

# Love Song

Song of Songs  
6:11-13

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

## The Sacrifice of Love

She

<sup>11</sup> I went down to the nut orchard  
to look at the blossoms of the valley,  
to see whether the vines had budded,  
whether the pomegranates were in bloom.  
<sup>12</sup> Before I was aware, my desire set me  
among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince.

Others

<sup>13</sup> Return, return, O Shulammité,  
return, return, that we may look upon you.

He

Why should you look upon the Shulammité,  
as upon a dance before two armies?

- Song of Songs 6:11-13

### Notes on Song of Songs 6:11-13

**Summary...** According to the symmetrical, chiasmic structure to this book that we have been following (see Guide 1), these verses parallel the “Invitation to Depart” given especially by the Groom to his Bride in chapter 2:8-17. That is where we find the captivating words “*Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away...*” (2:10). Now, in 6:11-13, we hear a different invitation. And this time the Bride says “No.”

The Shulammité Bride is now the wife of her beloved, and at this point in The Song the chorus (Girls of Jerusalem) invite her to return. In essence they are asking her to come back to them, to come back to her former life before marriage. They say they want to “look upon” her which may be their poetic way of saying that they would like to see her as they did before. It is an invitation to come back a be “one of the girls” with them as they were before.

It is important for us to realize, once again, that this is a song. It is a lyric love poem, and so it does not *tell* a story as much as it *draws out the meaning* of a story. These young maidens of Jerusalem who form the chorus of The Song are to be seen not as real girls meddling in the marriage of one of their former friends but as archetypal figures bringing out the meaning of the life change that has taken place for this newly-wedded woman.

She has pledged her love. She has made a commitment. She has chosen to lose her virginity. She has given herself to her beloved man, and in so doing she has completed herself

according to God’s plan for men and women. Her former loyalties, to her family of origin and to her friends, now rightly fall in line behind her consummated loyalty to her new husband. She cannot go back to being single. She must not go back. She will not go back.

The real pressure of this invitation to “return,” is set up by the poetic picture, using its familiar agricultural images, of the bride going down to check on the trees and vines and fruit in the valley. This is like the imagery of her complaint at the beginning of The Song that her brothers prohibited her from “tending her own vineyard” (1:6). She goes out to tend to her own home, her own family, her own life and sex-life (which she is now able to do as closely-held beloved wife to her husband rather than closely-guarded virgin sibling to her brothers). And as she takes stock of her life, she wonders how “before she knew it” she found herself wanting her husband and now located “among his chariots.” She is wondering how all this has happened when the chorus invites her to “return.”

The voice of her husband answers for her at this point asking why they should be looking at his wife as though she were part of some kind of entertainment (the “dance between two armies” is an obscure reference that scholars have not identified with any certainty). Perhaps we could see the “two armies” as representing two conflicting ways to go (like “onward in marriage” or “back to singleness”), but this is purely conjecture. The “He” of the song seems at least to be saying something like “The show’s over. She is not coming back with you. She belongs to me, and is staying right here.”



With this answer the Groom speaks for himself and for his Bride.

v.6:11 - **down to the nut orchard...blossoms...vines... pomegranate...** The

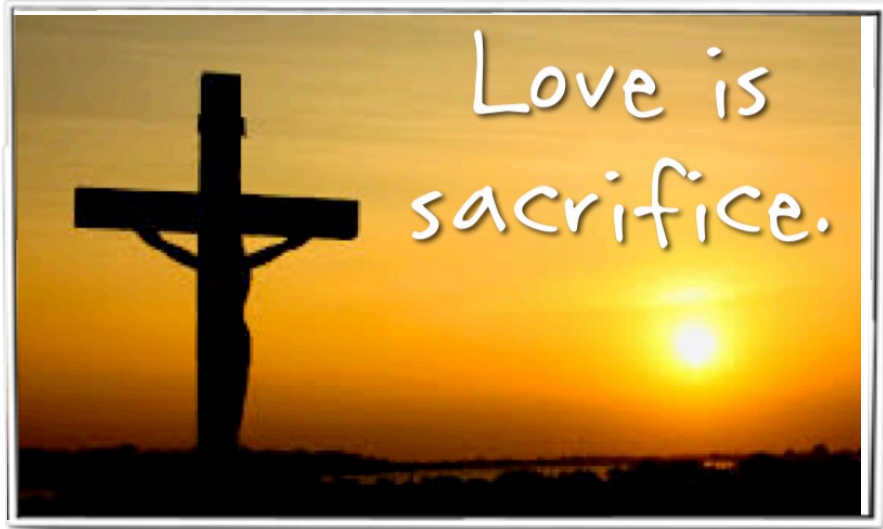
garden metaphor almost always refers to female sexuality, and there is evidence in ancient literature that nuts, like apples, also symbolized sexuality... The "nut" (as with English slang today) was symbolic of male genitalia while the open nut, or open pomegranate, symbolized that of the female... Some kind of sexual intimacy in thought or action is probably indicated here.

