

# The Royal Love Song



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## 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.*

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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 (*Ps. 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.*

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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?**

**Key Text:** *Proverbs 5:15-17*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To show that sexuality is a sacred gift from God.
2. To reveal the importance of intimacy and of unity within the marriage.
3. To emphasize that infidelity is a sin against God.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. The Spirituality of Sexuality (*1 Cor. 6:18-20*)

- A. The Scriptures reveal sexuality as an essential part of life.
- B. The body, including the sexual nature, is to be set apart for holy use.
- C. Christian parents should share godly values and truths regarding sexuality with their children at an appropriate age.

#### II. Intimacy in Marriage (*1 Cor. 7:2, 3*)

- A. Friendship between marital partners is important to the well-being of their relationship.
- B. The Bible teaches husbands and wives to have monogamous relationships.
- C. Marital partners can safeguard against sexual immorality by not withholding affection from each other.

#### III. Unity in Marriage (*Gen. 2:24*)

- A. The Scriptures reveal the oneness that God desires married couples to share.
- B. Complete oneness is expressed in the sexual union.
- C. Unity in marriage is a revelation of the unity between God and the church.

#### IV. Infidelity Is Sin Against God (*1 Thess. 4:3*)

- A. The Bible admonishes Christians to avoid sexual immorality.
- B. Sexual sin destroys God's image in humankind.
- C. God offers forgiveness to those who have sinned in the past.

**Summary:** Sexual intimacy is a gift from God and should be reserved for marriage. The sexual experience is an expression of the unity between husband and wife. Parents should explain the biblical values of sexuality to their children at an appropriate age.

## COMMENTARY

### I. Introduction

Popular culture has so distorted our thinking that many people believe sexuality is anything but holy. Are you, as the teacher, ready for a frank but reverent discussion of a topic often viewed as profane?

Why was the Song of Solomon included in Scripture? What does it teach us that has life-saving relevance for today? Why are there still some Seventh-day Adventists who want to argue about why it is wrong to have sex on the Sabbath? How can we teach our

## 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.

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*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?

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children about the holiness, beauty, and joy of sexuality when all around them are conflicting messages?

## II. Why Study About Sexuality?

Sexuality is a major preoccupation of contemporary society. How does one live with sexual drives without being consumed by them? What does it mean to be a man? A woman? Many people always have sex on their minds, while others are *in over their heads* with sexual engagements.

Our homes, churches, and schools need to present a Christian approach to sexuality that does more than build barriers against temptation. What we need is understanding, hope, and healing from our shame and guilt.

What does God have to do with sexuality? He created us male and female (*Gen. 1:27*) and thus provided the most intricate and intense human experience—the sexual response.

What did God have in mind when He created us as sexual beings? Nathan Greene portrays in a painting that electric moment when God introduced Adam to Eve. We have the biblical account in Genesis 2:21-23, but it does not give details. How much time elapsed between the introduction and the wedding homily in Genesis 2:24, 25?

Why does Scripture include Genesis 2:25? What does “naked” and “not ashamed” mean? Who is the author of shame? How would our marriages be different if we still were “not ashamed”?

What God had in mind when He created us as sexual beings is answered, in part, by an understanding of the word *dominion*, or *responsibility*. Just as humanity was given dominion over the earth, we also were given dominion over our bodies. We can choose to abuse our bodies or to nurture them. With the power of choice comes accountability. We always must live with the consequences of the choices we make.

Every dominion in life bears a corresponding obligation. A Christian view of sexuality affirms that *restraint* is the scriptural obligation regarding sexual intercourse. Scripture teaches that this union is a sign of the commitment between a man and a woman. This commitment is called marriage. The whole of each person is involved in the sexual act. It is communication that is physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The gift of our sexuality was given to us for procreation and relational bonding and as a means of renewing the wedding vows. However, this is not the message of popular culture.

Fearing sexuality is often the root of being obsessed with it and the motivation behind joking about it. The scriptural picture of sexuality, however, provides freedom from this fear. God’s Word upholds the dignity of male and female sexuality, as it teaches restraint and a balanced stewardship of bodies and emotions. When

## 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?

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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.

we learn not to be afraid of sex and are better able to understand the biblical concept of it, we will be able to enjoy it for what God intended it to be.

How does restraint contribute to an understanding of sexuality? Christian sexual restraint demonstrates a respect for something that is very good. It is not that God does not want us to enjoy sex. He wants us to remain emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy so we can enjoy the gift of sexual intercourse to the fullest within the protective commitment of marriage. Being responsible with one's

