

# Love Song

Song of Songs  
4:16-5:1*Solomon's Song of Songs  
and The Goal of Love*

## The Goal of Love

### Together in the Garden of Love

<sup>16</sup> Awake, O north wind,  
and come, O south wind!  
Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow.

She  
Let my beloved come to his garden,  
and eat its choicest fruits.

He

5 I came to my garden, my sister, my bride,  
I gathered my myrrh with my spice,  
I ate my honeycomb with my honey,  
I drank my wine with my milk.

Others

Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love!

- Song of Songs 4:16-5:1

## Notes on Song of Songs 4:16-5:1

**Summary** - We come now to the dramatic center of the Song of Songs. In the symmetrical, chiasmic structure of the Song of Songs (see "The Structure of the Song of Songs" in Guide Number 1), verse 4:16 and 5:1 occupy the middle. As with most chiasmic literary structures found in the Bible, this central text provides the interpretive key for the whole book. Here *"the centerpiece is the sexual union of the man and woman. This moment is the pivot point for the whole book... the bridal event, the movement from virgin to wife, is the theme of Song of Songs"* (Garrett, *Song of Songs*, p.201).

All the previous verses have been leading up to these two. What is communicated in this song among the songs of The Song is the deep, fulfilling, mysterious joy of married love consummated in sexual union. The language is highly symbolic which allows it to be perfectly frank, hiding nothing in terms of what is actually going on here, but at the same time appropriately discreet and reverently restrained, offering no pornographic descriptions to excite and entice and distract us from the beauty of married love promised and fulfilled. What we read here is far from the blatant and demeaning anatomical description and sexual commentary our modern entertainment and news industries can't seem to do without. As the Bride was a "locked garden" to her Groom until after their vows were spoken and their wedding was celebrated with friends and family, so now the marriage bedroom is a "locked garden" to all eyes but their own. The bodies they enjoy together and the intimate actions and responses they learn and share with each other are for them alone.

So we hear of "winds and spices and gardens and fruits and milk and honey" and the couple's dignity is preserved and

their privacy is honored as they give full physical expression to their whole-life union as husband and wife. And a new Adam and a new Eve once again make each other "drunk with love" to the binding of human hearts and to the glory of God and then, perhaps, by God's power and will, to the making of a new living soul, a precious son or daughter.

The broad-ranging importance of this event is indicated by the fact that here, at the center of the book, we hear from the Bride, from the Groom and from the Chorus. The group of Others/Friends cheers the new lovers from behind their wall. And we are reminded that Love and Marriage and Sex are of crucial importance not only for the couple involved but for the entire community of which they are a part (and from which they are "apart"). A proper understanding of these things is essential if a community, a city, a nation is going to be healthy.

v.4:16 - **Awake**... Prior to the wedding, the call of wisdom was *"do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."* In other word, do not engage in sexual intercourse until the time is right, until you have found and vowed your faithfulness to your life partner. Now the waiting is over. Now the word is *"awake!"* There is a beautiful sense conveyed in this verse of the mystery of human sexuality... Whether sung by the woman or the man, there is a deep initial realization that something beyond mere human control is involved as passion is ignited, the bride gives herself to her groom and the two are seized and thrust into the luxurious storm of two-become-one physical union... The act of marriage, sexual intercourse, certainly occurs under the control of human wills (We decide to do it), but having decided we find ourselves gripped by "the emotional fervor of sexuality that seems to be a powerful force that seizes control of us" (Garrett, p.202). The newly

married bride and groom invite this force to come and overwhelm them... **north wind... south wind...** It is significant that the word “*ruach*” (meaning wind, but also often signifying God’s Spirit--as in Genesis 1:2 & Ezekiel 37:9) is not used here. Thus, the songwriter avoids any suggestion that the act of sexual intercourse is a god-invoking enactment, religious rite or sacramental event (as would have been the case with various pagan fertility cults). The “force” the man or woman calls upon to “blow upon” their “garden” is real but it is not God, or a god. “*While the text does not treat the sexual act in mythological terms or ‘sacralize’ the moment, it does invoke something of the mystery and quasi-religious power of sexual ecstasy*” (Garrett, p. 201)... One might pause to consider these forces that arouse human sexual passion still today: The elemental realities of nature found in God’s good creation, including our good feeling bodies and our good thinking minds, with their mysterious interplay of chemical processes? Or other darker, intruding forces which are also powerful but are not good and threaten to seize our willing imaginations and lead us away from God’s good design and into personal and corporate harm?... **garden...** a symbol representing the woman’s body... It is interesting to consider what would happen as the wind from the north and the wind from the south meet together in this “garden”--a powerful whirlwind carrying all the delights of the garden, the scent-filled resins and oils of its plants released and its spices blown to and fro... **Let my beloved come to his garden...** Here is the invitation the groom has longed to hear and

*The woman responds that the man should come into his garden and eat his choice fruit. In the language of the Song of Songs, this is a straightforward invitation for him to enter her sexually. In the structure of the Song of Songs, this is the centerpiece and crescendo. All of the Song focuses on this, the union of the new husband and wife.*  
- Duane Garrett, *Song of Songs*, p. 202

needed to hear. The “locked garden” has been opened to him...

