

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

● Oct.-Dec. 1992

Just an Old-Fashioned Love Song

Song of Solomon



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GUIDE
TO
PERFECT
HOLINESS



A study of
sin and salvation

GEORGE R. KNIGHT

Song of Solomon

Just an Old-Fashioned Love Song

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This Quarter's Artist



Kurt Reichenbach is a 38-year-old self-taught artist who began his freelance career at the age of 15 as an illustrator for the supplemental reading books for Seventh-day Adventist schools. Since that time he has taught art at the elementary and college levels and has worked in advertising and magazine illustration. He became interested in computer-art in 1989 and has since virtually discarded his pencils and drawing board to work entirely with a mouse at the computer screen in his design and illustration work.

He has completed three major design projects for the Walt Disney Company while he is studying acting at the Estelle Harmon Workshop in Hollywood, California. He has done some stage work and has appeared on the television show *L.A. Law*.

Getting the Most Out of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY (CQ) is based on the conviction that the Word of God has transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because CQ deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. More than 200 individuals contribute to CQ each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 26,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type in the "Introduction" (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

"Introduction" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"Logos" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

"Testimony" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"Evidence" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

"How-To" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"Opinion" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.* Particularly the "Evidence" and "Opinion" sections express views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.

Lesson 1, September 27–October 3

The Shaping of a Bible Writer



“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out” (Prov. 10:9, NIV).

Lovers Know His Name

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 5:18

Solomon. Lovers know his name. We sometimes treat his song as literature, but it's more than clever writing. In the middle of the Old Testament, and looking awkward to those who would reduce life and religion to history, logic, and formulas for "right living," the song pulsates with the vitality and urgency of life. What kind of man could write such a song?

Solomon. Speak his name, and wisdom, penetrating insight, and decisive action come to mind. His proverbs still turn the mundane into unforgettable lessons. Solomon said, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6, NASB), and ever after the ant has become a living rebuke to an unmotivated, unimaginative, and frequently inactive human race.

There was another Solomon, however, who wrote, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccles. 1:2, NASB), and "Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in Sheol where you are going" (Eccles. 9:10, NASB). I am a planner and a doer, and this Solomon troubles me. Many of life's sweetest moments come when I lose myself in my work. Maybe that's where the value lies, in the doing and the being and the caring.

Solomon. His life speaks to us across the millennia. His youthful idealism and humility before God, his middle-aged self-indulgence and rebellion against God, and his final repentance marked a life lived on a titanic scale in dangerous times. These are dangerous times too. All around me, my middle-aged peers seem to be following in Solomon's footsteps. We toyed with idealism in the 1960s, then gave it up for self-indulgence. The "me" generation now leads the pack in divorces, broken homes, and shattered lives. Is repentance next? I doubt it. We'd have to admit our failures. Reality is too boring, too threatening, and definitely too much work. No, I think my generation prefers its fantasies.

I don't know whether Solomon was young or old when he wrote his song. I like to think that he was old. Teenagers sometimes think that the wonders of true love belong only to the young. Not so. There's a young heart trapped in my middle-aged body. God made that heart to swell with wonder, pride, and admiration in response to the love of my life—all my life. I even know "old" people who feel the same way.

Some people regard passion as dangerous or irrelevant to the Christian life. I suspect that many of these same individuals also find *compassion* irrelevant. The Song of Songs is a very special gift, reminding us of who and what we are, and I, for one, don't want to lose sight of that—ever.

by David A. Thomas

David A. Thomas is a professor of mathematics education at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

Monday, September 28

Solomon: Carnal Knowledge v. Wisdom

LOGOS

1 Kings 4:29-34

Solomon: a love story—and more. The story of this larger-than-life hero would make a great movie.

It begins with Solomon's father, a warrior chieftain who became king of Israel. He had an illicit relationship with the wife of one of his soldiers. And to avoid embarrassment, he had her husband killed so he could marry his pregnant lover.

I wish I could say that Solomon came from a warm, supportive family and that his older brothers nurtured and helped him toward maturity. But the facts wouldn't support me (read 2 Sam. 13:28, 29). One of Solomon's older brothers raped his half-sister. This angered her brother, who executed the half-brother in front of the rest of the family.

Now this same son can't wait for Dad to die. He wants the kingdom, and he doesn't want to wait. But Dad is not *that* old. And Dad is smart, and he has smart generals. To shorten the story, Solomon became one brother closer to being the oldest son. If you're interested in the details, turn to 2 Samuel 18:6-17.

In spite of fratricide and civil war, Solomon was still not David's oldest son. However, the Hebrew nation had no tradition of making the oldest son king.

Rather, at God's direction, one of the prophets would anoint a king. But being anointed was no guarantee of a smooth transition of power.

Once again an older brother couldn't wait for his father's death so he could become king (see 1 Kings 1:5-27). This time Dad prevented civil war and outfoxed his oldest son by keeping a promise made to Solomon's mother that her son, Solomon, would be made king. And so it was done; Solomon was anointed king by the prophet.

First Kings 2:1-9 records the last charge Solomon's father made to his son.

1. *Obey God.* This is first and foremost. Do everything that God tells you, and you will prosper.

2. *After I'm gone I want you to reward certain persons who have been good to me.* I also want you to execute certain guilty persons who have been my enemies. And of yet certain others, just make their lives difficult (see verses 5-8, 36-46). Solomon did his best to follow through (see 1 Kings 3:3).

I have only presented the visible facts. The more important facts, the motivations and intentions, are harder to discover but much more important. My question for you is: What is the most important "fact" about any person's life?

by Jim Ballard

Jim Ballard is a graduate student in mathematics at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

I wish I could answer this question. I do know that Christ gives us some strong hints of the answer, maybe even the answer (see Prov. 23:17; John 5:24-26).

Yes, David and Solomon made big mistakes. But big people admit their mistakes, and they make corrections.

“I am going the way of all the earth,” David charged Solomon. “Be strong and show yourself a man. Fulfill your duty to the Lord your God; conform to his ways, observe his statutes and his commandments, his judgements and his solemn precepts, as they are written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in whatever you do and whichever way that you turn, and that the Lord may fulfill this promise that he made about me: “If your descendants take care to walk faithfully in my sight with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall never lack a successor on the throne of Israel” ’” (1 Kings 2:2-4, NEB).

For the next few weeks we will study the Song of Songs; a song about love and sexuality, not a song about sex; a song about human passion, compassion, and intimacy.

Was Solomon qualified to write this song? Are any of us qualified to write about love relationships?

I do know this, Solomon liked women (see 1:1-6). I also know that any man who has 700 wives

must know something about women—or nothing about women.

“And God gave Solomon depth of wisdom and insight, and understanding as wide as the sand on the sea-shore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed that of all the men of the east and of all Egypt. For he was wiser than any man. . . . Men of all races came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom he received gifts” (1 Kings 4:29-34, NEB).

Solomon certainly had the ability to write the song because of his intelligence and experience; however, the qualification and the depth of understanding comes from something far more basic. Solomon, like his father, was a man of passion. His passion, his exuberance, the height and depth of his life’s experiences, all are made clear in what was written by him and recorded about him. That is why Solomon was qualified—through God’s wisdom—to write the Song of Songs. No hypocrisy for Solomon. He lived his love.

REACT

1. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Which did Solomon receive from God?

2. If Solomon was so wise, why did he do “dumb” things, such as taking 700 wives?

Tuesday, September 29

All You Need Is Love?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: James 1:5

Have you ever been in love? I have. I still am. After 20 years of marriage, Nancy and I are closer than ever. But that closeness was not a wedding present. It was won one day at a time. We grew closer whenever I listened sympathetically to her problems, whenever I stopped long enough to consider her point of view, whenever she took the time to understand my own concerns, whenever we really communicated. Each time we opened our hearts to each other, our love grew and our trust grew too.

How pleased God must have been when Solomon asked for an understanding heart! "In his heart there was no selfish aspiration for a knowledge that would exalt him above others. . . . 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.'"¹

Solomon's reward was more than he asked for and more than he could handle. Pride of place and vanity spoiled the gift for Solomon, and these have been the seeds of ruin for countless others through the ages, as well. "Those who today occupy positions of trust should seek to learn the lesson taught by Solomon's prayer. The higher the position a man occupies, the greater the responsibility that he has to bear, the

wider will be the influence that he exerts and the greater his need of dependence on God."²

Unfortunately, I have occasionally heard this quotation used in the context of a warning to young SDAs interested in public service, scientific accomplishment, and other pursuits not commonly available through denominational employment. That kind of advice has contributed to our isolation as a people and has cost us credibility.

