

# A Tradition of Intimacy and Love

Printed Text · Song of Solomon 4:8-5:1a

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCUSS the beauty and wonder of love in a committed relationship; REFLECT on our attitude about love and commitment; and EXPLAIN how to build a relationship that honors a marriage commitment.

## In Focus

Craig and Miriam, both attorneys, celebrated their 27th wedding anniversary in two different hotels in two different states. They expressed their love via text message, each too busy to place a call. When they finally caught up with each other a week later, celebrating their anniversary was the last thing on their minds. Miriam's major elite athletic client was in a paternity suit, while one of Craig's corporate clients was embroiled in a messy federal probe.

They both were working when they got the news. Craig's best friend had died in a fiery car crash along with his wife and son. Miriam and Craig felt crushed. This friend was the same one who had set them up for a blind date in college. He recently reminded them to slow down and refocus their priorities. "Tomorrow is not promised," he warned them.

The accident was a wake-up call for Miriam and Craig. Finally, they felt compelled to act on their friend's advice.

*Many priorities vie for a couple's attention, but nothing is as important as their devotion to God and each other. Building a relationship that honors a marriage commitment helps couples outsmart the "little foxes" that destroy marriages. The Song of Solomon gives us a godly perspective on intimacy in relationships. How do you prioritize for your most valued relationships?*

## Keep In Mind

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song of Solomon 4:16, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Sister** (Song of Solomon 4:9) àchowth (Heb.) — A term of endearment meaning "beloved;" it denotes an intimate relationship.
- B. **Enclosed** (v. 12) naàl (Heb.) — Something that is locked, bolted, or shut up.

## Say It Correctly

**Amana.** a-MA-na

**Calamus.** KAL-a-mus

**Camphire.** KAM-fir

**Hermon.** HUR-mon

**Saffron.** SAF-run

**Shenir.** SHE-ner

**Spikenard.** SPIK-nard

## KJV

**Song of Solomon 4:8** Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

10 How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

11 Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

12 A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

13 Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard,

14 Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

15 A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

16 Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

**5:1a** I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse:

## NLT

**Song of Solomon 4:8** Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Come down from Mount Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, where the lions have their dens and leopards live among the hills.

9 You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride. You hold it hostage with one glance of your eyes, with a single jewel of your necklace.

10 Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride. Your love is better than wine, your perfume more fragrant than spices.

11 Your lips are as sweet as nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. Your clothes are scented like the cedars of Lebanon.

12 You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain.

13 Your thighs shelter a paradise of pomegranates with rare spices—henna with nard,

14 nard and saffron, fragrant calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes, and every other lovely spice.

15 You are a garden fountain, a well of fresh water streaming down from Lebanon's mountains.

16 Awake, north wind! Rise up, south wind! Blow on my garden and spread its fragrance all around. Come into your garden, my love; taste its finest fruits.

**5:1a** I have entered my garden, my treasure, my bride!

## The People, Places, and Times

**Weddings and Marriage.** Compatibility and romance were not necessarily essential to marriages in Solomon's day. In biblical times, couples did not meet, date, fall in love, and then marry. Rather, marriage was a vastly different four-step process that had little to do with emotional involvement. First, fathers chose their sons' brides. Indeed, marriage was an arranged contract between two families who sought alliances with each other for various reasons, such as to enhance a social, territorial, or financial position. Second, to seal the contract, the bridegroom's father paid a "bride price" to the bride's family. Third, the couple became betrothed to each other after their parents ratified the contract either verbally (pre-exile) or by signing a covenant (postexile). The year-long betrothal encompassed the groom-to-be's preparation of the home and the couple's abstinence. Sex between the couple was forbidden, as was sex with other individuals (Deuteronomy 22:13–21; 23–24; 28:2). Fourth, after the successful completion of the betrothal, the couple fulfilled their legal (and

social) responsibility to marry. Wedding feasts—elaborate events that often lasted a week—provided ample opportunity for family and friends to applaud the new alliance and celebrate the marriage consummation.

