

**Directions:**

This is a booklet to aid you in your personal study of this book. Read through the text first, discovering God's precious truths for yourself. Write down the main point of each section of text in the space provided. Use the margins on each side of the text and the backside of the page to make notations of the truths you discover and passages you do not understand. When you believe you have seen all there is in text, read and answer the questions in the booklet pertaining to that section of text. The questions are not an exhaustive list of things to look for in the text. The questions are to help you consider the points that the author was trying to convey to his audience. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

**Introduction:**

The Song of Songs contains a beautiful poetic song expressing romantic love between a young man and a young woman in ancient Israel. Beyond this there is much disagreement over the way to interpret this Song. Throughout the centuries many have interpreted this Song as an allegory of God's love for Israel or as an allegory of Christ's love for the church. However, this has changed in recent years as studies have found that the language in the Song of Songs is common romantic love imagery that used in songs and poetry in ancient near eastern times. The Song is therefore seen as the telling of the story of two people who are betrothed, become married and enjoy the love they have for each other. God uses this song to teach us about godly dating and marriage relationships.

It is important to note that this Song is written from the perspective of the woman, not the man. This suggests that many of the lessons are instructions to women. Proverbs was written from the perspective of a father giving wise instruction to his son. Therefore, many of the lessons center on what a young man needs to know for life. This does not mean both gender cannot learn much from either book. But it reminds us that there is a particular audience in mind.

Read through Song of Songs in one sitting, noticing the themes and headers in your Bible. Write down some of the key themes and words you see:

1. What do you know about the book called "Song of Songs?" What methods of interpretation have you heard for understanding the book? What are some unusual features of the book?
2. Why would people gravitate to an allegorical interpretation for the book? Are there problems with interpreting Song of Songs allegorically?
3. Should the sexual language bother us because it is in scriptures? Are there other places in scriptures that speak of human sexuality (cf. Proverbs 5:15-23)?

4. What is unique about the “wisdom books” (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) in the Old Testament canon? What kind of theology do they present?
  
5. The first verse of the book tells us this is a song. Why would song be in scripture? As you answer consider the difference below.

Consider the difference

She walks in beauty, like the night  
 Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
 And all that's best of dark and bright  
 Meet in her aspect and her eyes.  
 Thus mellowed to that tender light  
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies. (Lord Byron)

or      A woman in a black dress with shiny beads  
 looked pretty as she walked by.

**Preparing Your Mind For Poetry:**

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
 And sorry I could not travel both  
 And be one traveler, long I stood  
 And looked down one as far as I could  
 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
 And having perhaps the better claim  
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
 Though as for that the passing there  
 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
 In leaves no step had trodden black.  
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,  
 I took the one less traveled by,  
 And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

6. How should the above poem be interpreted? Is it literal? Is it full of metaphors? What is the meaning?
  
7. What does a song tell us about the way we should consider interpreting Song of Songs? Should we take everything we read in the Song of Songs literally or see romantic love metaphors?

### **Further Thoughts**

The text in no way implies that some historical event is being preserved. It is poetry. It is a song. We need to think of it as a song. Think of it being sung. Think of the artistry. It has highly figurative language and telling us it is a song allows us to interpret in this way. Poetry contains the art of being highly expressive in a minimal amount of word usage. Or using words that invokes the senses of the mind and heart.

Consider that there is a distinction between clinical language, crude language, and poetic language about love and sex. We even use some of that imagery to kindly speak of love in a way that is not crude but is not clinical (eg. birds and the bees; gardens; meadows; flowers). We do not speak about perspiration and heart rates but you make my heart "go pitter patter."

The language is similar to ANE love poetry. It is not unusual how it is written. What it writes about is unusual in that it has no cultic reference (no love/sex with pagan sacrifices) and it glorifies marital love rather than fornication. The song speaks about human love, which is what God gave us. Immediately after creation, consider what we read about with Adam: (1) Not good to be alone (2) Leave parents, be joined together, and become one flesh.

There are hundreds of interpretations for the Song of Songs. Rather than going through all of the possibilities and meanings, the plan of this study will be to read the text and take the most natural sounding picture as the means of interpretation. This workbook will help with some of the image difficulties along the way. Keep an open mind as you read, as if you are reading a poem, because this is a poem. Listen to the beauty of God's word in song: The Song of Songs.

8. Why is a study of this book needed now more than perhaps ever?

Write down any additional questions and notes below:

# SONG OF SONGS

# 1:1-7

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

In Song of Songs 3:11 we see a description that it is the wedding day and what follows are images of a wedding ceremony. This sets the stage for how we should look at the poetry we are reading here. The first three chapters show courting and dating. We are reading love poetry about a relationship between a man and a woman that is moving toward marriage. So as we read the first few chapters we should look at this in the context of the dating relationship.