God gave Solomon wisdom so that he might lead his people well. Are we today in less need of wise leadership? Hardly! The world cries out for noble leadership. And just as God offered wisdom to Solomon, He offers it today to all who would serve Him. "When a burden bearer desires wisdom more than he desires wealth, power, or fame, he will not be disappointed."³

Do you dream of a life of service for God and to humanity? If so, God may need you in public service, in the scientific laboratory, in the corporate boardroom, in the public schoolroom—in any honorable trade. Ask Him for wisdom. He wants to be your lifelong partner in a relationship of love and trust.

REACT

What role should Seventh-day Adventists take in government?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*

by David A. Thomas

David A. Thomas is a professor of mathematics education at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

Why the Song of Songs?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 5:15-19

Why was the Song of Songs included in the Bible? Is it only an allegory of the love relationship between God and Israel, between Christ and the church, between Christ and the believer? Or is it that and much more?

Ellen White is somewhat silent on the song. There is one statement, however, that gives us a clue: "Like every other one of God's 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."¹

From beginning to end, the Bible uses marriage to illustrate the intimate relationship between Christ and the church; between Christ and the believer. The Greek word *ginosko* in its most intimate usage describes the physical union of husband and wife that results in new life (see Luke 1:34). It is the same word used by Jesus when He declares "I never *knew* you" (Matt. 7:23) to those who falsely claimed a relationship with Him. *Yada*, the Hebrew equivalent, is used in Genesis 4:1. Therefore, we cannot lightly pass over the spiritual applications of the Song of Songs.

There is a real danger in spiritualizing away the great blessing that God would have us enjoy in the safety of marriage. Fear of the words *sex* and *sexual* in our culture (and church) has stifled study and

discussion of this very important subject. This fear has resulted in unhealthy and unsatisfying emotional and physical relationships between spouses. Indeed, many have been led to the false conclusion that any sex beyond what is necessary for reproduction is perverted and sinful.

The Song of Songs, however, brings balance to the picture. It is a positive approach to the reality of sensual desire. And, while it is not a "how to" manual on the process of marital intimacy, it is a "linked chain of lyrics depicting love in all its spontaneity, beauty, power and exclusiveness—experienced in its varied moments of separation and intimacy, anguish and ecstasy, tension and contentment. The Song shares with the love poetry of many cultures its use of highly sensuous and suggestive imagery drawn from nature."²

In our search for deeper meaning, let us not forget the actuality of marital bliss in all its varied potential or come to the false conclusion that sainthood has been achieved when desire has ceased, for "marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4).

REACT

What should be our attitude toward advice on marriage from someone who was married 700 times?

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

2. *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), pp. 1279, 1280.

by S. W. Jensen

S. W. Jensen is pastor of the Yellowstone District of Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Montana.

Thursday, October 1

Never Halfway

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Kings 3:3

If Solomon had one special grain of wisdom to impart to the Christians of today, I think it would be this: Life is a precious gift from God to be treasured and lived to the fullest.

Despite all of his failings and faults, one thing can always be said in Solomon's favor. He definitely lived his life to the fullest. By the grace of God, he was the wisest, the richest, and the most powerful person in the world of his time. He never did anything halfway. In some cases this vitality and enthusiasm was not such a commendable quality. For instance, it is true that Solomon got a little carried away in the marriage category (OK, 700 wives may be more than a *little* carried away). However, it is also evident that although he had many wives, Solomon was capable of knowing and expressing true love. In fact, he wrote a love song of such beauty and poignancy that it still ranks on the bestseller list, centuries later.

In his youth Solomon showed this same zeal in his relationship with the Lord. "And Solomon loved

the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3). In fact, Solomon had such a close relationship with God that God came to him in a dream and offered him anything his heart desired. What a gift! How many of us have dreamed of such a chance? Would you ask for a million dollars? Maybe a new car? No, Solomon made a choice that would shape the rest of his life. This dedicated young man requested that mysterious quality—wisdom. What a choice! God was so impressed with Solomon's unselfishness and intelligence that He freely gave not only wisdom but also fame and fortune.

We Christians today are often guilty of forgetting the true essence of Christ's message. We get so caught up in the rules and regulations of Christian living that we sometimes ignore our greatest privilege as followers of Jesus—sharing. If we have the Lord in our lives, we will be, like Solomon, a testament to God's love. God doesn't want a people who are locked in a cage of do's and don'ts. He wants a whole army of Solomons! He wants a people filled with such vital enthusiasm and excitement that the whole world will want to join them!

by Jennifer Euell

Jennifer Euell is a freshman speech communication major at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

The Cost of Wisdom

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Kings 3:9

Furthering my education at a public university has made me confront my beliefs, morals, and values. I have been challenged by my friends, professors, and peers to defend my position on topics ranging from evolution to the types of food I eat. I have had to rethink, research, and pray to God to give me the wisdom to answer the questions asked of me. As the years pass, I also question myself and ask why I do the things I do. Why is keeping God's Word so important? Is church the only place to learn about God, and what am I to do with my life? How can I live a life that follows Christ's life and how will I be judged by my peers in the actions I decide to take? I believe that everyone must continually ask the Lord for His guidance and help. Alone, we are not strong enough to confront the questions that are asked of us by a curious audience.

Wisdom is a gift that God will give you in your time of need. Solomon's need was to rule his people with a "discerning heart" and to "distinguish between right or wrong" (1 Kings 3:9, NIV). What is your need? Is it answering the questions about sex, marriage, love, commitments, gender roles, violence, and discrimination?

One of my sociology professors

passed along a piece of wisdom that I will never forget. He told me that people are the ones who give words their definition. Upon reading the Song of Songs, I silently asked God to give people wisdom in reading this beautiful song of love, joy, sex, and marriage. It is my hope that, as we study this work of art, we are honest and open-minded with the answers to the questions that will be asked among us. Let our questions remind us of the amount of confusion, misunderstanding, and ignorance that still exists among us. And let's remember that God will give us the wisdom (if we ask Him for it) to bring us through everything to victory.

As Solomon demonstrated with his life, no amount of wisdom compares with the relationship that we need to keep with our Saviour. Solomon's greatest mistake was to take on the problems of his realm without the guidance of his Lord. Let's ask for God's wisdom and heed His counsel before we speak. Don't let the guilt of past sins keep us from exposing the truth about the problems facing us today. Let's take our rigid pride and throw it out the window so we will not stand in the way of a friend's need to be healed. Now is the time to come forward and find the answers that need to be found. Now, more than ever, everyone needs to ask God for His wisdom and guidance. Open your mind, eyes, ears, arms, and—most of all—open your heart.

by Kathleen Renee Harper

Kathleen Renee Harper is a senior English major at Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

Lesson 2, October 4-10

The World's Greatest Lover



“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12, NIV).

Regrets

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 3:5

"I don't know whether I should tell you this or not," Steven paused and looked across the inlet past the dying fire next to his tent, "but I'm not a virgin anymore."

Steven and I had become friends just the day before, as our senior class rode the cramped Bluebird bus from our boarding academy to Riggins, Idaho, where we were to begin our white-water rafting trip. Actually, our friendship began near the end of the trip, when he came over and sat with my friend Margie and me. It was then that I decided that I wanted to get to know him better.

Somehow that evening at supper I conquered my shyness and asked, "Um, Steve, . . . well, I was wondering whether you'd share one of the kayaks with me tomorrow." To my great relief, he said yes.

The next day I had the time of my life. Steven and I spent the morning tipping the kayak over in the rapids, bailing it out, and starting off again. After lunch we switched to one of the larger rafts and spent the rest of the day knocking each other off the raft and then trying to dry ourselves

and keep warm. That evening as we sat around the fire next to his tent along with a number of his friends, we talked about any and every topic that came along. We were the last ones up, and Steven was about ready to walk me back to my tent when he got the inspiration to walk over the rocks and around to the sand dune that lay across the inlet from his tent.

As we sat there on the sand, watching the fire flicker across the water and occasionally glancing at the stars, we began to talk about dating and relationships. I eventually admitted that I had been on only one real date and that I had never been kissed. At first Steven seemed shocked, but soon he admitted that he envied me. It was at that point that Steven made his heartfelt admission, and then he continued, "I know God can restore me, but how I regret having made that mistake in the first place!"

All of us, like Steven, have regrets. One may regret not having had a certain conversation, while another may regret entertaining an impure thought, and another may wish to take back an unkind word. What we must remember is that the more we read, reflect, and act on God's Word, the fewer regrets we will have.

by Kari Guth

Kari Guth is a senior mathematics major at Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Monday, October 5

Lover's Overture

LOGOS

2 Tim. 3:16, 17

About the Lyrics and Lyricist

"King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart" (1 Kings 10:23, 24, NIV).

