

Let us remind ourselves why we should study the Song of Songs, by Solomon. Confusion about love, sexuality, and marriage abound in our culture. We need the whole counsel of God to teach us about ourselves, about God and about righteousness. The Song of Solomon is God's gift to the church for such a time as this.

And yet, the Song of Solomon is still rarely taught, preached, or studied. Sometimes it is feared, often shunned as sexually explicit and mainly tolerated by Christians simply because it is found in the Bible. Easy for us to affirm that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but rare that we would feel as holy in interacting with it.

The hesitancy to study the Song is understandable. As a collection of poetic exclamations and exchanges between two lovers, the intimate nature of the material causes some to shy away. As Hebrew poetry, the Song employs parallelism with images and metaphors that are not always easy to grasp. And, some are not sure how to read the Song.

If these are reservations and questions that we have about studying the Song of Solomon, consider that studying the book is the best way to address them. It is Scripture, **"breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"** (2 Tim. 3:16). Studying the Song of Solomon as part of the whole counsel of God is good for our souls. As with any other portion of God's Word, we neglect it to our peril.

Of the many insights to be gained from studying this book, there are four that seem especially important for our cultural moment. The first is...

A Deeper Appreciation of the Gospel

The Song of Solomon is part of the wisdom literature of the Bible. It gives us a godly perspective on the love between a man and a woman. As we encounter God's ideal, our shortcomings, sins, and failures become evident. Our appreciation for the gospel grows even deeper as we see new ways that we need the grace of God in Christ.

A primary purpose of marriage is to reveal the mystery of Christ's love for his Bride, (Eph. 5:32). When the Song presents an ideal picture of love in marriage, we have a unique glimpse into the relationship between Christ and the church that leads us to love our Savior all the more deeply and as intimately as we should.

The second insight to be gained from studying this book that seem especially important for our cultural moment is.....

A Woman's Voice

The Song of Solomon is unique because the voice of the shepherdess is most prominent in this book. The body of the poem begins (1:2) with a bold declaration of her desire for her beloved, **“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!”**

Likewise, the poem ends with her calling out to her beloved, **“Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices”** (8:14). From beginning to end, the reader encounters the woman's perspective more than any other.

Christianity is, in certain quarters, stylized as marginalizing women, especially when it comes to sexuality. The fact that the majority of the Song is from the woman's point of view is significant.

Divine wisdom makes it plain that a healthy romantic relationship will be one in which the woman's voice is cultivated, heard and heeded, as well as fully considered. That is healthy and godly in a culture that objectifies women as economic commodities, gratifiers of sensuality, providers of pleasure at the whims of men and always clients in the otherwise God-ordained partnership to give and take.

(2-4a) Opening words of the maiden. **Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth— for your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you. Draw me away!**

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: The dialogue between the maiden and the young man begins with this passionate desire of the maiden. She wants to receive and experience the love of her beloved.

At the very beginning, we catch some of the power of this Song of Solomon. It causes us to feel as if we are with Solomon and Shulamite, not merely watching them. As we read, we share their feelings.

Right away we are struck with two complementary truths regarding this loving couple. First, the maiden is not weak and passive; second, the young man is nevertheless a leader and respected as such.

This is undeniably a strong woman - who happens to do most of the talking through the Song of Solomon. Nearly twice as many verses are from her lips than from his. There is nothing here of the aggressive male and the reluctant or victimized female. They are one in their

desires because their desires are God-given, and aspired to be enjoyed in the very sphere of the Divine.

Yet we see that the young man occupies a place of leadership; she does not initiate a kiss but asks that he might kiss her. She asks that he draw her.

For your love is better than wine: To the maiden, the love of her beloved is more refreshing and intoxicating than wine. She is deeply, passionately infatuated with her man.

The theme of sexual enjoyment and consummation runs through the book, and the theme of commitment is central to that whole relationship. This is no passing encounter: this is total dedication and permanent obligation.

Your name is ointment poured forth: This expresses the respect and esteem the maiden had for the character and reputation of her beloved. The name represented much more than just the title by which her beloved was addressed; it represented his character and reputation. His name was like ointment poured forth and flowed from the fragrance of his good ointments.