## 1:1-4

1. Give a summary of her words.
  
2. What does she describe that is attracting her to him?
  
3. What does she desire to do with him?

In verse 4 she expresses the desire to spend intimate alone time together. We are going to see throughout this Song that there is a fight to spend private time together. They are continually looking for alone time together. A couple translations suggest that this is the bedroom. "Chambers" can refer to a bedroom in scriptures but the word merely means "the innermost part of the house." There was a need for privacy for kissing, especially in that day. "Romantic kissing was assumed but kept away from the public gaze" (Hess, 49; cf. 8:1). There is still somewhat of a stigma today for kissing in public, though it does not at all seem to be to the degree that we are reading about in that time. But it is not hard to see that there was a need for privacy when kissing and that is what they are longing for and find privacy for. The point is not that they are starting a sexual relationship before marriage. The point is that they want to spend time together, to the exclusion of others. They want time alone, away from distractions. This is natural. You start ignoring your friends and spending more time with the person you are dating. When you spend time together, you spend the time without distraction, doing things together.

4. How should we understand the "king" reference in verse 4?
  
5. What do the other women think of him?

Notice also that she calls him "the king." Scholar and commentator Tremper Longman writes, "It is best to take the reference neither historically nor ritually, but rather as a poetic device. It is love language. She refers to him as king, but this must not be taken literally. In her eyes, he is a king, the best and most powerful male in her life, worthy of the highest honor. Elsewhere, she calls him a shepherd (1:7), but that is not literal either. These are terms of endearment. The Song is best understood as creating a poetic world, not as describing actual events" (Longman, 92). We use the same kind of language today in love and poetry. He should be your "Prince Charming." Women speak of certain men as their "knight in shining armor." Is he really a knight? Is he really a prince? Ladies, if one of you said to the other that the prince took you on vacation, you would not think that she was having an affair with a prince. You would understand that the prince is the husband. It seems best to do the same here, remember that this is a song with strong poetic metaphors in use.

### **1:5-7**

6. How does she speak of herself?

7. Why is she dark?

8. How should we understand the "shepherd" imagery in verse 7?

9. What lessons do we learn for our relationships?

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

1. After her own description of herself, what does he say about her?
2. How specific are his complements? Also, what does he call her?

### King or shepherd?

The discussion has been of flocks, herds, shepherds, and vineyards. But the rest of chapter 1 speaks of a table, expensive and exotic perfumes, and spices from far away places. First he was called a king and now he is called a shepherd. This may be confusing to us because we do not usually associate shepherds and kings. This confusion has led some to suggest that there are two men, one who is a king and one who is a shepherd. However, the confusion simply indicates how far our world is from the world of David's day. In the ancient Near East in the second and first millenniums B.C., kings from Greece to Egypt to Persia were called shepherds. Notice that the Lord calls Cyrus of Persia "my shepherd" (Isa 44:28). In Jeremiah 2:4-13 four classes of leaders are castigated: the priests, the legal authorities, the rulers, and the prophets. The Hebrew term for the rulers is ro'im (lit., "shepherds"). She is still calling him by pet names. Whether he is truly a king or truly a shepherd or neither is not relevant to the poet. To her, he is her king. To her, he is her shepherd. (cf. Expositor's Bible Commentary).

**Nard** (NIV, "perfume"; ASV, KJV, NKJV, "spikenard") was an ointment derived from a plant that grew in northern and eastern India. It was considered very fragrant and quite expensive. It was used as a love charm in the ancient Near East, as were other aromatic oils (cf. Luke 7:36-50). (Expositors' Bible Commentary).

**Henna** was a Palestinian shrub. Its leaves were used to produce a bright orange-red cosmetic dye. It has been used in the Near East to color the hair, hands, and feet. We still know it as a hair dye. Its blossoms, however, were quite fragrant.

**En Gedi**, an oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, was an extraordinarily fertile place because of its spring.

3. What does she call him? What is he to her?
4. What are they building together?
5. What lessons do we learn for our relationships?

