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SABBATH SCHOOL
LESSONS

Song of Solomon

A Song of Love



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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



Ronald M. Flowers brings to the study of the Song of Solomon a set of unique qualifications. He and his wife, Karen, are associate directors in the Department of Church Ministries of the General Conference; their area of expertise is home and family.

Elder Flowers holds a B.A. and an M.A. in religion, and an M.Div. in New Testament studies from Andrews University. He pastored several churches prior to joining the Home and Family Service in the General Conference in 1980. Elder and Mrs. Flowers have conducted Family Life Workshops in several divisions around the world. They have authored or edited more than 12 books and instruction manuals for seminars dealing with marriage, parenting, and family spiritual growth.

Elder Flowers enjoys preaching, teaching, writing, and counseling. Carpentry, running, and gardening occupy his free time. As a couple Elder and Mrs. Flowers enjoy remodeling their home in Takoma Park, Maryland; boating, and walking together. The couple have two sons, Jeffrey and Jonathan.

Check with your local Adventist Book Center for the companion book to the Sabbath School lessons.

Introduction to the Song of Solomon A Song of Love

The Song of Solomon provides a special contribution to the overall body of Scripture. Even the casual reader cannot help being carried aloft on the heights of the poetic eloquence Solomon displayed. The deeper meanings of its images and symbols will challenge the careful Bible student. If the literary quality itself is striking, its theme is even more so. The Song of Solomon addresses the fundamental human need for love and intimacy. If we will permit it to do so, the Song reveals to us heaven's perspective on human sexuality—God's gift to us at Creation, which serves to shape and control so much of our action and interaction with one another.

Specifically, the Song portrays in the most delicate terms the attraction, the passion, the tenderness, the unbounded delights of the relationship between a husband and wife. It discloses the innermost thoughts of the hero and heroine, showing their deep feelings for each other, as well as some of their anxieties, fears, and struggles. In this portrayal, it is without equal in all of Scripture.

Certainly in these days, when the whole trend of society is to dishonor marriage and debase the coinage of love, we may be most grateful for the instruction, insights, and inspiration found in this part of God's pure Word. To couples, courting and married, the Song provides guidance, counsel, encouragement, and support through the experiences shared by Solomon and his Shulamite queen. Couples struggling in their relationship will find secrets to a renewal of their romance and covenant with each other. Perhaps they can be encouraged to study together this quarter, drinking deeply of those insights and challenges that will bring renewed meaning to their united lives.

Yet, the Song is more than a poem about courtship and marriage. This creative work by Israel's King Solomon was made possible because God gave him the gift of a wise and understanding heart. Through him the Holy Spirit speaks to all about dimensions of love in the wider circle of the family, love between parents and children, between friends, and in relationships of loving service.

And, because God Himself has chosen human marriage as a figure of His relationship with His people, our discoveries of love in the Song of Solomon will afford priceless insights to that intimate bond between the soul and Christ in the grandest marriage of all.

Christ is the heavenly husband, whose unbounded love for His earthly bride has moved Him to sacrifice all for her future happiness. Solomon's Song may be viewed as a symbolic representation of Christ's intimate fellowship with His believing people.

Solomon: The Shaping of a Bible Writer



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Sam. 12:24, 25; 1 Kings 2:1-9; 3:3-13; 4:29-33; 8:22-30; 11:1-8.

MEMORY TEXT: "A blameless life makes for security; crooked ways bring a man down" (Proverbs 10:9, NEB).

KEY THOUGHT: The life, times, and special gifts granted to Solomon prepared him to write his renowned Song.

GOD INSPIRED SOLOMON. A casual reading of the biography of Solomon might lead some readers to question whether he was one of those "holy men of God [who] spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). Solomon is known for the magnificent temple he built and furnished, and for his writings—the Song of Solomon (sometimes called Canticles or the Song of Songs) as well as Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. Yet a shadow falls across his memory because of his polygamous, self-indulgent lifestyle, the opulence of his court, his oppressive taxation of his nation, his idolatry, and failure to be true to his covenant with God. Can we put our trust in the writings of such a man? Can we really consider his writings inspired?

There were periods of Solomon's life in which he was thoroughly right with God. The Bible account reveals that, at those times, God gave him exceptional wisdom and insight into the attitudes and behaviors of the human heart.

SOLOMON'S FAMILY BACKGROUND

Note Solomon's family background:

- 2 Sam. 11:26, 27. His parents' marriage.
- 2 Sam. 12:1-14; Ps. 51. Judgment of God on his father's sin, and God's forgiveness.
- 2 Sam. 12:15-23. Death of his older brother.
- 2 Sam. 12:24, 25. Solomon's birth.

Tragedies and triumphs. Solomon grew up in a household that knew both the tragedies of sin and the triumphs of God's grace. King David's dual sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite precipitated a series of crises within the royal family. God loved Solomon (Heb. "peaceable"), the second child born to the couple. His other name—Jedidiah—means "Beloved of the Lord."

However, God's forgiveness of David's sins did not prevent the adversity that came in the wake of his immorality. Scripture details with shocking candor the conflicts, sibling rivalries, and even crimes within the family in which Solomon grew up.

As a youth, however, Solomon also witnessed his father's deep love for the cause of God, particularly his preparations for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. "Great had been David's fall, but deep was his repentance, ardent was his love, and strong his faith. He had been forgiven much, and therefore he loved much."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 754.

What convictions did David pass on to his son Solomon at the close of his life? Compare his private conversation with Solomon in 1 Kings 2:1-9 with his public charge in 1 Chron. 28:9, 10, 20, 21; 29:1-5.

A father's wishes. Solomon was commissioned by God to build the temple. David's final words to his son reflected his beliefs about spiritual life and commitment to God. (See 1 Kings 2:3.)

Like many parents, David expected his son to complete certain unpleasant tasks David had not finished. Unfortunately these included acts of retribution upon persons who had caused the father personal injury.

What experiences have helped shape your attitudes and behavior today? How do the expectations of others influence or govern your plans and actions?

A SPECIAL GIFT FOR THE NEW KING

What subjects interested Solomon? 1 Kings 4:33.

The new king's interests included writing, literature, and the study of physical and behavioral sciences. He was also gifted in his understanding of human emotions and feelings. These abilities influenced the content of his writings.

To what does Scripture attribute Solomon's great learning, wisdom, and mastery of sciences? 1 Kings 3:4-14, 28; 4:29; 2 Chron. 9:23.

Solomon cast himself upon the true Source of discernment and wisdom. "Solomon was never so rich or so wise or so truly great as when he confessed, 'I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in.'" —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 30. His prayer "pleased the Lord" (1 Kings 3:10). God can bless such an attitude of dependence, of not seeking high position. (See James 1:5.)

Largeness of heart. God gave Solomon "largeness of heart" (1 Kings 4:29). The Hebrew word translated "heart" is used often for the mind and the emotions. "Largeness of heart" signifies a great emotional capacity. Solomon could share his own deep feelings and understand those of others.

How does Solomon's judgment in the case of the two prostitutes show his understanding of the workings of the human heart? 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Solomon's profound intellect and great heart led his people and those of the nations around him to comprehend more fully the ways of Jehovah, His fairness and justice with mankind.

Compare God's spiritual gifts to Solomon with His promised gifts to His church today. 1 Kings 4:34; Rom. 12:3-8 (compare 1 Cor. 12:4-12; Eph. 4:7-16). How will the use of these gifts attract others to Christianity?

Would those over whom you have parental or supervisory responsibility think of you as having "largeness of heart"?

THE FRUITFUL YEARS

"The name of Jehovah was greatly honored during the first part of Solomon's reign. The wisdom and righteousness revealed by the king bore witness to all nations of the excellency of the attributes of the God whom he served. For a time Israel was as the light of the world, showing forth the greatness of Jehovah."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 32, 33.

What can we learn about Solomon's early religious experience from his prayer at the dedication of the temple? 1 Kings 8:22-53.

Solomon's empire stretched from the River Euphrates in the north to Gaza in the south (1 Kings 4:24). Through it international trade routes wound their way. Israel's geography provided an opportunity for the wisdom of the great king and the knowledge of the God he worshiped to spread throughout the earth.

What event of personal significance to Solomon occurred early in his reign? Song of Songs 3:11; 4:7, 8 (compare 6:8, 9, 13).

Solomon's true love. Although his biographer notes especially his liaisons with foreign governments and marriages to their women (1 Kings 3:1; 11:1), it would seem that a lovely woman from his own territory, likely from a northern rural area of Israel or southern Lebanon, was the true love of his life. Their romance is the theme of the Song of Solomon.

Sixty queens and eighty concubines (Song 6:8) were the beginning of a number that would later swell to seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). A concubine in this time was not a mistress, but a woman lawfully united in marriage to a man—an inferior wife.

"Solomon lavished praise upon the most loved woman in his life. Canticles is a dramatic record of his estimation of her. His protestation of love is a production quite unlike anything else ever written."—George T. Dickinson, *Splendor of the Song of Solomon*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1971), p. 13.

What good results follow when you lavish honest praise and affection upon your husband, wife, parents, children, or some other person close to you?

SOLOMON'S SIN AND REPENTANCE

What influences led to the spiritual decline of Solomon and the decay of his empire? 1 Kings 11:1-4.

"How often it happens that a person's character is weakest at the point where he thinks himself strongest. Good traits of character are in personality somewhat as the grain is in wood. It is the grain which gives beauty to lovely wood, but if you wish to split the wood, just hit it along the grain. Similarly, it is along the grain of his good traits that a man's character is most easily cracked open. Men may feel so sure of their strong points that they leave them unguarded. Or they may become proud of them, and pride makes any good trait bad."—George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1954), vol. 3, p. 102.

God did not forsake Solomon. "By messages of reproof and by severe judgments, He sought to arouse the king to a realization of the sinfulness of his course. . . . Awakened as from a dream . . . , Solomon with quickened conscience began to see his folly in its true light. Chastened in spirit, with mind and body enfeebled, he turned wearied and thirsting from earth's broken cisterns, to drink once more at the fountain of life. . . . By the spirit of inspiration the king recorded for after generations the history of his wasted years with their lessons of warning."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 77-79. (See also *Education*, pp. 153, 154.)

What counsel, repeated three times by Solomon in his Song, points to the lesson he had learned of the "need of guarding the affections and the passions with a firm purpose" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 84)? Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

The statement in these verses probably means, "'Don't start the process of loving exchange until the opportunity and appropriate occasion is present.'"—G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 95. Solomon sought to give solemn warnings to help youth safeguard purity by watchfulness and prayer.

What can keep the soul from a moral fall such as Solomon's? How is a spiritual experience with Jesus maintained?

PERFECT TRUTH, IMPERFECT VESSEL

The Scriptures teach perfect truths through imperfect people. To cynics and unbelievers the tarnished lives of outstanding men and women in the Bible provide an ample source of criticism of both God and His followers. Such critics neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God. "It is one of the best evidences of the authenticity of the Scriptures that the truth is not glossed over nor the sins of its chief characters suppressed."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 9.

What benefit can we gain by studying the lives of Solomon and other Bible characters? Romans 15:4.

Sin is not excusable; it is to be conquered. "The pen of inspiration, true to its task, tells us of the sins that overcame Noah, Lot, Moses, Abraham, David, and Solomon, and that even Elijah's strong spirit sank under temptation during his fearful trial. Jonah's disobedience and Israel's idolatry are faithfully recorded. Peter's denial of Christ, the sharp contention of Paul and Barnabas, the failings and infirmities of the prophets and apostles, are all laid bare by the Holy Ghost, who lifts the veil from the human heart. There before us lie the lives of the believers, with all their faults and follies, which are intended as a lesson to all the generations following them. If they had been without foible they would have been more than human, and our sinful natures would despair of ever reaching such a point of excellence. But seeing where they struggled and fell, where they took heart again and conquered through the grace of God, we are encouraged, and led to press over the obstacles that degenerate nature places in our way."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 12.

God spoke through a purified instrument. Israel's wise yet imperfect King Solomon was saved by the God who is mighty to save us. As we study the Song of Solomon this quarter, let us remember that the human author was a man of passions like unto us, a sinner saved by grace. The words of his Song are the divine voice sounding through the fallen instrument. The message should not be discredited because of the author's sins. Deep, yet practical, insights inspired by God are expressed by a person who knew both good and evil. God, who blessed Solomon with wisdom, imparts it to us through His Word.

Does the Lord use people despite the sins in their lives, or after the sins have been removed by His power?

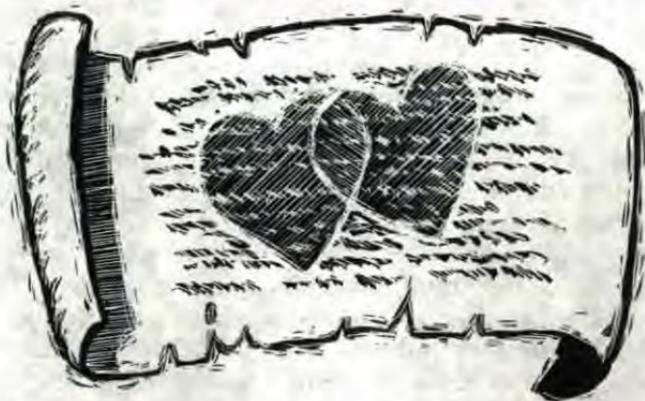
FURTHER STUDY: Review the life of Solomon in 1 Kings 3-11. Read *The Great Controversy*, "Introduction," pp. v-vii; *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 25-34, 51-86.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Interpersonal or Marriage Enrichment:* Think about and share the following with your spouse or a close friend:
 - a. In the family in which I grew up I was closer to my father/mother/other person because . . .
 - b. A significant event in my childhood family affecting my life was . . .
 - c. The way our family thought about God was . . .
2. What evils resulted from the polygamy practiced by some Old Testament characters?
3. A major point in the lesson is that the manner of life God wishes us to follow is the only road to genuine happiness and fulfillment. How could Solomon have remained true to divinely given ethical and moral principles and, at the same time, have related to the political and cultural pressures of his age?
4. Should the conventions of society or the demands of a particular office ever keep us from strictly obeying God's will? Or does God relax His will somewhat because of the pressures that confront us? Explain and illustrate your answer.

SUMMARY: Even though he came from a home in which there was much rivalry and departure from the path of strict integrity, Solomon began his reign with every intention of being guided by God's wisdom. His fall from grace was occasioned by pride, lust, idolatry, and the passion for luxury and power. Yet there was one maiden whom he loved above all others as the true wife of his youth. His Song memorializes his relationship with her.

Textbook on Relationships



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Tim. 3:15, 17; John 17:3; Matt. 22:37-40; Gen. 1:27, 31; Song of Sol. 1:9, 15; 2:2, 10, 13; 5:2, 16.

MEMORY TEXT: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT. The Song of Solomon complements the practical counsel on human love found elsewhere in the Bible.

LOVE AS JESUS LOVED. In His final hours before Calvary, Jesus chose to focus His remarks upon a "new commandment," as if to press home to our hearts the one thing that we must not miss in all our study of Scripture. "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). That commandment treats the essence of our lives, our relationships.

People were important to Jesus. He went about teaching, encouraging, healing their brokenness, restoring in them the image of God, fashioning anew their relationships with God and with one another. (See John 13:35.) The Spirit of Jesus was active in Old Testament times, as well. The Song of Solomon takes its place as part of God's great lesson book on relationships. In its melodic verses is echoed the divine refrain, "Love one another as I have loved you."

TRUTH FOR DAILY LIVING

In the following passages, what assertion is made regarding the source and authority of Scripture? 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21. What purposes do the Scriptures serve?

Human words express the Word of God. "The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. . . . Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

What is the central purpose of God's revelation in His Word? Phil. 3:9-11; John 17:3.

Truth for all experiences of life. The knowledge of God and His covenant love for us comes coupled in Scripture with instruction for covenant living. "Instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16) could be translated "discipline in right living" (NEB) or "training . . . in good living" (Phillips).

"The obedient, believing child of God beholds in it [the Bible] the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

"In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience."—*The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

In the routine affairs of your day-to-day life, are you influenced more by the media, your peers, your culture, or the Word of God? Consider some practical aspect of your life (for example, your prayer habits, your financial stewardship, or your selection of friends).

HOW RELATIONSHIPS REVEAL OUR RELIGION

To what level of importance does Scripture elevate our human relationships? Matt. 22:37-40 (compare Lev. 19:18).

What commandment did Jesus give concerning the attitude of Christians in all relationships? John 15:12.

Textbook for life. The Bible is God's textbook on abundant living, lovingly and carefully designed. In its light we come to see ourselves clearly, to understand the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Next to our relationship to God, the Scripture places highest priority on our relationships with others. The Bible teaches us how to relate to the individuals around us—with governments, neighbors, church members, spouses, families, enemies, the poor, indeed, with everyone.