Love at its best is not about partnerships for political expediency, nor is it about polygamous excess. Love is born of noble desire, matures in exclusive devotion, and finds permanence in a covenant commitment.

Those who rush to allegorize Solomon's treatise on love or see it primarily as a typological vehicle for some greater truth miss the point. The truth is that love between a man and a woman is God's glorious gift to be cherished and nurtured.

I Need You, I Want You

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine. . . . Take me away with you—let us hurry!" (Song of Songs 1:2-4, NIV).

Love finds expression through the desire to be needed by another human being. It is vulnerable because it begins with a confession of need. There is no guarantee that the yearning for human love will necessarily be fulfilled.

But I Am So Afraid

"Do not stare at me because I

am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. . . . My own vineyard I have neglected" (Song of Songs 1:6, NIV).

There is a certain self-consciousness experienced by would-be lovers that leaves them wondering whether the object of their affections will find in them even the slightest corresponding attraction. Since love is a mutual relationship, the solitary overture is not enough. Initiative must be met with response.

Isn't She Lovely!

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves" (Song of Songs 1:15).

The resounding theme of the Song of Songs is one of affirmation. The lover delights in his beloved and enumerates her charms in such rich and sensuous language as to make some readers who are unacquainted with ancient Near Eastern culture blush. In contrast to the "jet-set" sophisticates who must have formed a part of Solomon's entourage, the woman described in the Song of Songs possesses a beauty that is strikingly fresh and natural. The Bible speaks of her athletic form, her super tan, her spirit of adventure, and her dazzling eyes.

In a climate of appreciation and affirmation love flourishes.

Going All the Way

"How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant. . . . He has taken

by John C. Cress

John C. Cress is chaplain of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me” (Song of Songs 1:16–2:6, NIV).

Scripture speaks with unashamed exuberance about passion and pleasure in the context of marriage. This is not a sexual revolution promising commitment-free love. It’s definitely not an uptight, cloistered conservatism, uncomfortable with intimate expression. Instead, it maximizes and enjoys God’s gracious gift and gives it a positive relational structure.

The indictment against contemporary lovers ought not to be that they go too far, but that in a way they don’t go far enough. Many today seek the life-unifying experience of intercourse without the life-unifying relationship of total commitment.

Love Is Powerful Stuff

“Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.” “Place me like a seal over your heart, . . . for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away” (Song of Songs 2:7; 8:6, 7, NIV).

The Song of Songs deals with the most powerful force in the universe. It is not to be aroused frivolously. Timing is important, as is context. The seal signifies ownership, responsibility, commit-

ment. Some English versions translate the last part of verse 6 as “like the very flame of the Lord,” indicating the divine origin of love, as well as its power.

Purity

“We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar” (Song of Songs 8:8, 9, NIV).

The walls and strong door are not external fortifications so much as internal strengths of character, enhanced by thoughtful guardians who wish to ensure the maximum experience of love for one who is in their care.

Contentment

“Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains” (Song of Songs 8:14, NIV).

Rich with erotic imagery, the song’s final verse is a reprise of many of the longings expressed in earlier passages and comes in response to the lover’s overture (see verse 13). It suggests love’s continuity. Creative lovers call and listen, initiate and respond, throughout lifetimes of contentment.

REACT

1. How can love’s spontaneity and continuity be expressed at the same time?
2. How can I build for a lifetime of love?
3. What can I do to be a positive influence for purity to those who look up to me?

Tuesday, October 6

Him or Me

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Tim. 3:14-17

One of the greatest decisions young people must face is deciding whether to follow God's teachings on relationships or to follow the example with which the world surrounds them. The youth in Ellen White's day were no exception. She asks, "Why is it that our youth, and even those of maturer years, are so easily led into temptation and sin?—It is because the word of God is not studied and meditated upon as it should be. If it were appreciated, there would be an inward rectitude, a strength of spirit, that would resist the temptations of Satan to do evil. . . . We should make the Bible our study above every other book; we should love it and obey it as the voice of God. We are to see and to understand His restrictions and requirements, 'thou shalt,' and 'thou shalt not,' and realize the true meaning of the word of God."¹

We could also avoid much self-reproach and pain in our relationships if we would but choose to listen to God's counsel. "The

curse of God rests upon many of the ill-timed, inappropriate connections that are formed in this age of the world. If the Bible left these questions in a vague, uncertain light, then the course that many youth of today are pursuing in their attachments for one another would be more excusable. But the requirements of the Bible are not halfway injunctions; they demand perfect purity of thought, of word, and of deed. We are grateful to God that His Word is a light to the feet, and that none need mistake the path of duty. The young should make it a business to consult its pages and heed its counsels; for sad mistakes are always made in departing from its precepts."²

REACT

1. What do we need to do to bring our relationships up to God's ideal? Are we willing to do it?
2. How does the Song of Songs contribute to our concept of God's ideal?

1. *Messages to Young People*, pp. 425, 426.

2. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 102, 103.

by Kari Guth

Kari Guth is a senior mathematics major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Wednesday, October 7

Lovers, Listen!

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Song of Songs 1:6, 9; 2:7, 16; 8:6, 7

Those looking for a textbook on relationships sadly overlook Solomon's song. Thus honor and purity are rare. Commitment is a profanity. And one-night stands and test-drive marriages are boldly commonplace. But this all-time "hit" by Solomon still has something to say. Lovers, listen!

Love is spontaneous and timely. "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Song of Songs 2:7, NIV).

Love is exclusive. "My lover is mine and I am his" (verse 16, NIV). Notice the subtle reference to commitment. There is no sharing of lovers, for any reason.

Love has awesome power. "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away" (8:6, 7, NIV). This God-given strength found in true love enables relationships to withstand the elements of life.

Love affirms. "Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun" (1:6, NIV). The woman is shy about her appearance. Her lover reassures her that she is of great value to him by use of a magnificent simile of the day—an association of great worth,

beauty, and gentleness. "I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh" (verse 9, NIV). Affirmation is honest, not self-seeking; it is unlike flattery.

The New International Study Bible states that Solomon combined sensitivity and artistry in the composing of his greatest of love songs. "The subtle delicacy with which he evokes intense sensuous awareness while avoiding crude titillation is one of the chief marks of his achievement."¹ In Solomon's day it was a sublime compliment to compare your lover with a horse.

Robert Fulghum's wife understands the role and value of affirmation. In her husband's book, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*, she is quoted as saying, "Fulghum, sometimes you are a real prince."² Her words made such a profound impact on Robert that in filling out an information form at his bank, he listed his occupation as "prince"!

To all lovers, may you continually affirm your love. So more married couples will see princes and princesses in each other!

Listen, lovers!

REACT

What can I learn from Solomon's song that will strengthen my love relationship?

1. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), p. 1004.

2. Robert Fulghum, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It* (New York: Ivy Books, 1989), p. 64.

by Ernesto Douglas Venn

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Thursday, October 8

Putting Love Into Practice

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 22:37-40

As a young child in the world of male-female relationships, I've come to realize that in order to have a healthy, Christ-centered relationship, there is much to learn and remember. Additionally, even if I have the knowledge to conduct my relationship, it won't be a good one unless I choose to act upon what I know. The Bible contains a number of ideas that will make my relationships healthier when I put them into practice. Here are the three that I feel are the most important.

Act in Love (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Phil. 2:3-8)

In our world there are many definitions of love. People use it to speak of favorite foods, cars, sex, and human relationships. Unfortunately, love is too seldom mentioned in relation to God, the One from whom all love comes. It's no wonder so very few of us truly know how to be loving toward others, since we often forget to look to Jesus and take His example to heart.

Dwell on the Positive (read Phil. 4:8)

In my education classes I learned about a concept called self-fulfilling prophecy. Psychologists have discovered that people live up to the expectations

others have for them. So it seems reasonable that if we look for the good in others and speak about that, rather than dwelling on their inconsistencies or irritating behavior, they may begin to live up to our expectations. At the same time, because we've been dwelling on their strengths, we will begin to see them differently. Concentrating on the positive may take a lot of prayer and struggle to accomplish, but the end result will be worth it.

Make Purity a Priority (read Song of Songs 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:18, 19)

Every day we are bombarded with impurity. We see it on television and in movies, we hear it on the radio, we read it in books, and we see it on newsstands. Most of us know how we should behave, but because we haven't protected ourselves from letting sinfulness become ordinary, we have allowed our morals to slip. Far too many people I know either live by the world's standards or know the regrets that come with losing their physical or mental purity, and this doesn't seem right for a people who have the privilege of being the happiest on earth!