# SONG OF SONGS

# 2

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

The second chapter of the Song of Songs continues where the first chapter left off. She has been describing the beauty of her beloved and the strength of the relationship that they are building together. The first verse of chapter 2 is the woman describing herself. She says, "I'm just an ordinary flower." "Rose" is not a proper translation, but KJV translators didn't know what flower it was referring to. But the translation stuck. "Rose" does not fit because she is not glorifying herself. Rather she is speaking to how common and ordinary she is. According to the NET Notes, the location of this flower in Sharon suggests that a common wild flower would be more consonant than a rose. The term appears elsewhere only in Isaiah 35:1 where it refers to some kind of desert flower — erroneously translated "rose" (KJV, NJPS) but probably "crocus" (NASB, NIV, NJPS margin). Appropriately, the rustic maiden who grew up in the simplicity of rural life compares herself to a simple, common flower of the field.

1. What does she say about herself (2:1)? What does he say about her (2:2)?
2. What is he doing for her that she appreciates? What do we learn for our relationships?
3. Explain verse 7. What is her wise instruction to the daughters of Jerusalem?
4. What is he calling for her to do (2:8-14)? What does he want?
5. What has she seemed to do with his request, based on 2:14?
6. What does it mean to "catch the foxes" (2:15)? What are the "foxes" in your relationship?
7. What does she appreciate about this relationship?
8. What lessons do we learn for our relationships?

# SONG OF SONGS

# 3

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

The third chapter of the Song opens with a new scene. She is on her bed at night. Therefore it seems like that this is a dream. She says she is in her bed but she is running through the streets worried. So a dream seems to be the most likely picture. She is worried about something concerning their romance and upcoming marriage. She is concerned about losing him. Perhaps her hesitation to his marriage proposal has made her nervous about losing him.

1. What is the scene in 3:1-5? What is her concern in verse 1?
2. What is she doing in verses 2-3? Why?
3. What does she do once she finds him (3:4-5)? What has the distance between the two caused within her?
4. What is the scene in 3:6-11? What day is this?
5. What lessons do we learn for our relationships?



The fourth chapter appears to move the scene to the wedding night. The third chapter concluded with arrival of the wedding carriage. Song 3:11 reveals that this is the day of his wedding. Though nothing specifically says that chapter 4 is the wedding night, what we read in this chapter compels the reader to this conclusion. Remember that this is a song of love as these two long to be together. They are now married and continue to use love imagery to describe their coming together. We must appreciate this chapter because the wedding night is not described crassly or crudely. Nor is this described clinically with medical terms. Just as a red rose, twilight, and fire in the fireplace conjure up romance and lovemaking in our culture, these images conjure the same romance and lovemaking in ancient near eastern culture. Allow your mind to embrace this love language.

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

#### **4:1-7**

1. What is he doing in verses 1-7? Why is he doing this? Why is this important for marriage relationships?
2. Notice verse 7. Why is this important to express in the marriage relationship? Are wives sometimes insecure about their appearance to their husband?

We must consider the impact of what he is doing for her. His words of praise and adoration set aside any feelings of insecurity and uncertainty she might have.

#### **4:8-5:1**

Four times from verses 9-12 he calls her his bride. You will also notice that he calls her his sister. This was a term of endearment in ancient near eastern times. It is a similar term of affection that a man may use of his wife, calling her "honey," "darling," or "baby."

3. What is his covenant commitment to her (4:8)? Why is it important to express this?

4. Explain the message in 4:10-5:1.

The images in verses 12-15 were used in the ancient Near East as well as in the Bible as very sexual images (cf. Proverbs 5:15-20). He praises her for her purity and virginity. This shows that this book is not praising sex before marriage. She is praised for keeping herself for marriage. She is not a fountain open to everyone who passes by. Our society needs to hear this and women today really need to hear this. This is the picture of you in the scriptures. You are to keep your garden locked and your fountain sealed. Sexual activity is not for anyone else but the one you marry. This is a beautiful gift for your husband. He praises this gift. "Sexual pleasure is diluted when it is given prematurely to others, but it is concentrated when it is saved for one's marriage partner, and then given to that one person with a full and open heart" (Estes, Apollos OT Commentary, 363). Since she has remained sexually pure, verse 8 may also include his call to her that they are married and there is no need for her to be guarded. They can experience any aspect of each other's bodies that they want.

5. How does the message of this chapter conform with other teachings in scriptures? Consider the following passages:

Proverbs 5:15-20

1 Corinthians 7:2-4

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

The next movement of this song shows that something has gone wrong in the marriage. There are now some problems in the marriage. This should not be surprising to us. Every marriage goes through problems and difficulties. Especially early on in the marriage there are problems that have to be worked through as two sinful humans try to obey Christ toward one another. As an individual, we are used to doing whatever we want. Now we are to yield our lives to another person. There can be many problems that arise as these two lives try to merge into one. I believe one of the reasons why so many divorces occur is the unwillingness to try to work through these problems. Too many people enter marriage with a Cinderella concept of living happily ever after. But that can only happen when there is a commitment to work through problems that will certainly come to the marriage.