Study carefully the following passages. Why are our attitudes and behavior toward others so important? Matt. 5:22-24; 25:34-45 (compare 1 John 2:9-11; 3:17, 18).

"You have done it unto me." Service to God and service to others are bound together. The Bible knows no distinction between our spiritual life and the practical duties of our behavior in relationship to others. It is as much an act of religious service to God to maintain a human relationship or reestablish a broken one as it is to bring a gift to the altar. Our attitudes toward each other comprise the fabric of our spiritual lives as much as do our acts of worship. One way we show love for God, whom we cannot see is by loving those around us, whom we can see.

Imitate Jesus. "Though your efforts for good have been unsuccessful ninety-nine times, and you received only insult, reproach, and hate, yet if the one-hundredth time proves a success, and one soul is saved, oh, what a victory is achieved! One soul wrenched from Satan's grasp, one soul benefited, one soul encouraged. This will a thousand times repay you for all your efforts."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 31.

How does Christ's radically new commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you," make Christian living different? How can this kind of love promote healing in situations where relationships have been strained or broken?

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN AFFECTION

Created as social beings, humans have a need for relationships with other people. (See Gen. 2:18.) This longing is for fellowship, companionship with others, for what social scientists call *intimacy*. In the deepest sense, intimacy may be defined as being fully known, fully accepted, and fully loved.

How does the Genesis account describe the foundations of human sexuality? What evaluation of God's creative work is given? Gen. 1:27, 31.

Since all that God created on the sixth day was pronounced "very good," we can affirm that our human sexuality, the qualities and attributes that characterize the two sexes, was also, at that time, "very good."

After the entrance of sin, human nature was no longer flawless. It is the intention of the gospel to recover the soul and "to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 194. Human love in marriage is still the symbol of God's love for His people.

How does Scripture mark out the boundaries of sexual behavior and attitudes? Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:6-23; Matt. 5:28; 1 Cor. 6:18.

We all establish satisfying friendships, but for the man and woman who wish to share a special love in the deepest levels of bonding, God's Word demands commitment to the covenant of marriage. (See Mal. 2:14.) The fullest experience of intimacy is only for a man and a woman within marriage.

For human bonding to result in relationships that reflect the image of God, what transformation is necessary? Eze. 36:26, 27 (compare Ps. 51:10; Rom. 5:5; 12:2; Eph. 3:14-17).

The indwelling Christ changes hearts and lives. "The divine love emanating from Christ never destroys human love, but includes it. By it human love is refined and purified, elevated and ennobled. Human love can never bear its precious fruit until it is united with the divine nature and trained to grow heavenward."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 99.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON

In what terms does the woman describe her relationship with Solomon? Song 5:16. What affectionate name is used by Solomon for his bride? Song 1:9; 4:7; 5:2; 6:4 (compare 1:15; 2:10, 13; 4:1).

A manual on friendship. In the Song we see two persons building a relationship that grows closer and closer. Though they are married lovers, they are first of all good friends. The wife declares to her attendants, "This is my friend." "Friend" here "expresses companionship and friendship without the overtones of sexual partnership. There is refreshing candour in her identifying her lover as also her 'friend'—friendship goes far deeper than mere sexual compatibility and excitement. Happy is the husband or wife whose spouse is also a friend."—G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 144.

How does the Scripture refer to the special bond that is to be enjoyed by a husband and wife? Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4, 5.

Marriage restored. Jesus died to deliver husbands and wives from Satan's relentless attacks on them as individuals and on their special relationship. Yet often within Christian circles there has been a reluctance to share the good news about this aspect of life. God delights in the intimate love of each caring couple. "Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

The message of the Song "comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is. . . . So long as there is impurity in the world, we need, and need badly, the Song of Solomon."—E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 336, 337.

How do you feel about the open portrayal of loving affection shown in the Song of Solomon? What does the approach of the book teach about the God who inspired it?

REHEARSAL FOR THE GRAND MARRIAGE

What metaphor is used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the tender union between God and His people? Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 2 Cor. 11:2.

Similarities between human and divine love. "God's relationship with humans is one of intimate bonding and . . . all human intimacies are 'rehearsals' for the ultimate reunion of humans with their Creator."—Donald M. Joy, *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God*, p. ix.

Our marriage, the marriages of others we know, and our close friendships should teach us what it means to relate to God. The warmth of close relationships ministers the grace of God to us and provides opportunity for us to minister grace to others.

How does the Lord depict the preparation of His people for His coming? Rev. 19:7-9 (compare Eph. 5:26, 27).

The "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7) is the judgment (verse 2) that ends with "his servants" being vindicated. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 427.) During this pre-advent judgment Christ's bride, the "saints" (verse 8), have received His grace to make them ready for His coming. Clothed with His righteousness, they perform "righteous deeds" (RSV)—works that God can accept because they are done by faith.

Only those who maintain their born-again relationship with Christ are capable of doing works acceptable to God. (See 1 John 2:29). They are described as "righteous, as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7, RSV). Because Christ dwells in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, they have righteousness of heart (Rom. 8:9, 10). This is the "fine linen" spoken of in Revelation 19:8—Christ our righteousness, filling our hearts, controlling, and empowering. The saints who enjoy "the marriage supper of the Lamb" are purified on this earth, so that, when they meet the heavenly Bridegroom, they are undefiled, clothed with the perfect marriage garment of Christ's righteousness.

Whether you are single or married, do your relationships reflect an intimate fellowship with Jesus? Is His presence in your life the source of your ability to interact with others within and outside your home?

FURTHER STUDY: Consider the relationships portrayed in Genesis 27. What needs for acceptance and love are demonstrated? How were these fulfilled or frustrated? Read "The Plan of Redemption" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 63-70; *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 218-239.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Think about and share the following with your spouse or close friend:

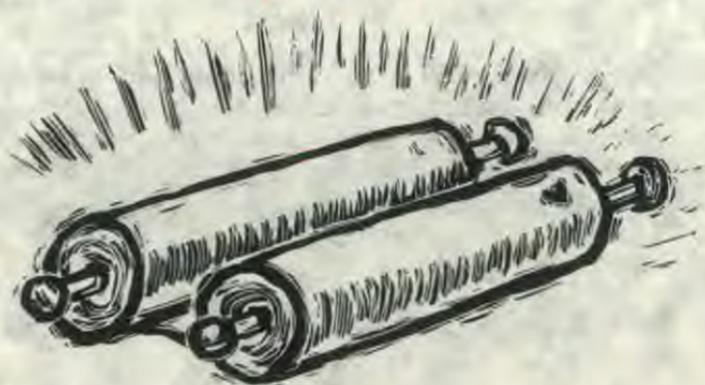
1. The person who has been most significant in helping me understand the Bible is/was [individual] because . . .
2. The most recent change in my life that the Bible has helped bring about is . . .
3. A way in which the Bible has helped me relate better with people is . . .

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon comes from God and leads to God. In revealing something of the tenderest ties that human hearts can know, Scripture elevates our souls toward God and entwines our hearts more deeply with the Divine.



For the first time in 70 years, the people of the Soviet Division may buy Adventist literature again. Support our Soviet Adventist family, our newest division, December 26.

Showcase for a Crown Jewel



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Song 1:1, 5-7; 3:7, 9, 11; 4:1-15.

MEMORY TEXT: "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come" (Song 2:11, 12).

KEY THOUGHT: Reflection on the Song of Solomon as a remarkable exhibit of Hebrew literature leads to a deeper appreciation of God's message to us.

POETRY THE VEHICLE FOR A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE. Poetry is one of the chief literary forms Bible writers used to convey the profound ideas of sacred truth. With its compression of ideas, its thought-rhythm, its picturesque imagery, its colorful figures of speech, biblical poetry has a freshness and vigor that arouses noble feelings, engages the imagination, and enables the message to linger in the memory.

Often this poetry was set to music and sung. As poetry moves words into a realm apart from prose, so the music produced by the voice in song takes poetry to a loftier dimension, creating a new art form that delights the mind and spirit. The Song of Solomon is in this class. Its very first verse affirms it to be Solomon's best.

SOLOMON'S BEST SONG

What is the literary form of this piece and who is its author? Song 1:1. What other mention is made of the author in the Song? Song 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12.

Of the 1,005 songs written by Solomon, Israel's wise and gifted ruler (1 Kings 4:32), this one is acclaimed as the best. References to plants, animals, palace lore, the mentioning of Solomon by name, and the theme itself—a royal courtship and marriage—point to Solomon as the author. Referring to Song 5:10-16, Ellen White states that Solomon wrote this "by the Spirit of inspiration."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 49.

"Among the chief subjects of study in the ancient schools of the prophets, sacred poetry and sacred music held honored places."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 17.

Singing helps us draw closer to God and to others. "The value of song as a means of education should never be lost sight of. Let there be singing in the home, of songs that are sweet and pure, and there will be fewer words of censure and more of cheerfulness and hope and joy. Let there be singing in the school, and the pupils will be drawn closer to God, to their teachers, and to one another."—*Education*, p. 168.

With what glorious, triumphant love song does the Bible close? Rev. 19:5-8. By whom is this song sung? To whom is it sung?

"Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss. Then we shall cast our crowns at His feet, and raise the song, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 131.

Could a special song help you, a friend, or someone in your family? What effect does singing have in times of discouragement and temptation? Why is singing so important in worship? Plan to sing together at family worship today.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN SOLOMON'S SONG

The Song of Solomon is "the only book in the Bible to have all its content put into the mouth of speakers."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5, p. 92.

Describe the principle characters who speak in the Song of Solomon.

1) Song 1:5-7; 3:1-4; 6:13 _____

2) Song 1:8, 9, 15; 4:1 _____

The female speaker is called "Shulamite" in Song 6:13. This may refer to the village of which she was a native. No site by the name Shulem is known to have existed in the time of Solomon (ca. 950 B.C.), though Shunem, a village about seven miles east of Megiddo and assigned to the tribe of Issachar (Joshua 19:18), was being called 'Shulem' by the fourth century A.D. (See *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 1035, "Shulamite.") The Song indicates that Solomon courted the woman in its leading role and that, because of the several references to Lebanon and its mountains (Song 4:8 ff.), she came from a home to the north.

Some scholars point out that the word translated "Shulamite" is the feminine form of the name "Solomon." This interpretation would agree with the poem's presentation of the woman as Solomon's opposite and equal. Although the term appears to be something like a title that might be better rendered "Solomoness" or "Lady Solomon," in our study we will use the more personal "Shulamith."

The male speaker, Solomon, refers to her as "my love," "my bride," "my spouse," "my dove," "my perfect one," but also as "my sister" (Song 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1), a term of endearment for a lover that appears in other ancient Near Eastern poetry. The woman refers to Solomon by name, calls him "the king," but more often "my beloved."

What other identifiable group of characters appears in the poem? Song 1:5; 2:7; 3:11.

What significance may be attached to the almost non-existence of personal names in the poem? What is the effect of terms of endearment and pet names? Do you think the use of such loving terms will add to the happiness of your home?

THE SPEAKERS AND THE POETIC FORM

Modern Bible versions commonly divide the script of the Song of Solomon into the various parts spoken by the major and minor speakers. Students are usually able to distinguish between the male and female speakers by a careful observation of the gender distinctions.

You may wish to mark your Bible to identify the speakers. (The NIV has labeled these for you.) Final identification of the speakers in some instances is difficult, as shown by the parentheses. Some verses will need to be divided into parts, as shown by the letters "a," "b," "c," etc.:

Shulamith: 1:2-4a, 4c, 4f-7, 12-14, 16; 2:1, 3—3:5; 4:16; 5:2-8, 10-16; 6:2, 3, 11, 12, 13b; 7:9b—8:4, 5b-7, 10-12, 14.

Solomon: 1:9-11, 15, 17; 2:2; (3:6-10), 11; 4:1-15; 5:1a, (1b); 6:4-10, 7:1-9; 8:(5a), 13.

The Daughters of Jerusalem: 1:4b, 4d, 4e, 8; 5:(1b), 9; 6:1.

Shulamith's brothers: 8:8, 9.

Friends: (3:6-10); 6:13; (8:5a).

How does identification of the speakers help in understanding the poem?

Thought rhythm. In common with other Hebrew poetry, the Song of Solomon achieves rhythm through *parallelism*, a "balanced symmetry of form and sense," which has been called "thought-rhythm." (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 23.) One form is a paired arrangement of statements, like a sound and its echo, called *synonymous parallelism*.

The following references contain *synonymous parallelism*. Discover the parallel "echo" statements in the remainder of each of these verses:

Song 2:8 (NKJV): "Behold, he comes Leaping upon the mountains"

Song 4:7 (NKJV): "You are all fair, my love"

Song 7:12 (NKJV): "Let us see if the vine has budded"

Parallelism provides almost endless poetic variety. Note, for example, parallelism between verses (Song 1:13, 14).

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM NATURE

An outstanding characteristic of this poem is its setting against a backdrop of nature.

Study the following several verses that mention animals and plants. What purposes do these serve? What special effect does reference to them give? Song 2:1, 2, 8, 9; 4:12-15.

How do animals, plants, and objects of nature assist the poet in his description of human nature? Compare Christ's teaching: Matt. 5:13; 6:25, 26; 7:16-20; 13:3-8.

Lily (Song 2:1, 2) _____

Gazelle (Song 2:8, 9) _____

Dove (Song 2:14) _____

Sun and moon (Song 6:10) _____

Lifting one's thoughts toward God. Solomon's vast knowledge of the natural sciences is evident. References to animals, plants, gardens, orchards, vineyards, spices, perfumes, and precious stones offer vividness and description with which his audience locally and universally can identify. More than this, the way nature is presented in the Song of Solomon lifts one's thoughts toward God.

How did the psalmist express similar feelings of gratitude and joy in the Creator's handiwork? Ps. 104:24-26, 33, 34.

"There are wonderful truths in nature. The earth, the sea, and the sky are full of truth. They are our teachers. Nature utters her voice in lessons of heavenly wisdom and eternal truth. But fallen man will not understand. Sin has obscured his vision, and he cannot of himself interpret nature without placing it above God. Correct lessons cannot impress the minds of those who reject the word of God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 107.

What benefit did God intend for nature to provide? What makes the difference in the way nature speaks to us? What do the references to nature seem to imply about the poet?

SYMBOLISM OF THE SONG

Use of metaphors. The Song of Solomon often uses similes and metaphors, words or phrases suggesting a likeness or analogy between objects or ideas. (See Song 2:2, 9.) The rich use of such symbols elevates the literary value of the Song and enables the author to express discreetly and delicately the intimate relationship between a husband and wife.

Parables in miniature. Comparisons in the Song of Solomon are miniature parables laden with meaning. To decode their symbolism is to open the door to understanding the message of the book. Context, emotional association, and other uses in Scripture help indicate the meaning of the figures of speech.

Write down what you believe the meaning of the following metaphors to be. What helped interpret the symbolism?

- a. "My own vineyard I have not kept." Song 1:6, RSV.
- b. "Your name is ointment poured forth." Song 1:3, NKJV.
- c. "Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon." Song 1:7, NKJV.

What teaching device enabled Jesus to find an avenue to human hearts? Matt. 13:13, 34.

Object lessons to convey truth. "Christ had truths to present which the people were unprepared to accept or even to understand. For this reason also He taught them in parables. By connecting His teaching with the scenes of life, experience, or nature, He secured their attention and impressed their hearts. Afterward, as they looked upon the objects that illustrated His lessons, they recalled the words of the divine Teacher. To minds that were open to the Holy Spirit, the significance of the Saviour's teaching unfolded more and more."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 21.

If you had been listening to the parables of Jesus, would you have welcomed His message or scorned it? What are your criteria for deciding whether something is truth?

FURTHER STUDY: Read chapter 1 of Song of Solomon, carefully interpreting the symbolic, poetic language. If you have the *SDA Bible Commentary*, read "The Poetry of the Bible," vol. 3, pp. 17-28. Read also "Poetry and Song," *Education*, pp. 159-168.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Write one or more ways in which this lesson has given you a greater appreciation of Scripture.
2. Will the information or insight you have gained from your study of this lesson bring about any change in the way you relate to Scripture? Why?
3. This lesson has emphasized the importance of song in worship. What kind of music do you consider appropriate in worship? Why? Is there room for diversity of tastes in worship music? How can music affect your daily life with Christ?
4. How does the beauty of nature influence your spiritual life? Is the love relationship between the members of your family improved by a mutual enjoyment of nature? Why? How can you incorporate more of nature in your daily life?
5. Suggest ways in which the wonders of nature may be a means of introducing nonbelievers to Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY: How God has favored us in the Song of Solomon! He has given us truths about love and loving in the most beautiful gift-wrapping known to language. The truth of the King of kings is presented by an earthly monarch as an artisan finishes a rare gem and presents it in an exquisite jewel case befitting its splendor. The poetry in the Song itself speaks of God's grace and His gracious way of attracting us to truth vital to our marriages, our homes, and families. The Song of Solomon reminds us again that when God gives, He gives in abundance—a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

God's Gift of Love



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Song 1:4, 6, 7, 12; 2:4; 3:1, 4, 6-8; Gen. 1:27, 31; 2:23-25; Isa. 54:5; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rom. 1:24-32; Rev. 21:2.

