

## **INVEST IN THE BEST**

### Song of Songs – Various Verses

Most marriages and relationships do not fail during the courtship and honeymoon phase simply because both the individuals are careful to give attention to the other person and are sensitive to their desires. Following the early times of exhilaration and the return to routine life, one or both of the marriage partners may allow other demands to divert attention from investing in the marriage. As a result, feelings can be injured and that can lead to a need for restoration or revival.

The same series of changes can be seen not only in a marriage but also can be found in a new job, a newly found hobby, and can even impact church membership as well as the relationship of a new Christian with Christ. The things that allow restoration are the presence of a strong foundation of true love and a desire to rediscover that special elation that created the initial enthusiasm.

#### Longing Love – 5:6-8

<sup>6</sup> “I opened to my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and had gone! My heart went out to him as he spoke. I searched for him but I did not find him; I called him but he did not answer me.” <sup>7</sup> “The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, They struck me and wounded me; The guardsmen of the walls took away my shawl from me.” <sup>8</sup> “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, If you find my beloved, As to what you will tell him: For I am lovesick.” Song of Solomon 5:6–8 (NASB95)

The situation pictured in these verses would seem to be that some time after the wedding night the husband had gone away on business for a period of time. When he later returned home at night, his wife was too sleepy to open the door to allow him to come in. As a consequence, he withdrew for a period of time to a secluded place.

After he had left without being welcomed in, she finally decided that she would open the door only to find that he was gone. She was inclined to get up and let him come in but she failed to follow through on what her heart desired. Then, she tried to find him in the streets of the town but, instead, the watchmen found her and treated her poorly.

She then went to those who were familiar with her husband and asked them to speak to her husband if they found him and assure him that she was eager for him to return.

**Israel:** An allegorical lesson from this segment of the poem can be applied to Israel’s relationship to God. The earlier description of the wedding night and the bliss of that experience (Chapter 4) might apply to God meeting with the liberated and newly founded nation at Mount Sinai. That description concluded with verse 5:1 that described the consummation of the marriage. Sometime later, the Lord (Israel’s Husband) came to the Israel to “commune” with her again. This could be related to the first Advent of the Messiah. He appeared in fulfillment of the promises to come to Israel; however, she was too sleepy and had settled in her own created comfort (formal religion) so that she did not welcome Him.

This rejection happened at the same time the nation was “looking for the coming Messiah” which continues to be a “heart’s desire” for Israel. Even today, Israel continues to look for the Messiah to come and is searching in the “streets of the world.” While doing that, those who are of the world have only abuse for her and treat her shamelessly.

**Church (Historically):** If this account is tied to the church and its relationship to Christ, then we could relate the bliss of the wedding night with the Resurrection and the events that followed in the early years of the church. There were tremendous growth and miracles during that time. Before the end of the first century, there was evidence that some had “settled in for the

night” and when Christ showed up at the door, there was a reluctance to let Him in. We see a picture of this in John’s account of the Seven Churches of the Revelation. In Laodicia we find Christ standing at the door of the church, knocking on it to be allowed in.

When the church awakened enough to again seek the Lord who was not to be found in the streets of the world, persecution and abuse followed. This continued through the period of the Dark Ages and a realization of where to find Him came about in the period of the Reformation.

**Church (Today):** There have been “awakenings” on various occasions in which revival has occurred in the church in last several centuries. Starting in 1731, there have been at least four so-call Great Awakenings. These would last for several decades and would be followed by a waning of ardor for the Lord. In between these times secularism would strengthen and there would be ridicule and abuse of believers. We are seeing such abuse following the last awakening that waned around 1980.

**Marriage:** The lessons to be learned from this account that can be applied to individuals in their marriage are somewhat challenging to apply. The enthusiasm of the honeymoon period following the wedding can cool and other things take on elements of urgency and importance. When one spouse is in an amorous mood and the other is not, then that can result in a remoteness that develops in their relationship. Efforts to restore the former enthusiasm of the relationship can result in looking for solutions in the philosophies of the world and many times that can lead to a worsening of the remoteness and pain for both spouses.

As in the case of the Shulammitte and her husband, spouses may find opportunity during times of estrangement to pass along information to each other through their friends that tells of their continuing love for each other.

### Exclusive Love – 6:1-3

<sup>1</sup> “Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, That we may seek him with you?” <sup>2</sup> “My beloved has gone down to his garden, To the beds of balsam, To pasture his flock in the gardens And gather lilies.” <sup>3</sup> “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine, He who pastures his flock among the lilies.” Song of Solomon 6:1–3 (NASB95)

Whether it was Israel, the early church, the modern day church or individual spouses, those who are engaged to help are willing, but do not offer a lot of meaningful help. The question raised in verse 6:1 was the second question that the “friends” asked. The first (verse 5:9) was to request a description which the Shulammitte provided as to the handsomeness of her beloved. This description was so well done that the friends were eager to help her find him so that they could behold his handsomeness. It is not at all clear that their motives were pure in that they may have been thinking of enticing her beloved to pay attention of them.

It then occurred to the Shulammitte that her beloved would be in his place of work and productivity or in his garden where he pastured his flocks. So she dismissed the “interest” of her friends by asserting that she and her husband have an exclusive relationship with the statement that I am his, and he is mine.