However, the language may indicate that she is thinking back to the time before she was married, when she was anxiously waiting for her time of love (during which time she did not "awaken love" before the time was right)...

v.12 - In a book loaded with difficult verses, this one is particularly problematic for translators and interpreters...

*By all means marry.  
If you get a good wife,  
you'll become happy.  
If you get a bad one,  
you'll become a  
philosopher.  
- Socrates*

**among the chariots of my kinsman, a prince...** Again, no one translates and interprets this phrase with great confidence... How do these chariots relate to the woman's journey among the blooming plants?... Some find a proper name, Amminadab, in place of "kinsman/people" and "prince," but this makes little sense... Tremper Longman III summarizes this verse by saying this: *No one can speak with much certainty about its rendition or its interpretation. The most definite point we can make about this verse is that it expresses strong passion, most likely of the woman for the man. Her passion has so overwhelmed her that she is "caught up" and discovers herself transported into the man's chariot* (Song of Songs, p.187). Dr. Garret sees this phrase as indicating the chariots of "my-beloved-is-a-prince" which is



an honorific and poetic way of referring to her husband (Song of songs, p.233).

v.13 - **Come back...** The young women of Jerusalem, the

Chorus, want the Bride to come back with them... **Shulammite...** This is the only place where this name appears. Three proposals predominate concerning its meaning ... 1) it is a reference to the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war named *Sulmanitu*... In the absence of some sort of cultic interpretation of The Song (a ritual celebration of fertility, etc.) which flies in the face of everything else we read in the Hebrew

Scriptures) this idea has little to commend it... 2) *Shulam* is a variant spelling of *Shunem*, a city in ancient Israel where Abishag (the "bed warmer" for King David in his later life - 1 Kings 1-4). So, this is a beautiful woman from Shunem... 3) *Shulammite* is the feminine form of the name *Solomon*. She is the counterpart to Solomon in his song. This name also reflects the ideas of peace or wholeness, so the name may also indicate that she is one who "brings peace to the one who loves her" (8:10) (Longman, p.193)... **that we may look upon you...** They want to see her again. They are delighted by her.. **Why should you look upon the Shulammite?...** **dance before two armies...** the meaning of this phrase is unknown but it seems to refer to a dance that was well known at the time... The noun for "dance" here comes from the Hebrew word for "whirl" and so, along with the title that it involved two groups of dancers indicates an intricate and energetic performance that would have held the rapt attention of spectators... The Groom is telling them not to view his wife

as they would this kind of show... She is no longer to be identified in terms of their world of feminine social dramas... She is no longer a virgin: She is his wife.

**FOR WHOEVER  
WANTS TO SAVE  
THEIR LIFE WILL  
LOSE IT, BUT  
WHOEVER LOSES  
THEIR LIFE FOR ME  
AND FOR THE GOSPEL  
WILL SAVE IT.  
- MARK 8:35 NIV**

## Read & Reflect - 6:11-13

**First Reading:** What has changed for the woman/heroine of The Song at this point in the drama (in terms of her identity, commitments, loyalties, influencers...)? What actual and/or potential conflicts do you see in these few verses as a result?

## Search & Consider

**v. 6:11** - Where is this newlywed Bride going at the beginning of this section? What might this symbolize?

**v. 6:12** - Where does she find herself? How did she get there? How does she seem to feel about this new location?

**v. 6:13a** - What does the chorus (the young women of Jerusalem) ask the newlywed Bride to do? Why? What do they want?

**v. 6:13b** - The Groom/Husband interjects at this point. What does he say? What do you think his strange words mean?

What does his response suggest about where he believes his new wife belongs?

Does this interaction help us to see something of what the Heroine/Bride has sacrificed in order to be in the place of love with her new husband? What has she given up?

## Apply

What does this hard-to-interpret section of The Song perhaps help us realize and affirm the connection between real love and sacrifice?

Respond to this statement, and give an example from your own life: *Love always involves sacrifice.*

## Marriage Builder's Corner

**Question for Couples:** What did you give up in order to be married? What did your spouse sacrifice to be married to you? How aware were you of these sacrifices at the time of your wedding? How necessary do you think they were?

**Activity for Couples to Share:** 1) After sharing your answers to the above questions, take a few moments to thank each other for what you each gave up so you could enter into your relationship of love and commitment. 2) Then share 3 reasons why all the sacrifices were worth it.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father in Heaven, we thank You for all the sacrifices that had to be made so we could get married and then stay married. We thank You for all the ways these have contributed to our health and maturity as individuals and as a couple. Thank You for the great sacrifice You made for us at The Cross because of Your amazing love for us. And we thank You that You work for us and with us to make us more holy even though this doesn't always make us happy. Amen.*

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## The Sacrifice of Love & The Purpose of Marriage

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*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?..."* - Jesus (Mark 8:34-36; see also Matthew 16:24-26 & Luke 9:23-25)

What if marriage fits under this core teaching of Jesus found in all the Synoptic Gospels and expressed with poetic power in John 12:24-25:

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...?*

What if the key to a fulfilling and faithful marriage is like the key to a fulfilling and faithful life? And what if that is about following the way of Jesus which is the arduous way of love, real and true?