MEMORY TEXT: "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Song of Solomon is both a literal description of married love and a symbolic representation of Christ's union with His believing people.

HUMAN LOVE ILLUSTRATES GOD'S LOVE. We can draw many parallels between the love relationship of a man and a woman and Christ's relationship with His people. Often a man seeks to win the affection of a woman before she has any interest in him. Christ died for us before we had any concern for Him, and He endeavors to attract us to Himself before we have any desire to be united to Him.

In courtship, a man and a woman try to understand each other and look for ways to foster the relationship. They seek to establish a lasting bond. Just so, the new Christian enters into fellowship with Christ, tries to understand His ways, and communicates with Him directly.

Marriage symbolizes a permanent union with Christ that points to an indissoluble bond of love.

THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG OF SOLOMON

What story within the poem can you piece together from the following passages? Song 1:4, 6, 7, 12; 2:4; 3:1, 4, 6-8; 4:8; 8:1, 2, 5.

Major views held today regarding the Song of Solomon:

1. *Two characters: Solomon and the Shulamite country girl.* H. H. Rowley summarizes it for us: "The king saw her and fell in love with her, and took her from her country home to make her his bride in Jerusalem, with the result that he was lifted from a merely physical attraction to a true and pure love."—*The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1965), p. 212.

2. *Three characters: Solomon, the Shulamite country girl, and her shepherd lover.* "On this view, the maiden resisted the king's advances, and though he carried her off to the royal palace, she was still true to her rustic swain, until the king, failing to win her affection, allowed her to return to her true love. The book is thus turned into the story of the triumph of pure love over the blandishments of a Court."—H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, pp. 213, 214.

What specific information is recorded about the women to whom Solomon was married? 1 Kings 3:1; 11:1; 14:21.

Incomplete narrative. Adherents of the three-character story reject Solomon as the author. This version casts him in such an unfavorable light that, had this been the sense of the poem, it is difficult to see how the rabbis would have allowed it in the canon of Scripture. The poem reflects the courtship and marriage of Solomon with one of his wives. Scripture mentions Solomon's wives (1 Kings 11:1; 14:21), but it does not single out his leading queen.

The way of poetry. In this poem, crafted in the simple, rustic style of Eastern poetry, Solomon, perhaps with his special queen, penned a poetic portrayal of the love between them. It may be the song of every married couple, as well. It may become the song of all who enjoy close relationships.

Why is it important to address the "heart," as well as the "head"? What gives this piece of biblical literature universal appeal? In what way is its theme modern?

THE PHYSICAL EXPRESSION OF LOVE

With what words does the Song of Solomon begin? Song 1:2. What do this verse and other verses such as 1:13; 2:6; 7:7-9 indicate about the Song?

An invitation to a private world. The Song of Solomon is an invitation to enter the private world of a wedded couple, to sing their song of love with them. They do not blush to speak openly of the physical aspects of their love. Such language may seem too frank, too bold and explicit for some readers today. But the openness of the Song of Solomon is in keeping with the overall positive outlook of Scripture on love and sexuality.

How do the two Creation accounts portray sexuality as originally a good gift of God? Gen. 1:27, 31; 2:23-25.

What use do the following scriptures make of married love as a figure? How do these verses confirm the positive, wholesome attitude of the prophets toward human sexuality? Isa. 54:5; 62:4, 5; Jer. 2:2; 3:8, 20; Eze. 16:8; Hosea 1-3.

What evidence is there that "body" and "flesh" are part of the biblical view of mankind as a wholistic unit?

Gen. 2:7 _____ Ps. 63:1 _____

Ps. 84:1, 2 _____ Ps. 139:13-17 _____

1 Thess. 5:23 _____

"It must . . . be realized that in the Biblical faith, there is never any split made between the material and spiritual worlds. . . . In the Biblical view, human beings are always considered as psychophysical wholes. They cannot be split into separate parts of soul and body, mind and spirit."—Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage*, p. 157.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the totality, the wholeness of the person. What is the relationship between the spiritual life and the emotional and physical desires of the Christian?

AN ILLUSTRATION OF DIVINE LOVE

The love between Solomon and his bride affords an illustration of the love between God and His people.

The Bible refers to Israel as the wife of the Lord (Isa. 54:5). To what does it compare the Christian church? 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2.

Representing a sacred union. The covenant relationship between God and His people is described in the language of married love. But in our fallen state, the experience of marriage for many has been unfulfilling, disappointing, even bitter. Others have no experience in marriage. We might expect, therefore, that our all-wise God would give His people an inside look at the bonds of affection in a good marriage, some outstanding example of love and faithfulness, which would serve to exemplify on a human level the surpassing bond that exists between Christ and His church. "In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people, the redeemed ones whom He has purchased at the cost of Calvary. . . . In the 'Song of Songs' we hear the bride's voice saying, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' And He who is to her 'the chiefest among ten thousand,' speaks to His chosen one, 'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.' Song of Solomon 2:16; 5:10; 4:7.'"—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

Note the aspects of Christ's union with His people symbolized in the following passages.

Song 2:3—Enjoying peace and rest with Christ (*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 69; *Education*, p. 261).

Song 2:4—Being covered with Christ's righteousness in the celestial banquet hall (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 206, 207).

Song 4:7—Christ's estimation of the church by virtue of His sacrifice for it (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356).

Song 4:15—The inexhaustible fountain of grace in God's Word (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 20).

Song 5:10, 16—The beauty of Christ's character (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 275; *Education*, p. 69; *Evangelism*, p. 186).

Song 6:4, 10—The church, clad in Christ's righteousness, fulfilling her divine mission (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 725; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 81, 82).

Song 8:6, 7—Christ's long-suffering love (*Education*, p. 93).

MORAL PERVERSION AND APOSTASY

How does the Bible depict the apostasy and unfaithfulness of God's people? Eze. 23:2-4, 30; Hosea 2:2; Rev. 17.

The Bible compares the unfaithfulness of God's professed people to moral impurity. Ancient Israel was His bride, who fell into spiritual adultery. The Bible represents modern spiritual Babylon as an adulterous woman with whom the kings of the earth have committed immorality (Rev. 17:1-6). The reasons for this imagery are apparent:

1. God regards His church as His bride. Any defection to the world on the part of His people is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow or covenant they have entered into with the Lord.

2. Whenever men and women turn away from God, they become instruments of the evil one. Satan and his demons play upon the inherited tendencies of their minds and bodies, leading them into immoral thoughts and acts. Note the close association between idolatry and immorality in human history. Unfaithfulness to God has moral and physical results that are devastating for individuals and society.

How did Paul demonstrate the close relationship between spiritual apostasy and sexual immorality? Rom. 1:22-32.

Paul held all accountable to God because He has given light to all (Rom. 1:20). Because of unfaithfulness "their senseless minds were darkened" (Rom. 1:21, RSV). The result was sexual perversion with inevitable emotional and physical suffering. "Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and . . . men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Rom. 1:26, 27, RSV). Without the restraining power of the Holy Spirit, human beings become worse than beasts. The God-given sexual faculties, designed to be used within marriage for the spiritual, emotional, and physical enrichment of both husband and wife, become instruments of unholiness and the basest impurity.

If you are married, how does your relationship with your spouse rate when compared to Christ's relationship with His church? Do you delight in your spouse as Solomon delighted in Shulamith? If you are single, do your relationships with others emulate Christ's relationships?

THE CULMINATION OF TRUE LOVE

In what exultant terms did Solomon describe his delight in his beautiful bride? Song 4:16-5:1.

The midpoint of the Song of Solomon depicts events occurring on the wedding night. Alone with his bride, Solomon compares her to a pleasant, fragrant, though locked garden (Song 4:12-15). She invites her groom to come to the garden and partake of it. Solomon accepts her invitation. The two delicately crafted verses (Song 4:16; 5:1) describing the consummation of their love are the central, or pivotal, point in the Song. They form the exact middle of the Hebrew text, with 111 lines from 1:2 to 4:15, and 111 lines from 5:2 to 8:14.

Since the marital union has been chosen by God to represent His intimate relationship with His people, this focus within the Song is exceedingly relevant.

When is the consummation of the marriage between Christ and His people? Rev. 19:7-9; 21:1-7, 9-11.

The marriage ceremony for Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, and His people, the "saints" on this earth, comes to an end at the conclusion of the pre-advent judgment. This event is followed by the second coming of Jesus, when the heavenly Bridegroom transports His pure bride to the heavenly New Jerusalem. (Compare John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:16-18.) Here for one thousand years Christ and His bride, enjoying the fruits of His gracious love, reign together in the heavenly kingdom. (See Rev. 20:4.)

Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem as "a bride adorned for her husband" (verse 2, RSV). John saw the "Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (verse 9, RSV), the perfectly symmetrical "holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God."

The magnificence of the holy city represents the spiritual perfection of the saved who inhabit it. By the grace of Christ, they have overcome the wiles of the devil. Just as the New Jerusalem is perfect in all its features, so His people, filled with His righteous Holy Spirit, are spiritually perfect. The marriage covenant entered into while the bride was still on earth now finds its culmination in the eternal city of God.

Have you come to know your heavenly Bridegroom as it is your privilege to know Him?

FURTHER STUDY: Compare Matthew 25:1-13 with three pages of the chapter "In the Holy of Holies," *The Great Controversy*, pp. 426-428.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What aspects of this lesson have helped you to understand the Song of Solomon better?
2. In what way has this lesson brought the hope mentioned in our memory verse to your life?
3. To whom can you extend this hope by sharing your personal testimony about the blessings of Scripture in your life?

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon can be given both a literal and a figurative meaning. The legitimate delight that a happily married couple take in one another is a symbol of the mutual delight of Christ and His people. As the fruition of married love brings joy and ecstasy to husband and wife, so the consummation of Christ's marriage to His church will result in rapturous delight that will be eternal.



This picture shows one of the first public baptisms in the Soviet Division in 70 years.

December 26, this division will receive its first Thirteenth Sabbath Offering since 1927. Won't you help us raise a half-million dollars* for more baptisms there?

**The division portion is 25%. To raise this much, the total offering will need to be 2 million. The other 75%, with the offerings of the other 12 weeks, goes to support existing world mission work.*

Quests of the Heart



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 1:2-8.

MEMORY TEXT: "But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine' " (Isaiah 43:1, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: An assurance of personal worth is essential to the building of close relationships.

A SENSE OF PERSONAL VALUE. The Song of Solomon opens with three brief reflections by Shulamith of early married life at the palace with her king-husband. The desire for love and attention that she expresses at the outset sets the tone for the poem. These are but part of her heart longings. She seeks the assurance that she is truly accepted, that she truly belongs. This quest she has in common with all women and men everywhere, in all time. Her dialogue with her husband and her attendants gives an opportunity for us to reflect on the universal human concern for the feeling of personal value.

This fundamental human need affects our sense of well-being and shapes our relationships with others. To uncover this quest of the heart is to discover at the same time a deeper understanding of God and why we need Him and those who love Him in our lives.

GLIMPSSES OF A LONGING HEART

What urgent plea does Shulamith make to her husband? Song 1:2. How is this verse a keynote to the poem?

The poem begins by capturing our attention with her frank and open expression of her desire for affection. This unusual book, containing extraordinary self-disclosure by both husband and wife, begins with a request for love. It ends with a similar request, though one that is veiled in symbolic language (Song 8:14). "Love" in Song 1:2 translates the Hebrew word that includes the connotations of physical love-making and interpersonal relations rather than love as an abstract idea. (See Prov. 7:18; Eze. 16:8; 23:17.) The Song uses the plural form here and again in 1:4; 4:10, and 7:12, signifying "acts of love-making."

An interesting poetic style. In the Song of Solomon we find occasional shifts between the use of third- and second-personal pronouns. Song 1:2, "Let *him* kiss me with the kisses of *his* mouth, for *thy* love is better than wine." The sense is, "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!" (RSV).

Who else does the wife see drawn to her husband as to the scent of a fine perfume? Song 1:3, 4 (last part).

The bride is aware that others also are attracted to Solomon. The group of young women, with whom she dialogues throughout the Song, cheer the king as he enters with his queen into their private room: "We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your [Solomon's] love more than wine" (Song 1:4, NKJV).

Shulamith is not naive about this courtly sentiment. She has already acknowledged, "The maidens love you" (1:3, RSV). Now she declares, "Rightly do they love you" (1:4, RSV). Why this twice-repeated comment about other women's loving him? She bestows her compliment generously. But, given the whole tenor of the section (1:2-8) of which this is a part, it seems that she speaks with a degree of wistfulness. Her query seems to invite a response from him.

Do you hear a wistfulness, a longing in Shulamith's voice? What response is she seeking from her husband? What response should Solomon give to her?

A COMMITTED WIFE

Why does Shulamith speak as she does to the daughters of Jerusalem? Song 1:5, 6.

She senses the difference between her background, her personal appearance, her preparation for life in the palace, compared to the fair women who have been polished at court (verses 5, 6). Because Shulamith was expected to work in the family vineyards, she was deeply tanned.

What is the meaning of "my own vineyard"? Song 1:6.

A major symbol in the Song. Shulamith may well have owned her own vineyard. Something more, however, is intended here. Her concern about her tanned complexion directly parallels her statement about her "own vineyard" having gone unattended. The vineyard refers to the woman herself. This symbol broadens later to become a garden paradise (Song 4:12-5:1).

A most important question. "Soul" (Song 1:7) describes the whole being—spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. This wife assures her husband of a lifelong love involving her entire person. Marriage is total commitment for as long as life shall last. Just so, our commitment to Jesus as Lord and Saviour is forever.

In the wife's question to Solomon, what do you think is her concern? Song 1:7.

Her question literally translated is, "Where do you pasture? Where do you rest at noon?" She is inviting Solomon to spend time with her, despite his involvement in heavy affairs of state.

The reply seems to be from her attendants. Here they respond to her as a newcomer to the court. It is appropriate for her to seek Solomon ("follow in the footsteps of the flock," verse 8, NKJV). The reference to her as a shepherdess ("graze your kids close to the shepherd's huts") is a metaphorical way of suggesting that she has an important part to play as an equal partner of the "shepherd" of Israel.

Are Shulamith's concerns real? How is her situation similar to that of both couples and friends today?

IN SEARCH OF HUMAN WORTH AND VALUE

A fundamental human need. The feelings of Shulamith are universal. Within every mind there lies a concern about one's personal worth. This concern expresses itself more prominently when we feel ourselves under scrutiny or in competition for love and affection.

How does Scripture show that one's innermost thoughts influence powerfully the words and deeds of the life? Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34, 35 (compare Rom. 12:3; Gal. 6:3).

Discover what worldly values are often used to evaluate the worth of a person:

- 2 Sam. 14:25; Prov. 31:30.
- Isa. 5:21; 1 Cor. 1:20.
- Jer. 9:23; Luke 12:15.

A faulty system for encouraging personal worth. The typical values of the fallen world around us tend to center on physical beauty, intellectual sharpness, material wealth and possessions, and our performance or accomplishments. Different cultures, communities, even families, have different attitudes toward these criteria. But the criteria themselves appear to be universal. To the extent to which we fulfill the expectations of the culture in which we live, to that extent our world considers us valuable.

What evidences are there that the sense of values of the following people was determined by the culture in which they lived?

- Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2, 6-11)
- Esau (Gen. 27:1, 2, 32-41)
- Jonah (Jonah 4:1-4)
- Jesus' disciples (Matt. 20:20-24; Mark 9:33, 34)

The world's evaluation of human worth is faulty:

- It tends to focus on externals rather than the unseen needs of the heart.
- It emphasizes what we can do by ourselves.

A MESSAGE OF VALUE FROM GOD

What two great acts of God are described in Isaiah 43:1-7? With what tender words does God satisfy the human hunger for value?

Creation declares our value. A loving heavenly Parent brought forth upon this planet the first human beings, invested them with His image, and declared them very good (Gen. 1:27, 31). We are not the products of a chance evolution, but the handiwork of a loving and gracious God. (See Heb. 2:6, 7; Jer. 1:5).

Even in our fallen condition, we are still of great value to our Creator. To some extent, all human beings are bearers of the divine image. James 3:8-10 implies that our treatment of people should reflect their creation in the likeness of God.

What second act of God in our behalf expresses the worth He attaches to every soul? 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

What greater evidence could we have of the infinite value God places on each of us than the sacrificial condescension of Jesus in leaving heaven's courts and taking upon Himself our human nature, living in poverty, working for degraded humans, bearing our guilt on the cross, and rising to give us newness of life?

