

“Song of Songs” – Part 2

The great theologian and philosopher, Huey Lewis, said this about love in 1985:

*The power of love is a curious thing
Make a one man weep, make another man sing
Change a hawk to a little white dove
More than a feeling, that's the power of love*

Love. We all want it. We all need it. Wars have been fought for it. Many have died for it or lack of it. It supposedly makes the world go 'round and yet some people say it stinks. Do you realize that since the beginning of time, or at least since people started writing music, the number one subject for songs of every style of music from country to rock to jazz to opera and in every country and every society and every form of music is love. That's the number one topic for all songs.

How long would it take for humanity to completely cease to exist if there were no love? I don't think it would take long. And, yet, as Burt Bacharach sang, what the world needs now more than ever is love, sweet love! And what we don't need is another silly love song...as Paul McCartney sang about.

Love and love songs go hand in hand. Something about being in love brings out the singer / songwriter in almost everybody at some point. It has always been that way. It was that way with King Solomon who lived several thousand years ago and that is why we have the little romance novel between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah in the Old Testament.

Song of Songs or Song of Solomon (either is correct) is Solomon's greatest hit. It is the best of Solomon in his prime and before he forgot or lost sight of what God blesses in a relationship. It is a tribute to his beloved girlfriend and then wife but it is also poetry. It is also wisdom. It is truth. Throw in some very descriptive language and what you have is a fascinating book that God wants you to read and understand.

Now, that understanding part can be difficult since it was written so many years ago and written unlike any other book of the Bible but there is plenty to learn from it. And one of the things we can learn is what God wants and expects and has designed for a marriage to last. As bad as everybody wants to be loved and craves love and sings songs about love, the best our society today can do is about half of all marriages last. Why is that? What can we do about that?

Well, you could go to the bookstore or library and get about 1000 different books that will give their opinion on how to make your marriage last but about half of those authors are probably divorced. Or maybe you want me to stand up here and give my opinion on how to do it, with all my great experience and wisdom. If you do want that, I can also give you expert advice on the best shampoos to use and what foods to eat to help you lose weight.

But if those ideas don't do it for you, how about we go to the Word of God? Turn to the book of Song of Songs. The book is not all about romance and describing the various body parts of the couple here in love. They actually get married and well after the wedding are still making goo goo eyes at each other, but we will skip most of that. You're welcome.

Before we even get into the passages we are going to read, let me just tell you that the way to keep a marriage alive is to do it the way God designed. God is the author of marriage and sex and love. He designed it and when done according to His rules, there is no greater relationship a person can have except with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And I will start by saying that God's design is for one man and one woman to be married. And that marriage starts with a wedding. I hear people all the time say that a wedding is just a piece of paper. That doesn't make a husband and wife and it's not necessary. And do you know what? I agree that the piece of paper is not necessary. What is necessary is standing up before God and all your friends and family and saying, *"This is my one. He / she is my only one forever. I am now and always with them."*

The wedding itself may look different depending on when and where you live and the customs of the day. Isaac and Rebecca had a wedding. In their custom, when a man and woman walked into a tent together by themselves, everybody knew what that meant. There was no other reason why that would happen. They were married. In the New Testament, weddings might be week-long parties with lots of food and wine and dancing. It doesn't matter today if you go to the Justice of the Peace or have a fancy church wedding. What is important is that there is a wedding.

Starting your relationship by shacking up or even having sex before the wedding is a great way to sabotage your marriage. It's not God's way and He will not bless that kind of relationship. The good news is that there is always forgiveness but there may still be consequences.

If you are planning a wedding, chapter 3 of Song of Songs might give you some good ideas. Guys, if you want to impress your bride-to-be, you just pick her up in a carriage like Solomon's. His fiancé looks down the road and sees this huge crowd coming towards her. She says there is smoke coming from the carriage but it is not on fire. It is actually just all the incense and spices that are being burned as they travel. The carriage is described in detail and I'll let you read that but he is being escorted by sixty armed warriors and the last verse says he is wearing the crown his mother gave him for the day of his wedding.