So while the chemistry is volcanically churning in the chests of these lovers, character is foundational. Character and chemistry both matter in the matters of love.

When she said that his name was '**perfume poured forth,**' she meant that his character was as fragrant and refreshing as cologne poured out of a bottle. This is the reason the girls around the palace loved him – not just because he was handsome, but because his inner person was so attractive. That is character. We have to remain warned about being lustful, when looks seem to be the guide to love.

This couple is obviously physically attracted to each other; yet their relationship goes far deeper. From the start they focused on the other's character and kindness toward each other. They learned to value and care for each other as persons.

This shows us that a wise woman chooses a man whom others see to be a man of character. There is something not-quite-right if she thinks she can see what an amazing guy he is, but no one else can see it.

The seriousness of her estimation of him – going far deeper than just a physical or sexual attraction – shows us the character of their passionate love. Reading this collection of love poems, one might

easily think that this is primarily a book about falling in love. Instead, it is much more accurately seen as a book about building love.

Therefore the virgins love you: The maiden understood that others could see the good character qualities in her beloved, without necessarily being romantically attracted to him. This made her love him all the more.

Draw me away: This was the logical desire of a woman so taken with loving desire towards her beloved. She wanted to be with him, and to be one with him.

You find an interjection from the **“Daughters of Jerusalem”**, saying in vs. 4b, **“We will run after you”**. The idea is that the Daughters of Jerusalem – these on-lookers who do so in a chorus, who observe and celebrate the love between the maiden and the young man – they want to see what will happen as this wonderful love builds and takes its course. It is a good thing, and from their respectful distance they still want to be part of it.

So really, the woman’s voice is a rare insight to be gained from studying this book which is important for our cultural moment. I have dwelt on it longer to emphasize its importance.

The third insight to be gained from studying this book that seem especially important for our cultural moment is.....

A Re-visioning of Sexual Intimacy

Sexual imagery is powerful. Our culture abounds with images and paradigms that corrupt more than they instruct and wound more than they heal. So much of the culture’s presentation of sexuality is crass, lacking the beauty and mystery that should characterize the physical consummation and enduring love of marriage.

A study of the Song of Solomon (which cannot be complete in a short time that we share during this month) can revise our understanding and help us reclaim in holiness the sexual expression that God has created and declared good.

This inspired poem encourages us that husbands and wives are to share their adoration for each other with joy. The Song of Solomon contains sexual imagery in parts and is full declarations of love and adoration. But the language is tasteful, poetic, and beautiful. It is ancient, divinely inspired language from another time.

We need the fresh perspective on love and sexuality that the Song of Solomon offers, in order to build weaponry against surges within our souls, the tides in our culture and Satan's energizing endeavors that often lead us astray from God's design and purpose for maleness and femaleness.

The fourth insight to be gained from studying this book that seem especially important for our cultural moment is.....

A Realistic Perspective on Love

The Song of Solomon is not one sensuous scene after another. It is a series of love poems that capture the joys, insecurities, sorrows, and frustrations that accompany the journey of love. Through patient Bible study, the reader can follow the bride and her beloved on a journey from courtship to consummation and beyond.

The voices of friends are there. The fears and insecurities are there. The temptations of the world are there. Most of all, God is there. He is superintending it all. The relationship captured in this poem is his Word for his children's understanding of love, marriage, and sexuality.

The love that they share is **"the very flame of the Lord"** It literally says in 8:6, that **"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.

While the Song of Solomon provides much-needed wisdom from God on love and marriage, this wisdom is not attainable apart from Christ. At times, the Song puts forward the ideal portrait of human love.

We are spurred on in these times and fascinated that the Song knows our deepest longings, but also humbled to know that this is how God designed us to glorify Him. And that, we hear the call once again to live a life of **"faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us"** (Gal. 2:20). For Jesus is our beloved, and we are his bride.

Song of Solomon is a unique book of poetry that is often misrepresented, misunderstood or simply overlooked. Presenting a godly view of marriage from the beginning, it covers the issues of attraction, deepening, courtship, sex and sexuality, conflict, and deepening. This book will raise our sights and show the redemptive potential of healthy, godly relationships. Let me share five areas ahead in form of application.