## Background

Son of King David and Bathsheba, Solomon was part of the lineage of Jesus. He was the third king of Israel. He reigned in Israel for 40 years. Israel was at peace during much of Solomon's reign. During that time, Solomon became renowned for his unequalled wisdom, vast wealth, and impressive Temple construction project (which took seven years to complete). Of the three, wisdom was Solomon's greatest claim to fame. Solomon's wisdom was a gift of God, drawing worldwide acclaim (1 Kings 4:34). Some of Solomon's wisdom is contained in the three thousand proverbs—wise sayings—and more than one thousand songs he wrote. While the authorship of the Song of Solomon—also dubbed the "Song of Songs"—has been debated, many scholars attribute it to King Solomon. By Solomon's day, many men had strayed from God's one-wife design for marriage. Most had multiple wives. Few, however, could attest to having as many as Solomon. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1–13). Concubines, considered to be secondary wives, held lower social rank than women who bore the title "wife." The foreign women in his life influenced Solomon's worship of foreign gods. However, he may have had a change of heart later in life (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## At-A-Glance

1. Invitation to Love (Song of Solomon 4:8–9)
2. Love Expressed (vv. 10–15)
3. Love Cherished (4:16–5:1a)

## In Depth

### 1. Invitation to Love (Song of Solomon 4:8–9)

Song of Solomon remains a text to which Christians can turn for encouragement as they contemplate love and commitment. Every marriage begins with an invitation to love, the point at which a relationship becomes more serious and leads up to the exchange of vows. In today's text, the groom-to-be issues the invitation to love and awaits his beloved's response. He invited his beloved, "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Come down from Mount Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, where the lions have their dens and leopards live among the hills" (Song of Solomon 4:8, NLT). Then he utters the words that have enthralled women for centuries: "You have captured my heart, my treasure, my bride" (from v. 9, NLT). Many singles wonder if they will ever find the suitable mate, while couples wonder how to revive a stalled marriage.

Consider the following: No two men or women are exactly alike. That is why there is no "one size fits all" formula to finding or keeping a mate. Also, it is important to acknowledge that many Christians skip to the altar without first asking God, "Is this the one?" Inviting God into the mate selection process has helped many couples make the right decision. Struggling couples can seek God's help, committing to biblical principles—not worldly wisdom—to renew their commitment to each other.

Many Christians over the centuries have also interpreted this book as an allegory for the marriage between Christ and His Church. In Ephesians 5, Paul said that the relationship between Christ and the Church is reflected in biblical marriage.

## **2. Love Expressed (vv. 10–15)**

Solomon eloquently enumerates the bride's endearing qualities. By doing so, he reminds us that love needs expression. How can married or dating couples express love verbally? First, meditate on a beloved's good or sweet qualities! Second, extol a spouse's physical attributes. For example, Solomon talked about the sweetness of his bride's lips. Third, consider the beauty, joy, and value that your beloved adds to your life.

Sometimes the root of an inability to express love is one or more of the following "little foxes": Past experiences. These include verbal abuse, childhood sexual or physical abuse, a failed marriage, or even wrong advice. Many husbands believe "real men never share their feelings," while many wives heed, "Girl, do not let that man know how much you love him." Whatever the cause, couples can look to God for healing and wholeness, knowing He designed marriage to be the place for couples to experience satisfying love. Harsh words. Sometimes familiarity breeds contempt in marriage as evidenced by how a wife speaks to her husband and vice versa. The apostle James warned, "The tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire" (from James 3:5, NLT). Couples are reminded: "Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them" (Ephesians 4:29, NLT). Family and friends.

Marriages do not play out in enclosed gardens out of the presence of other people's eyes, ears, and comments. Nonetheless, while couples need trusted advisors at different seasons of their marriage, they should rely only on individuals who honor confidentiality. These include friends, family members, church leaders, or marriage counselors who seek the couple's best interests.