REACT

1. What other guidelines has God given us on relationships?
2. How important is purity to the eventual happiness of a Christian marriage?

by Kari Guth

Kari Guth is a senior mathematics major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

When's the Wedding?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 4:20

I experience a twinge of adolescent rebellion whenever I hear Song of Songs referred to as “a beautiful analogy of God’s love for the church.” Then I read Song of Songs through again and lose some of my natural contentiousness. I forget that the Song was written by a man who had a thousand wives and concubines; I forget that it was written by a man who was reputed for his great mind, yet his love song makes no mention of his beloved’s mental qualities. Because the Song of Songs is beautiful, emotional, and poetic, it is interesting reading. Because one of the few ways we can know God’s love is through human love, it is necessary reading.

Nineteenth-century religious literature included such terms as *lover*, *woo*, and *matchless charms* to describe a relationship with Christ. Although this language may make some uncomfortable, perhaps it is worth our while to examine exactly how our relationship with Christ can be like a romantic one. What does marriage tell us about a relationship with God?

God created and gave us love, so all true human love points back to Him. The best thermometer of our love for God is our love for people. As John protests, how can we love God, who is invisible, if we can’t love people,

who are visible (see 1 John 4:20). So even our view of erotic love influences our picture of God’s character.

The Song of Songs illustrates the exclusiveness of love (see Song of Songs 2:16), the sensitivity of love (see 3:5), and the strength of love (see 8:6, 7). It is absolutely necessary to relate sexual love to God as the giver of love, or it loses its meaning and its joy. Isn’t it obvious? Today’s movies and songs are full of searching for love, but never finding it—or being resigned to superficial attractions. God’s love claims, I love you more the more I get to know you. In order to love someone whose faults and strengths we know intimately, we need more than strong romantic feelings.

The Song of Songs brings the sacredness back into eroticism. Both ancient and modern society have tried to distort sex into as casual an act as having dinner, to persuade us that sex is a bodily function as common as eating. Song of Songs reminds us that it is the delicate complexities of love that make it exciting. It also reminds us that our love relationships grow and change. By the time this is published, I hope I understand God slightly better. Love should be like that.

REACT

1. How is erotic love different from divine love?
2. Why do you think God compares His relationship to us with a marriage?

by Donald Carson

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Lesson 3, October 11-17

Crown Jewel Showcase



“See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth: the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land” (Song of Songs 2:11, 12, NIV).

Look What I Found

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Gen. 2:24

It would never have happened if my seventh-grade science class hadn't been so dull. Bored with studying the seed-in-the-styrofoam-cup phenomenon for the "billionth" time, I one day flipped open my Bible instead of my science text.

I was headed for Judges but ended up in Song of Songs instead. Imagine the surprise and embarrassment as my 11-year-old eyes read: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine" (Song of Songs 1:2, NIV). I hurriedly turned the pages back to Judges—I felt a lot safer with Ehud than with this stuff—and glanced around the room to make sure no one had seen what I'd been reading.

I was secretly convinced that an obscure, uninformed editor had slipped that book into my Bible by mistake, and if my teacher ever happened to look over my shoulder and discover Solomon's song, I'd be in trouble for sure.

I, like my elementary and academy teachers, avoided the song for the next decade. Surely, I rea-

soned, there was little "spiritual blessing" to be derived from a bunch of sappy love dialogues.

It wasn't until I took a college course in biblical literature that I encountered a professor who willingly took the Song down and dusted it off. I discovered that the Song of Songs was not tucked in there after Ecclesiastes by accident. Nor is it eight chapters of "love sap."

Instead, the Song of Songs is a tremendous book of love poetry that explores a whole range of romantic emotions: from the rapture of falling in love to an expression of longing to be with the beloved. Granted, few people in real life talk the way the speakers do in the Song of Songs, but the emotions are real.

The song contains remarkable, God-given truths about love and human relationships that are vital to our homes, marriages, and families. The relationship between the lover and the beloved, the king and his bride, is a marvelous example of romantic ideals of marriage. It is a remarkable exhibit of Hebrew literature—full of action, suspense, symbolism, and metaphor. I'm sure God knew this was something we could not afford to miss.

by Kelli J. Dunks

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Monday, October 12

Star of His Own Composition?

LOGOS

Song of Songs 2:11, 12, NIV

The Best Love Song Ever

Placement of this work in the canon of Scripture following Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, both of which are attributed to King Solomon, is in keeping with the declaration of authorship in the opening verse of the song itself. The title indicates it is neither the first nor the only song composed by Israel's wise king. It is simply his best.

Characters

"My mother's sons . . . made me take care of the vineyards. . . . Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday" (Song of Songs 1:6, 7, NIV).

Some readers of the Song of Songs see Solomon as the "star" of his own composition, perhaps celebrating on the occasion of one of his hundreds of marriages. Others find evidence for two male protagonists—King Solomon, who tries to woo a beautiful young maiden, and a humble shepherd, who loves this country girl with an undying passion and ultimately wins her affections. Still other students of the Song see only two anonymous lovers from a rural setting in Palestine. The latter is the position taken in this article.

What Does the Song Mean?

The Song of Songs, only 177

verses, poses significant challenges to the thoughtful student of the Word. From the outset one must decide what approach to take in its interpretation. Commentators have historically taken four basic approaches.

1. *Allegory.* The allegorical interpretation suggests that there is nothing historical or factual about the story itself. What the author says is not nearly as important as what the author means to say. The most common allegorical approach is to ignore the vivid male-female relationship and to see only a message about God's dealings with Israel or Christ's relationship to His church. Such interpretations are subjective and often quite contrived.

2. *Typology.* The typological interpretation, the most common approach to the Song of Songs, also focuses on a greater truth or deeper meaning, but doesn't necessarily deny historical and factual elements. For Christians, typology usually means that something in the Old Testament can be more fully explained in a New Testament application. But the Song of Songs is not quoted in the New Testament.

3. *Drama.* Many early and some recent commentators have suggested that the Song of Songs is a dramatic script, but there are too few literary clues in the book itself to give credence to this approach.

by John C. Cress

John C. Cress is chaplain of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

4. *Literal*. A positive approach to understanding the Bible is to take the words and perspectives of Scripture at face value unless there are compelling historical and literary factors suggesting an alternative approach. A literal understanding of the Song of Songs is more in keeping with the text itself and celebrates God's gift of love, marriage, and sexuality to the human family.

The Song of Songs speaks clearly and graphically about the courtship, marriage, and lovemaking of two young people, and affirms the declaration of our Creator that all of creation, including erotic love between a woman and a man, is "very good" (Gen. 1:31). In fact, it is so good and natural and beautiful on its own merits that the composer never needs to mention the name of God in the Song, though the presence of the Author of love is sensed throughout.

The Structure of the Song

The Song of Songs is an outstanding example of Hebrew poetry and is characterized by parallelism as literary structure. One way to understand parallelism is to see it as "thought rhyme" rather than "word rhyme." A basic idea may be *repeated*, i.e., "leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills" (Song of Songs 2:8, NIV); *reversed* or *contrasted*, i.e., They "made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected" (1:6, NIV); or *built upon*, i.e., "His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me" (2:6, NIV).

One great advantage to Hebrew poetry is that it allows for translation into a variety of other languages without losing aesthetic appeal or theological significance.

In addition to the micro-

parallelisms of Hebrew poetry, many scholars see a sort of macro-parallelism or chiasm, which gives structure to much of biblical literature. A simple chiasmic outline of the Song of Songs, suggested by G. Lloyd Carr's division of the poem, follows:

- A. Anticipation
- B. Found, and Lost—and Found
- C. Consummation
- B'. Lost—and Found
- A'. Affirmation

In this case, the chiasm underscores the essential point of the song—a celebration of heterosexual love in the context of marriage.

Glimpses of Grace

Parallels between human love and the divine are obvious and have intrigued readers for centuries. God cares for His children personally and jealously, wishing for them only the best.

Freedom, including the freedom to experience love, is a gift of God's Spirit (see 2 Cor. 3:17). But that freedom, paradoxically, finds its deepest fulfillment as one assumes the role of servant to Jesus. We need to make Christ the Lord of all aspects of our life, including the physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and relational.

REACT

1. Do you see the Song of Songs' literal or its allegorical aspects as more important? How do you defend your choice?

2. What does the Song of Songs tell us about the integration of the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of our life?

*G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17 of the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, D. J. Wiseman, ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 45.