ATTRACTION 1:1-6

Most of us tend to be attracted to others based on their physical appearance. But what if that is not by priority according to God? Biblical attraction is based on character, more than looks. Looks don't last, they can be deceiving, and looks are always canceled out by character.

When it comes to attraction, character and chemistry must be aligned according to divine priorities. Do you think Eve became ugly by looks after she led her husband into sin? Of course not. But the word ugly, rightly applies to their marriage relationship after, and we suffer the same today. Whether we remain single or build on that foundation for a strong marriage in the future, character is what matters.

DATING 1:7-2:7

Many Christians who date are off the charts as far as emotional and spiritual intimacy, yet they don't realize emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy are like links in a chain that follow each other closely, so they end up crossing moral boundaries, even when they never intended to.

As we rethink what it looks like to date biblically, may we move forward in holiness, like the couple in the text who date each other in public, in community, and in a way that is non-escalating, non-manipulative, and honoring to God.

COURTSHIP 2:8-3:5

There is wisdom in rediscovering the issue of courtship - a period where a couple develops a romantic relationship that is moving toward marriage.

Intimacy is a natural overflow of communication with each other over time, and the closer you move toward intimacy, the more important clarity becomes.

You don't oops your way into a good marriage, and if courtship is done well, a marriage can be built on a foundation of Christ and of clarity, which is a beautiful thing. A theological vision for life must guide the essence and practice during courtship.

SEX AND SEXUALITY 3:6-5:1

God created us as sexual creatures, and He wired us with a longing to express our sexuality. He also designed that expression for the context of marriage.

As a culture, we have allowed our sexuality to be an issue of choice rather than design, leading to confusion and various deviations.

Yet when a husband and wife come together to reflect the full image of God, delighting in each other as He intended, it is a beautiful thing. Many of us are broken from the choices we have made in this area, but God redeems the repentant and brings forth beauty from the ashes.

No one in God's sight, can assume to be at the point of no return. We read about adulterers, harlots, prostitutes and fornicators who had hit their wits end when Jesus fully restored them. God restores us and finds pleasure in it.

CONFLICT 5:2-6:13

Conflict is a part of marriage, and that is not always a bad thing. If we can learn to handle conflict with our spouse well, we can start to grow together in a way we would not be able to do otherwise.

Conflicts and clashes expose sin and our weak points, so that we may be deliberate to grow. They also become the basis for assessing the virtues needed for marriage, because marriage was meant to build us into holy beings, more than it is meant for happy animations.

DEEPENING 7:1-8:14

There is an excitement with new relationships, but that is nothing compared to the fulfillment and satisfaction that comes with being with your spouse over time. Intimacy should be distinguished from intensity.

There are many who seek intense engagements and involvements whether in marriage or outside, but then realize how empty each session leaves them. Intimacy is thoughtful - a God-centered reflection that keeps Him the focus of all loving endeavor.

There is a richness to the connection when we let the other person change and mature, allowing love to deepen as we move toward intimacy and oneness in our marriage. That is what God intended for us to enjoy, and that is the kind of marriage that reflects the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE / MARK 10:1-12; EPHESIANS 5:31-32

It seems the idea of marriage has become more confusing in our culture than ever before. More and more couples are choosing to avoid marriage altogether because they no longer see any meaning in it.

The Scripture will help lift our sights toward a more robust, compelling and theological vision of marriage as it relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Song of Solomon confronts us with the challenge of the allegory of life itself. It calls us to look into and through the physical pleasures of sex both in Solomon's song and in our bedroom.

In other words, it is not just that this song is really physical and also points to something spiritual in relationship to God and the Church, but that life is physical and points to something spiritual. In other words, the literary sex and the real sex are both allegorical.

God didn't just give us the Song of Solomon to show us something of his love. He gave us sex to show us something of his love. The person who is fit to interpret the Song of Solomon is the person who in real life has the spiritual depth and sensitivities and wisdom to see in real sex the realities of joy in relation to Christ.