'The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know its worth, go to Gethsemane, and there watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweat as it were great drops of blood. Look upon the Saviour uplifted on the cross. Hear that despairing cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mark 15:34. Look upon the wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all. For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled. At the foot of the cross, remembering that for one sinner Christ would have laid down His life, you may estimate the value of a soul.'—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 196.

"Satan's work is to discourage the soul. Christ's work is to inspire the heart with faith and hope."—*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 32. What means does Satan use to cause us to feel valueless? How does the good news of personal worth make a difference in our lives? When do we most need this confirmation of value?

A DIVINE PLAN FOR FASHIONING CHARACTER

Because He understands the human need to be valued, God has supplied abundant resources to encourage and strengthen us when our own hearts condemn us and when Satan capitalizes on our discouraging moments:

- The truths about our worth given in God's Word (Matt. 10:30, 31).
- The ministry of Christ in heaven for us (Heb. 2:17, 18).
- The companionship of Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (John 15:26; 16:7-13; 17:23-26).
- Prayer power and the "boundless resources of Omnipotence" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 95; John 15:7).
- Guidelines for physical, mental, and spiritual health that promote a sense of well-being (3 John 2).
- One another, in the family and in the church—to love, care, and appreciate (1 John 2:10).

How does Scripture direct us to become involved in encouraging one another? 1 Thess. 5:11; Rom. 14:19.

What prediction did Isaiah make regarding Jesus' ministry? Isa. 42:3 (compare Matt. 12:20). How does this describe Jesus' view of human need and His subsequent ministry to all?

"The Lord would have us ever to urge the worth of the human soul upon those who do not understand its value."—*Evangelism*, p. 461. In His redemptive ministry Jesus approached human beings gently. He spoke the truth, but always with compassion born of understanding.

A Spirit-directed assurance of personal worth is vital to good health and good relationships! Family bonds are stronger when the individuals within them possess good feelings about their personal worth, and when those feelings are encouraged and supported. The response of her husband will be very important to Shulamith. She needs to hear some things from him that many men have difficulty putting into words. Likewise he needs to hear from her, because his heart also is searching for reassurance and acceptance.

Discuss with a friend or your spouse some of the practical things Jesus did that made people love Him. Find ways to do similar things for your friend, your spouse, or your child.

FURTHER STUDY: Consider Jesus' method of giving people a sense of self-worth: Luke 10:29-37; 15:3-7; 11-32. Read "This Man Receiveth Sinners," *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 185-197.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about and share the following with your spouse or close friend:
 - a. Times when you feel good about yourself.
 - b. Times when you feel unsure, discouraged, not so valuable.
 - c. Things you can say and do that increase your sense of personal worth.
2. What steps do you take to reassure your spouse or your friends when they lose respect for themselves? Are your attempts successful? If not, why not?

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon begins with Shulamith expressing doubts as to her beauty and acceptability. Uncertainty and insecurity crave acceptance and reassurance. As we learn to respect ourselves because of the love of our heavenly Bridegroom, we are able to relate with empathy toward others.



For the first time in 70 years, the people of the Soviet Division may buy Adventist literature again. Support our Soviet Adventist family, our newest division, December 26.

Love Finds a Voice



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 1:9–2:7.

MEMORY TEXT: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (Song 2:4).

KEY THOUGHT: Communication is the lifeline of any relationship. Various methods of communication are essential to happiness within any friendship or marriage.

EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION BRING HAPPINESS. One of the unique features of the Song of Solomon is that all its content is dialogue, primarily between Solomon and Shulamith. To have crafted it this way is a fitting stroke of poetic genius, for this format matches one of the dominant themes of the Song: the delight in the human voice. "Let me hear your voice," begs Solomon of her, "for your voice is sweet" (Song 2:14, NIV; compare 8:13). Shulamith rejoices in the voice of her beloved (Song 2:8; compare 5:2). The look of the eyes, the hearing of the ears, the touch of the hand, all have their important parts to play in linking us with one another. But nothing quite matches the ability of the voice with word and tone to share the intent of the heart. This the Song celebrates. To the poet, of course, the sound of the voice itself is not the ultimate cause for rejoicing. What is significant is the communion of two hearts finding ways to express their fondness for each other.

TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

"We need more sunshiny parents and more sunshiny Christians. We are too much shut up within ourselves."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 37. "Let the husband and wife study each other's happiness, never failing in the small courtesies and little kindly acts that cheer and brighten the life."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 393.

How did the happiness of Solomon and Shulamith find expression in their affectionate names for each other?

- His name for her: Song 1:9 (compare 1:15; 4:1, 7).

With Solomon's first words in the poem we hear him call his bride by the endearing term "my love" ("my darling"—NIV; "my dearest"—NEB). She in turn uses the masculine form of this word of him in Song 5:16, where it is translated "my friend." "My intimate friend" or "my loving friend" seems to be what Solomon's affectionate name for her means.

- Her name for him: Song 1:13 (compare 2:3, 8-10.)

The bride's most frequent favorite name for her husband, used more than twenty times, is "my well-beloved" ("my beloved"—RSV, "my lover"—NIV). The daughters of Jerusalem and other friends use the term to refer to him (Song 5:9; 6:1; 8:5) and to them both on one occasion (Song 5:1).

Note the first compliment in the Song addressed to the bride. Song 1:9. Compare this with others given her; for example, Song 4:1, 2; 7:4. Under what circumstances were they given? How do you think they were received?

An ornamented mare? Her hair like a flock of goats on a mountainside? Teeth like newly washed and shorn sheep? At first glance, this extolling of the wife seems hardly complimentary! In their intimate moments, both husband and wife strain language to the utmost in expressing their love. Comparisons to animals, precious stones, metals, spices, and fruits help them give voice to their feelings.

How do honest compliments form a part of the communication of love?

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPLIMENTS

How does Shulamith's compliment of Solomon convey her feelings of love? Song 1:12-14. What do the expensive fragrances mentioned in these verses suggest? Compare Shulamith's choice of language with Solomon's in Song 1:9.

In what ways do compliments help fulfill the Christian commandment described in Romans 12:10?

The word for "kindly affectioned" (KJV) combines two Greek words for "love" to give the sense of "heartfelt love," "loving dearly." A second word in the text, "honor," comes from the root meaning "to give great value to." Honest compliments appropriately given are like sunshine to relationships. They are an important way in which we elevate another person's sense of worth.

Study Jesus' contacts with the following individuals to discover His masterful use of the compliment. How were His attitudes and actions toward them, as well as His words, an affirming touch of His grace? How did they prepare the hearts of His hearers for deeper relationships with Him?

Mary (Matt. 26:10-13).

Zaccheus (Luke 19:5-10).

The Samaritan woman (John 4:5-26, 39).

The Saviour binds others to Himself. Each of these personal encounters was a miracle, an emotional and spiritual resurrection that brought with it new life and hope and a strong desire to be connected with Him.

"Kind words, looks of sympathy, expressions of appreciation, would be to many a struggling and lonely one as the cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. A word of sympathy, an act of kindness, would lift burdens that rest heavily upon weary shoulders."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 23.

What "miracle" have you experienced in your life as a result of a compliment paid to you?

LOVING COMMUNICATION

In Song 1:9–2:6, Solomon and Shulamith are engaged in dialogue. Their communication may appear at times as trivial. But notice several things occurring that are important to close relationships.

- They offer each other sincere compliments.
- They use endearing terms for each other.
- They talk together face to face.
- They express feeling through touch.

Toward deeper levels of communication. The dialogue of Solomon and Shulamith parallels what experts tell us about how communication leads to close relationships. Whether in marriage or single life, as friendships grow closer, there is greater and greater trust in another person, and more and more openness. The deeper the relationship, the more it will include the sharing of feelings and self-disclosure. The atmosphere of comfort and security that affectionate names and compliments produce paves the way for more meaningful sharing.

What is significant about the bride referring to herself as “the rose of Sharon” and “the lily of the valley” in Song 2:1?

The descriptions “rose of Sharon” and “lily of the valley” (Song 2:1) are titles often given to Christ. (See *Education*, p. 120.) Both grammar and context indicate that these words are spoken by Shulamith herself. The flowers to which she compares herself are simple and common wild flowers of Palestine. Her statement has a twofold significance:

1. The openness revealed in Song 2:1 is deeply moving. Shulamith wishes to be viewed as a simple flower waiting to be appreciated. Her words indicate self-disclosure in their relationship. She trusts him with her plainness, her simple rustic beauty, and her ordinariness.

2. Her identification of herself as a “lily” reveals another of the Song’s symbols representing a woman. It provides a key to interpretation of later verses of the poem. (See 2:16; 4:5; 6:3.)

What part have expressions of appreciation played in your personal relationships, either within or outside of marriage? Why does failure to express appreciation have a negative effect on: (a) a marriage; (b) a parent-child relationship; (c) a work relationship; (d) a friendship?

COMMUNICATION ESSENTIAL TO TRUST

How does Solomon show that Shulamith can trust him with her feelings about herself? Song 2:2.

Even though she feels unworthy, because the king deeply loves her, she is in a most favored position. As a wise listener, Solomon accepts her and what she says. He does not seek to correct her. She has revealed to him her inner self, and this makes her all the more winsome and attractive. To him she is a woman of surpassing qualities.

By what attitudes and actions can you extend an invitation to deeper communication with those you love?

To what enjoyable experiences does the bride liken her relationship with her beloved? Song 2:3.

Ideally, communication that includes trust, openness, and expressions of love leads to a closeness marked by a sense of security, restfulness, and contentment. "Let the husband aid his wife by his sympathy and unflinching affection. If he wishes to keep her fresh and glad, so that she will be as sunshine in the home, let him help her bear her burdens. His kindness and loving courtesy will be to her a precious encouragement, and the happiness he imparts will bring joy and peace to his own heart."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 218.

Sitting under God's shadow. "We need to appreciate more fully the meaning of the words: 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight.' Song of Solomon 2:3. These words do not bring to our minds the picture of hasty transit, but of quiet rest. There are many professing Christians who are anxious and depressed, many who are so full of busy activity that they cannot find time to rest quietly in the promises of God, who act as if they could not afford to have peace and quietness. To all such Christ's invitation is: 'Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest.' Matthew 11:28."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 69.

Think of an experience you have had relaxing beneath a shady tree. What feelings engulf you as you remember? Which of these feelings could you use to express your feelings for your spouse? for a family member? for a close friend? for God?

"HE LOOKED ON ME WITH LOVE"

What is the meaning of the phrase "his banner over me was love" (Song 2:4)? What do you think led Shulamith to make this exclamation?

The Hebrew word for "banner" is commonly used for "standard," "flag," or "ensign." (See Num. 1:52.) Some have envisioned a kind of protective awning fashioned for her by the king from his flag. Others translate the verse: "His look upon me was in love" or "He looked on me with love." (See G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon*, p. 91.) Song 2:4 describes the all-encompassing satisfaction given by love and its expression.

"There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. This spirit checks the current of sympathy. . . . Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

The Lord's "banner over us" is loving also. Well may we marvel at the extent of His affection for us. Study the following passages. How do they proclaim the extent of God's love?

Lam. 3:22, 23 _____

Ps. 63:3 _____

Eph. 2:4-7 _____

1 John 3:1 _____

"Your Heavenly Father will take from you the garments defiled by sin. . . . God will clothe you with 'the garments of salvation,' and cover you with 'the robe of righteousness.' Isa. 61:10. . . . He will bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love. (Cant. 2:4). . . . 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' Isa. 62:5."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 206, 207. (See also *Education*, p. 261; *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 131.)

What does God's love for you do for your sense of self-worth? How can you communicate to others, not only your care, but also God's infinite concern for them?

FURTHER STUDY: Study Jesus' method of communicating His love: Luke 7:36-50. Read "The Feast at Simon's House" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 559-568; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

"Though difficulties, perplexities, and discouragements may arise, let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union is a mistake or a disappointment. Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. Study to advance the happiness of each other. Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How may the principles mentioned in the above quotation be applied in relationships other than marriage?
2. What has the phrase "His banner over me was love" meant for you?
3. In what way do the principles of communication discussed in this lesson help us to understand prayer?
4. How might worship with a friend or spouse lead to a deeper experience with God?
5. What steps do you plan to pursue to make a deeper experience with God a reality?
6. Think about and share the following with your spouse or close friend:
 - a. Areas in your relationship where you feel communication is very good.
 - b. Areas in your relationship in which there is room for improvement in communication.
 - c. Some areas you avoid communicating about.
 - d. Things you can do to open communication in areas in which there is now little or no communication.

SUMMARY: Communication is vital to a relationship. Through communication with one another we reveal the longings of our hearts and find the answers to those longings. For communication to build a relationship, there must be trust, openness, and expressions of love.

The Ingredients of Meaningful Relationships



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 2:8-17.

MEMORY TEXT: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16).

KEY THOUGHT: Careful attention to the details of God's plan for the formation of close relationships yields lasting friendships and marriages.

THE PROCESS OF HUMAN BONDING. The segment of the Song of Solomon that we will study this week contains reflections from before and after the wedding of Solomon and Shulamith. In the opening lines (Song 2:8-15) the wife recalls some of their very special courtship experiences. These verses serve to highlight the importance of this period for couples. Their courtship and betrothal provided a foundation for their commitment to each other and the closeness they enjoyed in marriage (Song 2:16, 17).

With these glimpses into different phases of the relationship of this pair, the Song illustrates the fascinating process of human bonding. It affords us the opportunity to take a closer look at the predictable pattern of relationship formation, seemingly inscribed on the human heart since Creation.

COURTSHIP MEMORIES

Describe the event recalled in Song 2:8, 9. What kinds of feeling are present in Shulamith? in Solomon? To what does Shulamith compare her beloved?

Solomon is like a "roe" ("gazelle"—RSV) or a young "hart" ("stag"—RSV). These beautiful, graceful animals help describe the physical charms and attributes of the spouse. (Compare Prov. 5:19; Song 2:7, 16, 17.)

What is the purpose of Solomon's visit? Song 2:10-13.

The springtime of a relationship. The king visited Shulamith's mountain home to ask her to join him in a springtime outing amid the beauties of nature. The excitement, the romance, the promise of this budding relationship is conveyed through the lines, and between the lines, of the Song.

During the period of engagement, the structure of a couple's marital relationship is being shaped. Adequate preparation is needed for the important commitment about to be made.

"The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356, 357.

Anyone contemplating marriage should think carefully about the following questions. Most of these questions are relevant for us all, regardless of our marital plans. Can you answer each question positively? Of which are you uncertain? Discuss your answers with God in prayer. Seek confirmation of your marriage plans from your parents, your pastor, a relative, or another whom you trust as a spiritual guide.

Evaluating your personal preparation. Is my relationship with Jesus Christ personally satisfying? Do I have a positive outlook on life? Can I bear responsibility? Do I have an objective for my lifework? Am I a source of encouragement to others? Do I relate to my parents in an adult way? Do I recover quickly when I am emotionally hurt or angry? Am I ready to make a commitment to one person? Do others feel I am ready for marriage?

SELECTING A POTENTIAL LIFE PARTNER

Many questions should be considered: Is this person committed to Jesus Christ? Is he or she personally prepared for marriage? Do I have a strong conviction that this person values much the same things in life as I do? Do I love this person deeply despite the flaws I can see and others that I have yet to discover? Can I be flexible and accommodating regarding the ways in which this person is and will be different from me? Would our marriage strengthen us both spiritually? Can this marriage be blessed in our church? Do others feel I know this person well enough?

Preparing as a couple. Have we prayed often together? Have we shared our thoughts and feelings about God, church, Christian service, careers, money, sexuality, in-laws, children? Do we know and accept each other's family? Have we planned how to reach our goals in life and how to adjust if we cannot reach them? Have we discussed our respective responsibilities within marriage? Can we trust each other with our deepest fears? Have we honestly compared our expectations of each other, including the things we'd like to change in each other? Does our love-bond allow the individuality of each? Do we know by experience that we can solve problems and handle conflicts well together? Will we have the support of relatives and friends in our marriage?

What attitude toward Shulamith is displayed by Solomon?
Song 2:14.

Charming ways of the heart. Solomon affirms Shulamith's special qualities and conveys his wishes as an invitation, not a command. An invitation recognizes that fundamental feature with which the Creator has endowed every human being—the ability to think, the freedom to choose. True love invites; selfish love coerces, commands, threatens, or otherwise pressures the object of its passion to comply.

How does God recognize the sovereignty of the human will? Joshua 24:15 (compare Isa. 55:1; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17).

What are some of the pressures that we sometimes exert on our friends? on our marriage partner? on our family? How does this bring hurt, frustration, or fear?

FORMULA FOR MARRIAGE

With what words does the Song focus on the heart of the divine plan for marriage? Song 2:16.