Tuesday, October 13

Fairest Lord Jesus

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 103:8

Song of Songs is captivating as your eyes flow over the eloquence of each thought and each emotion. As you begin to study this book, it is exciting to discover the symbolism depicted. So many of us, married and unmarried, have a lot to learn about love, devotion, feelings, honesty, and openness.

"The divine beauty of the character of Christ, of whom the noblest and most gentle among men are but a faint reflection; of whom Solomon by the Spirit of inspiration wrote, He is 'the chiefest among ten thousand, . . . yea, he is altogether lovely' (Song of Songs 5:10-16); of whom David, seeing Him in prophetic vision, said, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men' (Psalm 45:2); Jesus, the express image of the Father's person, the effulgence of His glory; the self-denying Redeemer, throughout His pilgrimage of love on earth, was a living representation of the character of the law of God. In His life it is made manifest that heaven-born love, Christlike principles, underlie the laws of eternal rectitude."¹

"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. 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. 'Fear not,' He says; 'thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.' 'Turn, O backsliding children, said the Lord; for I am married unto you.' Isaiah 54:4, 5; Jeremiah 3:14. 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."²

"On all these occasions Christ should be set forth as 'the chiefest among ten thousand; the One 'altogether lovely.' Song of Solomon 5:10, 16. He should be presented as the Source of all true pleasure and satisfaction, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Author of every blessing, the One in whom all our hopes of eternal life are centered. In every religious exercise let the love of God and the joy of the Christian experience appear in their true beauty. Present the Saviour as the restorer from every effect of sin."³

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 49.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 175.

by Lisa Ann Frankovich

Lisa Ann Frankovich is a sophomore general-studies major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Celebrate!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 2:11, 12

To suggest that the Song of Songs' primary purpose is to celebrate love between a woman and a man runs counter to a tradition of medieval and modern allegorizations of the text, as well as the consensus of rabbinic wisdom. Rabbi Aquiba, for example, offered this warning: "He who trills his voice in chanting the Song of Songs in the banquet house and treats it as a sort of song has no part in the world to come."¹ John Calvin's contemporary, Sebastian Castellio, got kicked out of Geneva for suggesting that the Song of Solomon was to be taken quite literally as an explicit poem about sexual love.²

Despite Aquiba's prohibition, however, the common Hebrew understanding was and is that all of life is sacred. Human sexuality is approved and is to be experienced and enjoyed within the context of the marriage partnership (see Prov. 5). This is the message of Solomon's Song.

Some interpreters have concluded that the song speaks of and perhaps tacitly condones passionate sexual encounters prior to marriage.³ Such commentators would argue that the Song is simply an affirmation of sex per se, not necessarily within any specific context.

The presence of the term *bride* in the structural middle or peak of the poem, however, indicates the centrality of the notion that

the two characters in the Song of Solomon are married.⁴ Central also to the theme of the song is commitment.

The mutual love, its reciprocal nature, and its dependence on thoughtful, caring communication are all highlighted by the very structure of the book. The Song is antiphonal. It is dialogue between a woman and a man who are very much in love with each other. And the woman speaks first. She takes initiative beautifully and naturally. There is no gender stereotyping here—aggressive male acting out his passion, reticent female merely being acted upon.

The Song of Songs is an uninhibited celebration of love between a man and a woman who care enough to exercise restraint when love's restraint is appropriate, to express exuberant passion within the context of marital commitment, and to experience unparalleled intercourse of mind with mind, heart with heart, and body with body.

REACT

1. What role does choice play in love?
2. What is the role of physical love in marriage?

1. Quoted in G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, D. J. Wiseman, ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 52.

2. *Ibid.*

3. For one example of this point of view, see H. Gollwitzer, *Song of Love: A Biblical Understanding of Sex* (Fortress Press, 1979), p. 29.

4. The bride is mentioned only in Song of Songs 4:8-12 and 5:1 (NIV). These verses constitute the core of the song. They are almost the exact center of the text.

by Jay Charles

Jay Charles is a pseudonym.

Thursday, October 15

Wake Up and Smell the Flowers

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Songs 2:11, 12

I suspect that many of us are a bit hesitant to study the Song of Songs. All the talk of stags, gazelles, pomegranates, and lilies probably leaves us both curious and uncomfortable. This isn't surprising, however, because the Song of Songs is about love—and love has always been a bit of a mystery.

Too often, though, we get bogged down defining love and actually forget to experience it. Our key text for this week, Song of Songs 2:11, 12, doesn't attempt to describe love. Rather, the "Beloved" joyfully announces that the talking and the waiting are over. The winter is past, flowers bloom, people sing, and doves coo. The time actually to experience love has arrived. This same invitation comes to us today. Both God and other people invite us to experience love by entering into loving relationships. Unfortunately, some of us are missing out. We lack love. The "winter" lingers. But love is possible. How can we enjoy the "spring" and better experience the love that both God and other people offer us?

1. *Expect love.* We tend to find what we expect to find, and many of us don't expect to find love. Instead, many of us have adopted the attitude "Nobody loves me, so I'll just go out in the garden and eat worms." In the text for this

week, this attitude is noticeably absent. Both lover and beloved go out in the garden, but neither expects to eat worms. Both expect love. We too must expect to be loved. This expectation changes our attitude and enables us to recognize the love that is offered to us daily.

2. *Accept love.* Ironically, we who desperately desire to experience love sometimes fail to accept love when it is offered. Like the person who wins the lottery, we exclaim, "What? Who? Me? Are you sure? This can't be true!" But it is true. People love you. God loves you. Don't walk away in disbelief. Don't refuse the love simply because you feel you've not earned it. Accept love.

3. *Express love.* In the Song of Songs we can't help noticing the way lover and beloved compliment each other. These expressions of adoration are genuine, specific, and creative. Praise builds and benefits all, and it can be shared when we look for the good in others. Often we fall into a rut in our expressions of love for others and for God. Solomon's Song encourages us to open ourselves to new and perhaps more powerful ways of expressing this love.

As we expect, accept, and express love for others and for God, we will come to experience love more fully, and with the beloved we will enjoy the flowers, the songs, and the cooing doves.

by Paul Dybdahl

Paul Dybdahl is a senior theology major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Truth Is a Troubadour

OPINION

Key Text: Song of Songs 4:1-15

The Song of Songs has been grossly misinterpreted for thousands of years—and continues to be so by many readers today. Not too many generations ago, those who touched this love poetry of Solomon's did so only to hold it up as an allegory of Christ and His church—an Old Testament preamble to Revelation.

Now, finally, we are opening our minds and recognizing that the Bible is a tremendous anthology of literature, encompassing all sorts of genres and styles. The Song of Songs fits into this anthology as a perfectly recognizable form of literature—a collection of love poems. It is obvious that the characters in the book are rapturously in love and that the main subject matter of the poems is the emotions of love.

By abandoning ourselves to read the Song of Songs as a collection of love poetry, we can develop a clearer understanding of the style of the book; it is pastoral, hyperbolic, and metaphorical.

The natural human tendency to take romantic delight in pastoral imagery is evident in the song. The poems are filled with references to flowers, trees, gardens,

and rustic, countrylike settings.

The style is also hyperbolic, as lovers often are, giving readers an exaggerated description of the attractiveness of the two lovers. We know the lover is exaggerating when he claims that she has stolen his heart, “with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace” (4:9, NIV). But the emotions he expresses are very real, and he defines his love with hyperbole.

Furthermore, the poems are clearly metaphorical in style. The lover is not saying his beloved is a horse, nor is she claiming to be in love with a young stag. Instead, these metaphors ask us to translate the value of these comparisons. A mare of Pharaoh's chariots is one of the best and most beautiful horses. Young stags are known for their strength, grace, and agility.

The whole cluster of images conjured up by the pastoral imagery, hyperbolic style, and extensive metaphors of the Song add up to a picture of excellence, the excellence of God's gift of romantic love expressed in terms of what the lovers mean to each other.

REACT

The Song of Songs is clearly literature and more. What is the “more” and why is it necessary?

by Kelli J. Dunks

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Lesson 4, October 18-24

How to Make It Last



“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4, NIV).

Called to the Banquet

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 2:4

The relationship between a man and a woman in marriage closely parallels the union of Christ with His believing people. Our study of the Song of Songs this week is significant, for it is in this book that we find both a literal description of married love and a symbolic representation of Christ's union with the church. By focusing on the interplay between a man and a woman in marriage we understand the level of intimacy Christ wishes to have with His people. We see how Christ woos us to Himself and showers us with the gifts of His love, how He does "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). The process is as natural as the love that grows out of the marriage bond.

As we consider what holy matrimony means to mankind, we first recognize the commitment between husband and wife to love, honor, cherish, and remain faithful until death. Likewise, holy baptism signals the beginning of a relationship between the new believer and Christ and includes a commitment of loving service to God forever.