All Saints Church - Preaching Schedule, February 2019

3rd	Take me away with you	Song of Songs 1
10th	My lover is mine	Song of Songs 2
17th	Until Love so desires	Song of Songs 3
24th	How beautiful you are	Song of Songs 4

SONG OF SOLOMON 1 - "RIGHTLY DO THEY LOVE YOU"

A. Introduction to the Maiden, the Beloved, and the daughters of Jerusalem.

1. (1) Title: The Song of All Songs.

The song of songs, which is Solomon's.

This great song, or collection of poetic songs, is unique in the Bible. If the Song of Solomon was not in our Bible and we were to discover it as an ancient document from the time of Solomon, it is unlikely that we would include it in the collection of Old Testament books.

If a manuscript of this little book were found alone, detached from the biblical context and tradition, it undoubtedly would be viewed as secular. The book has no obvious religious content.

It seems that Bible translators cannot even agree on a name for the book. Some call it "Song of Solomon," some "Song of Songs," some even use the Latin word for songs, calling it "Canticles."

No matter what one calls this book it has rightly been highly praised, even by those who have interpreted it in somewhat allegorical and speculative ways. "The entire history of the world from its beginning to this very day does not outshine that day on which this book was given to Israel. All the Scriptures, indeed, are holy... but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." (Rabbi Aqiba, an early Jewish commentator on Song of Solomon, cited in Kinlaw)

iv. Charles Spurgeon preached 59 sermons on this book (in Victorian England) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) preached 86 sermons on chapters one and two alone.

b. The song of songs: Many different interpretive approaches have been used in understanding this great song.

i. Some avoid this book altogether. Origen (c.185-c.254), an important teacher in the early church, said of the Song of Solomon: "I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of vexations of the flesh and blood, and has not ceased to feel the passions of this bodily nature, to refrain from reading the book and the things that will be said about it." Origen apparently felt he was prepared to study Song of Solomon because he castrated himself when he was a young man.

ii. Others embrace this book with great devotion but see it primarily as an allegory describing the love relationship between God and His people, not between a husband and wife. "The early Jewish rabbis taught that the book pictures God's love for Israel. Early Christian writers took the same approach, but they replaced Israel with the Church. One writer in the third century wrote a ten-volume commentary on Song of Solomon, telling how the book describes God's love for Christians." (Estes) Trapp expresses this perspective: "The chief speakers are not Solomon and the Shulamite... but Christ and his Church."

iii. Others see this book primarily as a drama dealing with three characters; Solomon, a simple country shepherd, and the young maiden. The idea is that Solomon one day traveled through his kingdom and saw the young maiden and was captivated by her beauty. Though she was betrothed to the simple shepherd, Solomon brought her back to his palace and tried to win her affection with all lavish gifts and loving words. Though her resolve wavered, just before she gave in to Solomon's attention and affection, she fled his palace and went back to her simple shepherd, her true love.

iv. The best way to see this book is as a literal, powerful description of the romantic and sensual love between a man and a woman, observing both their courtship and their marriage. It does not give us a smooth chronological story, beginning with the introduction of the couple to one another and ending with their married life together. Instead, it is a collection of “snapshots” of their courting and married life, with the pictures not necessarily in order.

v. Yet, because God deliberately uses the marriage relationship as an illustration of the relationship that He has with His people, we find that this great song of songs illustrates the love, the intensity, and the beauty of relationship that should exist between God and the believer. This is clearly a secondary meaning, sublimated to the plain literal meaning, yet nevertheless valid and important.

vi. “There are those who treat this Book as a song of human love. There are those who consider its only value is that of its mystical suggestiveness. Personally, I believe that both values are here.” (Morgan)

4. (4c) The Shulamite enters the king’s chamber.
The king has brought me into his chambers.

a. The king: This is another line that seems to reinforce the point that this is Solomon, inviting the young maiden into the private rooms of his palace.

b. The king has brought me into his chambers: However, because it does not seem that their love is yet consummated, this reference to his chambers may well be poetic and symbolic, in the sense of “He has welcomed me into the affections and secrets of his heart.”