Chapter 4 is probably rated PG as they both describe each other on the wedding night and then consummate the marriage and **chapter 5** has an interesting verse that, in my Bible is attributed to their friends. It says, *"Eat, oh friends, and drink. Drink your fill oh lovers."* To me, it doesn't make sense or is at least kinda creepy that their friends would be encouraging them like this. Are they looking through the windows at the couple lying in bed? I don't think so. I think these words are God's words encouraging them to enjoy it. Have fun. Knock yourselves out. That's part of why God invented sex.

But, as everybody knows, marriage is not all about sex, to say the least, right? How do we make it last? What's the secret? Would anybody here like to tell what your secret is to making a marriage last? Tell me in one or two sentences.

There are several things we can do to make sure our marriages are blessed and we can learn from Solomon starting in **chapter 2 verse 15**. The book kind of skips around a bit. It's not necessarily in chronological order but in **2:15**, after Solomon has once again complimented her on the way she looks, he says something interesting. Look at chapter 2, verse 15 where Solomon tells his beloved, *"Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards that are in bloom."*

Now, if you think this is a weird time to tell your wife to go catch some wild critters, you are right. But he is not concerned about his literal vineyard at this point. He is staring deep into his lovers eyes and telling her he wants to get anything out in the open and taken care of that might hurt their relationship. He just says it in a pretty, poetic way; and in a way that she would understand.

She has worked in a vineyard and she knows that foxes could wreak havoc there. They scurry around and dig up the roots. They gnaw at the vines and eat the berries and basically cause all kinds of problems. Solomon doesn't want that in their relationship. He is in love with and committed to her and wants to get to the root of any problem before it becomes an issue.

Let's get rid of the problem of jealousy before we go any further. Let's talk about our money issues and trust issues. Let's bring out into the open between the two of us our past histories of drug use or sexual abuse. What about that little thing he does that drives you nuts? Does he squeeze the toothpaste from the middle? Let's talk about it. Does she bite the end of her pen and that bothers you? It's time to communicate.

Now, when you hear me say couples need to communicate, you've heard that before. You will probably hear it again next week at our marriage seminar. Everybody knows communication is important. But so many people think communication means I get to talk. I get to explain in long monologues how I feel and what I think. And there is a time

for that. But the most important part, the overwhelmingly most important part of communication is listening; deep listening.

Two psychiatrists meet at their 20th college reunion. One is vibrant, while the other looks withered and worried. "So, what's your secret?" the older looking psychiatrist asks. "Listening to other people's problems every day, all day long, for years on end, has made an old man of me." "So," replies the younger looking one, "who listens?" (American Health, quoted in Reader's Digest.)

Nobody said it was going to be easy but if you are going to rid your vineyard of all those little pesky foxy problems that will blow your marriage up, you have to communicate and about 95% of communication is listening. Not listening until they take a breath so you can tell them how to solve the problem. Just listen.

I've told some of you before that when I get fired from this job I'm going to start a company called "Ears to You." All I'm going to do is listen to people talk all day long. I'll start by asking a question or two and then for the next hour I'll just say, "Really? Then what? Wow! Tell me more." It'll be a dollar a minute and I think I'll soon be a millionaire because the need is so great for people to have somebody to listen to them. I see it every day.

Teenage prostitutes, during interviews in a San Francisco study, were asked: "Is there anything you needed most and couldn't get?" Their response, invariably preceded by sadness and tears was unanimous: "**What I needed most was someone to listen to me. Someone who cared enough to listen to me.**" (Jim Reapsome, Homemade.)

Listening is hard to do. We all want to be heard. We all want to talk and express ourselves but give your spouse time to just talk and you just listen. That's a huge step in getting rid of those little foxes. Solomon later wrote in **Proverbs 18:13** that he who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame. It is shameful to not listen, especially to your spouse.

