

Real romantic love— Song of Solomon 1



Aharon April

Christ's inexpressibly great love for us is analogous to the depth of passion and desire in the romance of this book. Our own experiences of romance teach us about the depths of love and widen our hearts. It is encouraging and refreshing to read a book where we see clearly that God values our experiences of romantic love.

The song is identified as Solomon's very best. The poem describes exclusive and passionate love. I Kings 3 says when he married Pharaoh's daughter his heart belonged to God, so perhaps the poem was for her. She is called "Shulamite", which is the feminine form of Solomon. Both names mean "peaceful". But Solomon failed. By I Kings 11 he had married many foreign women--he is famous for having 1000 women--and they "turned his heart to worship their gods.". This poem, in contrast with Solomon's story, reminds us that both our romantic love and love for God need to remain pure and exclusive.

For us also, our identity as sexual people can be damaged in our overly sexualized media environment. The damage diminishes or distorts a gift that brings joy and pleasure and connection, but this book can rehabilitate any brokenness with its explicit love poetry. The book never once mentions God or worship or holiness, instead, it is a robust celebration of sexuality.

For example, in chapter one the woman celebrates passionate kisses, her lover's popularity with other women, acceptance of her own good looks, and acceptance of her lower social status.

She is committed to maintaining a good sexual reputation. Both lovers give and receive compliments. Here we are offered something beautiful and healthy that contrasts with our anxieties about physical intimacy, jealousy, low body-image, social inferiority, reputations for promiscuity, and inadequate skill at offering verbal compliments.

If romantic love is a hurtful area for us, meditating on these poems offers us a positive vision of how it can be. It can help parents to encourage healthy sexuality in their children, and continually seek positive sexuality in marriage. While there is not explicit reference to God, some variation on "love" occurs over 60 times, and as the source of all love, he is standing just off stage.

Is there damage in my sexuality or in someone I know for which I can pray for healing?

Courtship--Song of Solomon 2-3



Egon Tschirch

Paul taught that marriage and singleness are both gifts. The imagery of femininity or masculinity apply to us all, married or single, and invite us to have an appealing character. All of us, no matter our marital state, can apply this book to our intimacy with Christ. During our singleness, even if it is only for a time, we can use that time well to be completely devoted and focused on Christ, without the distractions of spouse or children. It is a time to be treasured. It can also be a time to try to develop the qualities celebrated in this poem.

A beautiful courtship is celebrated that can serve as a model for us. As the partners find one another they don't doubt that the other one is the very best person for them, they enjoy public acknowledgement of their relationship, and they keep their sexuality within good boundaries even when their desire is strong. They work to protect their relationship from petty irritations.

In chapter three the woman expresses her intense desire for her lover and pursues him until she finds him. Here is a validation of feminine passion that might fly in the face of some modern Christian advice to women. She unabashedly asks for others to help her in her pursuit, and when she finds him, she takes him in to the most intimate places of her own heart. Her mother's bedroom in her childhood home need not be literal but poetically expresses the feminine sexuality she has inherited.

What makes a man attractive? According to this poem it is his protectiveness and his athletic prowess. He takes his lover to beautiful places and lavishes compliments on her. As the poem continues in chapter three, she celebrates his impressive presence, how good he smells, his chariot, and his strong friends. The vehicle gets extra lines for its luxury, a sign of his financial success.

Even if not at Solomon's level, part of masculine attractiveness is the ability to provide. Solomon has the mystique of being Israel's wealthiest and wisest king, and I Kings 10 tells us of his vast amounts of gold, his unique and elaborate throne, his 1400 chariots, and 12,000 imported horses. We have partial confirmation of this in that at Megiddo archaeologists excavated a stable complex with 480 horses in pairs, and there are at least four other similar cities.

There is a storyline in the book from attraction to marriage to a life-long relationship of committed love. Read in this way, one sees how physical and emotional passion deepen and it becomes a model for God's ideals for our romantic love. It is thereby both preparation for marriage, and a reminder to refresh our marriages. These chapters end with reference to a wedding day, and Solomon's mother crowning him on that day. Our wedding days are also like coronations; moments of splendor and honor.

Do I have a healthy sense of my own masculine or feminine identity? Are their ways I need to ask God to heal my own self-image?