## **3. Love Enjoyed (4:16–5:1a)**

Solomon's poetic words whet the appetite for building a marriage that honors a marriage commitment. Acknowledging the following makes this an attainable goal: True love surpasses all else. After the honeymoon, couples need to continually prioritize as they remember the "why" of love and execute the "how" of love. True love is satisfying. It quenches emotional and physical thirsts, thus eliminating the need to sip from any other fountain. True love is physical. Solomon celebrated the beauty of sex in the confines of marriage. It is passionate and fulfilling. Marital sex catapults a couple back to the Garden of Eden where love is freely given and received, and where there is the vulnerability characteristic of being "naked and unashamed." True love is faithful. A husband needs to know he can trust his wife and vice versa. Infidelity is a sin and a serious breach of one's wedding vows. It is important to note that Song of Solomon is applicable for singles, as well. For example, the analogy of the "enclosed garden" reminds singles to reserve intimacy for marriage and to seek other ways to express love to each other.

For single women this means: (1) keeping her garden closed; (2) the Song of Solomon, which is told mostly from the viewpoint of the woman, includes references to her lover's physical attributes, but it also calls for us to look beyond physical attributes to a man's heart; and (3) not buying into society's "ticking clock" mantra. For single men this entails: (1) not pressuring a woman to open her garden; (2) looking beyond physical attributes to a woman's heart; and (3) expressing love in non-physical ways.

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. What did Solomon's beloved do to him (Song of Solomon 4:9)?
2. List some of the things Solomon had to say about her (4:10–15).

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Solomon expressed his feelings for his bride without detailing exactly what occurred in the privacy of their bedroom. What lessons can couples learn from his example? How can couples sidestep questions that are an invasion of marital privacy?

## **Liberating Lesson**

Romance is often talked about in entertainment, social media, and the arts, but rarely in the church. Song of Solomon reminds us that God created and celebrates romance and love between husbands and wives. Why don't we talk more about romantic love in churches? How can we talk about it more in ways that are faithful and healthy?

## **Application For Activation**

Couples seeking to improve their marriages can take lessons from this text. Solomon and the woman knew how to verbally bless each other. Likewise, dating singles headed for the altar can begin today to build a strong foundation for marriage by using uplifting words. One Scripture worth remembering is Ephesians 4:29. Commit it to memory and live it out—beginning today. If you have been guilty of demeaning your husband or wife, ask for forgiveness.

## **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## **More Light on the Text**

### **Song of Solomon 4:8–5:1a**

#### **Introduction**

Until the 19th century, Jewish and Christian communities both interpreted Song of Solomon as an allegory of God's love for His people. Today, the book is recognized for what it really is: love poetry. The Song of Solomon celebrates erotic love as something that is beautiful—a good gift of God for which we should be thankful. However, the book is also clear that sexual expression carries responsibilities with it, and it must conform to God's law in order to be a blessing. We are repeatedly warned against stirring up or awakening love until the right time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Although there is no explicit mention of a marriage ceremony in the book, there can be no doubt that the author only condones sexual intercourse within the bounds of marriage. In this week's passage, the man speaks passionately about his admiration for the woman. In 4:1–7, he praised her beauty by describing her features from the top of her head to her breasts. In verse 8, his focus shifts slightly to the impact that her beauty has on him.

**8 Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.**

The man calls for his lover to come to him from Lebanon, the country to the immediate north of Israel. Shenir (in Hebrew Sheniyr, shen-EER, also known as Senir), a mountain in this area, is part of a range that extends into Lebanon and includes Mount Amana. Hermon is another name for Shenir.