Is it possible we are living among people who are clinging to a terrible, popular, hell-born, attractive, devastatingly destructive and easy-to-embrace myth concerning marriage (and love, and sex): The Point Is for Me to Be Happy... Satisfied... Fulfilled...?

Jesus said the way to a soul-preserving, healthy, fruitful, God-honoring life was to take myself out of the center of things, to "take up my cross" which means to live as one already dead to worldly aspirations and self-promotion. He said that if I cling to myself, to my life, trying desperately to make something of it for my own sake and to get others to revolve somehow around me, I will lose... everything. Then He said that if I give myself, my life, my hopes and dreams and aspirations to Him, I will gain... everything. He will unbend, re-tune and polish up my hopes and dreams and desires and give them back to me, better than ever and infinitely achievable with Him.

Gary Thomas has written a book about marriage, Sacred Marriage, built on this idea. He suggests that God's purpose in marriage actually isn't to make all wives and husbands happy, but to make them holy. His is one of the best marriage books I have read. I am convinced that if we would give up our misguided right to be happy in our marriages and would substitute a dogged determination to let our marriages (and the variety of relationships we have with others in other settings) be the lab in which we keep perfecting our ability to sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of others--for our spouse, for us. We would thus, somewhat ironically Letting happiness be the unsought demand, in our marriages and ourselves... much... happier.

How does this work? How can I know life," things will actually work out? I for Christ and for others is giving up the outcomes. The whole thing may hurt. A me, to trust the promise of Jesus at this that be enough for us? We can also look "happy" life. Disappointment. Yet, His was a life of ultimate joy -- for (Hebrews 12:2) -- and fulfillment. He earth, and the benefits were as high and

Here is a picture of what this kind of among mere mortals like us from a book called Letters to an Unborn Child. It was written by a man named David Ireland, who was disabled, confined to a wheelchair and terminally ill, while his wife was pregnant with a child he would never meet. As I read his words, I feel I am in the presence of holiness, and all my ideas of striving for my own happiness fade into the ghost-like insignificance they are in comparison... May his description of his wife's love inspire you as it has me, and point us to Jesus, the author and perfecter of love...

What if God didn't design marriage to be "easier"? What if God had an end in mind that went beyond our happiness, our comfort, and our desire to be infatuated and happy as if the world were a perfect place? *What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?... Any situation that calls me to confront my selfishness has enormous spiritual value, and I slowly began to understand that the real purpose of marriage may not be happiness as much as it is holiness.*

- Gary Thomas, Sacred Marriage, pp. 13, 22

Christ--things would go much better for I realize, discover a life of greater joy. blessing rather than the non-negotiable elsewhere, we would actually find

that if I give up control, if I "lose my don't know. Part of "giving up our lives" security (and illusion) of predictable lot. I would encourage us, starting with point. He says this is the way to go. Can at the life of Jesus. It wasn't exactly a Misunderstanding. Hatred. Crucifixion. *the joy set before Him, he endured the Cross perfectly accomplished His purpose on deep and wide as can be.*

love, and this kind of marriage looks like

*"Your mother is very special. Few men know what it's like to receive appreciation for taking their wives out to dinner when it entails what it does for us. It means she has to dress me, shave me, brush my teeth, comb my hair; wheel me out of the house and down the steps, open the garage and put me in the car, take the pedals off the chair, stand me up, sit me in the seat of the car, twist me around so that I'm comfortable, fold the wheelchair, put it in the car, go around to the other side of the car, start it up, back it out, get out of the car, pull the garage door down, get back into the car, and drive off to the restaurant. And then, it starts all over again: she gets out of the car, unfolds the wheelchair, opens the door, spins me around, stands me up, seats me in the wheelchair, pushes the pedals out, closes and locks the car, wheels me into the restaurant, then takes the pedals off the wheelchair so I won't be uncomfortable. We sit down to have dinner, and she feeds me throughout the entire meal. And when it's over she pays the bill, pushes the wheelchair out to the car again, and reverses the same routine.*

*And when it's over--finished--with real warmth she'll say, "Honey, thank you for taking me out to dinner." I never quite know what to answer.*

*Every week, sometimes twice a week, I have to wash my hair; this involves sitting with my shirt off in front of the sink. There's a mirror there and I am able to look at myself, which otherwise I rarely can. Each time I see my concave chest, my head leaning to the right--the muscles and flesh of my arms and shoulders having slowly disappeared over the past few years--I begin to feel depressed, and Joyce will say, "Oh, don't look! I'm going to take that silly mirror down if you don't stop admiring yourself."*

*Then perhaps a little later I may be lying on the bed taking a nap, and your mother will sit down next to me. She'll place my hand in her lap and, looking into my eyes, with all depth of sincerity she will say, "You're so handsome to me. You're the most handsome man in the world. I love you so much." And somehow, out of the ancient well of our experience together, I know she means it."*