Marriage — Song of Solomon 4-6, Ephesians 5:11-12



Elena Kotliarker

Song of Solomon foreshadows Christ as the bridegroom. Here is a love poem of great beauty, full of delight, longing, misunderstanding, making up, contentment, and public recognition. Paul wrote that the husband is an image of Christ and the wife an image of the church; in this poem Christ is the King/lover and we are the queen/beloved.

The poem celebrates the passion and joy of marriage. In addition to lauding the details of one another's beauty, the groom repeats that she is his treasure. They both say that the love of the other is better than wine. The lavish, sensual imagery weaves a spell of two people in joyful harmony with one another, feeling that deep security that comes from loving and being loved.

What makes a woman attractive? In chapter 4 the poem celebrates her physical beauty. Eyes, hair, teeth, lips, mouth, cheeks, neck, breasts, and curves all get lines of poetry. Her gentle flirting, perfume, and kisses draw him in. She makes him feel safe and comfortable, and he compares her to a private garden, a fountain, an orchard of fragrant fruit, and a refreshing mountain stream. This is much deeper than admiring a good body--it is enchantment with a person whose outward and inward beauty complement one another.

In chapter 5 the woman has a nightmare (verse 2). Her lover is gone and when he returns she is too sleepy to open up and he leaves. When she goes on a quest for him the presumed protectors of the city are harmful to her. The hurt and fear she feels are out of key with other parts of the story, but perhaps most lovers can identify with times of anxious longing when they are apart. But she then celebrates him as better than 10,000 others. Eyes, cheeks, lips, breath, arms, body, legs, and mouth are poetically praised.

In chapter 6 the man celebrates his lover as the best woman of all. A love relationship flourishes in an environment of positivity and compliments. The poem validates today's researchers on marriage who suggest that compliments keep a relationship healthy and happy. Her security in his delight in her beauty and exclusive commitment to her have an effect on her looks.

But a reference to sixty queens and eighty concubines hardly sounds exclusive. Some suggest that this was from a period in Solomon's history when he was building up his harem; others suggest there are two competing men--Solomon versus her true love the shepherd, and so Solomon is not our model for love. Some see the reference as counterfactual: "I could have any woman I want, but I've chosen you." Whatever the interpretation, she gains the admiration of all her rivals who exclaim in delight that she is glorious: fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and majestic as masses of banners. The principle of seeking women as friends, not competitors, is a good one.

These poems are full of honor for the one another and remind us that this is an important aspect of our love relationships. Applied to Christ, the honor we offer is worship, thanksgiving, and praise, all of which increase our joy in our relationship.

Am I full of positive praise for those I love? Is praise my natural response to God?

Undying Love — Song of Solomon 7-8, John 1:14



Aharon April

Christ's love for us is unfailing, and the passion of human love is compared here to several things: to fire, to something that survives a flood, to something worth more than a fortune. Once again, the husband celebrates the beauty of his wife and the wife responds with eagerness.

The love poetry becomes even more intimate. Before it was her face, but now it is a nude woman: her thighs, her navel, her belly, her breasts, her breath, her exciting kisses flowing into his mouth. When the man celebrates his lover's beauty, her response is to feel secure and the result of their mutual love is loyal and undying commitment.

In the context of this secure sexual relationship, the attention turns to a younger sister who is coming of age. They want to protect her from two extremes: being timid or flaunting herself. The middle ground of being simultaneously attractive and chaste is our goal in developing young women today.

As a wife, she shares the vineyard which is hers with her husband. As a couple they are now one, including in what they own. The last two lines affirm their ongoing enjoyment of one another, their ongoing special and unique connection.

Historically, commentators and teachers have said that this poem serves as an analogy to that of each heart in its love relationship with God. Many of us cannot honestly say we strongly love God, and perhaps it is worth asking for more if we are not experiencing much passion. Growing love can and should take us to a place of complete commitment.

In scripture God's unfailing love is repeated 121 times. This quality of his character makes our relationship with him reliable, trustworthy, unshakeable. In the struggles of life, we may be tempted to doubt this or forget it, but in any situation, refocusing our attention on God's love changes our hearts and gives us peace.

In the midst of life's challenges we question the reality of God's unfailing love. Here we are reminded of how deep the experience of that love must be—strong as fire and flood—to take us through life with the unseen.

Is my commitment to my closest relationship strong through the ups and downs of life? Is my commitment to God unchanging as well?