Distilled essence of marriage. The fundamental theme of the Song of Solomon resides in these profound words, "My beloved is mine and I am his." (This is the "one flesh" described in Genesis 2:24.) Song 6:3 repeats the thought in reverse and Song 7:10 modifies it. French expositor Andre Feuillet beautifully termed it "the formula of mutual belonging." Belonging means mutual giving, attachment, devotion, and promise. All these are tied up in this cryptic package, this miniature marriage-covenant formula. Because Christ is our heavenly Bridegroom, we are His and He is ours. (See 1 Cor. 3:21-23.)

What is the significance of the phrase "he feeds among the lilies"? Song 2:16; 6:2, 3 (compare the differing uses of "feed" or "feeding" in Job 1:14; Hosea 12:1; Isa. 14:30).

The Hebrew word *feed* may be used in the sense of feeding someone, something, or oneself, as fits the context best. In the symbols of the Song, Shulamith is a "lily" (Song 2:1, 2), her beloved, a "gazelle" (Song 2:9, 17). Her husband is a caring companion, one she trusts, to whom she has opened her life, with whom she has made a marriage covenant. To her he is not a marauding fox, wantonly rampaging and spoiling tender grapes, but a gentle gazelle who "browses" (NIV), taking emotional and physical delight in her.

This passage opened with Solomon's invitation to Shulamith to go with him on an outing in the mountains. With what invitation by Shulamith to her husband does this section of the Song close? Song 2:17.

Some have interpreted this as Shulamith's bidding her beloved Godspeed as he returns home. Other interpreters see this verse as an invitation by Shulamith for Solomon to enjoy close spiritual and physical communion with her.

What does the knowledge that you are Christ's and He is yours do for your outlook on life and your relationships?

DIVINE DESIGN FOR BONDING IN RELATIONSHIPS

How does Genesis 2:24, 25 portray a pattern in forming the marriage bond?

The joining or bonding process for men and women in marriage is summarized in the Creation account with the progression implied in the words "leave," "cleave," "one flesh."

In what way does the word *cleave* or *join* summarize a relationship-building process? Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6.

A bonding script. *Cleave* or *cling* means "to adhere," "to stick together." (Compare 2 Sam. 23:10; Job 41:17; Dan. 2:43.) The psalmist clung to the testimonies of the Lord (Ps. 119:31). The word is used of the strong attraction that draws two together in a close relationship, such as in marriage (Gen. 2:24), in friendship (Prov. 18:24), or with God (Deut. 10:20). It is evident that this "cleaving," this relationship-building process, takes place in similar ways in all human beings, giving evidence of the Creator's handiwork.

What physical faculties are involved in relationship formation?

Gen. 12:14, 15; Song 4:9 _____

Judges 14:7; Song 2:14 _____

Gen. 26:8; Song 2:6 _____

Song 1:3, 12; 4:10 _____

Song 2:3; 5:1 _____

Relationships between people are formed through complex interactions involving the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of our beings. Sight, hearing, and touch play vital roles in bonding.

How have you observed bonding operating between parents and their infants? between friends? between couples preparing for marriage? between married couples?

BONDS OF HEAVENLY ORIGIN

Sin has marred the script for human bonding and the human sexuality with which it is so closely linked. Human beings still seek relationships, but do so now with scarred and weakened natures. And their notions of love and sexuality often are confused or perverted. God's redeeming grace and power are needed to guide this human bonding process and ensure the quality of relationships.

How does Paul in Ephesians treat this need for renewal in relationships? In what ways does the gospel build on the natural laws of human bonding? How does it change or modify them? Eph. 2:13-18; 3:16-19 (compare 4:1-3; 5:1-7).

The changes necessary for Christlike relationships to develop are brought about by God Himself. In Christ, He deals with the evil that obstructs human bonding, including the most significant bond of all—that between the soul and God. In Christ, God bonds us with Himself. He works the miracle of conversion in our minds and hearts. With a new heart come new affections. We are able now to "walk in love" (Eph. 5:2). As we partake of Christ's mind, we have a new appreciation of His will and a deep desire to learn of Him. Our human love and sexuality are schooled by His Word, directed and disciplined by His Spirit.

We are to be transformed spiritually and emotionally. In the plan of salvation, the need for bonding, which the loving Creator implanted in human hearts, is redeemed. No longer is it dominated by the corrupt whims, lusts, infidelities, and broken promises of the fallen heart. The covenant love of a new mind and a transformed heart brings kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, and endurance that does not die when severely tested. By grace, relationship formation becomes a dramatic production directed by the Holy Spirit.

"Men and women can reach God's ideal for them if they will take Christ as their helper. What human wisdom cannot do, His grace will accomplish for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can unite hearts in bonds that are of heavenly origin."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 362.

How do you plan to deepen the ties you have with family and friends? Think in terms of the physical, emotional, and spiritual changes you can make in your approach.

FURTHER STUDY: Study the guidelines for developing relationships in Ephesians 5:19–6:9. Read “Ministry of the Home,” and “The Builders of the Home” in *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 349–362.

“It is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed. Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection.

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 358.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about and share the following with your spouse or close friend:
 - a. An important reason we have become friends is . . .
 - b. I enjoy talking to you because . . .
 - c. I am drawn closest to the Lord by . . .
2. Think of the closest human relationship you enjoy. What would you say is the most important influence binding you to this person? What other secondary factors are also important?

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon pictures for us the bonding process between a man and a woman, from courtship days to the enjoyment of happy marriage. The principles set forth in God’s Word are the only safe guides to formation of close relationships, whether they are friendships or romantic attachments.

Marriage That Gladdens the Heart



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 3:6-11.

MEMORY TEXT: "Let marriage be held in honor among all" (Hebrews 13:4, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Though sin has perverted the original design for marriage given in Eden, by faith in the restoring power of Christ husbands and wives today may experience the purity and beauty of marriage that God intended.

CHRIST RESTORES IDEAL MARRIAGE. Sin has wrought more havoc with marriage than with most of God's gifts to us. Ideas regarding marriage and marriage practices often fall far short of God's original design. Yet, in Christ, that which sin has corrupted is restored. If we will permit it to do so, His truth will make our marriages in every way an honor to Him.

Couples wanting to implement God's ideal confront conflicts between tradition and truth, dominance and submission, servitude and companionship, lust and love. The life of every couple is a stage on which the great controversy in miniature is played out.

Our study this week traces the beginning of married life for Solomon and Shulamith and considers the effects of sin and the grace of redemption on their marriage.

A WEDDING REMEMBERED

How does Song 3:6-10 describe the wedding day and wedding procession of Solomon and Shulamith?

The reminiscence begins with a view of the wedding procession. The smoke of verse 6 "probably refers to the custom of heading a procession with burning incense which pervades the route of the procession with fragrant odors. This is an ancient and common custom in the East."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1117. The "bed" ("carriage," NIV) of verse 7 and the "chariot" ("carriage," NIV) of verse 9 are references to Solomon's portable carriage.

Who else share in the happiness of the wedding day? What custom does the act of the queen mother reflect? Song 3:10, 11.

The daughters of Jerusalem expressed their joy in the royal pair by their work on the royal carriage. "The paving with love may refer to verses worked on the counterpane, the hangings, or the carpet by the daughters of Jerusalem as an expression of their love for King Solomon and his bride."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1117.

"The crowning by *his mother* indicates that this is a celebratory crowning, for the royal crowning was carried out by the divine representative, the High Priest. . . . Until the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70, 'crowns' were worn by ordinary brides and bridegrooms."—G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 113.

A social dimension to marriage. In the biblical understanding, marriage is a covenant promise with both religious and social dimensions. Couples pledge to God, to each other, and to society to be faithful to each other. Support by family and friends greatly enhances the likelihood of a successful marriage.

How does Song 3:11 describe the wedding day? (Compare Ps. 4:7 and Isa. 51:3.)

Why are family celebrations of such events as baby dedications, birthdays, baptisms, weddings, and anniversaries important? How can the memory of a wedding day help sustain marriage in difficult times?

IN THE BEGINNING

How does Jesus help His hearers understand the meaning of marriage? How does His summary of Edenic marriage draw upon both Genesis 1 and 2? Matt. 19:3-8.

In the Genesis 2 record of the creation of man and woman, what human need did God express? How did God purpose to meet this need? Gen. 2:18-23.

"It is not good that the man should be alone." Humans are by His design social beings, with a need for fellowship. "I will make a helper suitable for him" (NIV). "Helper" (Heb. *ezer*) literally means "help" or "succor." The majority of Old Testament uses of this word portray God helping, supporting in one way or another. (See Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 70:5; 121:1, 2.) Adam's "helper" was to be one with whom he could share mutual love, care, and understanding. She would be a source of spiritual and emotional encouragement. *Helper* "is a relational term, describing a beneficial relationship, but in itself does not specify position or rank, either superiority or inferiority."—Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Spring 1988, p. 15.

In what special way did God provide this "helper" for Adam? Gen. 2:21, 22.

Adam played no active part in woman's creation. Raw material, "one of his ribs," was removed from Adam. The two genders are thus of the same earthly "dust" material. (Compare Gen. 2:7; 3:19.) The selection of the bone from Adam's side further signifies that man and woman were equal. "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

In what ways are the two kinds of human (male and female) alike and different? In your own words, how would you describe the relationship between man and woman as God originally designed it? What advantages would such a relationship have for husbands and wives today?

EQUAL PARTNERS

How do the new terms for *man* and *woman*, introduced after the creation of woman, indicate God's plan for the harmonious relationship of the sexes? Gen. 2:23 (compare Gen. 1:26-28).

With the arrival of woman, the sexual distinctiveness of the two genders of humankind becomes evident. The word for *man*, until now only *adam*, is now *ish*, and the word for *woman* *ishshah*. They are two beings, yet complementary, harmonious parts of one humanity. So complete was this oneness "in the day when they were created" that they had one name, *Adam*, given them by God (Gen. 5:2). Only after the account of the Fall do we read of the name *Eve* being given the woman (Gen. 3:20).

How do the two accounts of the creation of man and woman complement each other? Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 2:18-23. What special emphasis does Genesis 2:24, 25 give?

Both passages join in according full human worth, dignity, respect, and equality to the two genders. Genesis 1:26-28 indicates that both man and woman bear the "image of God"; both are given the same dominion as co-rulers over creatures of land, sea, and sky; both share God's blessing and the responsibility for procreation. Though sexually different, they are one. The singular word *adam* is twice used to designate the human pair (verses 26, 27).

Genesis 2 amplifies Genesis 1, detailing the process whereby the man (*ish*) and woman (*ishshah*) came to be. The emphasis is on the relational need of humanity and how the intimate bond of marriage fulfills that need. In this account marriage is instituted (Gen. 2:24). "These words express the deepest physical and spiritual unity of man and woman, and hold up monogamy before the world as the form of marriage ordained by God. These words do not recommend a forsaking of filial duty and respect toward father and mother, but refer primarily to the fact that a man's wife is to be first in his affections and that his first duty is toward her. His love for her is to exceed, though certainly not to supersede, a very proper love for his parents."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 227.

Why are the Bible records of the creation of man and woman and the institution of marriage important to us?

MARRIAGE AFTER THE FALL

How did sin affect the personal lives, as well as the marriage, of the first couple? How did it change their relationship to God? Gen. 3:1-24.

Tragedy for marriage. Henceforth marriage would suffer from the sinful tendency to exploit or dominate. Many future marriages would know hostility, abuse, violence, lust, and unfaithfulness. Many would know the searing pain of separation and divorce. The ideal of an exclusive lifelong relationship between one man and one woman would be replaced by other "marriage" forms.

In what way is Genesis 3:16 significant to an understanding of marriage after the Fall?

Change in a delicate alignment. In their sinless state neither of the sexes ruled the other. However, the divinely designed qualities of masculinity and femininity were distorted by sin, and their carefully balanced alignment in marriage was adversely affected. The self-disciplined, selfless love, the sense of fulfillment and peace, the mutual helping and willing submission to each other were radically altered.

"Their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. . . . It was by her [Eve's] solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 58. (Compare Eph. 5:21-26, 28-33; 1 Tim. 2:13-15; 1 Peter 3:1-7.)

Abuses in marriage. The Hebrew word in Genesis 3:16 for the husband's rule has a range of meaning that includes "protection," "love," and "care."

"Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 58, 59.

How does the story of Ahasuerus and Vashti illustrate the pattern of male domination by which marriage has often been abused? Esther 1:9-22. Contrast this with the Edenic ideal reflected in "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (Song 2:16).

HEIRS TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

From perversion to purity. "Marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

Describe Christ's triumph over sin. How may we experience His triumph today? What is yet future? Col. 2:15; Eph. 2:1-7; Rom. 8:22, 23.

In Christ, God restores marriage by redeeming husbands and wives. Though we wait for full deliverance from the bondage of corruption until His second coming, in Christ the kingdom of God has now come to us. (See Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 3:19.)

How did Christ's teaching overturn the evils that sin had brought to the relationship between the sexes? John 2:1-10; Matt. 9:15; 20:25-28; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Jesus "sanctioned marriage, recognizing it as an institution that He Himself had established. . . . Christ honored the marriage relation by making it also a symbol of the union between Him and His redeemed ones. He Himself is the Bridegroom; the bride is the church."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356.

The curse subjected the wife to the husband (compare *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 484). The gospel emphasizes the love and service of husband and wife to each other. "Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal. . . . She [the wife and mother] should feel that she is her husband's equal—to stand by his side, she faithful at her post of duty and he at his."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 231. "The husband is to be the houseband of the family, the priest of his home. The wife is to respect and love her husband, and he is to love and cherish his wife. [Eph. 5:15-21 quoted]."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 161, 1902 (Manuscript release #1317, p. 1).

Equal, yet different. "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3, RSV). Christ and the Father are entirely equal (Col. 2:9), but they exercise distinct functions within the Godhead. Similarly, man and woman were created equal but with different functions within the home.

FURTHER STUDY: Consider Jesus' respect for woman: John 4:6-30; 8:3-11; Luke 7:36-50; 10:38-42; 13:10-17. Read "Solemn Promises" and "Mutual Obligations" in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 99-104, 114-120, 211-215; and "The Temptation and Fall" and "The Plan of Redemption" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 52-70.

"Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control. Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other's love. Be kind, patient, and forbearing, considerate, and courteous. By the grace of God you can succeed in making each other happy, as in your marriage vow you promised to do."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361.

"Christ came not to destroy this institution, but to restore it to its original sanctity and elevation."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 99.

"Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 47.

"The husband is the house-band of the home treasures, binding by his strong, earnest, devoted affection the members of the household, mother and children, together in the strongest bonds of union.

"His name, 'house-band,' is the true definition of husband. . . . I saw that but few fathers realize their responsibility. . . . The husband and father is the head of the household. The wife looks to him for love and sympathy and for aid in the training of the children."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 211.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the gladness of Solomon's wedding illustrate the union between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the church, His bride? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.)
2. How does God's grace draw our family relationships ever closer to the ideals of Eden?

SUMMARY: To a greater extent than we realize we may know the life of Eden as God originally designed it. Christ is God's answer for all that sin has done to marriage. Christ designed that the energizing power of the Holy Spirit will enable couples in marriage to enjoy union and gladness.

A Unique and Tender Knowledge



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Song 4:1-5:1.

MEMORY TEXT: "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!" (Song 4:10, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Scripture celebrates the wholesomeness and beauty of the divine gift of married love. This gift illuminates the relationship between our loving Lord and His devoted people.

A SACRED THEME. The memory of Solomon and Shulamith's wedding day forms the exquisite centerpiece of the Song of Solomon. Song 3:6-11 has enabled us to glimpse the public ceremony. The delicate metaphors of the verses that follow (Song 4:1-5:1) contain the most tender and sublime scenes from within human marriage that God in His Word has permitted us to contemplate—the joy in one another experienced by a devoted married couple.

In the passage for this week's lesson we are privileged to behold that which is holy. These extraordinary scenes are purposeful. Through them the Holy Spirit would instruct us about ourselves, about our married love, and, because He is the Creator of marriage, about Himself.

GOD'S IDEAL PERVERTED

Despite God's plan for marriage, what sinister powers are at war with Him, His followers, and His truth? 2 Cor. 4:3, 4; Eph. 6:12.

"Excluded from heaven, he [Satan] resolved to be avenged by injuring the workmanship of God. . . . No sooner was man created than Satan resolved to efface in him the image of God, and to place his stamp where God's should be."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1119.

What attitude must believers have when God reveals sinful attitudes and practices to them? Acts 3:19, 20; 17:30, 31.

"Satan is ever on the alert to deceive and mislead. He is using every enchantment to allure men into the broad road of disobedience. He is working to confuse the senses with erroneous sentiments, and remove the landmarks by placing his false inscription on the signposts which God has established to point the right way. . . . None need despair because of the inherited tendencies to evil, but when the Spirit of God convicts of sin, the wrongdoer must repent and confess and forsake the evil. Faithful sentinels are on guard to direct souls in right paths."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1120.

What effect did the traditions, customs, and false philosophies encountered by Christ have on truth and human lives? Mark 7:9, 13; Matt. 23:1-4, 13 (compare Col. 2:8).