v.5:1 - **my garden...** The language of these verses is reminiscent of the groom’s song praising his bride (4:1-15), but here it is not simply “a garden” or “the garden” of “your attributes” (describing his beloved from the outside looking in): It is now “my garden.” Her body is his. His body is hers. (see 1 Corinthians 7:4). The **myrrh, spice, honeycomb, honey, milk and wine** (all suggesting the properly luscious delicacies of their marriage bed) are all qualified now by the word “**my**”... **be drunk with love...** The chorus of friends

now gives no word of restraint but says, in effect, “do not hold back at all! Give yourselves fully and completely, with joyous abandon!” This is the very antithesis of what a religious community would say under the watchful eye of a cosmic killjoy God who hated all things fleshly and sex most of all! The call, “*Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases!*,” always had in mind, as the norm, that the right time would come. Protecting the

virginity of the woman (and the man) was not the goal: It was in order to make the true goal all it was meant to be for them. The wall around “the locked garden” was not to keep it empty but to keep it pure for the day when it would be beautifully and wondrously occupied by the two-become-one who were only and always meant to be there. The goal of love, a love worth honoring and protecting even before it appeared, is attained in the life-long union of shared fortunes, shared emotions, shared thoughts, shared souls, shared faith and, yes, shared bodies begun and continuing for this, and for every, married-before-God wife and husband.

**Read & Reflect - 4:16-5:1**

**First Reading:** Which of our senses does the author appeal to in these two central verses of The Song?

**Search & Consider**

**4:16** - What does the word “awake” suggest to you about what is happening in this text? What does it tell us about the intent of the repeated prohibition “do not awaken love until it so desires” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4)?

What does calling upon the powers of nature, and from opposite ends of the world (north wind & south wind), tell us about the nature of sexual activity in general and of the consummating act of marriage in particular? (What do you suppose happens at the point at which winds from opposite directions converge?)

What makes “my garden” a fitting image for the place of real and ultimate physical intimacy?

**5:1** - What happens between verses 4:16 & 5:1? (Note the past tense of the later verse.)

By placing this activity at the center of this book of the Bible, what do you suppose God is telling us about what He thinks about human sexual activity?

Do you suppose there is anything conveyed by the fact that this central moment in the drama of the Song of Songs, this central act of the book, takes place in the undescribed silence between verses? If so, what do you learn from this?

What does the chorus say to the couple at this point? Why does this matter?

### Apply

What are some of the views and attitudes of sex and sexual activity you see reflected in the songs, movies, magazines, television shows, advertising, etc. of our culture? How is this Biblical view different and better?

## Sheep, Wolves, Snakes & Doves: A Wedding Homily

**Prayer** - Lord Jesus, Risen Savior, You turned water into wine at a wedding long ago. Turn now, at this special wedding, my watery words into something special—Your Word—that we all might be challenged by Your truth & captivated by Your love. Amen.

**Scripture** - When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples, He said this: *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.* - Matthew 10:16

Friends, on your wedding day I offer you a **warning**, an **exhortation** and a **promise**.

As our Lord Jesus sent His twelve, so you two will go forth today: Like sheep among wolves. That is the **warning**.

Beware, newlyweds, you are venturing out into a world, a culture and an age that are very unfriendly to marriages. Forces without and within will work to drive you apart. Look around you. Turn on your television or rent a movie and you will quickly see that holy matrimony is no longer viewed with much respect and honor. Weddings are still “in” – They play well on the screens – but marriage is not. It’s too much work, and it gets in the way of individual fulfillment – a true idol of our time.

You will be treated more often than not as individuals seeking personal fulfillment, not as a couple seeking growth in love:

Offices will ask you to commute long distances and work long hours and attend far-away conferences with no regard for the devastation this might wreck on your marriage... *Friends and acquaintances* will tell you things and then ask you not to share them with your mate, even as they probe for clues about your intimate marital secrets... *DVD’s & Netflix* will invite you to sit down for a few hours in the same room and wordlessly become engrossed in the lives of people who don’t even exist and who find so much more joy outside than inside their marriages. Then these machines will put you to sleep thinking you have spent an evening together... Even *Churches* (and I’m pretty fond of churches) will ask you to spend your last free night of the week serving on the C.E. board and the planning committee for the Marriage Enrichment Weekend, vainly promising to give back in two days what it has spent weeks chipping away from your relationship... What does all this add up to?

Listen. No one is going to respect and honor your marriage unless you tell them and show them that that is what you expect. No one is going to protect your relationship, no one is going to make it a priority, if you don’t.

Then, look within you. The tapes playing in your heads will tempt you to think that a good relationship is what makes a marriage. But Marriage is not primarily about good relationships: It is about Marriage. It is about promises. Promises made. Promises kept. Vows. I do and I will. (cont.)