Naming Lebanon and these mountains creates the perception of separation by distance. The mention of lions and leopards paints a picture of danger, but also of mystique, grandeur, and power. It is worth noting that this kind of desolate, mountainous imagery was commonly used in the ancient world in descriptions of goddesses. Although the Jewish author and audience would have rejected the pagan myths of gods and goddesses who engage in sexual relations, the man's words were influenced by that motif. He is saying that his beloved is a goddess to him. She is, at least to this point, "off limits" or inaccessible to him. She does not yet belong to him, so in his mind she might as well be at the top of a distant mountain. He wants her to be close to him.

**9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.**

The phrase "ravished my heart" is used twice to describe the impact the woman has on her suitor. The Hebrew verb *labab* (law-BAB) comes from the word for "heart" and occurs in an intensified stem that emphasizes the resulting state. It could mean that she leaves him feeling weak or shaken; it may also mean that she energizes and arouses him. The New International Version translates this as "stolen my heart." The New Living Translation renders it as "captured my heart." Less formal ways to capture the sentiment being expressed could include "I am hopelessly in love with you" (Garrett, 406) or "You drive me crazy!" (Longman, 151).

The man referring to the woman as "sister" was not unusual to the original audience. This was a common expression of romantic affection in the Ancient Near East. It certainly implies marriage because in his mind they are family.

All that it takes to capture his attention is "one glance of [her] eyes" or "one jewel of [her] necklace" (NIV). The Hebrew word translated "chain of thy neck" is *'anaq* (aw-NAWK), and it refers to a beaded jewel from a necklace. Since goddesses in the Ancient Near East were frequently portrayed nude except for a necklace, this may be another subtle reference to goddess myths.

**10 How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!**

Having described the impact the woman has on him in verses 8 and 9, the man now focuses on the sensory experience of her love. A man of fewer words would simply say, "I love everything about you." But that would not do justice to her beauty. The only fitting way to communicate his captivation with her is to use finely crafted metaphors that compare her attributes to the finest and best things known in the ancient world.

Wine has already been used as an analogy for love in this book (1:2; 1:4). A fine wine has both mood-altering power and a sophisticated, refined beauty. The comparison of her love with wine says that her love is elegant and has an intoxicating effect. Her "ointments" are her perfumes. The Hebrew word translated "spices" is *besem* (BEH-sem). Also used in verse 14, *besem* was an ingredient in the anointing oil used in the temple (Exodus 25:6) and was given to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:2, 10, 25). Doubtless, it was a valuable, high-end product. By comparing her scent to the most prized fragrances of the day, the man is saying that not only does he prefer her to anyone or anything else, but she is also the gold standard.

**11 Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.**

Honey and honeycomb were highly prized luxury items in the Ancient Near East. Note that when Jacob wanted to pacify the ruler of Egypt, he instructed his sons to take a gift package that included, among other things, honey (Genesis 43:11). "Milk and honey" are common expressions in

the Old Testament used to indicate fertility, prosperity, and an abundance of good things. In other words, honey and milk were some of the best things in the ancient world. The appeal of this kind of luxury item is multidimensional: sweetness perfectly balanced with texture and aroma. Such delicacies cannot be properly enjoyed quickly, but must be savored. He is dreaming of long, slow kisses.

At the time of Solomon, Lebanon was renowned for its cedar forests. To say that the smell of her clothes is like the smell of a cedar forest does not necessarily mean that she smells like cedar. However, there is something ideal about the aroma of Lebanon and her aroma is likewise a very fine thing. Note that in the first seven verses of Song of Solomon 4, her hair is compared to a flock of goats and her breasts are compared to gazelles. This kind of metaphor **does not indicate resemblance, but a shared standard of excellence or quality.**

**12 A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.**

The appeal of the woman is based not only on her excellent physical features, but on her skill in self-presentation, air of nobility, and overpowering charm. Her virtue overpowers and enhances all these charms. She is not readily available for any who want her—or even for her lover at this point in the poem. The fact that she has saved herself for him and has waited for the right time to consummate their love intensifies his desire for her.