**Israel:** In the case of physical or natural Israel, she has not yet discovered where God is working or what is His garden where He pastures His flocks. While this is true of the collective, there are many individuals of Israelite heritage who have found God working through Christ in His Church. The idea of exclusivity that is pictured in the ideal marriage of humans cannot be applied indiscriminately to God’s relationship with His people. The nation of Israel could not understand why God would save other nations who were not descendants of Abraham though his legitimate son Isaac and then through Jacob. God’s plan included not just these physical

descendant but all who had the faith of Abraham. What kind of faith was that? *Abraham believed God and that was accounted unto him as righteousness.* This same criterion was required even of those who were physically descendant from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's special promises are exclusively for those who believe or what has been call "spiritual Israel."

**Church (Historically):** When the traditional church was incorporated into secular government, the true church was difficult to find and yet Christ was at work among His people. Those who were faithfully devoted to and followed the Way that Christ demonstrated found Him adding to the church (gathering lilies) and feeding His sheep. They did not find Him in the streets which would represent the church-state coalition. Those who represented this coalition were the one who abused those who were true believers.

**Church (Today):** The same question that the friends of the Shulammitte asked – "Where has your beloved gone?" is being asked by many today. People are seeking salvation even though they do not call it that. What they really want is security for the present and have little or no concept of an eternal future. Consequently, many have embraced government and secular teachings as the means of salvation. Yet, the answer as to where "the beloved" has turned has never changed. He is working in His garden which is euphemistically the true church and in the heart of true believers.

One possible lesson that we can draw from the scene of the wife being too sleepy to respond to her husband who was knocking on the door is that when Christ comes to us with an opportunity for ministry and we are too preoccupied (either as a local church body or as an individual), then he withdraws and presents that opportunity to another local body or another individual. The local body or the individual may realize (too late) that an opportunity for ministry was missed and then may go out on their own searching for ministry opportunities by looking in the streets and trying to create an opportunity. Thus is born any number of "church programs" that are little more than flashes in the pan which typically produce very little in terms of long-term results.

**Marriage:** Trying to apply this passage to spouses in a marriage relationship could be used to explain why both men and women get absorbed by career and job responsibilities and spend so little time in cultivating a healthy home life for a successful marriage and family. If the husband of the Shulammitte in the account were the young shepherd, then he might simply return to his flocks and gather some lilies as a diversion needed from his being temporarily rejected. On the other hand, if the husband was Solomon, then he might have gone to his "garden" (or harem) to find another "wife" for that time. This would certainly not be applicable to an ideal marriage that advocates exclusive love between the two spouses.

#### True Love – 8:4-7

<sup>4</sup> "I want you to swear, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not arouse or awaken my love Until she pleases." <sup>5</sup> "Who is this coming up from the wilderness Leaning on her beloved?" "Beneath the apple tree I awakened you; There your mother was in labor with you, There she was in labor and gave you birth." <sup>6</sup> "Put me like a seal over your heart, Like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, Jealousy is as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, The very flame of the LORD." <sup>7</sup> "Many waters cannot quench love, Nor will rivers overflow it; If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, It would be utterly despised." Song of Solomon 8:4-7 (NASB95)

In the context of the story in the poem, the woman gives advice to the daughters of Jerusalem to be cautious in keeping their emotions and passion under control in situations that might result in sexual intimacy until it is appropriate. As we understand God's plan for such relationships, the only appropriate situation is in marriage. This is the third time this warning was given which shows the importance of the message. Even in the context of marriage, the

admonishment could be interpreted to mean that one should not rush into such relationships but should let it develop naturally as a result of the support and embracing that was described in verse 3 immediately preceding this advice.

The daughters of Jerusalem then repeated the question that was asked in verse 3:6 with regard to the arrival of Solomon coming to the wedding ceremony. Now the two of them are together and she is dependent or leaning upon him. It is not clear as to why they would be coming from the wilderness unless there is an implication that she had found him in his garden and now they were returning to their home in Jerusalem.

The second part of verse 5 is thought to be the words of the woman directed toward her beloved since the words used pertaining to the person to whom the statements are referenced are masculine. The use of the term “apple tree” is a euphemistic reference to a situation of romantic love and she told him that she had awakened or gotten his attention because of the allure or attraction of romantic love. This was the same situation than had resulted in his conception by his mother and father.

There was then a request by the wife that her husband view her as the “seal” over his heart and arm that would indicate that she belonged to him as his most valued possession. The intent was that this would influence his thoughts (heart) and his actions (arm).

The reason this reminder was needed is found summed up in an explanation of the nature and power of the love described in this poem. True love is a universal and irresistible love in the same way that death is universal and irresistible. True love is exclusive and possessive with genuine concern as the grave is possessive and will not give up those who reside there. It is as passionate as a blazing fire. It is persevering as a flowing river and the final thing about true love is that it is priceless. Since it is priceless, it cannot be sold and bought, it must be given and received.

The application to the church and its relationship with Christ is that we need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The lesson of verse 8:4 is that we must be careful to be neither running ahead nor lagging behind Christ’s support and His provoking us as individuals and as the Church to do the work of the ministry of the church.

Just as the wife was leaning on her husband as they traveled, we should always be trusting and relying on the Lord in all things in which we are involved.

In the second part of verse 8:5, we could argue that just as Christ was conceived in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the same way Christ is conceived in us by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit by which we are born again of the Spirit and experience new life in Christ.

It was because of His immeasurable and priceless love for us that prompted the Father to send His Son to redeem us from the world and to prepare us to be the Bride of Christ. He is always faithful and always looks out for our best interest and to prove that He has sealed us with His Spirit as His mark upon us for all eternity. In addition to all this He has poured out His love into our hearts so that we can love Him as He loves us.