Erroneous or unbalanced views lead to an incomplete, warped concept of God. They cause distortion in Christian development or abandonment of God altogether. Like the enemy in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-30), Satan has introduced confusion by mingling error with truth.

Erroneous ideas regarding social relationships and marriage are just as damaging to emotional and spiritual growth as are erroneous interpretations of Bible doctrine.

What insights regarding human relationships have you found valuable in your search for success and happiness? What negative attitudes have you discarded?

GOD'S IDEAL DISTORTED

What other institution shares a common origin with marriage? Gen. 2:1-3. How important is it to us today? Matt. 24:20.

"Jesus pointed His hearers back to the marriage institution as ordained at creation. . . . He referred them to the blessed days of Eden, when God pronounced all things 'very good.' Then marriage and the Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63.

Compare the Sabbath and marriage both in their purpose and in the ways they have suffered under sin:

| | Sabbath | Marriage |
|--|---|--|
| Specially blessed | Gen. 2:3 | Gen. 5:2 |
| Symbolic purpose | Ex. 20:8-11 | Isa. 54:5, 6 |
| A delightful experience | Isa. 58:13, 14 | Prov. 5:18, 19 |
| Sacredness desecrated | Eze. 22:8 | Eze. 22:9-11 |
| Subject of religious disputes | Mark 2:23, 24 | Mark 10:1-16 |
| Influenced by pagan practices and philosophies | Observance changed to accommodate worshippers | Conditioned by Greek idea that body is inferior to soul. |

God's ideal distorted. Desecration of the Sabbath parallels the desecration of marriage. Revival of true Sabbathkeeping will be accompanied by revival of Christian marriage.

Devaluation of women. In pagan cultures, and even among the people of God, women were often regarded as property. Easy divorce for men, polygamy, and treatment of women as inferiors corrupted God's plan.

Violations of the marriage covenant: adultery (2 Sam. 11:2, 4), incest (Eze. 22:9-11), rape (2 Sam. 13:14), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Rom. 1:26, 27), prostitution (Judges 16:1), polygamy (2 Sam. 5:13), divorce, violence, and abuse (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:8).

Sexual renunciation or permissiveness. Throughout the Middle Ages celibacy and virginity were thought more holy than marriage. This view is still held, though it is contrary to Scripture. (See Heb. 13:4.) By contrast, today sexual pleasure is often divorced from true love within marriage.

LESSONS FROM A LOVING COUPLE

As we have already discovered, Song 4:16–5:1 are the focal point of the book. One hundred eleven lines of Hebrew text precede 4:16 and 111 lines follow 5:1. These delicately worded verses, shrouded in symbols, represent the consummation of Solomon and Shulamith's marriage relationship. Song 4:1-15 likewise belongs to this private time. The ceremony (Song 3:11) concluded, the couple take delight in each other.

How do the words of Song 4:1-7 convey Solomon's love for his bride? What truths about married love do they serve to convey?

Though the meanings of these several compliments may be somewhat obscure to us, the groom's comparisons are to things familiar and enjoyable to them both.

The Song of Solomon presents the personal, physical aspects of married love as a source of enjoyment like the rest of creation. (See Prov. 5:18, 19; Gen. 26:8.) Scripture knows nothing of the artificial, pagan separation between mankind's physical and spiritual natures, nor the aversion to the joy of wedded love that appears in the writings of some church fathers.

In what way is Solomon's superlative compliment in Song 4:7 a commentary on true love?

Blessed is the couple who, when they discover the imperfections that were camouflaged by early romance, can still say, "There is no flaw in you" (Song 4:7, RSV). God's gift of selfless love, dispensed by His Spirit (Rom. 5:5), sustains romance and friendship. "There is no flaw in you" becomes a commentary on the lover as much as on the one loved. True love cloaks imperfections and deeply values the person.

Christ "is the Bridegroom; the bride is the church, of which, as His chosen one, He says, 'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.' Canticles 4:7. . . . Ephesians 5:25-28."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356.

What is the wisdom in focusing upon the good qualities of a spouse, a relative, or a friend? How can we confront attitudes and behaviors injurious to our relationships and still be loving?

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF LOVE

What is the relationship between the invitation "Come with me from Lebanon" (Song 4:8) and the comparisons to Lebanon of Song 4:11, 15?

Solomon enjoyed Lebanon, using its timber extensively (1 Kings 4:33; 5:6) and placing buildings there (1 Kings 9:19). Probably these verses imply that this is where he found Shulamith. His pleasure with this region's scenic grandeur (Song 4:8), the fresh fragrance of its vegetation and forests (verse 11), the refreshment of its waters (verse 15) describe her charms.

How does the attitude shown by each spouse in the Song reflect their commitment to the gospel principles referred to in these texts?

1 Cor. 7:1-5 _____

Phil. 2:3, 4 (compare 1 Thess. 4:3-5) _____

Solomon invites his wife, "Come with me" (Song 4:8). She responds with an invitation of her own, "Let my beloved come into his garden" (Song 4:16). He responds (Song 5:1). This invitation-response pattern illuminates the nature of true love. There is no force or manipulation. The response of Shulamith is the best evidence of the atmosphere of loving freedom that exists. Into this relationship she freely and lovingly enters. "My garden" is "his garden" (Song 4:16).

"Neither party has the right to deny the other the intimate privileges of the marriage relation. . . . Each has a claim to conjugal rights; always, however, with the divine qualification that God is to be honored in all things."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 706, 707.

A loving spirit. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4, RSV). This principle should lead each to promote the other's comfort, pleasure, and satisfaction. Neither should push the other beyond that with which he or she is physically, emotionally, or spiritually comfortable. As married partners study "to advance the happiness of each other," there will be "mutual love, mutual forbearance"—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360. "In all the deportment of one who possesses true love, the grace of God will be shown."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 50.

OUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

How does Scripture commonly describe the marital union? Gen. 4:1 (compare 1 Sam. 1:19; Luke 1:34; Matt. 1:24, 25). How does this deepen understanding of married love as symbolic of the union between the believer and God? Eph. 5:31, 32.

"*Know* is the term used in the Bible to define our relationship to God; it also is the term used to designate the intimate union of husband and wife."—Ed Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 22. In this "knowing," the most hidden inner depths of their beings surface and are offered by each to the other. For the discerning Christian, such a unique and tender knowledge provides insight into the most holy mystery, the union of Christ and the church.

What do these passages indicate regarding our privilege of knowing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Jer. 9:24 _____

Hosea 6:3 _____

John 16:13-15 _____

John 17:3 _____

2 Peter 1:2 _____

"In a knowledge of God all true knowledge and real development have their source. Wherever we turn, in the physical, the mental, or the spiritual realm; in whatever we behold, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed. Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate."—*Education*, p. 14.

Consider why the Scriptures use the physical, mental, and spiritual relationship between a husband and wife as an illustration of the believer's relationship with God. What specific features of the two relationships are similar?

FURTHER STUDY: How does Paul's discussion of the believer's fellowship with Christ (Romans 8) relate to the fellowship between husband and wife that is encouraged in other passages of Scripture? Read "Marital Duties and Privileges" in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 121-128. If you have access to it, read *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 705-708, 1038.

"Religion is needed in the home. Only this can prevent the grievous wrongs which so often embitter married life. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish love. Then soul will be knit with soul, and the two lives will blend in harmony. Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy vigils will hallow the marriage chamber. Debasing sensuality will be banished. Upward to God will the thoughts be directed; to Him will the heart's devotion ascend.

"In every family where Christ abides, a tender interest and love will be manifested for one another; not a spasmodic love expressed only in fond caresses, but a love that is deep and abiding."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 94.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is verbal communication between husband and wife important as a means of reinforcing their love relationship?
2. Why do some married couples cease to express love for each other by kindly words and deeds? How can the joy of first love be restored?
3. Think about and share the following with your spouse:
 - a. Things that are very good about our relationship.
 - b. Things that are fairly good, but where some improvements could be made.
 - c. Things I can do to improve our relationship.
4. In what sense is it true that wrong attitudes about marriage and sexuality are an homage we pay to the god of this world? Why must a true Sabbath revival be accompanied by an equal effort to recover marriage as God intended it?

SUMMARY: God honors the conjugal relationship as an enriching part of human life. The physical, intellectual, and spiritual relationship between husband and wife represent the believer's relationship with Christ.

Hope for Shattered Dreams



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 3:1-5; 5:2-6:3.

MEMORY TEXT: "His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend" (Song 5:16, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: Even in close relationships disagreements and differences are inevitable, but God's wisdom and power enable us to surmount the barriers that tend to separate us. He equips us for building intimate friendships and families.

WE CAN OVERCOME THE BARRIERS TO BONDING. In the Song of Solomon, the delights of marriage, as well as some of its difficulties, are revealed. On either side of the happy scenes of Solomon and Shulamith's wedding day are episodes that contrast sharply, displaying elements of conflict, stress, and a sense of separation. These verses help us to face our own close relationships honestly. We discover that, by the wisdom and grace of God, we can surmount the barriers to our bonding with others.

Differences in personality and approach to life's challenges need not necessarily result in irreconcilable conflict. Persons who are somewhat set in their attitudes and behavior can gain new insights and develop new methods of interacting with others as they allow their friends or spouses to influence them.

REVEALING DREAMS

Describe the events recorded in Song 3:1-4; 5:2-7. What similarities do you find? What contrasts?

Feelings of separation. In these episodes, Shulamith longs to be with Solomon, but feels separated from him. In Song 3:1-5, no reasons are given for her concern over the separation. The anxiety of her search, which is futile at first, is relieved when she finds her husband shortly after meeting the watchmen.

In Song 5:2-8, Shulamith refuses the late-night approach of Solomon. Finally deciding to let him in, she finds that he is gone. A search similar to that of the earlier episode takes place, this time without success.

What evidence indicates that these episodes are dreams?

The two episodes are perhaps best understood as dreams:

1. *Nighttime incidents.* (Compare references to night, sleep, rising from bed in 3:1, 2; 5:2, 5). "To sleep while the heart wakes [Song 5:2] signifies to dream, for sleep and distinct consciousness cannot be co-existent; the movements of thought either remain in obscurity or are projected as dreams."—Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 91.

2. *Emotionally charged, recurring scenes with abrupt endings.* In each incident Shulamith experiences:

- a. a sense of the loss of her beloved (3:1; 5:6).
- b. frantic, futile searching (3:1; 5:6).
- c. encounters with the watchmen (3:3; 5:7).
- d. anxiety and pain. Though the first episode ends with the finding of the beloved, even this is not without anxiety. She "held" (literally "seized") him and "would not let him go" (Song 3:4). The second episode ends abruptly after the violence of Song 5:7.

3. *Shifts in setting are common in dreams.* In the earlier experience she is first in her bedroom (palace), then in the city streets and squares (Jerusalem), then in her mother's bedroom (Lebanon). The second episode contains scenes inside and outside her bedroom, then in the city streets.

4. *Events inconceivable in real life.* It is unlikely that the queen would be searching the city for the king, that she would be alone on the streets at night, or that she would be attacked by her subjects in the manner described.

A RECORD OF EMOTIONAL PAIN

Compare other scriptural references to individuals with nighttime experiences of emotional tension and troubled rest upon their beds:

Esther 6:1 _____

Ps. 6:6, 7 _____

Dan. 2:1 _____

Dan. 6:18 _____

Concern or anxiety about relationships often disturbs sleep or causes dreaming. Scripture speaks of individuals being emotionally tense, restless, and troubled upon their beds. A heart and mind at peace can truly sleep (Ps. 4:8). While prophetic revelations are sometimes given in dreams (Daniel 2), usually dreams play back, like an emotional record, the important wishes, fears, concerns, and worries of the dreamer.

Shulamith's dreams hint at vague feelings of concern about her future with Solomon, which give rise to strong feelings within her. She has a sense of distance between herself and her husband.

What feelings do you think Shulamith could have been experiencing in her marriage to Solomon? What feelings might her husband have had? Check from the following list, and add other feelings that may be appropriate. Put "M" for him, "F" for her, or "MF" when both have the same feeling:

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> jealous | <input type="checkbox"/> manipulated | <input type="checkbox"/> lonely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> offended | <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> rejected | <input type="checkbox"/> vindictive | <input type="checkbox"/> indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> afraid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> misunderstood | |

Explain why you chose these feelings.

How does your experience reveal that close relationships have their moments of ecstasy and delight as well as moments of pain and anxiety? How do relationship matters affect your ability to concentrate in the daytime or to sleep at night? What have you found helpful to enable you to deal with your concerns?

DIVINE PURPOSES FOR MARRIAGE

For what great causes was marriage ordained by God? Gen. 1:28; 2:18.

Perpetuation of the human family and also provision for human love, affection, and companionship are outlined in Genesis as God's purposes for marriage.

"God made from the man a woman, to be a companion and helpmeet for him, to be one with him, to cheer, encourage, and bless him, he in his turn to be her strong helper. All who enter into matrimonial relations with a holy purpose—the husband to obtain the pure affections of a woman's heart, the wife to soften and improve her husband's character and give it completeness—fulfill God's purpose for them. . . .

"He ordained that men and women should be united in holy wedlock, to rear families whose members, crowned with honor, should be recognized as members of the family above."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 99.

The call of the gospel is to a shared life in marriage, to mutual love, belonging, caring, acceptance, and service.

What barriers to meaningful relationships lie within us? What is needed to remove these barriers? Study the following passages as they may apply to marriage and other interpersonal relationships: Isa. 59:2; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 19:8; Rom. 7:15-25; 8:1-14.

Scripture points to the heart as the source of difficulty in relationships between us as human beings, as well as between us and God. *Heart* "generally denotes the seat of various attitudes, emotions, and of intelligence."—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 447. Our hearts govern our attitudes, our behaviors, and our relationships with others. If deep in our hearts, for example, there is a sense of worthlessness, we may unconsciously act this out by withdrawal, by hiding our feelings, by a lack of communication, or by fighting, blaming, or seeking to control or manipulate others. Our most pressing need is to allow the Holy Spirit to direct every attitude and behavior. "Hearts that are filled with the love of Christ can never get very far apart."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 94.

As you examine your heart, what barriers to mutually beneficial relationships with friends and loved ones have you erected? How do you plan to remove these barriers?

DIFFICULTIES WITH DIFFERENCES

Our differences tend to pose barriers to all our close relationships. "We differ so widely in disposition, habits, and education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same. There are not two whose experience is alike in every particular. The trials of one are not the trials of another. The duties that one finds light, are to another most difficult and perplexing."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 473.

The way we deal with our differences determines the quality of our marriages, our families, and our other friendships. To accept differences with understanding and a willingness on the part of both individuals to make adjustments results in progressive growth toward deep and lasting relationships. Otherwise, differences cause disagreement. Disagreements can result in expressions of anger and conflict. Unresolved anger and conflict can lead to a giving up in the struggle for happiness, followed by resentment, bitterness, rebellion, and alienation. Or there may be endless disputing, which is never settled. Some may work out a form of agreement by the capitulation of one of the partners to the other, thus giving up his or her own personality. Or withdrawal may occur, with each person organizing his own life and becoming more and more secretive. (See Paul Tournier, *To Understand Each Other* [Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1967], p. 32.)

How did differences in spouses affect the following biblical marriages? What conflicts were present? What evidences of anger and irritation were there? What resolutions were reached?

Rebekah and Isaac (Gen. 24:15-26, 66, 67; 27:1-46):

Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sam. 1:1—2:11, 20, 21):

Michal and David (1 Sam. 18:20-28; 2 Sam. 6:16-23):

Why would it be good for couples contemplating marriage to compare the ways they are alike or different? Suppose one partner needs to change, but cannot or will not. What attitude should the other partner adopt? Should there be a limit to tolerance? (See 1 Cor. 7:10, 11.)

BECOMING ONE WHEN TWO ARE SO DIFFERENT

In what promise may we place our trust when we face difficulties in our relationships? Phil. 4:19.

Do not harbor negative thoughts. "Though difficulties, perplexities, and discouragements may arise, let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union is a mistake or a disappointment. Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

God's choice is best. "A strong sense of common purpose, a conviction amid all other uncertainties that their destinies are intertwined, can provide the Christian married couple with an indomitable will to toil together for the fulfillment of the dreams they dreamed together when they took their vows at the altar. They can rest content in the assurance that because their choice of each other was not theirs alone, their life together is enriched by the divine blessing."—David and Vera Mace, *In the Presence of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 70.

Varied temperaments can relate. "Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings and respect the right of the others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each."—*Child Guidance*, p. 205.

How does Shulamith describe her husband? Song 5:10, 16.

"Tell the people of Him who is 'the Chiefest among ten thousand,' and the One 'altogether lovely.' The Song of Solomon 5:10, 16. Words alone cannot tell it. Let it be reflected in the character and manifested in the life. Christ is sitting for His portrait in every disciple."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 827.

