

The Royal Love Song



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Song of Solomon.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Song of Solomon 8:6, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: With an openness some might find shocking, the *Song of Solomon* explores the beauty of sexual love within marriage.

The *Song of Solomon* portrays, in sensitive terms, the attraction, the passion, and the exquisite delights of sexuality. Certainly in these days when the whole trend of society is to dishonor marriage and devalue love, we can be grateful for the instruction, insights, and inspiration found in this part of the Bible.

The *Song of Solomon* is an invitation to enter the private world of a wedded couple. They are not embarrassed to speak about their sexuality, though the poem uses delicate metaphors and symbols to express the delights of their love. The openness of the *Song of Solomon* is in keeping with the view of Scripture that sexuality is an integral part of life. Further, because the redemption of Christ includes the whole person, His followers can trust in the guiding of the Holy Spirit as they seek to become more comfortable with this sensitive yet crucial topic, so interwoven with life.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 18.*

Indivisible Life

Based on the following passages, how would you characterize the Bible’s view of the human body? *Gen. 2:7; Pss. 63:1; 84:2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 1 Thess. 5:23.*

Some religions believe in dualism, a philosophy that views the human body as a problem for the life of the spirit. In Scripture, however, the human body, including its sexual characteristics, is integral to the whole being. Life is “body” and “spirit” (*Gen. 2:7*). The psalmist gives the whole of himself in worship to God (*Pss. 63:1, 84:2*). The total person is to be sanctified, set apart for the holy purpose God intended.

This positive view of the human body, in the context of sexual relations, is reflected in the Song of Solomon. How do these texts reveal this attitude? *Song of Sol. 1:2, 13; 2:6; 5:10-16; 7:1-9.*

Throughout this sacred text the human body is admired. The physical aspects of married love are not an embarrassment. A full range of emotions is presented openly.

Toward greater comfort with the topic of sexuality. Powerful sexual taboos typically exist in many cultures. Married couples thus often find it difficult to communicate in healthy ways regarding their intimate life. Similarly, children often are deprived of the opportunity to learn about sexuality in the setting of a Christian home, where godly values can be integrated with accurate information. The Bible’s openness with sexuality calls His people to a greater level of comfort with this topic so this vital aspect of life is treated with the respect and dignity due so great a gift from the Creator.

How can we protect ourselves against cultural and moral forces that either make sexuality into nothing but degrading animal passion or turn it into something shameful that must never be talked about? How does the Bible show us that both extremes are wrong?

The Loves of the Love Song

Describe various aspects of love presented in the Song of Solomon. *Song of Sol. 1:2, 13; 2:10-13, 16; 3:11; 4:1-7; 5:16; 6:6; 7:1-9; 8:6, 7.*

Friendship love. The Song of Solomon shows how friends spend time together, communicate openly, and care about each other. In the Song of Solomon, two good friends become married partners. The wife declares, “This is my friend” (*Song of Sol. 5:16*). The word *friend* expresses companionship and friendship without the overtones of sexual partnership. Happy is the husband or wife whose spouse is a dear friend.

Throughout the poem intimate compliments and loving gestures convey the strong attraction and the physical and emotional delight that the male and female find in each other. The natural intimacies of romantic love are a gift of the Creator, to help partners bond closely to each other in marriage. As partners are open to the work of divine love in their hearts, their human love is “refined and purified, elevated and ennobled.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 99.

These verses also convey the loftiest of thoughts about love. True love, though, is not natural to the human heart; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*). Such love bonds husband and wife in a lasting union. It is the committed love so desperately needed in the parent-child relationship to build a sense of trust in the young. It is the self-giving love that binds believers together in the body of Christ. The Song of Solomon calls us to make this love an active force in our relationships.

How does this kind of intimacy reflect, in its own way, the kind of intimacy we can have with God? What are some parallels one can draw (for example, spending time, giving completely of ourselves, and so forth)? What other parallels are there?

A Loving Knowledge

Many have seen a “return to Eden” theme in the Song of Solomon. Though the couple described is not the first man and woman, the poem calls to mind the earliest Garden. God’s plan that they be “one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24, 25*) is portrayed throughout in delicate metaphors and symbols.