5. (4d) The Daughters of Jerusalem remark on the couple and their love.
We will be glad and rejoice in you.
We will remember your love more than wine.

a. We will be glad and rejoice in you: The Daughters of Jerusalem rightly saw this passionate love as something to celebrate. It was good – not simply fun or exciting and should be recognized as such.

b. We will remember your love more than wine: Another phrase remarking on the beauty and goodness of their love.

6. (4e-6) The Shulamite considers her own shortcomings in appearance.
Rightly do they love you.
I am dark, but lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
Do not look upon me, because I am dark,
Because the sun has tanned me.
My mother’s sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,
But my own vineyard I have not kept.

a. Rightly do they love you. I am dark: Hearing the words of the Daughters of Jerusalem in the previous lines, the maiden considers that their high estimation of her beloved is appropriate (Rightly do they love you). Yet of herself, she feels that her deeply tanned appearance (I am dark... like the tents of Kedar) makes her less worthy of their praise and (presumably) of her beloved's attention.

i. The maiden was happy that the character of her beloved was good and could be seen as so. "Because his character was so attractive, the girl who will someday be his bride can confidently say that the women of the court rightly appreciate him. After they praise him, she must agree, 'Rightly do they love you.'" (Glickman)

ii. This well-deserved (rightly) respect others had for the young man showed that the maiden made a wise choice. "She should not be so infatuated that she imagines a scoundrel or knave to be her knight in shining armor. She should be able to say, 'rightly do I love you.' He should be the kind of person one ought to respect." (Glickman)

iii. Marriage-eligible women today should have the same perspective, considering that the Apostle Paul summarized the responsibility of a wife towards her husband in Ephesians 5:33 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available) with one word: respect. Though it is common - in the words of a modern film - for women to select a man for who he almost is, or to choose him for the man she can make him to be, this is unwise. An unmarried woman should ask herself the serious question: "Can I genuinely respect this man as he is right now? Do I respect him enough to submit to him the way the Bible says a wife should submit?" The maiden of the Song of Solomon had already asked and answered this question.

b. I am dark, but lovely: The self-doubt the maiden had regarding her own appearance should not be overstated. She did feel, in some ways, unattractive and unworthy (Do not look upon me, because I am dark). Yet at the same time she could say she is lovely.

i. Look not upon me: "This is an attitude very common to early Christian life. We do not want our natural life to be exposed at all. Thus, before being sufficiently dealt with by the Holy Spirit, immature believers will tend to hide from others. They do not wish to be known as they really are." (Nee)

c. Because the sun has tanned me: Perhaps it is best to say that she saw herself as fundamentally lovely, yet marred by her prolonged exposure in the sun, transforming her more fair skin into darker, deeply tanned skin.

i. Like the tents of Kedar: "Kedar was a territory southeast of Damascus where the Bedouin roamed. Their tents were made of the skins of black goats." (Kinlaw)

ii. In that day (as in most of history), fair skin was considered more attractive than tanned skin, because it showed that one was of a financial or social status high enough to where they did not have to perform outdoor work; they lived a higher life than that of simple farmers.

iii. The manner in which primarily allegorical interpreters deal with the line, because the sun has tanned me, demonstrates the weakness of the primarily allegorical approach. Trapp discusses how some think that the sun represents the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, and how in His brilliance the church sees its own nothingness. Or, he says that the sun might represent original sin. But he thinks the best understanding is to see the sun as "the heat of persecution, and the parching of oppression."

d. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards: Worse still for the maiden, her unattractive appearance was unjustly forced upon her by her stepbrothers. Somewhat as a "Cinderella" figure, she was forced to work by cruel relatives.

i. The maiden seems to make - or at least almost makes - the mistake of thinking that her hardships have disfigured her and make her less qualified to be truly loved. Instead, "She has a natural attractiveness to her and a certain humility which often only suffering can bring. No doubt genuineness and humility were refreshing changes to the king." (Glickman)

e. But my own vineyard I have not kept: She worked hard in this unjust labor, while neglecting her own appearance. In this she well represents the thinking of many women who consider themselves not attractive enough to be truly and passionately loved. She should not believe the lie that her hardships have made her less attractive to a good man.

i. There is an old story about a thief who broke into a department store and stole nothing; but he switched the price tags. The next day an expensive Swiss watch was marked as being worth \$1.50; a fine leather handbag was marked for \$1.75. A simple rubber ball for a child was marked for \$150.00 and three pencils were marked for \$175.00. If people bought or sold at those prices, you would think they were crazy. Yet all the time people value precious attributes and characteristics in other people very cheaply (especially when it comes to love and romance), and they assign high value to attributes and characteristics that are actually worth little.