The Hebrew word translated “garden” is gan (gan). Gardens in the Ancient Near East had more in common with our parks than what we typically think of as a “garden.” Although they would have contained a variety of herbs, vegetables, fruit trees, and flowering plants (see verses 13 and 14), they were not simply thought of as a place to grow things. Rather, they were regarded as sources of great beauty and pleasure. By using this garden metaphor, the man is building anticipation for the day his lover gives herself fully to him.

Fountains were another source of pleasure to the ancients and a metaphor for sexual pleasure. A garden is a feast to the senses of sight, smell, and taste; a fountain satisfies the eye as well as refreshing the skin and quenching the thirst of the one who partakes of it. Proverbs 5:18–20 describes the wife of his youth as a fountain and exhorts him to be delighted with her breasts.

In Song of Solomon 4:12, the Hebrew word translated “inclosed” is na’al (naw-AL) and is used to refer to “locked” doors elsewhere in the Old Testament. She is “shut up” and “sealed” so that no one has yet been able to enjoy the pleasure she has to offer. Of course, her virginity is evidence of her moral integrity. But the overriding thought here is that she recognizes it would be a tragedy to throw her pearls before swine. Her sexuality is a valuable commodity—too valuable to be wasted on the wrong man or used at the wrong time.

**13 Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, 14 Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:**

The man extends the garden metaphor to praise the excellence of the woman’s love by listing a variety of plants found in her garden.

The Hebrew word translated “orchard” is pardec (par-DACE), a word used only rarely in the Old Testament and a noticeable change from the word gan in verse 12. Although we shouldn’t read too much into it, pardec is the word from which the English word “paradise” is derived. The list of plants is impressive.

Pomegranates are an edible fruit slightly smaller than a grapefruit with a reddish color. Inside its

thick skin are roughly 600 arils—seeds covered with juicy pulp. The arils separate from each other and are eaten raw. “Camphire” (Heb. kopher, KO-fer) is henna, a shrub that bears white flowers. It is still used today to make orange dye for hair, nails, fingers, and toes.

“Spikenard” (Heb. nerd, nayrd) is nard, an aromatic plant native to the Himalayas, China, and Japan. It was used to make perfume that was quite costly in ancient times. Mark 14:3 and John 12:3 report that the perfume used to anoint Jesus at Bethany was pure nard, and its cost aggravated certain disciples—most notably Judas Iscariot.

“Saffron” is a type of crocus with purple flowers native to Asia, Asia Minor, and the eastern Mediterranean. It produces an oil with a sweet, spicy floral scent.

“Calamus” (Heb. qaneh, kaw-NEH) is an aromatic reed or sweet cane, probably imported from northern India (cf. Jeremiah 6:20).

“Cinnamon” can refer to the aromatic bark of a number of trees. “Frankincense” and “myrrh” are fragrant tree gums; along with gold, they were the tribute gifts given to Jesus by the Magi. Calamus, cinnamon, and myrrh were ingredients in the anointing oil used by the temple priests (Exodus 30:23). Cinnamon, myrrh, and aloes are mentioned by the adulteress of Proverbs 7:17 as perfumes for her bed. A large amount of myrrh and aloes was used by Nicodemus in the wrapping and burial of Jesus’ body (John 19:39).

Even a brief survey of this list reveals several important facts. First, there is a wide diversity of plants, many of which are not native to Palestine. The chances are low that any one garden would contain all of these items. Clearly, the man is speaking of an ideal “dream” garden—not comparing her to one with which he is familiar. Second, all of the plants mentioned are beautiful; many appeal to more than one sense. Third, this list contains items that were highly prized and extremely valuable. To him, she is beyond comparison. She has no equal. Her love satisfies his every desire, and he could never be satisfied with anyone else.



# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Genesis 1:26-31

## **Tuesday**

Genesis 2:18-24

## **Wednesday**

Jeremiah 3:1-5

## **Thursday**

Hosea 2:16-23

## **Friday**

1 John 4:7-12

## **Saturday**

1 Corinthians 13

## **Sunday**

Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1