## Inductive Bible Study

**Text for Discovery:** *Song of Solomon 1–8*

- 1 Sex must be an important part of human relationships, or else why would Satan so desperately try to pervert it? Yet, sexual intimacy is just one kind of intimacy that married couples share. What are other types? How do those other types of intimacy affect the sexual kind?
- 2 The notion that sex is a *necessary evil* has been propounded by religious people to the present day. What scriptural evidence can you present to show that God intended sexual relations to be part of a married couple's total physical, emotional, and spiritual make-up?
- 3 What are the leading sources for society's perception about romance and sex? Are they realistic? Or are they only products of some screenwriter's fantasies? What dramatic portrayals about romance and sex have you seen or read about that were consistent with biblical values and principles? Describe them briefly.
- 4 The results of sexual infidelity are legion: unwanted pregnancies, divorce, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. People who have made mistakes in improper sexual situations hardly need well-meaning critics reminding them of their mistakes. What do they need? What Bible promises can you share with those who carry the guilt of inappropriate sexual relationships?
- 5 Jesus' message to the church in Ephesus, "You have forsaken your first love," may apply to some married couples (*Rev. 2:4, NIV*). What may have started out as a passionate, fiery romance has died down to a few smoldering embers in danger of becoming lumps of cold charcoal. How can you rekindle the flames of passion so that both you and your spouse are warmed? Or, have other forms of intimacy replaced sexual intimacy? Are they sufficient?

## 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?



sexuality will pay rich dividends in freedom from shame and guilt.

This is what God desires; but what does Satan want? He wants to trivialize sex, to make us afraid of it, to fill us with shame and guilt about it. Remember, Satan is a fallen angel, and perhaps this causes him to envy what humankind is able to experience in cooperation with God. After all, it was Lucifer's envy of Christ's position in the Godhead that caused him to be cast out of heaven.

Because of sin, sexuality often falls short of God's ideal. When we sin sexually, the God who created us as sexual beings can heal our shame and guilt, our temptations and our confusion, and even our fears. Because of sin, there is often mistrust, disconnection, alienation, and rejection. These find expression in disorders relating to sexual desire. However, when we repent and ask forgiveness, we also are admitting that a part of our life has lost its way. We turn to the Lord of new beginnings for restoration. Regardless of what has happened in the past, God has promised the miracle of a

## Witnessing

Solomon's song testifies of a love stronger than death and far more deeply interfused with life and light and glory than mere fleshly passion ever could be. The kind of intimacy to be sought in marriage includes a deep appreciation for the hidden qualities of grace and the finer sensibilities of soul that none could be privy to but those who have become one flesh and one spirit through matrimony.

Physical intimacies outside marriage are a mutual violation of privacy, even if consensual. Physical intimacy is a gift that accompanies the fulfillment of the mutual obligations of married life—service, support, and protective regard for one another's honor and well-being. Adultery is selfish and inconsiderate in the highest degree, because it breaks the sanctity of the home circle and severs the bands of trust, loyalty, and single-minded devotion to a relationship that God has commanded that no man shall put asunder. Adultery is comparable to murder, because it kills love and casts contempt on the value of the person who has the right to look to his or her spouse for loyalty and protection. Adultery is the slaying of a relationship.

*Project:* Read the Song of Solomon with a view to catching every ray of light it reveals on how to discover and bring out all that is best in your mate or fiancé(e). If you are a woman, project yourself into the heart and mind of the Shulamite woman. If you are a man, do the same exercise in relationship to the love-smitten King Solomon. Besides all the opulently romantic aspects of love, what does the Song of Solomon reveal about love's robust endurance, courage, and sacrifice? Of what value is love without these qualities?

## 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?**

renewed mind (*Rom. 12:1, 2*), which is our most important sexual organ. Scripture teaches that God is eager to forgive and accept those who honestly repent of their sins, including sexual sins. His renewing power and love will enable any one of us to experience a transformation from sexual brokenness to fulfillment and peace.

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Swindoll tells of “a wife who went to lunch with eleven other women. . . . One rather bold type asked, ‘How many of you have been faithful throughout your marriage?’ Only one lady raised her hand. That evening one of the women related the incident to her husband. When she admitted she was not the one who raised her hand, her husband looked crestfallen.

“ ‘But I’ve been faithful to you,’ she quickly assured him.

“ ‘Then why didn’t you raise your hand?’

“ ‘I was ashamed.’ ”—Charles R. Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope*, pp. 67, 68.

### Thought Questions:

❶ Shame and guilt result from wrongdoing. However, worldly standards and social norms sometimes can shift biblical definitions of right and wrong. Read Psalm 143. How did the psalmist cope with the pressures to succumb to the ways of the world?

❷ “In theory the Jew had the highest ideal of marriage. The Rabbis had their sayings. ‘Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery.’ . . . But the fact was that by Paul’s day, divorce had become tragically easy.”—Barclay, “The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians,” *The Daily Study Bible*, rev. ed., p. 168. Obviously, intimacy and fidelity are ancient dilemmas. What are the responsibility and the role of the church in dealing with these concerns in a member’s life?

### Application Question:

Triadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the state of Maryland of the United States, has a strong Family Ministry department. One of the programs sponsored by the department was “Couple’s Night Out.” Several couples got together one Sabbath afternoon per month to study a topic relevant to marriage and relationships. After the study, each couple would go out on a date for some quality time together. The church offered free babysitting services for the evening. Can you think of similar programs that your church could participate in?

**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.