The marriage ceremony begins with a celebration, a banquet, where the happy couple is showered with gifts from those who share their happiness. It is through this union of male and fe-

male that the image of God is fully realized,* and through this union that the human family is born. Similarly, the union of Christ and the church fully represents God's ideal for His people, and from this union the family of believers who love and serve God is formed (see Acts 2:47).

How beautifully poetic are the words of the Song of Songs. How full of love and passion. It is here that true love finds its fullest expression. It is here that the physical expression of love, as God would have it, is chronicled (see Song of Songs 1:2, 13; 2:6; 7:7-9). We would do well to read this book again, whether married or single. It will serve to rekindle the flame of loving commitment to our spouses and to our God. May I suggest the King James Version for your study in order to receive the full impact of the poetic beauty of the song.

You will learn through your study this week how God has planned your happiness. You will learn about your relationships to each other as Christians and about your relationship to God, and you will be encouraged to remain faithful to the end: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4, NIV).

*See *SDA Bible Commentary* on Genesis 1:27, vol. 1, p. 216.

by Philip Nixon

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Monday, October 19

Many Faces but One Heart

LOGOS

Song of Songs 8:6, 7

The Story Behind the Song of Songs (read Song of Songs 1:1-4)

The Hebrew text of chapter 1, verse 1, gives us both the title ("Song of Songs") and author (Solomon) of this, the last in order of the five Old Testament books of wisdom. Probably idiomatic for "the best of the songs of Solomon," the title suggests that of the "thousand and five" songs written by Solomon (see 1 Kings 4:32), this one is superior to them all and the only one included in the Old Testament canon. Some Bible versions use the title "Canticles," which is from its Latin name *Canticum Canticorum*.

The thematic thread running throughout describes an amorous relationship in idyll poetry, an apparent love story of Solomon and his rural Shulamite wife (see Song of Songs 6:13), probably the same as Shunammite (see 1 Kings 1:3), which citizens of Shunem were called (see Joshua 19:18).

The Physical Expression of Love (read Song of Songs 1:2, 13; 2:6; 7:7-9)

Physical love in marriage represents the closest tie possible between human beings. Is not this a part of the reason for the apostle Paul's warning against intimacy with a prostitute? "Do you not know that your bodies are

members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:15-18, NIV).

The voice in the song is that of love, even a woman's voice, portraying a mutual response between her tenderness and her man's power. Such uninhibited physical expression flourishes at its best only in an environment of marital union.

Nevertheless, love may be expressed in physical ways short of those that lead to sexual involvement. This too finds kinship in the Song of Songs.

An Illustration of Divine Love (read Song of Songs 8:6, 7; 2 Cor. 11:2)

Love has many faces, but one heart. Whether the visage is patriotic love or filial love or brotherly love or marital love or religious love or whatever other authentic face of love smiles in the world about us, they all reflect that eternal love principle originating in the heart of God. As all truth is God's truth, all true love comes from God.

No less is suggested in an alternate translation of a particular word in Song of Songs 8:6. Describing the intensity of love, Solomon compares love to a "most

by Mervyn A. Warren

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vehement flame" (KJV), or "a mighty flame" (NIV). The Hebrew word so variously rendered here, *shalhebethyah*, translates literally "the flame of Yahweh." Notice furthermore, how divine inspiration ignited pens of biblical prophets to employ married love as a symbol of God's relation with His church and with His people (see Isa. 54:5; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2, 9, 10).

Moral Perversion and Apostasy (read Ezek. 23:2-4, 29, 30; Hos. 2:2; Rev. 17)

In reading such accounts of disobedience and waywardness as depicted in these Bible texts mentioned above, it becomes crystal clear that by such expressions as "prostitutes," "lewdness," "promiscuity," "lust," "adultery," and "unfaithfulness," God intended to paint sin in colors just the opposite of true love. John says, "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

The Culmination of Love (read Song of Songs 4:16-5:1)

It is worth saying again that physical love represents the closest bond possible between human beings. These verses selected from Song of Songs 4:16-5:1 portray words between the beloved and the lover speaking of the fragrance of charms wafting about them to draw each to the other that they may indeed enjoy love's intimacies. "His garden" (verse 16, KJV) would mean that she, the speaker, yields herself unreservedly to her lover, that he may enjoy the fruits of delight.

The depth of the meaning of physical love prompts us to want to know more of its significance and to ponder the import of Jesus Christ's having to take upon Himself a human body to save us (see Heb. 10:5).

REACT

1. What are some of the ways in which love can be expressed in a nonphysical way?
2. How can the perversion of love be considered as breaking the third commandment?

Tuesday, October 20

What God Has Joined Together

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Gen. 2:21-24

Love is the basic principle of God's government. Through it, all things were created. Before the fall, God had a plan to redeem humanity through love. After the fall, humanity had to be shown all over again what love was about.

"Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This work only one Being in all the universe could do. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it known. Upon the world's dark night the Sun of Righteousness must rise, 'with healing in his wings.'"¹

Marriage symbolizes a relationship between a man and a woman. It is one of God's gifts to humanity. "God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. 'Marriage is honourable'; it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this rela-

tion, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature."²

"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. To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father's house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb. . . . 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.'"³

REACT

1. With the many different kinds of professed love in the world today, how can we be sure that the love within us for others is true?

2. How should we enter into a marriage relationship, and from whom should we take our example?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

by Allen A. Brown

Allen A. Brown is a theology student at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Love Is . . .

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Rom. 5:8, 10; John 15:13

“O Love divine, what hath
Thou done!

Th’ incarnate God hath died
for me!

The Father’s well-beloved Son
Bore all my sins upon the tree!
The Son of God for me hath
died;

My Lord, my Love is crucified.”

In these beautiful and touching words, the English hymnologist Charles Wesley attempted to capture and convey the true meaning of divine love.

The Bible tells us explicitly that God is love (see 1 John 4:8), and it seeks to convey this message to us in language that we can understand. For example, God’s love for His church is portrayed allegorically in the Song of Songs. His love for us is dramatically illustrated in the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son.

But what is love? What are the different kinds of love? The study of God’s gift of love suggests a consideration of these questions. The statement that “God is love” is more inspiring than enlightening.

The Greeks use three words in an attempt to describe the broad spectrum of affectionate attachments.

1. *Philia* (comradery, familial love). The love of Abraham for Isaac, and of David for Jonathan

are examples of this kind of love.

2. *Eros* (desire). The love of David for Bathsheba illustrates this kind of love.

3. *Agape* (charity, unrequited love). The preeminent example of this kind of love is God’s love for us while we were yet sinners, that is to say, enemies (see Rom. 5:8, 10).

What is God’s definition of love? John declares: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1, KJV). Paul spoke of the four-dimensional character of God’s love—“the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Eph. 3:18, 19).

But the purest, the clearest, the noblest, and the most sublime definition of God’s love is to be found in the act of God Himself giving His only begotten Son to redeem the world from sin. As Jesus has said: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, KJV). Though still incomprehensible to us, the picture of the incarnate God dying on Calvary’s cross is indeed God’s definition of love.

REACT

What is the place of each of the three different kinds of love, and can they all be a part of the same relationship?

by Emerson A. Cooper

Emerson A. Cooper is chairman of the chemistry department at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Thursday, October 22

Making Love

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 22:37-40

Deep, fervent, pure, affectionate, enduring love is God's divine gift to His children. It can be experienced only in union with Him. Moreover, love is a command and must be demonstrated first to God and next to others (see Matt. 22:37-40). Everything essential for life now and for eternity is in the one word—*Love*. In fact, the sacred term *love* is demeaned by the erotic expression "making love." How, then, does one express and maintain fervent love?

1. *Reason*. Bring the high faculty of your mind, reason, into your love. Many do not reason or plan before rushing into marriage. True love is reasonable and patient. Scripture gives us an example: "Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, 'I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.' . . . So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:18-20, NIV).

2. *Purity*. Maintain absolute purity. The command is, "Keep yourself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22, NIV).

This is a tough job when we are surrounded by a quagmire of the grossest immorality; but it can be done if we will occupy our minds with pure, elevating, and noble thoughts (see 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Peter 1:22; Ps. 119:11).

3. *Action*. Love must be expressed in words and deeds. "I have compared you, my love, to my filly among Pharaoh's chariots. Your cheeks are lovely. . . . Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold you are fair! You have dove's eyes" (Song of Songs 1:9-15, NKJV). "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NIV; see also John 3:16).