1. What excuses does she give for not opening the door to him (5:3)? Why are these terrible excuses? How do we make these kinds of excuses when it comes to our marriage relationships?
2. What did her excuses do to him (5:6)? Consider how we damage our marriage when we engage in fights and excuses rather than trying to work through our disagreements and yielding to one another. Should we be surprised that we marriage problems when we try to win the argument rather than being willing to be defrauded and reconcile?
3. What does she do after he leaves (5:6-8)? Why does she do this? What is she fearing?
4. Verse 9 helps her get over her problems with him. What do they ask her to do? Why does doing this help the marriage? What should we focus on in the marriage? How can this help us overcome marital conflicts?
5. What other lessons do we learn for our relationships?

# SONG OF SONGS

# 6

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

Chapter 5 revealed problems in the marriage that needed to be overcome. As we studied that chapter we saw the strategies given by God to deal with our marital problems and bring harmony back to the relationship. Chapter 6 begins with a question by the chorus (the daughters of Jerusalem) if everything is fine. Notice verse 1 that they ask if she ever found her beloved. Remember that the fifth chapter showed him leaving. She had hurt him and there was a fracture in the relationship. She went out looking for him, desiring to be with him, and praising him for who he is. Rather than focusing on what he is not, she is focusing on what he is. Did it work?

1. Did reconciliation work (6:1-3)? Did focusing on the positives about him cause an end to the conflict?
2. Did he hold a grudge because of her excuses or did he quickly come back to her (6:1-3)? What do we learn about forgiving each other in marriage and reconciling our conflicts?

Notice that he says the same words about her in 6:5-7 as he did in 4:1-3. One of the keys to marital harmony is to continue to show love for each other by doing the things you know your spouse likes. Do and say the things you did and said when you were dating and when you first got married. Too many marriages talk about when things were better in the marriage before. It was better when we first were married or it was better when we were dating. There is a simple answer to this problem. Do what you were doing before. Don't stop. Those words and actions do not have to be mere memories. Go back to those good times and continue to do them. Kindle the love for each other by doing what the other person loves. Do not take the love of each other for granted. Doing so is a critical mistake.

3. What does he do for her next (6:4-10)? What is he particularly telling her in verses 8-9? Why is this important?

In verse 11 it appears that she is going to a valley to see if it is spring when the plants are blooming and budding. Spring is a metaphor for love. Is it still the time of love? Is the relationship still good? Another way to look at this is that she is seeing if their reconciliation has brought about a new spring.

4. What has she found when she comes to him for reconciliation (6:11-13)? Is there still love and romance? Has the relationship been restored? What lessons do we learn from this?

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

Chapter 7 really begins in 6:13, setting the stage for what is being described. The group is calling for her not to go off with her husband but to return so they can look at her. He seems to intervene against this request. Who are they to be looking at her like the dance of Mahanaim ("two armies," ESV)? Scholars are uncertain on what this dance is. Most scholars point out that it was a dance that was done by the women after the nation won a military battle. This dancing was entertainment for the men who would watch the women as they moved. He steps in and says this dancing is not for others to see. She is not for everyone else to look at. But it is not that no one is to look at her. Rather, it is her husband that is able to enjoy looking on her body.

1. What does he find pleasing about her (7:1-5)?
2. What is he suggesting to her that he wants to do (7:6-9a)?
3. Does she accept his request (7:9b-10)? What do you find wonderful about her words in verse 10? How can we build our marriages so that we can say these confident words about our spouse?
4. What is she offering to do (7:11-13)? How is she facilitating their coming together? Why is this important? How does this help the marriage? What does she want to give to him?

Mandrakes were prized for their aphrodisiac properties in ancient near eastern times (7:13).

5. What is she doing in verse 13? What is she offering him? Why is this good for a marriage?

Main point: \_\_\_\_\_

Make additional notes at left and below:

In much the same way as today, public displays of affection between a couple was considered unacceptable. Keep this in mind as you study the first four verses.

1. What does she desire (8:1-2)? Why?
2. Who taught her about the ways of love (8:2)? Why is this important? What lessons do we learn?
3. Explain verse 4. We saw this statement made in 2:7 and 3:5. What does it mean in 8:4?
4. What is special and powerful about love (8:6-7)? How does this reflect the way marriages ought to be?

Verses 8-12 is the request of advice for preparing their sister for the day she is married ("the day when she is spoken for").

5. How early should teaching about love and marriage begin (8:8)?
6. Explain the imagery of verse 9. What will they do if she is "a door?" What will they do if she is "a wall?" What lessons do we learn?
7. What was the woman in this song (8:10)? Why was that a benefit to the marriage?