In what ways are differences evident between you and your spouse, children, or others to whom you would like to be closer? How can you use these differences to build stronger relationships?

FURTHER STUDY: What shall we do with anger in relationships? Study these references: Gen. 30:2; Ps. 4:4; 85:3, 5; 103:8; Prov. 15:1; 16:32; Matt. 5:22; Mark 3:5; Eph. 4:26, 27, 31; Col. 3:8.

What attitude lies at the heart of Christian relationships? Eph. 4:32 (compare Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 2:23, 24; Rom. 12:17, 19).

Read "A Happy, Successful Partnership," "Mutual Obligations" and "A Sacred Circle" in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 105-120, 177-180.

"It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

"By getting behind the anger to the hurt feeling that has triggered it, the couple can learn something important about their relationship and clear it up. This is one of the most valuable ways in which relationships grow."—David and Vera Mace, *In the Presence of God*, p. 58.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about and share the following with your spouse or close friend:
 - a. Times when your forgiveness has meant much.
 - b. Areas where forgiveness is needed in our relationship to make way for new beginnings.
2. Can you tell of a situation in which, when someone forgave you, your attitude changed and you were able to establish a renewed friendship with that person?

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon describes Shulamith's dreams, which dramatized her fears regarding her relationship with her husband. When differences between friends or married couples result in division and broken friendship, by God's grace it is possible to study each other's points of view and to be sensitive to each other's feelings. When differences of temperament are understood, they can result in more effective bonding.

Drink From Your Own Well



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 6:4-7:10.

MEMORY TEXT: "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners" (Song 6:4).

KEY THOUGHT: The nurture of marriage maintains strong bonds and guards against inappropriate relationships. As the heavenly Bridegroom, Christ inspires His bride, the church, to be faithful amid the challenges of the last days.

THE JOY OF MARRIAGE. In 1891 Hudson Taylor published sermons on the Song of Solomon. Prefacing a reprinted edition of this book, J. A. Motyer observes: The Song of Songs "is rarely, if ever, taken in to the contemporary pulpit, and present-day Christians, on the whole, seem to view the song with nervousness, if not with suspicion. And, to be frank, there is good reason for this, for the song alludes with plainness and delight to areas of human experience where modern fashions, at least among Christians, dictate reticence, and where the devil has achieved something of a take-over bid."—Hudson Taylor, *Union and Communion* (London: China Inland Mission, 1891), p. vi.

Song, screen, and printed page today portray the joys, pleasures, and excitement of what is called love, but rarely in marriage. It is time to reclaim for marriage its profound joy.

MARRIAGE IN DANGER

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-7. In what ways are the characteristics of life in the last days contrary to God's plan for:

Friendship _____

Marriage _____

Family life _____

Sexuality _____

Why is it significant that, following his counsel on marriage and family living (Eph. 5:21-6:4), the apostle Paul draws upon military metaphors and uses the language of battle to describe the Christian experience? Eph. 6:10-12. What are the "wiles of the devil" as far as marriage is concerned? How can his assaults be resisted?

Studied strategies against marriage. "It was Satan's studied effort to pervert the marriage institution, to weaken its obligations and lessen its sacredness; for in no surer way could he deface the image of God in man and open the door to misery and vice."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338. "The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 292.

That many marriages are miserable is demonstrated by statistics on marital violence and escalating divorce rates. Reports from many who remain married tell of conflicts, romance-robbing frustrations, and wide-scale unhappiness.

How does the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14, RSV) reveal the danger to which marriage is exposed in our fallen world? To what sinful tendencies of the human heart does this commandment point? Matt. 5:28; 1 Cor. 7:7, 9 (compare Titus 2:12; 1 Peter 2:11).

Susceptibility to unauthorized relationships. The seventh commandment, when obeyed by Christ's grace, protects the sanctity of marriage and the home. It applies to the whole range of sexual morals. It acknowledges the lustful tendencies within us because of sin and warns against yielding to them.

WARNING SIGNALS

How do the Proverbs of Solomon warn us about dangers for marriage? What does Proverbs 5 say about immorality? How do the references to the woman's lips and voice (verse 3), to walking with her, visiting her house (verse 8), being embraced in her arms (verses 20-23), seek to discourage immoral bonding? What consequences follow adultery? 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4.

"Fidelity to the marriage vow is good sense and infidelity is folly, even if there were no judgment and no afterlife. But there is an afterlife, and entrance to it is dependent upon a willingness to be cleansed from all defilement. The adulterer meets a double condemnation. He loses the true joys of this life and is barred from the greater and more enduring joys of the life to come (Prov. 15:3; Mal. 3:5; Heb. 13:4)." —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 964.

Early warning signals. Our human weaknesses provide no excuse for sin. We must be aware of situations in which we are vulnerable. It causes us to be more earnest in maintaining faithfulness and integrity. An adulterous relationship can steal up on anyone who ignores the warning signals. Insight into ourselves should cause us to call upon Christ for grace. (See Prov. 5:21.)

Times when individuals are particularly vulnerable to inappropriate bonding include:

- When one is working apart from one's spouse.
- When one is experiencing grief or loss or is in special need of affirmation.
- When one is sharing spiritual or emotional topics on a deep personal level.

The complex physiological and psychological laws that govern human pair-bonding operate similarly whether a relationship is appropriate or illicit. When an extraordinary comfort, an exceptional inner delight, an electric excitement results from seeing a person, from hearing the other's voice, or from touching or being touched, the initial stages of the bonding sequence are under way. An urge for privacy with him or her, anticipation of closer contact, or desire for more intimate communication signals deeper involvement. Daydreaming or night dreaming about the person confirms the growing bond.

What means do you use to restrain yourself when you become aware of any of the signs listed above? (See 1 John 5:1-5, 18.)

THE DIVINE PRESCRIPTION

What example of faithfulness and integrity did Joseph provide? What special pressures were upon him as a single person? What firm and decisive steps did he take to avoid forming an inappropriate relationship? Gen. 39:7-20.

"Under the inspecting eye of God and holy angels many take liberties of which they would not be guilty in the presence of their fellow men, but Joseph's first thought was of God. 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' he said."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 217.

Considering the Mosaic law's death penalty for adultery (Lev. 20:10), why was Christ's forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery significant? John 8:1-11. In what way does the spirit of forgiveness look beyond the actual offense to treat the individual's inner sense of shame?

Divine pardon available. "In His act of pardoning this woman and encouraging her to live a better life, the character of Jesus shines forth in the beauty of perfect righteousness. While He does not palliate sin, nor lessen the sense of guilt, He seeks not to condemn, but to save. The world had for the erring woman only contempt and scorn; but Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. The Sinless One pities the weakness of the sinner, and reaches to her a helping hand. . . . Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

How is the statement "Keep the windows of the soul closed earthward and opened heavenward" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 96) good advice in avoiding inappropriate relationships? In fulfilling this counsel, what is the special value of counseling, guidance, and support from trained professionals when a marriage is in danger? How might the lessons Jesus taught in forgiving the adulterous woman help us in relating to those who have committed similar offenses? Why is forgiving of a guilty marriage partner so important—even when the marital relationship is no longer viable?

NURTURE FOR A TENDER PLANT

What positive counsel does Solomon give about strengthening marriage? Prov. 5:15-19. How does this compare with the themes within the Song of Solomon?

"Home is to be the center of the purest and most elevated affection. . . . The plant of love must be carefully nourished, else it will die."—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 195, 196.

"Drink from your own well." This passage (Prov. 5:15-19) is a strong affirmation of marriage and the directive to cultivate love with one's spouse. Here Scripture likens the union of a husband and wife to a wellspring of water which refreshes the hearts of both. (Compare Song 4:15.) "A man's love for his wife should be a strong affection that enters into every facet of life. It should be—in a good sense—an obsession, so that nothing is thought or done without being affected by the thought of the one who shares the life. In this sense love is an inebriation. The word for 'ravished' [Prov. 5:19] may literally mean 'intoxicated.'"—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 964.

Discover new comparisons made by Solomon. What compliments are repeated? Why? Song 6:4-10.

Love for a lifetime. "To gain a proper understanding of the marriage relation is the work of a lifetime. Those who marry enter a school from which they are never in this life to be graduated.

"However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the afteryears."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 105.

Maintaining a healthy marriage requires regular repetition of the steps in bonding—admiring each other, talking, touching, playing, laughing, listening, worshiping together, complimenting each other's special qualities and talents, accepting each other's limitations, sharing each other's deepest joys and fears.

In what ways does Christian love and commitment make a difference, even in a marriage with less than ideal circumstances? What *new* compliment could you give today to your friend, your spouse, your child, or other relative?

RECAPTURING EDEN

What additional comparisons highlight Shulamith's bearing and character? Song 6:10.

This description applies to both Shulamith and the pure bride of Christ. "Beauty and strength are here combined in a description that has appropriately been applied to the church."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1121.

"Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict. 'Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners' (Song of Solomon 6:10), she is to go forth into all the world, conquering and to conquer."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 725.

How does Song 7:1-10 endorse the physical aspects of married love? (Compare Gen. 26:7-9; 29:17-20; Prov. 5:19.)

Reminiscent of Eden. Solomon's delight in Shulamith is another crescendo in the Song. In their marriage, the deepest levels of bonding are open to them. And in these, they both take delight. With joy and wonder the wife exclaims, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (Song 7:10, RSV). The whole passage indicates a marital relationship reminiscent of Eden.

Love is not lust. "Love is a pure and holy principle, but lustful passion will not admit of restraint and will not be dictated to or controlled by reason. It is blind to consequences; it will not reason from cause to effect." "It is carrying that which is lawful to excess that makes it a grievous sin."—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 123, 124, 122.

Love's emotions a gift of the Creator. "It was our Creator who gifted us with the capacity for the intense and passionate emotions required to fall in love. Clearly, God intended for our emotional potential to be fully developed in marriage and to find its fulfillment in oneness with our beloved. . . .

"Infatuation demands and takes; love delights in giving. . . . In real love, your reason, instructed by biblical concepts, guides your emotions and shapes your relationship according to God's wisdom."—Ed Wheat, *Love Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980), pp. 94, 95.

How would you explain the relationship between spiritual and physical love within marriage?

FURTHER STUDY: Read "Security Through Love" and "Moral Standards" in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 195-199; 326-339; read also from "Joseph in Egypt" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 217, 218.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For true love to be recaptured, what change must take place at the center of one's life? Gal. 2:20; John 3:16-21.
2. Evaluate your ability at rekindling affection and love:
 - a. Have I renewed my commitment to my spouse/friend?
 - b. Does my partner feel loved?
 - c. Do I care for my personal appearance?
 - d. Do I offer honest compliments often?
 - e. Am I imaginative and creative?

SUMMARY: The Lord designs that pure marriage between a man and a woman should be a source of spiritual, emotional, and physical blessing to them both, and a source of blessing to their loved ones, friends, neighbors, and the society in which they live.



This picture shows one of the first public baptisms in the Soviet Division in 70 years.

December 26, this division will receive its first Thirteenth Sabbath Offering since 1927. Won't you help us raise a half-million dollars* for more baptisms there?

**The division portion is 25%. To raise this much, the total offering will need to be 2 million. The other 75%, with the offerings of the other 12 weeks, goes to support existing world mission work.*

Passing on Love's Torch



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 7:11–8:14.

MEMORY TEXT: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death" (Song 8:6).

KEY THOUGHT: A happy home life increases the likelihood that children will experience wholesome emotional development, relate well to others, and make their parents' values their own.

CHILDHOOD HOME LIFE PREPARES FOR MARRIAGE. Perhaps no influence is more telling upon children's present and future emotional well-being than the quality of their relationship with their parents. For this reason, though the Song of Solomon is not about children, its theme—the joy to be found in marriage—is profoundly important to children.

The hero and heroine of the Song were once children themselves. Like all couples, the hero and heroine of the Song brought to their union what they had learned at home about themselves, about human relationships, and about love. In the final sections of the Song are found several references to Shulamith's home, mother, childhood, and youth. In a unique way, these verses reach back to the years of childhood, showing the influence of the parental home on marriage.

A HEART TURNED TOWARD HOME

What invitation and proposal does Shulamith make to her husband? Song 7:11-13.

"In this section the bride expresses her longing for her home in Lebanon."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1122.

What makes Shulamith want to go home? What memories does she have? Who else is in her mind? Song 7:12-8:2.

Fond memories of home. Happy memories of a childhood home and its natural surroundings flood Shulamith's mind. Their early romance took place there. This section parallels Solomon's courtship visit to her home (Song 2:8-12). Shulamith's memory of home includes thoughts of her mother. Thinking of the high moral standards her mother impressed upon her, Shulamith seems to reminisce of a time early in her acquaintance with the king. She wishes now for them to go back to her home as husband and wife.

What does Scripture teach regarding the important role of parents in their children's lives? Prov. 1:8; Isa. 66:13; Eph. 6:4.

What responsibilities do children have toward their parents? Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20, 21.

Mutual responsibilities of parents and children. Children are a gift from God (Ps. 127:3). They are the "younger members of God's family" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 161). To find Christ, to trust Him, to be reborn in Him, to grow in Him, and to follow Him is a journey that God has not left children to make alone. As God is a parent to us, so earthly parents are to provide for, train, and correct their children. They too are to be adopted into the heavenly family.

"Parents are entitled to a degree of love and respect which is due to no other person. . . . The fifth commandment requires children not only to yield respect, submission, and obedience to their parents, but also to give them love and tenderness, to lighten their cares, to guard their reputation, and to succor and comfort them in old age."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308.

"TRAIN UP A CHILD"

How can the gospel enable a home to be the happiest place on earth, a foretaste of our home in heaven? John 15:12; 1 John 4:7-11.

The nucleus of the home is the relationship of the parents. If Christ's love has made their marriage fragrant, its aroma will permeate the whole family.

"Mutual affection between husband and wife will be to the family what the heating system is to a house. It will maintain the relationship of all family members in a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere. That does not mean, however, that the peace of the family will never be disturbed. . . . It is not the absence of problems that marks the truly happy family, but the confident assurance that relationships in the home are basically so sound that family members can deal with any problems which may arise." —David and Vera Mace, *In the Presence of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 109.

What valuable counsel on transmitting values to our children is found in Proverbs 22:6?

Children need to be trained. Because children do not naturally follow after Christian values, they should be lovingly trained. There is a need for firmness. But in God's plan firmness is always paired with kindness. Parents need "a firm, steady hand and a kindness which convinces the child of your love." —*Child Guidance*, p. 283. (See also p. 264 and *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 391.)

Parents should seek to create a thirst for the things of God, making His ways so attractive that children will seek after them as eagerly as a newborn turns to its mother's breast. It is vital for parents to model Christian values consistently in their own lives. Kindly but firmly they should correct their children's misbehavior, at the same time encouraging them to ask questions. The goal is to encourage children to accept Christ's way.

How does one balance "leaving" father and mother (Gen. 2:24) with "honoring" them (Ex. 20:12)? In what sense does the directive to "leave" obligate parents to release their adult children to live their own lives? What can parents do to maintain a relationship with their children?

MAKE DISCIPLES

How did Jesus describe a "disciple"? John 8:31; 13:35. In what way is the family an important setting for carrying out Jesus' directive to make disciples? Matt. 28:19.

The most important mission field. "As workers for God, our work is to begin with those nearest. It is to begin in our own home. There is no more important missionary field than this."—*Child Guidance*, p. 476.

Christian families are natural settings for teaching Christian truth. Parents should use God's Word in teaching values and lifestyle. Since children first learn about relationships in the family, the Christian family possesses a remarkable potential for teaching about God's love and the Christian manner of relating to others (John 13:35).

"It [the family] is a place where disciplelike relational skills are learned, and it is a primary group in which disciple making takes place."—Dennis Guernsey, *A New Design for Family Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1982), p. 11.

How do relational skills learned at home prepare us to be God's disciples? Complete the column on the right.

| <i>Family Experience</i> | <i>Experience With God</i> |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Showing respect | [Reverence] |
| Communication | |
| Showing appreciation | |
| Submitting to one another | |

In what ways does Scripture indicate the need for sharing truths about close relationships, love, and sexuality with our children? Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:1-30; Deut. 6:6-9; Prov. 6:20-29.

Scripture does not hesitate to share extensive instruction about issues related to love, intimacy, and sexuality. Parents were to take the time to teach their children (Deut. 6:6-9).

How do you teach children God's plan for relationships?

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT LOVE, INTIMACY, AND SEXUALITY

Joseph's experience indicates that his parents were able to share such topics with their children. "The early impressions made upon his mind garrisoned his heart in the hour of fierce temptation and led him to exclaim, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God [Gen. 39:9]?' "—*Child Guidance*, p. 197.

Establish a loving home climate. The love of their parents for them and for each other is a primary source of instruction for children about love, intimacy, and sexuality.

Communicate the positive biblical message. The parents' comfort with the subject of intimacy and sexuality determines the quality and effectiveness of their guidance. Positive, balanced scriptural views must replace misunderstandings, myths, and folklore.