How does the Song of Solomon present a commitment to mutuality in the intimate life of the married couple? *Song of Sol. 4:7–5:1*. How is Paul’s instruction of 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 similar?

Solomon invites her, “Come with me” (*Song of Sol. 4:8*). His bride responds. Later she invites him: “Let my beloved come into his garden” (*vs. 16*). He responds (*Song of Sol. 5:1*). Scripture here teaches that there is to be no force or manipulation in this intimate setting. Into this relationship both partners freely and lovingly enter. “My garden” is “his garden.”

“Solomon” and “Shulamith” share names that are derivatives of the Hebrew *shalom*, “peace,” or “wholeness.” Their admiration is mutual (*Song of Sol. 4:1-5, 5:10-16*). The balance in their relationship is evidenced even in the poetic style of paired lines and verses. The covenant expression “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (*Song of Sol. 2:16*) echoes the language of Eden, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen. 2:23*).

How does the description of the marital union as “knowing” enrich our understanding of our relationship with God? *Gen. 4:1, 25; 1 Sam. 1:19; Luke 1:34; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:3*.

The Bible uses *know* for the intimate union of husband and wife. In this loving “knowledge,” the most hidden inner depths of their beings are offered to the other. Not only two bodies but also two hearts are joined in “one flesh.” *Know* also describes the relationship between individuals and God. For the discerning Christian the unique and tender knowledge of marriage, with its companionship, commitment, and unbounded delight, provides a profound insight into the most sublime and holy mystery ever, the union of Christ and the church.

Love at the Right Time

Study the following passages and the comments. Then make observations of your own. How do these add to the scriptural teaching that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for marriage? Compare Gen. 39:7-9, Proverbs 5.

“Wall” or “door”? (*Song of Sol.* 8:8-10). During her childhood Shulamith’s brothers wondered whether she would open herself to others like a “door” or guard her purity as a “wall.” Both before and within marriage, she has decided to be a “wall,” keeping herself only for her husband. Such a decision enabled her to be “as one who found peace” (*vs.* 10, *NKJV*). Peace (Heb. *shalom*) is a word-play on her name and his name and means “wholeness” or “completeness.”

A locked garden (*Song of Sol.* 4:8-12, 16; 5:1). A verdant garden symbolizes the woman in this poem. On their wedding night her husband affirms her for being “a garden enclosed . . . , a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (*Song of Sol.* 4:12, *NKJV*). “The image of the garden behind its walls and with the gate locked suggests the unapproachableness of the area to all but those who rightfully belong. . . . Here, a fountain sealed and a garden locked speak of virginity. The couple, while approaching consummation of their love, still have not reached that level of intimacy.”—G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 123.

Guarding one’s affections. A poetic device has the bride speaking words of caution to the “daughters of Jerusalem” in conjunction with moments of physical intimacy with her husband: “Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases” (*Song of Sol.* 2:7, 3:5, 8:4, *NKJV*). The likely intent is “Do not start the process of loving exchange until the appropriate occasion is present.” These verses join others that call upon young and old to guard against premarital and extramarital sexual intimacy.

What good news is there for individuals who regret their wrong choices in the expression of their sexuality? *1 John* 1:9; compare *Ps.* 103:12, *Isa.* 55:7, *John* 8:11.

What practical steps can be taken by those who are single and those who are married to reserve or preserve intimate sexual expression for marriage?

Safeguarding the Creator's Gift

God had a special purpose in creating humankind as male and female (*Gen. 1:26-28*). While each bears His image, the joining of gender opposites in the “one flesh” of marriage reflects the unity within the Godhead in a special way. The union of male and female also provides for procreation of a new life, an original human expression of the divine image.

What attitude does Scripture take toward sexual practices not in keeping with the Creator's plan? *Lev. 20:7-21, Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-20.*

Scripture disapproves of all that alters or destroys God's image in humankind. By placing certain sexual practices off-limits, God guides His people toward the right purposes of sexuality. When human experience is confronted by God's precepts, the soul is convicted of sin.

