marriage: 5:2-8:14 by Bob and Shirley Shirock

1. The Shulamite's Fears revealed by her Dream: 5:2-8

The Shulamite's 2nd dream points to underlying unstated tensions in her marriage to Solomon. The dream does not specify her fears; but the context of the story and our own real-life experiences can suggest some of her likely concerns.

A. Fear over differing expectations regarding sex.

In the dream, Solomon came to her room late at night, seeking entrance (with very flattering words). It seems evident that he had in mind something more than a midnight chat. The fact that she initially refused his entrance seems to indicate different needs and expectations in their sex life. Problems and disappointments in the area of sexuality are a common source of deep relational pain.

B. Fear of saying what you REALLY want to say.

The Shulamite may have had any number of concerns or needs on her heart that she *wished* she had the freedom to speak to Solomon about. Was she afraid of hurting him? That he would become

angry? That he would retaliate? That he would run into the arms of his 60 other queens? That he would blame her for their problems? That he would reject her? Fear over how the other person will react when we speak up for ourselves causes us to bury poisonous seeds of bitterness and resentment in our souls. It is impossible to pursue true love with another person when our hearts are filled with unstated feelings.

C. Fear of being disconnected and distant.

Solomon was, perhaps, the busiest man on earth. His time and energy had to be divided among so many people and duties, not to mention his own private projects (Ecclesiastes 2) *and* his many, many other women. It is not hard to imagine that over time the Shulamite felt increasingly disconnected from Solomon, to the point where she did not really “know” him as she had at first. In marriage, it is quite common over time for husband and wife to become more like “roommates” rather than “lovers.” It takes intentionality, time and loving communication in order to stay deeply connected to another soul. Otherwise, you will eventually become like ‘strangers passing in the night.’

2. The Shulamite’s Longings revealed by her Speech: 8:1-14

So many hopes and longings are expressed in the Shulamite’s final speech. (The notes cover this section in detail. Here we highlight just a few of her key themes.)

A. Longing for exclusive devotion.

“Place me like a seal over your heart . . .” (8:6). Marital love *should* have protective jealousy, just as God has holy, righteous jealousy for our exclusive devotion to Him (Exodus 20:4-6). The Shulamite longed to be the one-and-only love of Solomon’s heart. Sadly, he dashed her longing to the ground as he pursued the lusts of his heart and increased his harem to over 1,000 women. God designed marriage to be a relationship between 1 man and 1 woman. She was longing for a “till death do us part” kind of marriage. That’s the way it’s supposed to be. She was right to long for that.

B. Longing for a spouse that values love as much as she does.

“If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned” (8:7b - NLT).

The Shulamite was the first to sing: *Money can’t buy me love.* The

Beatles were just copying *her song!* There are no substitutes for real love. Possessions, power, money, position – none of these can replace true love. Solomon said in Proverbs (I’m paraphrasing here) that it would be better to live in a little house with big love, than to live in a big house with little love. The Shulamite believed that. She was married to the richest, most powerful man in the world. But all of his “stuff” was worthless to her without his true love. If you really want to “provide” for your spouse, make sure you are providing *real love*. Anything less is a cheap substitute.

C. Longing for sexual purity and wholeness.

The Shulamite expresses concern for younger women, that their purity would be preserved for their marriage day. So, those who are listening say that they will try to help young women. If the young woman is a wall (protects herself from men) then they will celebrate her. If she is a door (wanting to let everyone in) then they will try to protect her from aggressive men. The underlying message is that sexual purity is valuable because it brings blessing and contentment into the marriage relationship. So . . . help young women (and men) to remain pure for their marriage day *because this will be a blessing to them and to their spouse*. Purity before marriage is NOT being presented here as an issue of morality; rather, it is presented as an issue of blessing upon oneself and one’s spouse. In other words, purity is for your own good.

D. Longing for a lifetime of love.

“Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains” (8:13,14).

She utters the final line, echoing earlier longings for Solomon’s pursuit of her (2:7,9,17). She deeply desired to be cherished, pursued and romanced for a lifetime, not just for one fleeting moment. She speaks here for *all* women, in *all* time!

For further reading:

Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul - Stasi and John Eldredge

Wild at Heart - John Eldredge

Healing the Masculine Soul - Gordon Dalbey

Sacred Romance - Brent Curtis and John Eldredge