Early parent-child bonding, through cuddling babies with our hands, eyes, voices, and mouths, sends positive signals, which give feelings of security and trust and lays a good foundation for life's later bonding experiences. Anxiety, displeasure, and punishment because of small children's exploration of their bodies or because of inadequate progress with control of body functions may create lasting feelings of unpleasantness and may engender a sense of confusion or shame.

Supply children with correct information. "The children need to be instructed in regard to their own bodies. There are but few youth who have any definite knowledge of the mysteries of human life. They know but little about the living machinery."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 536.

Be alert for natural opportunities to talk to children. Answer questions simply and to the point. Information, unfolding with the child's developmental and vocabulary levels, will include: correct terminology for body parts and functions, differences between boys' and girls' bodies, the role of father and mother in reproduction, appropriate and inappropriate touch of private body parts, an understanding of physical and emotional maturation in girls and boys, the process of friendship bonding and male-female pair bonding, responsible and irresponsible sexual behavior, social and emotional problems related to sex, the meaning of love and intimacy in marriage, principles of family planning and parenting, and the importance of wholesome sexual attitudes.

"CALL HER BLESSED"

The final verses of the Song of Solomon reveal several of Shulamith's character qualities. Presented in the context of a visit to her home, the implication is that these values came from her upbringing.

What request of Solomon does Shulamith make? What depth of understanding about love does she reveal? Song 8:6, 7.

"True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested. It is by faithfulness to duty in the parental home that the youth are to prepare themselves for homes of their own. Let them here practice self-denial and manifest kindness, courtesy, and Christian sympathy. Thus love will be kept warm in the heart, and he who goes out from such a household to stand at the head of a family of his own will know how to promote the happiness of her whom he has chosen as a companion for life."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

What indicates that Shulamith believed in premarital chastity? What was her brothers' attitude? Song 8:8-10.

She recalls these words from her childhood, when her brothers were concerned about maintaining her purity until marriage. "Brothers played a major role in the sister's courtship and marriage (Gen. 24:29, 50, 55, 60), and in the protection of her chastity (Gen. 34:6-17; 2 Sam. 13:20, 32)."—Marvin Pope, *The Anchor Bible: Song of Songs* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 678. They speak of her attitudes and behavior, using the figures of a "wall" and a "door"—barriers to forbidden modes of conduct. The brothers will endeavor to protect her.

In verse 10, no doubt is left about which of the comparisons describes her. Both before and within marriage, she has decided to keep herself only for the one with whom she makes a lifelong covenant. This is a state of peace, restfulness, and contentment.

How can parents, guardians, relatives, teachers, and friends best involve themselves in the process of adolescent development and yet allow the adolescent the freedom to grow?

FURTHER STUDY: Read "Responsibility for Eternal Interests," "Every Home a Church," "Leading Little Children to Christ," and "Preparing for Church Membership" in *Child Guidance*, pp. 471-502.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the reappearance of the "vineyard" theme form a fitting conclusion to the Song (Song 8:11-14)?
2. Why is it more important to rear children to know a perfect Saviour than to rear "perfect" children? What comfort can an understanding of God as a parent bring to parents whose children have chosen to adopt other than Christian values? What special stresses face single parents?
3. What can you do this week to minister to a family that needs help and encouragement?
4. How has your relationship with your parents influenced your life?
 - a. What memories of your parents are strongest?
 - b. Under what circumstances do you see your father or mother in yourself?
 - c. My relationship with my father and mother influenced my view of God by . . .
5. Why is it important to make every effort to present education regarding close relationships and sexuality within the context of the Christian message? How can the parents best fulfill their responsibility for their children's education in this regard? What is the role of the pastor, church, and school in augmenting the education given at home?

SUMMARY: We are not alone in the tasks of rearing children and making them disciples. The Holy Spirit and heavenly angels work with us. "As God puts this fearful responsibility into our hands, at the same time he encompasses us about once more with a marvelous mercy. He works in the lives of our children. . . . We may not be adequate to bring up our children, but God always is, and he never deserts them or forgets about them or leaves them out of his sight. Trusting that guidance, believing that God will use even our mistakes with our children, we parents have the courage to continue in our stewardship."—Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 197.

Loving Unto the End



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Song 8:6, 7.

MEMORY TEXT: "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song 8:7, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The love of God is fully revealed in Christ. Such love refines, elevates, and gives endurance to our human love in our families and friendships.

THE FINAL MOVEMENT in Solomon's magnificent song presents the loftiest of thoughts about love. True love is priceless and permanent, declares his beloved in her soliloquy. Its flame is not extinguished by floods, its value unapproached by earthly fortunes.

Eloquence of this kind might appear to be but an exaggeration by an anxious wife seeking a deep commitment from a man for whom other beauties wait in the wings. But this is no mere overstatement. This love of which she speaks will provide a lasting union of husband and wife. This love reaches out to grasp the galaxies. This is the eternal, boundless love of God being portrayed.

REVELATIONS OF GOD'S LOVE

List the qualities of love as portrayed in Song 8:6, 7.

"Pure love is such that nothing can destroy it. It cannot be bought. The highest offer would be completely scorned. This passage, telling of the invincible might and enduring constancy of true love, stands without a parallel in literature for forcefulness of expression."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1123.

What experiences of love on the human level enable us to glimpse the depth of God's love? Consider the love of Solomon and Shulamith as an illustration: Song 2:16; 4:7; 8:2 (compare Psalm 32; 2 Sam. 18:33). What are the limitations of human love?

Earthly ties reveal God's love. "God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 10.

"Properly and ultimately there can be no separating chasm between love divine and love human; and because of this fact the marriage bond became, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the symbol of the divine love."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5, p. 102.

Special revelation necessary. Though human love and divine love are one seamless piece, yet because of sin, revelations of God through human lives and relationships "but imperfectly represent His love." A special revelation is necessary. "The Son of God came from heaven to make manifest the Father. . . . Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 10, 11, 14.

Do you agree with the following statement? "A person's image of God is often patterned after his image of his own parents, especially his father. If his parents were happy, loving, accepting, and forgiving, he finds it easier to experience a positive and satisfying relationship with God. . . . If his parents were hard to please, he usually has the nagging notion that God is not very happy with him either."—Richard Strauss, *How to Raise Confident Children* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1975), pp. 23, 24.

ONE WHO KEPT ON LOVING

Consider the following glimpses into the character of the disciple John: Mark 3:17; 10:35-41; Luke 9:49, 51-54. How would you describe him as a person? What do you think it would be like to have a close relationship with him?

A most unlovable young man. "All the disciples had serious faults when Jesus called them to His service. Even John, who came into closest association with the meek and lowly One, was not himself naturally meek and yielding. He and his brother were called 'the sons of thunder.' While they were with Jesus, any slight shown to Him aroused their indignation and combativeness. Evil temper, revenge, the spirit of criticism, were all in the beloved disciple. He was proud, and ambitious to be first in the kingdom of God. But day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 295.

In what special ways did Jesus show unconditional love to John? Mark 9:2-8; 14:32-42; John 19:25-27.

How the Son of God changed the son of thunder. A tough exterior, more often than not, covers an interior that is insecure. Jesus looked beyond the coarse exterior to provide that for which John's heart craved—true love, acceptance, and a sense of value. Four times the apostle records in his gospel that Jesus kept on loving him (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7). Jesus drew John into the inner circle of the disciples, showed him His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, and invited him to Gethsemane, where He solicited John's prayer support at a most vulnerable period in His life. In His dying moments on the cross, Jesus turned over the care of His own mother to John. What acceptance of His disciple, what love and trust, what confidence in his ability to change through love's awesome power! These powerful portrayals of love touched John's heart.

Would you be willing to testify to your Sabbath School class how the love of Jesus has changed your life? What difference has His love made in your relationship with your spouse? in your relationships with other family members? with your work associates? with fellow church members? with those who treat you as an enemy?

GOD'S LOVE IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN

What concepts regarding God's love are found in the writings of John?

a. Love's source—God's love for us. 1 John 4:9, 10, 19. At the cross John beheld the embodiment of love crucified for him—Jesus, the Lamb of God, the atonement for our sins (1 John 4:10). On the cross Jesus became sin for John, became his Substitute, taking his untamed spirit, his hasty temper, his prejudice, his thirst for power and revenge. From that cross flowed redemptive, transforming love for John and for us. On the cross hung, as it were, the son of thunder (Mark 3:17), that at the foot of the cross John might be, by grace, a son of God (1 John 3:2).

b. Love's command—love one another. John 13:34; 15:12; 1 John 4:11. John records the words of Jesus, "Love one another; as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Here is a Christian imperative. But it is intimately tied to and follows the love of God showered upon us. Because of the security we feel in Christ's love, we are able to love God and others, our spouses, our children, even those who are unlovely. The human love of Christians is anchored in the unchangeable fact that God loves us.

Human love ebbs and flows like the tide. But even when the tide of our affections is out, leaving exposed the ugly mudflats of a dull or painful relationship, just beyond there is always the vast, unchanging ocean of divine love from which we can draw.

c. Love's essence—it gives. John 3:16; 15:13; 1 John 3:16. The essential nature of God's love is to forsake all systems of fear and power familiar to this world (1 John 4:18) and give itself in service for the needs of others. Love sometimes suffers, endures pain, and sacrifices itself for others.

d. Love's extent—it is permanent. John 13:1. God's love is not temporary. It is vastly different from the kind of love that is awakened by passion and dies suddenly when severely tested. It is tough, durable, resilient. It is love that can outlast the storm. This love endures because it is equipped to deal with obstacles that stand in the way. It is able to forgive and to provide for new beginnings. (See John 15:12.)

Is your love for your spouse and others unselfish and enduring?

MAKING LOVE A MINISTRY

In what ways does the gospel call us to engage in a ministry of loving others? Rom. 12:6-15.

"Our sympathies are to overflow the boundaries of self and the enclosure of family walls. There are precious opportunities for those who will make their homes a blessing to others. Social influence is a wonderful power. We can use it if we will as a means of helping those about us."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 354.

"Go to your neighbors one by one, and come close to them till their hearts are warmed by your unselfish interest and love. Sympathize with them, pray with them, watch for opportunities to do them good, and as you can, gather a few together and open the Word of God to their darkened minds."—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 64.

Who are some of the people for whom we are especially to minister? What are the unique needs of each?

Acts 9:36-39 _____ James 1:27 _____

Matt. 11:5 _____ Lev. 19:34 _____

How will a ministry of love seek to restore those who have fallen into sin? Gal. 6:1, 2.

"The love that is inspired by the love we have for Jesus will see in every soul, rich and poor, a value that cannot be measured by human estimate. . . . This is the spirit that should be encouraged to live in every heart and be revealed in every life. This love can only exist and be kept refined, holy, pure, and elevated through the love in the soul for Jesus Christ, nourished by daily communion with God. All this coldness on the part of Christians is a denial of the faith. But this spirit will melt away before the bright beams of Christ's love in the follower of Christ. Willingly, naturally, he will obey the injunction, 'Love one another as I have loved you.'"—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 83.

Despite the needs of others, why is it important to put first the needs for love in one's marriage and family? How might church discipline be made more redemptive by patterning it after the corrective love shown to children at home?

IN PRAISE OF LOVE

Why does our communion with the Lord and our praise of Him, like our communion with and affirmation of another person, have the effect of strengthening our love? Ps. 42:1, 2; 116:1, 12-19; 2 Cor. 3:18.

The law of praise. By beholding, we are changed. As we seek to discover the good qualities and affirm them in the other person, they become more strongly imprinted on our minds. We form a bond with that person. In our spiritual lives a similar response takes place. As we dwell upon the attributes of our Lord, we are attracted to Him. We feel closer to Him.

"It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

What exclamation does the love of God in Christ call forth from the apostle Paul? 2 Cor. 9:15.

How did these individuals express their love for God?

Jesus' mother Mary (Luke 1:46-55) _____

Simeon (Luke 2:28-32) _____

Mary (Luke 7:37, 38) _____

The healed demoniac (Mark 5:18-20) _____

Monuments of love. Love will find a way to praise and respond to its loved one, in lofty language or stuttering syllables, with achievements grand, or with simple, earnest acts of devotion. The Taj Mahal, that world-famous domed mausoleum of white marble in India, stands as a monument of the love of the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan for his beloved wife. Long before Shah Jahan, King Solomon and his Shulamite queen loved each other. The Song of Solomon is a literary monument called forth from his heart by the love they shared.

FURTHER STUDY: Read "The Divine Shepherd" and "Calvary" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 476-484; 741-757. What indication is there that life in the new earth will revolve around praise of God's love? Rev. 5:8-14.

"The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character. . . . From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As the Song of Solomon is to the Old Testament, 1 Corinthians 13 is to the New Testament. For a devotional exercise read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 in a modern version and place *Jesus* in place of the word *love*. Then personalize these verses by placing your name in place of the word *love*. Discuss with your spouse or close friend your experience with this devotional exercise. What insights did you receive? What personal growth is needed? What changes need to be made?
2. What is the evidence of my devotion to those I claim to love and care about?
 - What "monuments" am I leaving behind that will declare my love for God? for my family? for my church? for humanity?
 - Jesus said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8, NIV). In what tangible ways have I expressed this week to those who love me, my gratitude for Christ's priceless gift? How can I offer God's gift of unconditional love to someone who needs it today?

SUMMARY: The Song of Solomon is a magnificent poetic description of the spiritual, emotional, and physical bonds between a husband and wife. The principles that guided their relationship before and after marriage are a rich source of direction in our relationships today. Married and unmarried persons are directed by the Word of God to find in Christ the love and grace to form human bonds that will be satisfyingly close, mutually rewarding, and eternally binding.

Lessons for First Quarter, 1993

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the adult Sabbath School lessons for the first quarter of 1993 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is *Look Up and Live*. This quarter's lessons are on the topic of healthful living.

First Lesson: Why Be Healthy?

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 1-3; Rom. 3:23-28; Eze. 36:25-27; Mark 5:25-34; James 2:17-26.

MEMORY TEXT: "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 30:17).

KEY THOUGHT: Good health is the result of obeying God's natural and moral laws. The gospel of Christ frees us from habits that endanger our health and gives us the power to develop a healthy lifestyle.

Second Lesson: "None of These Diseases"

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ex. 6:7; Lev. 11:43-45; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 1 John 3:2, 3.

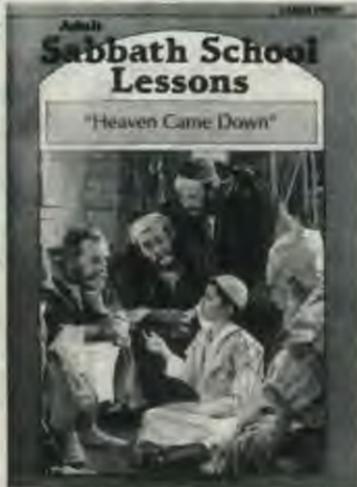
MEMORY TEXT: "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, . . . and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee; for I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26).

KEY THOUGHT: Because the plan of salvation includes our restoration to health (Lesson 1), the Bible shows us our part in pursuing this goal.

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WHY SHOULD KIDS HAVE ALL THE FUN?

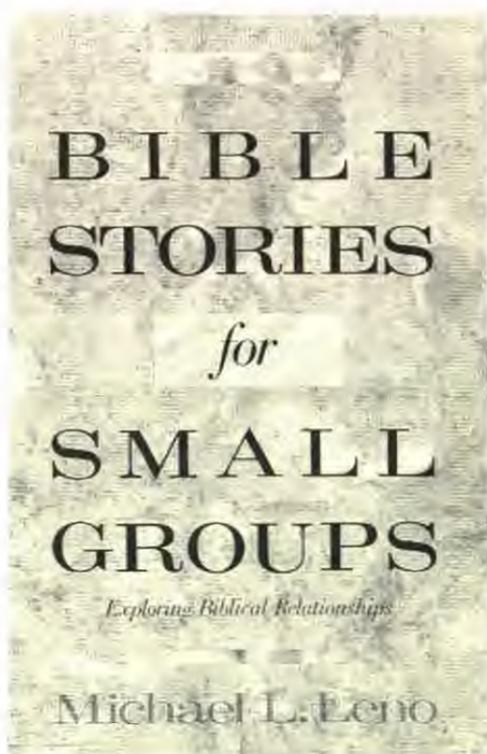
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Map courtesy of R.P.I.



| Unions | Churches | Membership | Population |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Baltic | 54 | 3,640 | 18,391,200 |
| Moldavian | 96 | 4,700 | 4,394,100 |
| Russian | 135 | 7,748 | 149,283,000 |
| Southern | 62 | 3,810 | 66,668,100 |
| Ukrainian | 228 | 15,620 | 52,263,600 |
| Totals June 30, 1990 | 515 | 35,718 | 291,000,000 |