Now, obviously the other side of communication is speaking. And I want us to look at how these two lovebirds spoke to each other. The first thing you notice is that they spoke to each other a lot. There is constant back and forth between the two. They praise each other. They praise the other's speech. They don't interrupt each other and they are free to give without embarrassment and free to receive without resentment.

They speak to each other a lot but you can tell they are also listening when the other is speaking. They also speak very personally and lovingly. She calls him her lover or loved one and he calls her his beloved. They have ways of making each feel unique and special. **Ephesians 5:22** says that wives should submit to their own husbands. Ladies, did you know that word "own" comes from the Greek word "idios" from which we get "idiosyncrasy" and "idiot"? So, it says ladies submit to your idiot husbands! No, not really. It really means to submit to your unique husbands. Your spouse is unique and you should treat them like it with your words.

These two speak **a lot**. They speak **lovingly** and they speak **positively**. If you read the whole book, neither of them says anything negative about the other. In chapter 5, verse 2, he calls her "my love, my dove, my undefiled." That "undefiled" literally means flawless. Now, she was a human so she had to have some faults but Solomon overlooks those and tells her she is perfect, at least perfect for him.

Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Do you realize that is a command? That's not a suggestion. If your speech to anybody else, much less your spouse, is not full of grace, then that is sin. But your spouse ought to get your most grace-filled speech. I know there will be arguments and disagreements but they won't last as long or be near as hurtful if your speech is seasoned with salty grace.

You say, "My spouse doesn't deserve grace." I understand that and you are right but grace doesn't go to those that deserve it. If it did, it wouldn't be grace. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. That's the definition. God shows you grace every day. He loves you, not because you are lovely and beautiful and deserve to be loved. No, He loves you in

spite of knowing what you did last night or last year or all those years before. He knows you and He loves you and shows you grace. So, let your words, to especially your spouse, be filled with grace.

Again, I know this is hard. And maybe right now you are thinking it's just too hard. I can't do this. My spouse is too hard to live with and it's just not worth it. Why should I even try? Well, let me give you a couple of reasons why you need to continue in your marriage. First, God hates divorce. He says so very plainly in **Malachi chapter 2**. Sin is anything that displeases God and so if God says He hates something, stay away from it! I don't want to be a part of anything God hates. There will be consequences. Trust me.

Another reason to stay with your mate is because the world is watching you. You, who claim to be Jesus-followers, are being watched. You are being watched by the world but you are also being watched by your kids, your grandkids, the kids at church and all their friends. I have said before that divorce is child abuse. I know you love your kids but there are not many things you can do to warp a kid worse than divorcing their father or mother. And it does not matter how old the kids are. Grown adult children are warped by their parents' divorce. I have seen it.

But I hear ya. Some of you right now are thinking, *"But God doesn't want me to be miserable."* I have heard that over and over. And you are right. God doesn't want you to be miserable but He is way more concerned with your holiness than He is your happiness and you can't be holy, separate, different from the world if you live like every other worldly person and displease God with a divorce. If you love God, then you will make the choice to love your spouse. And it is a choice.

You will choose to stay with them even though they don't deserve it. You will choose to speak to them lovingly and with grace even though they don't deserve it. And you will choose to listen to them intently even though they don't deserve it. And that's so difficult. Marriage is difficult. But when done according to God's plan, you also have God's power and His blessing. So, it can be done – through Him. I can do all things – even stay married to this crazy person – through Christ who strengthens me!

Is Jesus at work in your life and marriage today? Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and make sure there is no sin causing a barrier between you and God right now. Ask God to show you if there is any sin in your life. Maybe it's something you aren't even aware of. Then ask Him for forgiveness right now.

Maybe you don't have a relationship with Jesus today. I have no idea how to help your marriage. I really don't. I don't know how anybody makes it in this life without knowing God intimately. Why don't you make that choice today? Make the choice to allow God to come into your life and change you, forgive you and make you more like Him. Make Him Lord of your life today. Do it right now as the music plays.