4. *Affection*. "Be kindly affectionate to one another" (Rom. 12:10, NKJV). The tenderness and affection we demonstrate toward one another should be a constant reminder to us of God's attitude toward us. "Closer than father, mother, brother, friend, or lover is the Lord our Saviour."* Forgive consistently. Don't forget the little things, and love fervently.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 327.

Clarence J. Barnes

Clarence J. Barnes is professor of history at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Two Created Lovers

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 8:17

The love of a man and a woman for each other is similar to God's love for His two created lovers. A man's love for his wife has a great measure of romantic, sexual love, and a wife surely returns this love. "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes" (Song of Songs 1:15). Does Solomon's expression of affection for his Shulamite maid arouse feelings of love in a contemporary man's heart? It does in this husband's heart. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me" (Song of Songs 2:6). Can a woman of this busy world feel a warmth at the thought of such a wonderful embrace from her husband? This husband certainly hopes so.

But the love between man and woman is still more. The surety of a close and trusting friend makes for two secure persons in a world of little security; the labor of two makes a lighter load for both; two raising a child makes a complete home; and two standing to face the world—with God's help—are invincible. In these ways God loves His created beings as they love each other.

These two lovers stand as

equals before God with wills to choose, both having chosen to love and live together. If one spouse should try to possess the will of the other, as if it were some right, love is destroyed in the act. A spouse who will do what God will not do has destroyed the love in his family as Lucifer did in the beginning.

The love of a married couple expands naturally to include the parents' love for a child. Parents' love for their child nurtures growth, maturity, and independence. They love so that they may let go of the children they deem so precious; they do not love the child well if they do less. The element of romantic love, so important between the parents, cannot be any part of the relationship between parent and child, or else all family love is destroyed.

God's love for His children does not contain a romantic element; it is not obsessive, and it does not control—God gives all of His children the absolute right to choose. All of God's children should feel a special awe for the love God showed in making a special love between a man and a woman. They must not corrupt it.

REFLECT

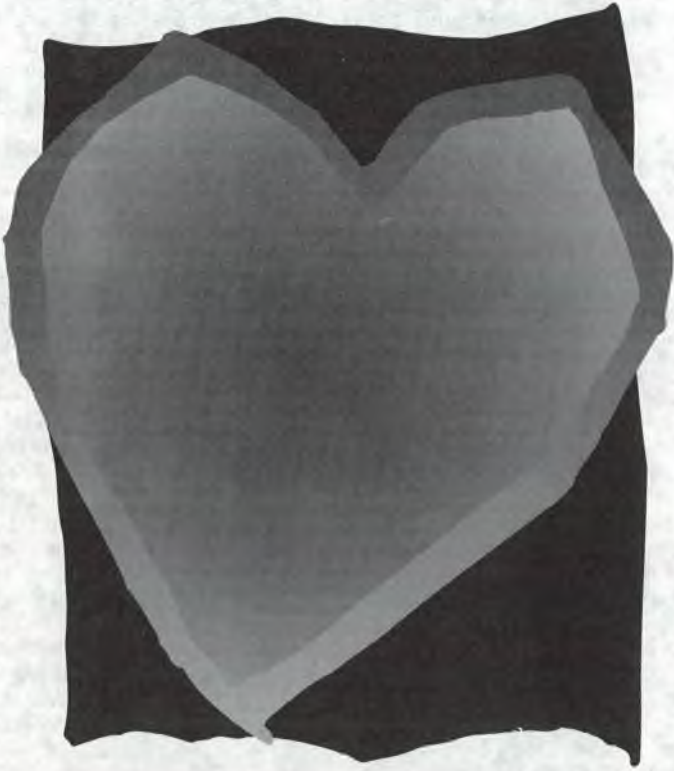
What relationships, if any, on this earth have taught me something about God?

by Larry Hasse

Larry Hasse is professor of history at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 5, October 25-31

Quests of the Heart



“But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine’ ” (Isa. 43:1, NIV).

Letter to Rachel

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 12:35

Dear Rachel:

I have paced the floor in my room for the past hour trying to decide what I should say to you in this letter. I have counted the stockings in my drawer; I've rearranged the clothes in my closet; I've even done something I rarely do—made my bed. In a way, I feel kinda goofy, much like a clown in shoes four sizes too big. I'm writing you because, well, because the other day you told me that you felt worthless, and I felt as if someone had smashed my idea of what it means to be perfect in Christ. Rachel, I want you to know that you are not worthless; you are a special gem. Let me tell you why.

Remember the time we went to visit Aunt Marie for the summer, and I went into the lake and took a fish out with my hand? I brought the fish home in a plastic bowl. My plan was to kill the fish and eat it. It was a small fish, but I delighted in its capture and what would have been its death. But you stopped me. You told me, "Bridget, don't kill the fish. It's such a small fish; let it live." After some thought I walked back down to the lake with the bowl, carrying the fish. As I released the fish back into the lake, I felt a sense of worth. For the first time in my life I imagined myself to be like Jesus. I had given a living thing a second chance at life.

Rachel, I've never told you

this, but it was that incident with the fish that convinced me to get baptized during the summer of 1983. And it was you who encouraged me to save the life.

So, my dear cousin, don't ever feel worthless. If you were not the Rachel whom God created, you would not have been able to cause a miracle in the summer of 1983. Before that I was like a weed, determined to devour every living thing that came into my view. When you said, "Bridget, don't kill the fish; let it live; give it the chance at life Jesus would offer you if you were dying," you helped me to appreciate John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." You gave me a hunger for righteousness. In a peerless way, Rachel, you are the emblem of the first half of the text in Matthew 12:35: "A good man [woman] out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things."

Let me say in closing, you are a valuable human being. You are like a rare piece of china. Don't let the devil break you and spoil your beauty by putting feelings of worthlessness inside your head. If ever there is a time to feel a sense of worth, it is now. Jesus is coming soon. There are so many other weeds like me needing you to help them know more about Jesus Christ. So get to work!

Love,
Bridget

by Ramona L. Hyman

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Monday, October 26

Just the Way You Are

LOGOS

Song of Songs 1:2-8

Love and Its Yearning for Union and Unity

"When Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 31:2, 3, RSV).

The Song of Songs is a love poem, and it places sexual love in the proper context of marriage, home, and family.

The song tells the story of the warm union of love between a groom (Solomon) and his young bride (the Shulamite), who unabashedly expresses her desire for her husband's love, saying, "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine" (Song of Songs 1:2, RSV).

"For your love is better than wine" avers that love is a known quality. It is something that is there to be experienced again and again, something she wishes to experience again and again. "O that you would kiss me [again] with the kisses of your mouth" expresses a delightful remembrance.

There is a note of urgency about her request that anticipates a complementary response. It almost seems to turn on God's "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer. 3:3, RSV), which, in turn, is looking for a response not unlike the confession in

Psalm 42:1: "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God" (RSV).

For Gregory the Great the young wife's yearning to be kissed by the kisses of her husband's mouth is figuratively the yearning of the church for renewed mouth-to-mouth communion with God. It expresses the yearning of the church to have God kiss and touch the mind by inner understanding.*

As the Song tells the story of the love and desire of a young bride for her husband, at the same time, inasmuch as Scripture elevates marriage to the stature of a divine similitude, it expresses the warm and responsive union between Christ and His church.

Quest for Continuing Commitment

"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth." "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (Isa. 45:22; John 6:37, NIV).

Her own commitment is the allure with which the young wife seeks to entice continual commitment from her husband. Commitment begets commitment. She is aware of his pose and carriage as she observes: "Your name [your very self] is oil poured out." She is free within herself to make the observation: "Therefore the maidens love you" (Song of Songs 1:3, RSV).

She is pleased to note that the maidens love him. She knows their love for him is not threatening to her own position. She is his

James H. Melancon

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wife and secure in the commitment and bond of love. In verse 4 she teases: "Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king [you] has brought me into his [your] chambers" (RSV). As if to say, "I know that I alone am your wife and you alone my husband. Love has bonded us to each other in a joyful union of body and spirit." The sentiment of their love mirrors for us the love Christ has for His church. She can say with confidence: "We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine" (RSV).

Satisfaction and Self-appreciation

"Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." "For he who touches you touches the apple of his eye" (1 Sam. 16:7; Zech. 2:8, RSV).

Whatever one really is, can be drastically modified by what another thinks he/she is. Self-esteem and self-appreciation are fragile commodities.

