

**1. INTRODUCTION:**

- a. David Roper in his book Love Song: A Fresh Look at Solomon's Song of Songs, says "Song of Songs is arguably the most beautiful and poetic book in the Bible. It's also the most startling. Understood literally, it is a collection of erotic love poems, a bold celebration of sexual passion." The restrained and controlled view of human sexuality between a man and a woman so common in the modern Christian church, is confronted with sexual the passion and wild abandon presented in these poems. Solomon confronts his readers with poetic imagery of nakedness and lust, of the tactile pleasure, of the senses of smell and taste all set aflame. At first the casual reader may miss the poetic passion being aroused, or the invitation into the sexual embrace of a husband and wife. But with a closer reading you observe what Professor Brian Morgan called, "passionate sexuality within strong relational boundaries."
- b. The double use "Song" in the Hebrew title "Song of Songs" expresses the superlative sense that this is the best song of all, literally meaning "The Incomparable Song." Biblical commentator's Ariel and Chana Bloch wrote, "The Song... is a work of the imagination, a work unique in its unabashed celebration of erotic love. Its theme is the wonder of a woman with a man. In it, Eros [erotic love] is its own reward. One might be tempted to call the Song subversive, were it not the least polemical<sup>1</sup> of books." In other words, it is not intended to be either confrontational or argumentative, but rather intentionally and openly celebrational of the Joy of Sex.

**2. BACKGROUND:**

- a. Author – The most accepted identity historically is that King Solomon wrote the Song. There have been scholars who have argued otherwise, but there is no clear alternative and no good reason not to accept a Solomonic authorship.
- b. Date of Writing – Although uncertain, the Song clearly evokes the Solomonic era from the wealth represented in the grandiose settings and the deliberate extravagance described, it certainly seems reasonable Solomon wrote it in the comfort of his pleasure palace. Solomon reigned from 970 to 930 BC, so a date of 950 at the height of his kingdom seems reasonable.
- c. Style of Writing – the poem describes a combination of rural and urban settings. This seems odd to our western thinking that it should be one or the other, but this blending was common of Semitic literature. The organization of the material seems like a stream of consciousness intended to evoke certain impressions and moods emotionally, rather than transmit precise data. It is an invitation to a sensory experience rather than a how-to sex manual. We're invited to feel what the husband and wife feel in the poem. The lovers also represent a metaphorical expression of physical discovery intended to arouse the readers interest. There is the wonder of discovery, passion of emotions, yet in a delicate and restrained sensuality. The imagination is clearly the more important component of sexual fantasy, not the crudeness of overt eroticism.

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<sup>1</sup> A *polemic* is a contentious rhetoric that is intended to support a specific position by aggressive claims and undermining of the opposing position. Polemics are mostly seen in arguments [debates] about controversial topics. The practice of such argumentation is called *polemics*. The word is derived from the Greek word *polemikos*, meaning 'warlike, hostile'.

The bride's boldness is refreshing; she is clearly an equal rather than an inferior and submissive partner. The repartee between husband and wife as sexual equals is obviously wondrous and provides a standard of experience and conduct well before it's time.

- d. **Allegory not Literally** – is the nature of poetry as a genre, and the Song is no exception to that rule. The elements of allegory including simile and hyperbole are fully on display and fire the imagination. Theologians through the millennia have tried to interpret the Song through several lenses – of God and His people, of the king and his subjects, as Christ and His Church. The Song is neither historical or religious allegory, it is not an extended divine-human love affair. It is the Godly expression of love in all its components – sensual, relational, physical, emotional, and spiritual – between a man and his wife. Ariel and Chana Bloch describe the Song as, “A poem about the sexual awakening of a young wife and her husband. In a series of subtly articulated scenes, the two meet in an idealized landscape of fertility and abundance, calling to mind a kind of Garden of Eden... where they discover [together] the pleasures of love.”

### 3. STRUCTURE:

- a. A series of poetic scenes emerge as the Song develops:
- i. Scene 1 – The Wife's pursuit – 1:2-4
  - ii. Scene 2 – Dark, but beautiful – 1:5-6
  - iii. Scene 3 – An invitation to a Tryst – 1:7-8
  - iv. Scene 4 – A beautiful Mare – 1:9-11
  - v. Scene 5 – Intimate Fragrances – 1:12-14
  - vi. Scene 6 – Outdoor Love – 1:15-17
  - vii. Scene 7 – Flowers and Trees – 2:1-7
  - viii. Scene 8 – A View of Spring – 2:8-17
  - ix. Scene 9 – Seeking and Not Finding – 3:1-5
  - x. Scene 10 – A Royal Procession – 3:6-11
  - xi. Scene 11 – From Head to Breasts, a Man's Sensuous Description of the Wife – 4:1-7
  - xii. Scene 12 – The Invitation – 4:8-9
  - xiii. Scene 13 – Eating in the Garden of Love – 4:10-5:1
  - xiv. Scene 14 – To Search and Not Find Again – 5:2-6:3
  - xv. Scene 15 – Awesome, Like an Army under its Banners – 6:4-10
  - xvi. Scene 16 – Surprise in the Nut Grove – 6:11-12
  - xvii. Scene 17 – A Description of the Dancing Calamite – 6:13-7:10
  - xviii. Scene 18 – I will Give You my Love – 7:11-13
  - xix. Scene 19 – Yearning for Love – 8:1-4
  - xx. Scene 20 – Like a Seal – 8:5-7
  - xxi. Scene 21 – Protecting the Sister – 8:8-10
  - xxii. Scene 22 – Who Owns the Vineyard – 8:11-12
  - xxiii. Scene 23 – Like a Gazelle – 8:13-14