Verses 11-12 continues this important message. Some quickly see the term "vineyard" and suppose that the Song is saying that Solomon has been with hundreds of women but she has kept herself pure. But the imagery falls apart upon closer examination of verse 11. Solomon has a vineyard that he lets out to the keepers. The keepers tend the vineyard and bring from the vineyard its fruit which is very valuable ("a thousand pieces of silver"). The keepers pay one thousand pieces of silver for the fruit from this vineyard. One can see that the imagery does not work sexually. The imagery does not fit Solomon having a harem because there is no explanation for the keepers and money they pay for the fruit from his vineyard.

What we need to see is the Song is moving from the literal to the figurative. The picture is that Solomon has a luxurious vineyard. The proceeds of the fruit brings him 1000 pieces of silver. The owner of the vineyard gets his share of the vineyard because it belongs to him. He receives the benefits of that vineyard because it is his. Now she uses this analogy for herself in verse 12. Verse 11 is the set up using a literal image that was common in that day and time for what she is going to talk about concerning herself. Her "vineyard" (which she is speaking about her body) is at her disposal. Now notice: who gets to reap the profit from her vineyard?

8. Who has she saved herself for (8:12)? Who gets to reap the benefits of her vineyard?

9. Verses 13-14 conclude the song. What are they saying about each other? What do they desire in each other?

**IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES CONCERNING LOVE AND MARRIAGE FROM THE SONG**

1. A couple should want to be together and must fight for time to spend with each other (1:2-4). Too often we allow other things to crowd out the necessary time we need to maintain the marriage and cause it to flourish.
2. Women, all that matters is that your husband sees your beauty (1:5-7). You do not need to compare yourself to the definition that the world gives for beauty, which is typically unreasonable and unrealistic. Men, your standard of beauty is not what the world defines as beautiful but the one you married (1:8-10,15; 2:1-2). To compare her to others is not only unfair, but damaging to her own self-image. The one you chose is beautiful. You must praise her. She is your standard of beauty and no one else.
3. Chapters 1 and 2 show both man and woman praising and complimenting each other for the attributes they love. We did this when we were dating. We must not stop doing this simply because we are married. Communicate with each other how much you mean to each other and what you love about each other. Through this they begin to build their lives together.
4. Always "catch the foxes" in the relationship before the relationship is destroyed (2:15). Identify issues and potential problems in the relationship and deal with them openly, honestly, and kindly. Ignoring issues will only cause future arguments and problems. Learn to deal with an issue before it becomes a point of contention.
5. Marriage is the place for sexual intimacy (4:1-5:1). We are to be intoxicated with the love and intimacy of the other in marriage (Proverbs 5:15-20). The apostle Paul commands spouses not to withhold sexual relations from each other because it leads to sexual temptation (1 Corinthians 7:2-4). We must desire to give ourselves to each other. Marriage is the proper place for sexual intimacy and pleasure.
6. How we handle marital conflicts is critically important to maintaining a good marriage (5:2-16). We have no right to explode with anger, bitterness, or resentment toward our spouse, no matter what he or she has done. We are only destroying our marriage when we handle conflicts in this way. No one is perfect. Both make mistakes in the marriage. Rather than always focusing on what the other person does wrong, focus on the things you love about your spouse. Focus on those positives and praise your spouse for the right things he or she does. Help each other overcome deficiencies rather than hurting each other for the failures.
7. Seek reconciliation when there is conflict (5:6-8; 6:1-12). We do not have to win arguments and fights. Be willingly to overlook flaws and always seek reconciliation. Going through difficulties with a kind heart that desires the best in the other person will only strengthen the marriage. Seek the good of the other person rather than looking out only for your own interests (cf. Philippians 2:4; Ephesians 5:22-33). Desire reconciliation.
8. We must want to fulfill each other's desires of love, affection, and sexuality (7:1-13). Husbands desire to be with their wives in sexual intimacy. Wives must be happy that his desire is for her (7:10) and willingly desire to make opportunities for each other to be together. Both want to fulfill each other needs. They communicate with each other what they want and desire to fulfill each other's requests.
9. When we do the above things, we will build a strong marriage that can withstand any difficulty (8:6-7).
10. We must teach our daughters at an early age about sexual purity and prepare them for being a godly wife in marriage (8:2, 8-10). Keep yourself pure for marriage and enjoy the fruit in marriage only (8:11-14).



# SONG OF SONGS



A SELF-STUDY WORKBOOK

by: Brent Kercheville