

Love Song

Song of Songs
3:1-4:15

*Solomon's Song of Songs
and The Risk of Love*



The Bride's Dream

³ On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not.

² I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not.

³ The watchmen found me as they went about in the city.
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

⁴ Scarcely had I passed them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.

⁵ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

Solomon Arrives for the Wedding

⁶ What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?

⁷ Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel,

⁸ all of them wearing swords & expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night.

⁹ King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon.

¹⁰ He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem.

¹¹ Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

Solomon Admires His Bride's Beauty

He

⁴ Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead.

² Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come

The Risk of Love

up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young.

³ Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David, built in rows of stone; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors.

⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies.

⁶ Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.

⁷ You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.

⁸ Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards.

⁹ You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.

¹⁰ How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice!

¹¹ Your lips drip nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

¹² A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.

¹³ Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits, henna with nard,

¹⁴ nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all choice spices—

¹⁵ a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

- Song of Songs 3:1-4:15

*"Tis better to have
loved and lost than never
to have loved at all."*

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

Notes on Song of Songs 3:1-4:15

Summary... In this section of The Song we hear three wedding night songs for which we could give these titles: 1. The Bride's Anxiety, 2. The Bride Comes to the Groom & 3. The Flawless Bride.

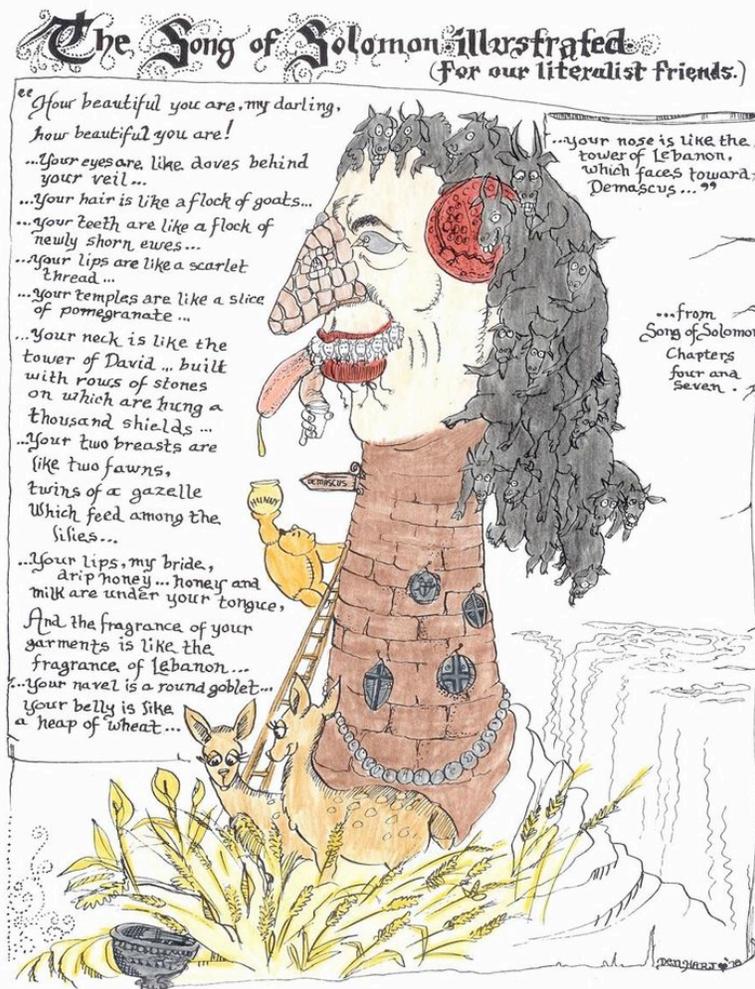
At the heart of these songs, just before the wedding is performed and the holy bond of marriage is consummated, is the reality of risk attached to real love in all its forms but especially in the commitment of marriage. Rather than interpreting the first song (3:1-5) in a literal sense (A yet-to-be-married girl wandering the streets at night looking for her fiancé, asking the guards where he is, and then bringing him home with her for sex?), it is best to see it as a deep expression of her fears regarding her impending change of life situation from single woman to married wife, from virgin to non-virgin. She will be changed, irreversibly. So her emotions are running high. Can she trust her beloved? Will he love her after she is his? Will his faithfulness and devotion continue on the other side of their physical union? The Bride confronts her fears, she resolves to go ahead and give herself to her groom, and she again exhorts the girls around her to keep their virginity until the time is right.

Next the chorus sings a festive song (3:6-11) about arrival for the wedding. The regal description reminds us that every bride and every groom is "royalty" on the day of their wedding. Whether this is the arrival of the Groom/King or the Bride riding on his litter, is a matter of discussion. If it is the Bride (contrary to the heading in the ESV), it may reflect Genesis 2 where God brings the woman, Eve, to the man, Adam. The Bible begins with a wedding (Gen. 2 - Adam & Eve), and it ends with a wedding (Rev. 19 - Christ & His "Bride," the Church). Thus, this song "reminds us of the ideal that we were intended to fulfill and of this creation miracle, the union of man and woman, that was not altogether spoiled by the fall. The ceremonial trappings of the entourage convey the reality that the joining of man and woman is a thing of great glory. It is a celebration of love" (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, p.182).