What guidance is given Christian believers for relating to their sexuality and that of others in a fallen world? *Rom. 8:1-14; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 10:5; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:3-10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.*

Believers wait for release from the corruption of sin at Christ's return. They wait in faith, considering themselves dead to sin through Christ's death on the cross and alive in Him through His resurrection. Through unceasing prayer, watchfulness, and the power of the Spirit, they treat their sinful nature as crucified and seek to obey Christ in their thoughts. They acknowledge God's ownership of their bodies and sexuality and use them according to His divine plan.

Submitting our sexuality to God. God forgives those who repent of sin (*1 John 1:9*). The gospel enables individuals, who formerly engaged in promiscuity and sinful sexual activity, to be part of the fellowship of believers. Because of the extent to which sin has altered sexuality in humanity, some may not be able to know full restoration in this aspect of human experience. Some, for example, might choose a life of celibacy rather than get involved in any sexual relationships that are forbidden by God's Word.

How should we as a church relate to, for instance, homosexuals? How should their own attitude about their sexual orientation influence our response?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Love and Sexuality in the Human Experience,” *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 218–239.

True love. “True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested. It is by faithfulness to duty in the parental home that the youth are to prepare themselves for homes of their own. Let them here practice self-denial and manifest kindness, courtesy, and Christian sympathy. Thus love will be kept warm in the heart, and he who goes out from such a household to stand at the head of a family of his own will know how to promote the happiness of her whom he has chosen as a companion for life. Marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be only its beginning.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it important to present sexuality education within the context of the Christian message? How can parents and others involved with youth best fulfill their responsibility to guide youth in knowing truth in this area?
- ❷ Unwed mothers, AIDS, broken homes . . . the list goes on regarding the impact of sinful sexual relations. How can you as a class, in a practical way, help those who have suffered because of these wrong choices?

Summary: Lessons in close relationships, with applications for friendship, abound in the Song of Solomon but especially for marriage. The consummation of the royal couple’s love in the poem beckons married couples toward deeper levels of knowing each other and invites each human heart toward greater intimacy with God.

One Bullet for Porras, Part 1

by ANTONIO SENDING, JR.

Fourteen-year-old Porras was a bright student and a born leader. His father, Chief Tranning of the Manobo people of Mindanao in the Philippines, was proud of him. One day Porras would be a warrior, so his father took him along on headhunting expeditions.

Porro's village often received threats of tribal war, so they were constantly alert for signs of danger. His father had rifles and taught his son to use one. But Porras did not share his father's dream for him. He wanted to lead his people in a different way; he wanted to study at Mountain View College, where his teachers studied; and one day, he hoped, he would return to the mountains of southern Philippines and teach his people to read and to write and introduce them to Jesus.

One day, a chief from another Manobo village came to visit Porras' father. He brought a horse, a gift from a family in the chief's village. The chief had come to ask Porras' father for permission for Porras to marry a girl from his village. Porras knew that in the past there had been problems between these two villages. A marriage would resolve those problems and prevent further bloodshed. Porras wanted nothing to do with this marriage. But to Porras' horror, his father agreed to the marriage.

Porras was in serious trouble. To refuse the marriage surely would mean bloodshed between the two tribes, and Porras's own life was at risk. But if Porras accepted the offer of marriage, his dreams for the future would vanish with the smoke from the morning fires.

Confused and frightened, he went to talk to his teachers, student missionaries from Mountain View College. The missionary teachers, however, did not dare advise Porras what to do. That would be to interfere with the village's customs. They could only advise Porras to pray that God would reveal His will for this young man.

Porras went home and prayed. "Dear Lord, I want to be a teacher! Please help my father understand that I want to attend the Adventist high school and then study at Mountain View College. If I marry, that will be impossible."

Porras' father and mother argued about what to do. His father wanted Porras to marry the young woman from the nearby village, but his mother refused to allow her beloved son to live in another village. "He is still a boy!" she sobbed to her husband. "I don't want to give him away!"

(continued next week)

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