### **Marriage Builder’s Corner**

Regarding their future sex life together, I offer my premarital counseling couples two basic bits of advice: 1) *Close the door...* (meaning that your bedroom life is all yours and only yours... by God’s design, you two are Adam & Eve all over again... don’t let the opinions of anyone else intrude on your good work of forming a mutually satisfying sexual relationship with and for each other).

2) *Be there for each other...* Concern yourself with, as a matter of primary importance, the pleasure, satisfaction & joy of your spouse... In so doing, you will nearly always be maximizing your own pleasure, satisfaction & joy as a God-empowered result.

**Question for Couples:** What do each of you think of the above advice? How have you found these things to be true? (Tell your spouse how he/she has “been there for you” and say thank you.)

**Prayer:** *Our good & gracious Creator, thank You for the gift of our sexuality which we are blessed to share & enjoy with & for each other. Help us to keep relating to each other sexually in a way that brings wonderful blessing & pleasure to us & honor to Your glorious name. Amen.*

Covenant

-- sheep, wolves, snakes & doves (continued) --

Presbyterian  
Church

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

A major problem with modern American marriage is that it is too closely linked with something called “a good relationship.” So, when the relationship gets to a point where it is no longer “good” – personally determined when one is no longer personally happy or personally satisfied or personally fulfilled – then it is no longer a marriage. Ruining, for a season, the relationship means ruining, forever, the marriage.

But a marriage can't be ruined. It is like a promise. You don't ruin a promise: You either keep it or you break it.

Marriage is not easy. It places upon you those weighty, hard to keep, promises and those inflexible, hard to meet, expectations. But in so doing it offers, in those very promises and expectations, the fertile soil in which a relationship faced with a season of struggling can survive and out of which a better, stronger, deeper, more beautiful relationship can emerge again and again.

As our Lord Jesus commanded His twelve Apostles to go out into the world, so you two must go forth today: As shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. How will you protect and improve your marriage? How will you make that peculiar combination of shrewdness and innocence characterize your relationship? Here is my **exhortation**:

**Keep your noses in the Scriptures, your knees on the floor, your eyes on Jesus, and your hands on each other.**

Sometime later you will have opportunity to sit and unwrap the presents people have given you, things intended to express heartfelt affection, things offered to help you set up your new home. Most of them will wear out or get lost or maybe be exchanged. But there is a gift that has been given today, one that you have given each other & to the rest of us, & this wedding gift will not wear out. It is the gift of Scriptures. You have selected just the right words from the Bible to be God's special word for your wedding day. You have chosen well. Good for you. Make this a habit. **Keep your noses in the Scriptures for each other.**

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God, profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* – I Timothy 3:16-17. The world will tell you lies: The Scriptures will tell the truth. You'll be tied up at the office: You'll be set free in the Scriptures. The movies will help you sleep: The Scriptures will give you meaning and direction and spur you to love and good deeds.

Talk together about God's Word and what it is saying to you each month, each week, each day. Keep your noses in the Scriptures and breathe in the very breath of God. This will pull you together and push you out to discover the unique purposes God had in mind when he brought you together.

**Keep your knees on the floor.** Never, never underestimate the power of prayer in your life together, *“for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers.”* (Psalm 34:15) By prayer, circumstances are changed and feelings are renewed, attitudes are transformed and faith is rekindled. Prayer is free and effective. Keep your knees on the floor.

Then also, **keep your eyes on Jesus.** With His example before you – He who emptied Himself for the sake of His beloved people, you and me, and His Beloved Bride, the Church – and with His very life within you, you will have all you need to serve each other cheerfully, submit to each other selflessly, and love each other with reckless abandon... *“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:8)

**Keep your noses in the Scriptures, your knees on the floor, your eyes on Jesus and, finally, keep your hands on each other.**

Our hands are the versatile workhorses of our bodies. Our minds devise work to do and our hands carry it out. Our hearts burst with intimate affection and our hands express it—a squeeze here, a pat there, a variety of caresses that belong to you and your spouse alone.

By our hands we take our good ideas and our good intentions and make them realities. Make your hands work for your marriage. Show your love in unmistakable actions. And then, too, help each other train your hands for intimacy. Learn to take each other's spiritual and emotional pulse. Learn to read the marriage barometer provided by your physical relationship.

Don't keep your affection bottled up in your own heart and mind: Let your partner feel it sizzling at your fingertips.

It continues to amaze me how a small touch can do so much to break through walls of hurts, melt away icy anger, and so open up needed channels of communication.

Make your marriage a constant celebration of the wonder of human touch, one of God's truly great ideas.

*Keep your noses in the Scriptures, your knees on the floor, your eyes on Jesus, and your hands on each other.*

Be shrewd like snakes and innocent like doves, for you are going out like sheep among wolves. But know this final **promise** as your new adventure begins: God will be with you every step of the way. God is with you, who can stand against you? He will help you do your marriage work. He will bring a fine vintage of blessings out of your watery marriage mistakes. God will help you hold unswervingly to the hope you have in Him.

You can count on Him, and through the power of His Spirit in you, you can count on each other until death parts you. Amen.

*Like everything which is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion but the creation of time and will, any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.*

- W. H. Auden