Then we hear the Groom sing of his beloved Bride using some very colorful and, to our ears, odd sounding language (see "literal portrait" above). Through his tender love song,

the Groom demonstrates sensitivity to the emotional needs of his Bride: His eyes are on her and not merely on his own physical desires. In addition, by alternately praising her beauty and declaring her inaccessibility to him, he affirms that he cannot have her until she yields to him. She must decide.

v.3:1-5 - **On my bed by night...** the place and time for uninterrupted reflection and consideration of anxious thoughts... **I sought him... but found him not...** expression of the Bride's anxiety about impending change and the risks it entails (see above)... **I will rise now...** As she sought him "on her bed," now she arises "on her bed"... This scene happens in her mind (actually to go out at night would be foolish and inappropriate behavior), and so we have another expression of her anxiety... **my mother's house... the chamber...** symbolic expressions for her womb, the place where her children will be conceived... **her who conceived me...** she will follow the way of her mother by which she herself was conceived... **that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases...** see comments on v. 2:7



vv.6-11 - **What is that coming up?...** could be the Groom/King's or the Bride's (see above) regal arrival... **mighty men... wearing swords...** adds to the royal scene and may also fit symbolically with the theme of protecting the Bride's virginity: She is arriving in purity and safety... **Solomon...** may not be an actual character in the story but rather a name symbolic of the "royal/kingly" nature of every groom on his wedding day... **Go out, O daughters of Zion...** the wedding is a matter of community joy & not just personal fulfillment...

vv.4:1-15 - a song praising the Bride, similar to 6:4-9 & 7:1-7... **Behold you are beautiful, my love...** the essence of what the Groom has to say with the words that follow... **goats leaping down the slopes...** perhaps because her hair is dark and wavy... **shorn ewes... twins...** her teeth are white and none of them are missing!... **tower of David...** military language, indicates perhaps the Bride's strength of character and thus impregnability... she commands respect & won't be taken by force... **mountain of myrrh... hills of frankincense...** refer to the Bride's breasts just described as **two fawns...** The groom looks forward to enjoying the breasts of his Bride... Yet for now, appropriately, she is to him a **garden locked...** The pleasures he longs for will not be his until she opens herself to him, until they are married...

Read & Reflect - 3:1-4:15

First Reading: Which of these three songs do you find most meaningful: The Bride's Anxious Thoughts (3:1-5), The Wedding Processional (3:6-11), or The Groom's Praise of His Bride (4:1-15)? Why?

Search & Consider

vv. 3:1-5 - Where is the Bride as this scene unfolds (see 3:1)? Where, then, are these things taking place?

Why might she, just before her wedding, have such anxious thoughts? What does she conclude for herself (v.4), for others (v.5)?

vv. 3:6-11 - What do all the military images and royal references suggest about Brides & Grooms & Weddings?

vv. 4:1-15 - Which of these laudatory comparisons do you find most beautiful? Which most strange?

How might these words be important to the Bride, particularly in light of her apprehension?

What does it mean that the Bride is a "locked garden" (v.12) at this point to him? What is the Groom calling her to do (v.8)?

Apply

How does this section of The Song help you understand the risk of making commitments, especially the commitment of marriage? What other kinds of commitments come with risk? What makes such commitments wise rather than foolish?

Respond to this statement, and give an example from your own life: *True Love and Real Risk are inseparable realities.*

Marriage Builder's Corner

Question for Couples: What apprehensions did you have before your wedding day? What helped you overcome them?

Activity for Couples to Share: 1. Think about something your husband/wife has said to you that gave you confidence in yourself or helped strengthen you for a big decision you had to make. Remind your husband/wife of what he/she said, and tell him/her "Thank you." 2. Make a list of three things you think your husband/wife would love to hear you say about him/her (like "Your neck is so beautiful to me, I imagine giraffes ducking in your presence.") Be as creative & kind & passionate as you can. Then say them to him/her.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I am grateful for my wife/husband, and here are some reasons why [share some of your unique praises]... You are all good and all-knowing. You have given me such a wonderful mate, to bless me, to challenge me, to be one with me and to bring you glory with me. Thank You. Amen.*

Covenant
Presbyterian
Church

Phone: 775-746-8118
Fax: 775-746-8195
covenant-reno.org

Out of the Garden: God's Good Plan Called Marriage

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. - Genesis 2:18-25

Here, almost at the very beginning of our Bibles, is the foundational passage

for the holy bond of marriage "instituted by God, regulated by His commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor by all people" as our Wedding Service from the Book of Common Worship declares. This text is of crucial significance for us (as it was for the Apostle Paul and for Jesus the Savior who both quoted it) because "there are all sorts of great institutions and human enterprises that the Bible doesn't address or regulate. And so we are free to invent them and operate them in line with the general principles for human life that the Bible gives us. But marriage is different... the concept and roots of human marriage are in God's own action" (Tim Keller, The Meaning of Marriage, p.13). I like to say that marriage is the one institution our oldest ancestors got to bring with them out of the Garden of Eden. Though we fallen creatures badly bend and twist it, there is a primordial beauty and purity in God's original design and purpose for human marriage, traceable through the real stories of real people throughout history and still today, unlike anything else in our common experience.