b. **A Series of Themes** – the Song seems to meander back and forth over these open ended dominant themes that invite the reader to pause and reconnect with the feelings they had in their experience with their bride or husband:

- i. **Theme 1 – Passionate Longings** – 1:1-2:7
- ii. **Theme 2 – Springtime and the Showers** – 2:8-3:5
- iii. **Theme 3 – The Lover’s Royal Wedding** – 3:6-5:1
- iv. **Theme 4 – Lost and Found** – 5:2-6:3
- v. **Theme 5 – Beauty kindles Desire** – 6:4-8:4
- vi. **Theme 6 – The Security of Love** – 8:5-14

**4. KEY TEXTS:**

a. **Movement through a Series of Identity Development** – the Song’s text invites sexual thought development within the context of their own relational experience. Remember that in this era there were no movies and no romance novels. Song of Songs provides a “romance poem” that is passionately seductive communicating emotional feelings through poetic imagery:

- i. **Insecurity...** 1:5-6 – the Shulamite says “I am dark, but lovely” – her relational tension produces speech, speech produces intimacy, intimacy produces poetry. This is a poetic picture of how love develops... incrementally. This woman is self-conscious about her physical appearance, and yet is hopefully apprehensive in being approached.
- ii. **Excitement...** 1:9-11 - the Shulamite is called 1) Friend (literally “girl-friend” – *ra’yah*) – 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 4:1, 7; 5:2; 6:4. 2) “Bride” (*kallah*) – 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12. 3) “My sister” (*achothi*) – 4:12. Contrast this with how the Husband is consistently called “Beloved” (*dodh*). In 1:9 we are given another picture explaining the passion and excitement that is happening. The imagery calls up a simile of the historical event when the Hebrew enemies of Pharaoh were completely outnumbered. Their strategy was to run mares that were in heat through the perimeter of the skirmish. This action caused the stallions in Pharaoh’s army to run off in another direction pulled along by their instinctive passion. This compulsion is what the author is getting at... when you find your love you are compelled to follow her.
- iii. **An Oath for the Next Generation** – 2:7, 3:5, 5:8 – Gazelles and Hinds or Does... both are known for their grace and beauty, and here are likened to a woman. When gazelles and does are startled, they take off away from the pursuer who can’t help but follow after them. “Arouse” and “Awaken” are the same verb in two forms... the author is saying “be careful young lady of what you are doing!” When Love is “aroused or wakened” is cautiously given in reference to a permanent relationship of “The Love” or a “love like this.” The woman speaking employs an oath formula to impart wisdom to the young women of Jerusalem to beware of the power they hold over a man and therefore to understand they are responsible for the ensuing action of their lover. In other words, don’t awaken sexual love until it is ready to be consummated.

- iv. **Love Longed for and Protected** – 2:14-15 – the image of the “Doves in the crevices of the rock cliff” is the ultimate in protection, it is a steep and unassailable protective place. No one and nothing can assail the dove in its cliff nesting place.

“Dove” is one of the husband’s many affectionate terms for his bride – 2:10, 13; 4:1, 10, 12; 5:2; 6:9. Note the tenderness in this paired poetic strophe:

Show me your face,  
Let me hear your voice;  
For your voice is sweet,  
And your face is lovely.

1. “Your face” literally means “what is seen with the eye” and refers to “all aspects of your beauty.”
2. “Lovely” refers to the complete state of being beautiful. “Your sight is beautiful” means literally that “you are absolutely lovely to look at.”

“Foxes” were plentiful in Palestine... they ran in packs and were known for their destructiveness in the vineyard and in recognition of how difficult these elusive animals are to catch, especially when the vineyard is in bloom and birds and other critters are drawn to the flowers. A “vineyard in bloom” was frequently used in Ancient Near East literature as a euphuism for a girl’s blossoming into womanhood.