B. Endearing words between young lovers.

1. (7) The Shulamite speaks to her beloved.

Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself By the flocks of your companions?

a. Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock: Here the beloved is pictured as a shepherd, which was presumably a symbolic representation, perhaps touching on the idea common in the ancient world that the king was like a shepherd to his people. Yet the picture is clear: she wanted to know where her beloved was, because she simply wanted to be with him.

i. This picture of a shepherd is one reason why some think that the Song of Solomon is actually a drama with a distinction between Solomon the king and the beloved who is also a simple shepherd. On balance, it seems best to regard this simply as a poetic description of Solomon the king, who was also the beloved.

b. For why should I be as one who veils herself: Here the maiden proclaims her modesty, because in that culture a veiled woman was a woman of low sexual morals. She didn't want to make herself look like a loose girl following the flocks looking for any lover; therefore, she wanted to know where her beloved was. She didn't want a man; she wanted her man, her special man, her beloved.

i. Genesis 38:13-15 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available) tells us that when Tamar, the widow of the sons of Judah wanted to entrap her father-in-law Judah by posing as a prostitute, she covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place. This was making herself available as a prostitute.

ii. "In their culture this term, 'a veiled woman,' referred to a loose girl, likely a prostitute. If she were going to see the king, she wanted it to be at the proper time and place – say, for example, when he was free in the middle of the day. She didn't want to go wandering around looking for him, appearing to be an aggressive and available prostitute to everyone else." (Glickman)

iii. In this the maiden shows that she is both humble (in that she doesn't want to make an ostentatious search for her beloved) and she has integrity, not wanting to even appear like one of these "loose girls." She understood that when it comes to sexual attraction and reputation, what others think does matter.

2. (8-10) The beloved praises his lover.

If you do not know, O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
And feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.
I have compared you, my love,
To my filly among Pharaoh's chariots.
Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with chains of gold.

a. If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock: Poetically, the beloved tells the maiden where she can find him – just follow the flocks. He welcomes her presence and companionship and is happy to have her with him.

b. To my filly among Pharaoh's chariots: Historical studies set this phrase in an interesting light. Normally, we would think of a beautiful filly, magnificently drawing Pharaoh's chariots. Yet there are ancient sources that indicate that by strict rule, Pharaoh's chariots were pulled by stallions, not fillies, mares, or geldings. This then would have the sense that the maiden was as alluring and exciting as a filly among stallions.

i. Estes describes the more conventional view: "Solomon's mare was his pride and joy. It was the most beautiful and graceful horse in the kingdom. It had been specially selected to draw the king's chariot... only one horse was good enough for Solomon. The meaning of the comparison is obvious; other women may be fine, but Shulamith was the only one Solomon prized." (Estes)

ii. Yet it seems that by the middle of the second millennium before Christ – well before the time of Solomon – the custom was established that only two stallions pulled the chariot of Pharaoh (according to Carr and others). Here, the man describes his wife as a filly among Pharaoh's chariots, which probably means that she had the same sexual attraction that a mare loose among stallions would have.

c. Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold: The beloved praised the beauty of the maiden in general (as in Song of Solomon 1:15 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)). Here, more specifically, he praised the way that she made herself beautiful, with ornaments on her cheeks and chains of gold on her neck.

3. (11) The daughters of Jerusalem offer gifts to the Shulamite.