There are some wonderful truths in this creation story I am delighted to share. First, we have *the problem*. Up to this point in the Biblical narrative, everything has been "good." God has spoken the universe into being, and He has consistently pronounced His word "good." Now something is "not good." It is "not good that the man should be alone." Loneliness. That is the original problem of creation. And God has a wonderful *solution*: Woman. Co-humanity. Two types of humanity, so much the same and yet so different. A Duplicity, each part of which is incomplete in himself or herself but made complete by reference and relationship to the other. A Completeness given full expression in a whole-life, full-bodied Unity called Marriage. So God makes woman, but note that before He does so, he does something else. He sits the man down, & He brings the entire animal kingdom before him. The man sees himself in relationship to them all. He names each & every one. But no mere animal solves his loneliness problem. Why didn't God go straight to the making of Eve? To teach His man, and His woman, that they need each other and nothing else will do. His warning continues to teach those who are wise to hear. Do not get in the habit of putting your spouse down. Resist the temptation to think yourself better, more important, higher than your husband or wife. Don't ever think your marriage is all about you. Do this and you are making a "lesser being" of your partner. You will be making your spouse some kind of noble pet, a particularly high form of animal, but "animal" nonetheless. And animals don't solve our original problem. You will be lonely. Could this pattern of self-centered self deception be the reason why so many people are so lonely though married? We could also suggest that the mirror image of the "putting one another down" problem is equally destructive: "Pushing one another up." Making your spouse like an animal to you is bad, but so is making your partner like God. My wife is not my reason for existence. I am not here to "live for her." It is not her job to anticipate and remedy all my needs in godlike fashion. When we made our vows 37 years ago, I did not promise to take care of all my beloved's needs. I couldn't keep that promise. But here is the promise I did make and can keep: I will stay *with* you. Whatever comes our way, we will go through it together.

Note the central marriage words in the last two sentences. *A man* will leave. Why is only the man mentioned? Because the assumption in the highly patriarchal culture of the ancient Hebrews, who were God's special people and produced our Old Testament, would have been that the woman leaves her clan to become part of her husband's. But God's plan is different. There is a glorious mutuality in real marriage. Neither patriarchal nor matriarchal intrusions are allowed. Every conceivable reason for "one against one" is ruled out in favor of the glory of "two become one." Both the man and the woman *leave* their places of prior relationship and primary loyalty to their families of origin. They do so in favor of a new priority relationship and primary loyalty to each other. A new household is established, and it is not essentially a continuation of the man's or the woman's clan. It is brand new. Every time a man and a woman unite in marriage, it is like Adam and Eve all over again. When I counsel engaged couples, I speak of the "marriage bubble" that forms around the two of them by God's design--*the two become one*--in which no one else (not parents, not siblings, not future children...) ever belongs. *Leaving, cleaving (holding fast) and becoming one flesh*, these are the three intertwining elements of healthy marriage according to its Creator. We see them all in the unfolding poetic drama of Solomon's Song of Songs. *Two become one* certainly refers to sexual intercourse, the holy act by which future generations have always been made, but it is about much more. The two become one physically but also socially, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually...

And in the bond of marriage, with vows made and meant, with mutual promises of lifelong faithfulness and love and care, even in this broken world and even with sin-stained participants like me and my wife, we have our best opportunity of recovering something of the "naked and not ashamed" place of joy and peace and fulfillment God intends. Physical "nakedness" is easy compared to emotional "nakedness" (vulnerability). Because my wife has declared her intention to love me and stay with me, I can dare to show her myself in ever-deepening vulnerability. I can share with her my deep needs and great fears. I can show her the parts of myself hardest to trust into anyone else's care (for if they were cruel or insensitive or apathetic about these things, I would be utterly crushed). And over time, and much more today than on our wedding day when we were so young and naive, I can see myself as one more truly known & more truly loved. And my wife can see herself likewise. Tim Keller's remarks (Meaning..., p.95) about this beautiful reality lead us toward thankfulness for our "out of the garden" blessing of marriage: *What you think of as being head over heels in love is in large part a gust of ego gratification, but it's nothing like the profound satisfaction of being known and loved. When over the years someone has seen you at your worst, and knows you with all your strengths and flaws, yet commits him- or herself to you wholly, it is a consummate experience. To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.*