- v. **Poetic Sensuous Description of my Love from Head to Toe** – 4:1-7

1. 4:1a – Eyes like doves – shy, alluring, and fleeting, darting here and there.
2. 4:1b – Hair like a flock of goats – dark and contrasting beautifully against the lighter mountainside.
3. 4:2 – Teeth like a row of sheep, all perfectly white and each in its proper place. Many people in the ancient Near East had teeth problems, as dental care was unknown.
4. 4:3a – Lips like a red-ribbon – accentuating the loveliness of your mouth.
5. 4:3b – Temples [cheeks] like halved pomegranates – well rounded and rosy.
6. 4:4 – Neck like the Tower of David – strong and elegant.
7. 4:5 – Breasts like fawns – perfectly paired twins.
8. 4:6 – Mountain of myrrh and the Hill of Incense – Refers to the “*mons pubis*” derived from the Latin for “pubic mound”, and “*mons veneris*” derived from the Latin for “mound of Venus” – this is the area above the vagina and clitoris that has a distinctive shape, scent, and allure.
9. 4:7 – Conclusion – How beautiful you are... there is no flaw in you.

- vi. **Incomparable Garden** – 4:15-5:1 – a garden is the best of places in the desert of the Ancient Near East. The garden is typically walled making it a place of safety, a place of beauty and rest, and of fertility and abundance. Again, this recalls the Garden of Eden – the best place on earth. In this segment we can hear the vibrant intimacy of this sexual encounter:

1. 4:15 – Garden Fountain – a well of flowing water... refreshing and the source of life and health.
  2. 4:16a – North wind – is cool and refreshing, while the South wind is warm and vibrant.
  3. 4:16b – The Shulamite says – “Let my lover come into his garden” – it is an invitation as she is ready for her husband’s sexual advances.
  4. 5:1a – Solomon says – “I have come into her garden, [he calls her] my sister, my bride.”
  5. 5:1b – I have thoroughly experienced her... myrrh and spice, honeycomb and honey, wine and milk... he is completely satisfied with their love making.
  6. 5:1c – Friends of the Bride and Groom gladly encourage these lovers to drink their fill of love and romance!
- vii. Sexual Tension – 5:2-8 – note the back and forth interaction of wife and husband:
1. 5:2a-b – Shulamite is awake and hears her husband knocking. The husband knocks taking the initiative. It would have been appropriate for the husband to initiate an overture for love making.
  2. 5:2c-3 – Shulamite has bathed and is already in bed... a mild rebuff.
  3. 5:4a – The husband tries to open the latch, but is unable.
  4. 5:4b – His determination causes his wife to begin to respond in anticipation.
  5. 5:5 – The wife is now perfumed and ready for romance.
  6. 5:6 – The wife opens the door, but her husband is no longer there. She now becomes the pursuer walking down the hallway, but doesn’t find her man.
  7. 5:7 – The wife is caught in the wrong place by the wrong persons, who rebuke her and discipline her for leaving her room alone at night.
  8. 5:8 – Though she has been wronged, she is anxious for her husband to return and is now ready for his romance.
- viii. The Strength of Relational Love – 8:6-7
1. 8:6 – The Shulamite asks that her lover would place her as a seal over lover’s heart. Irrevocably binding them together. Jealously unyielding of the exclusivity of their love, burning like a mighty fire is a statement that it’s passionate.
  2. 8:7 – The imagery is of a fire that can’t be quenched, of rivers that can’t wash it away, and that even great wealth is of no consequence compared to the riches of their love.
- ix. The Fulfillment of Hope of Marriage – 8:8-10
1. 8:8-9 – Shulamite’s friends speak to prepare their younger daughter for marriage. She is young and physically immature. They want to know how to prepare her for the day of her betrothal. If she is beautiful like a great wall, they will accentuate her with gold and silver; if she is more plain like a door, they will accentuate her more commonly.

2. **8:10 – The Shulamite states the obvious that she is very beautiful and fully developed like a great wall. Her beauty brings her husband great contentment.**