We will make you ornaments of gold
With studs of silver.

a. We will make you ornaments of gold: The on-looking daughters of Jerusalem wanted to bless the maiden also. When they saw how the king cared for her, they wanted to be kind and good to her also.

i. This is one reason why it is important to a woman that her man treat her well and treat her well in public. She instinctively understands that others will treat her better if they see that her man values her and treats her well.

b. Ornaments of gold with studs of silver: This shows how greatly they responded to the example set by the beloved. His treatment of the maiden made them want to be somewhat extravagant in honoring the maiden.

i. "In all probability, she was not in actual possession of any of these items. Rather, they are similes that express her sweet feelings toward her lover." (Carr)

4. (12-14) The Shulamite describes how precious her beloved is to her.

While the king is at his table,
My spikenard sends forth its fragrance.
A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
That lies all night between my breasts.
My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms
In the vineyards of En Gedi.

a. While the king is at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance: The maiden was aware of her attractive powers, and how her attractiveness could draw her beloved (the king) to herself. This is clearly a woman who is aware of her sexual attractiveness but uses it in a godly and responsible manner; not for casual flirtation or questionable liaisons.

b. A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me: The maiden understood her ability to attract her beloved; and she also understood his ability to attract her. This dynamic of mutual romantic and sexual attraction is wonderful in the context of a concern for character and corresponding commitment; it is a dangerous dynamic outside this context.

c. That lies all night between my breasts: The idea is that the presence and scent of her beloved stayed with her, even when the maiden was alone. The thought of her lover is like a fragrance that stays with her and sustains her, even when he is not there.

i. "Shulamith was explaining that even while she slept alone at night, Solomon's love continued to enrich and nourish her life." (Estes)

ii. This speaks to the sense of security that his love gives to her. Since she is secure in his love, he doesn't need to be immediately there for her to be blessed and benefited by it.

d. Between my breasts: This reference to the female breast – made by the maiden herself – makes some readers and commentators of the Song of Solomon uncomfortable. There is a reflexive instinct to believe that God must have had something else in mind; something more spiritual.

i. "Jewish scholars have seen in the bride's breasts Moses and Aaron; the two Messiahs, Messiah Son of David and Messiah son of Ephraim; Moses and Phinehas; and Joshua and Eleazar. Christian interpreters have been equally ingenious. They have seen the bride's breasts as the church from which we feed; the two testaments, Old and New; the twin

precepts of love of God and neighbor; and the Blood and the Water. Gregory of Nyssa found in them the outer and the inner man, united in one sentient being.” (Kinlaw)

d. In the vineyards of En Gedi: The place known as En Gedi is a famous oasis in the Judean wilderness, lush with water and life in an otherwise barren place. A cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi would be alive, beautiful, healthy, and full of good scents.

i. “The king was En-Gedi to this girl, an oasis of life in a desert of monotony, and like a weary traveler she found refreshment with him.” (Glickman)

5. (15) The Beloved praises the beauty of the Shulamite.

Behold, you are fair, my love!

Behold, you are fair!

You have dove’s eyes.

a. Behold, you are fair, my love: With both the intensity of the words and their repetition, we see that the beloved lavished praise upon the maiden for her beauty. It was important for him to say and for her to hear; she was beautiful to him.

b. You have dove’s eyes: He especially noted the beauty in her eyes. It is true that some women have beautiful eyes by birth; yet there is something wonderful about the beauty of spirit that is seen in the eyes. A woman deeply in love with God has a particular beauty in her eyes.

i. “The large and beautiful dove of Syria is supposed to be here referred to, the eyes of which are remarkably fine.” (Clarke)

6. (16-17) The Shulamite responds with kind words.

Behold, you are handsome, my beloved!

Yes, pleasant!

Also our bed is green.

The beams of our houses are cedar,

And our rafters of fir.

a. Behold, you are handsome, my beloved: The maiden loved and respected the character of her beloved (Song of Solomon 1:3 Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)); yet she was also attracted to his appearance. This was no doubt because the beloved was and made himself handsome; but also, because she saw him through a woman’s eyes of love, which undeniably make a man better looking.

i. She is clearly responding to his previous expressions of love. “He calls her ‘beautiful’ (1:15); she responds with the masculine form of the same Hebrew word (1:16).” (Kinlaw)

b. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir: The image is as if they are on a walk in the country, and they use the plants and scenes around them as pictures of their love and relationship