**5. PASTORAL APPLICATIONS:**

**a. Infatuation and Desire are not Love:**

- i. **“Falling in Love” is a misnomer. Love is rising above yourself in the company of your beloved, to a state of serving another. Love is self-less commitment, that remains enduring and fulfilling.**
- ii. **“Quick to sizzle... quick to fizzle.” Physical attraction is a strong tonic, but it usually does not develop into an enduring love relationship.**
- iii. **“Eros” is the Greek word usually translated as erotic sexual desire. This is not love. This is infatuation.**
- iv. **Song of Songs refers to sexual attraction in the context of an enduring love commitment. Sexual pleasure in the context of enduring marriage is what the Song is about.**
- v. **Marriage is a staggering commitment that involves individual fulfillment in the context of self-sacrifice. Note Ephesians 5:1-2 and 5:25-28 in the Living Translation – “Follow God’s example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him.” “And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious Bride [the Church] without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man is actually loving himself when he loves his wife.”**
- vi. **Our culture has it wrong in its obsession with infatuation and sexual desire that are unrestrained and unbridled; it cannot endure because it is shallow. Feelings support an enduring relationship, but feelings alone without a deep and abiding commitment do not last.**
- vii. **George MacDonald said, “Falling in love was a thing that did not suggest itself to her. If she were now in what others would consider danger, it was of a more serious thing altogether, for the lower is in its nature transient, while the higher is forever.”**
- viii. **Soren Kierkegaard said, “Love is the work of Love”... [true] love is the work of will, not of emotion. To love is to wish good for another, and [demonstrate] the will to do it. The choices we make naturally for ourselves we must [purposefully] learn to make for others... for their happiness, comfort, protection, and security.”**
- ix. **Augustine said, “It is by the [exercise of our] will that we [learn to] live righteously... it is by the will that we love.” Love chooses to serve or to suffer for as long as it takes. It seeks the highest good for its object no matter how it feels.**

- x. **Shakespeare said, “Love is not love which alters when it alterations finds” ... meaning Love accepts what otherwise it would change. Love may not be satisfied with what is, but it rests [and hopes] in God’s ability to change [us and] others in time. Love waits in continuance for that which God alone can grow in us both... the virtue of patient endurance.**
  - xi. **Change almost always starts first in me, before it takes root in another. To love someone is to love them warts and all.**
  - xii. **In my office I have had the following quote on a decorative plaque, “Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them out just as they are, chaff and grain together knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.” This is true love.**
- b. Character Matters Most:**
- i. **Single Mindedness versus Duplicity – Single-mindedness is to be “Intensely focused and concentrated on purpose; it is to be disciplined capable of focusing on only one goal, it means being able to be undistractable.” Being duplicitous is having the nature to be “Given to or marked by deliberate deception in one’s behavior or speech. It is to be deceitful, double-dealing and two-faced.”**
  - ii. **Four of my personal sayings have long guided my Christian and business development:**
    - 1. **Marriage is less about who you fall asleep with at night, and more about who you get to wake up and spend the day with tomorrow.**
    - 2. **All relationships are based upon the character elements of trust, respect, and integrity. To be compromised in any of these elements is fatal for a relationship.**
    - 3. **If I cannot take someone at their word in trusting them completely, I cannot afford to rely on them in my corporate or my private life. To trust is noble, to verify their trustworthiness is wise.**
    - 4. **Friendship is the foundation of love, and character and integrity are the foundation of any relationship.**
  - iii. **George MacDonald said.. “Better a feeble love to God, than a woman’s love to pine; better to have God, than making woman divine.”**
    - 1. **Margaret Clarkson was a prolific songwriter. She remained single but understood that she was never alone because of God’s Presence. She said, “To know God, is to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is Sovereign and that my life is safe in His care... this is the unshakable foundation on which I stay my soul. Such knowledge has deep significance for the single Christian.”**
    - 2. **The Apostle Paul encouraged Christ-followers to learn and develop in whatever state of being they find themselves in... learning to be content in all things in knowing, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

iv. There are two ways to look upon the brevity of life and thus prioritize my life here and now:

1. I can accept the reality of the brevity of life and press for the gusto here and now, seeking riches and a fat contented life on earth.
2. I can understand the transience of life on earth and press for the eternal, making the most of what I can do for the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the following questions arise knowing that my days are numbered:

1. What am I living for?
2. What am I willing to die for?

Life is transient and death is certain, therefore my answer to these two questions determine how best to invest my life.

c. God has established parameters for sexual relationships as being appropriate in the context of the marriage of a man and a woman. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 7 Paul speaks candidly about marriage, singleness, and divorce.

- i. Singleness is an option – I don't think I would call it the gift of celibacy... but some have it. Paul says singleness gives a man or a woman the option of undistracted service to God, though admittedly a husband and wife can serve together.
- ii. Sex is a part of the animal kingdom... all creatures have sex for procreation and for the higher forms of life for enjoyment. Sex is part of our physical nature. However, the world has become obsessed with sex, and this has given us a false view of our sexuality. Our sex life is not the measure of our humanity.
- iii. God created humanity as male and female and we find wholeness in marriage, but completeness in God apart from marriage.

6. For additional resources on marriage, character development, and transformation see the following links to the AD website:

- a. **Marriage and Transformation** - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%202.3%20-%20Marriage%20and%20Transformation.pdf>
- b. **Character and the Transformational Process** - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%206.7%20-%20Character%20and%20the%20Transformational%20Process.pdf>
- c. **Coaching for Character Development** - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/3-leadership-dev/LD%20-%204.4%20-%20Coaching%20for%20Character%20Development.pdf>