Song of Songs 1:5, 6 provide an image of the young bride through her own eyes. The darkness of her skin, mentioned in verse 5: "Dark am I, yet lovely, . . . dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon," may or may not be a reference to her race, in spite of the fact that verse 6 continues: "Do not stare at me because I am dark, . . . darkened by the sun" (NIV). Whatever the case may be, the young wife is confident in her self. "Dark am I, yet lovely" focuses on her contentment with herself just as she is—she is, in her own eyes, lovely. Figuratively, whatever the sinful past of human life may be, the life decorated by the forgiving graces and character of Jesus Christ is beautiful beyond description.

A Conversation Between the Young Bride and Her Husband

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11, NIV).

The young bride teases: "Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday" (Song of Songs 1:7, NIV). The tease is graphic. It is designed to summon a response. In verse 8 the groom offers a counter tease: "If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds" (NIV). The bride's "you whom I love" is met and balanced by the groom's "most beautiful of women."

Again, "If you do not know [the way], most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep," brings to mind the analogy of Jesus, telling His disciples: "I am the way" (John 14:6), and the words of John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29, RSV), and Jesus' final words to Peter: "Follow me" (John 21:19, 22, RSV). The way to the sheepfold of the bride's lover could be found only by following the tracks of the sheep. The way to the heavenly sheepfold of Jesus may be found only by following the footsteps of Jesus. It is up to us to follow the footsteps of the Lamb—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

REACT

1. How important is the outward appearance to the lovers in Solomon's Song? How important is it to God?

2. How important is the affirmation of one for the other in the Song of Songs? How important is it to you?

*Roland E. Murphy, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, p. 24.

Tuesday, October 27

I Am Somebody

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 3:1

Everyone needs to be assured that he/she is loved. Even the most self-confident person needs this assurance. In our study this week we are made aware of Solomon's love for his maiden wife. He marries her solely for love, without any thought of gain. Christ died for us out of love. By doing this, He bestowed upon all who return His love the high honor of becoming His sons and daughters.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1, 2).

"I exalted before them the infinite sacrifice made by the Father in giving His beloved Son for fallen men, that they might through obedience be transformed and become the acknowledged sons of God. The church and the world are called upon to behold and admire a love which thus expressed is beyond human comprehension, and which amazed even the angels of heaven. This love is so deep, so broad, and so high that the inspired apostle, failing to find language in which to

describe it, calls upon the church and the world to behold it—to make it a theme of contemplation and admiration."¹ "Then, through the blood of the atonement, we become partakers of the divine nature; through Christ we are children of God, and we have the assurance that God loves us even as He loved His Son. We are one with Jesus."²

"Said Jesus: 'The Father Himself loveth you.' . . . He does not become perplexed by the multiplicity of our grievances nor overpowered by the weight of our burdens. His watchcare extends to every household and encircles every individual; He is concerned in all our business and our sorrows. He marks every tear; He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. All the afflictions and trials that befall us here are permitted, to work out His purposes of love toward us, 'that we might be partakers of His holiness' and thus become participants in that fullness of joy which is found in His presence."³

Solomon's wife found joy with him. She preferred his love over everything; his love meant even more than the precious perfumes that were so rare in her country. Solomon's wife loved him unconditionally. This established a firm foundation for a close relationship.

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 293.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 741.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 742.

by Zaneta Battle

Zaneta Battle is a senior English major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

A Pleasing Fragrance

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 1:3

In almost every grocery store, a generous amount of shelf space is reserved for air-spray deodorizers, liquids in crystal jars, and slow-dissolving solids. In every mall there is at least one specialty store that dispenses perfumed sprays, cute sacks of potpourri, sachets, soaps, and oils. And in all department stores gaily decorated counters are lined with exotic perfumes, powders, and colognes. All, it seems, are part of a campaign to cast a pleasing aura when we encounter persons we want to impress.

In the morning when we have showered, shaved, brushed, splashed, dusted, and sprayed, we sometimes feel we've become a battleground of warring smells. But it's the right thing to do, socially.

Yet perfumes often fail to create the right aura for social success, as can be seen by a careful evaluation of the characteristics of the various scents. For example, some perfumes have been called aggressive: you can't ignore the person wearing one of them; in fact, you may be relieved when you leave his or her presence. Other perfumes have been formulated to be atmospheric: they seem to set a mood—often the wrong one. Many expensive perfumes strive for subtlety: they seem to speak, many times annoyingly, just under your ability to hear what is being said.

Is the scene in Song of Songs 1:3—a lovely lady expounding dreamily about things about her man that she likes—only a pleasant story of love? Or is there something deeper?

With the Bible there is always something deeper, so theologians say. After all, do we today, in the spirit of that lady, think longingly about our last meeting with God? Our last spiritual experience in His house? The feeling of joy we have when doing something He needed done?

Is it only when you are with that special girl or guy that you get that "special feeling"? Unfortunately, that "special feeling" on Sabbath morning may be more of a grudging "Let's hurry up and get this over with." Perhaps the "aroma" in God's presence is not to your liking?

"Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes": spikenard, the expensive perfume a penitent woman rubbed onto Jesus' feet, the fragrance of forgiveness; myrrh and spices, the gentle aura of a life given up freely so that others may live; frankincense, the symbol of the communication we can always have through prayer. His presence is like fine perfume. Never overbearing. Never aggressive. Always inviting.

"Your name is like perfume poured out," the Bible says. Not simply a pleasant earthly aroma, but the pleasant knowledge of a totally giving Person, a totally accepting Person. Now can we not also confess, "No wonder [we] love you."

by William Cleveland, Jr.

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Thursday, October 29

Life Is a Bowl of . . . ?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 4:11

A necessary foundation for strong interpersonal relationships is spiritual and emotional maturity.

It is happy people who make others happy. And happy people are that way because they maintain a consciousness of life, joy, and satisfaction that transcends their environment. They have learned to be content in whatever state they find themselves (see Phil. 4:11). It is a developmental process that continues throughout an entire lifetime. To maintain a sense of value for yourself and others you should:

1. *Develop a vital connection with the Lord Jesus Christ through daily study and reflection on the teachings of His Word.* The Shulamite woman's reflections on the love that existed between her and her king kept her love constant. Nothing else mattered when he was near, and when she could no longer sense his actual presence, she kept him in her thoughts and extolled his love to all who would listen to her praises.

2. *Maintain a positive attitude toward self and others.* A constant theme throughout the Song of Songs is a spirit of rejoicing and commendation. This significantly enhanced the esteem of the speakers, celebrated life-

enhancing words and actions, and contributed to a sense of self-worth.

3. *Develop a spirit of tolerance for the weaknesses and faults of others.* This is easier to do if we remind ourselves of our own imperfections so fully forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ, and practice the principles of forgiveness—even if forgiveness is not requested.

Sometimes we miss the fact that forgiveness benefits both the forgiver and the forgiven. Both enjoy the pleasant attributes of restored relationships, and the forgiver's mind is cleared of excess emotional baggage by his or her refusal to rehearse old wounds.

One way to bring this about is to picture in your mind and verbalize to others the positive characteristics of the offending party; this will make him or her more acceptable to you and others.

4. *Finally, maintain an overt spirit of gratitude for the blessings you enjoy (see 1 Thess. 5:16-18).* No life is totally without pain and disappointment. And no life is completely bereft of enjoyment of one kind or another. Read Romans 12:9-21 and try to incorporate the advice into your life. You will be surprised at the improvement in your quality of life.

REACT

What are the implications for the Christian's relationship with Christ?

by Claude Thomas, Jr.

Claude Thomas, Jr., is director of counseling and testing at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Of Human Value

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 8:4

H. L. Mencken said, "Man is like a sick fly—taking a dizzy ride on a gigantic fly wheel." We have been further described as "spiders spinning webs in the basement of the universe," "spittle clay grown arrogant with breath," and a "pendulum swinging aimlessly between a smile and a tear." All of the above statements are reflective of an amnesia that is chronic or an ignorance that is catastrophic.

Essential to all human achievement and relationships is a sense of one's personal worth. Heaven's own assessment reads: "Thou hast made him little less than God" (Ps. 8:5, RSV). His value is enhanced by his august origins. "Thou hast made him," the text says. Creation dignifies the creature. We are not the consequence of chemical reactions in some primitive slime pit. We were custom sculptured by the world's Creator and are, therefore, creatures with inherent dignity.

"I have redeemed you," the Bible says. This requires a statement of measurable worth. And Heaven has provided just that. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, RSV). The price of man's redemption is that the Son of God was

sacrificed for man's sins. God's esteem for man is thus indicated. Our sense of self-worth must be tempered by this knowledge.

Of course, the question of humility hinders many, for they cannot reconcile it with self-esteem. A simple explanation will help—humility is not a denial of one's worth, but gives credit to the Creator for those divinely bestowed "perks." The Bible says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is a clear indication that one who downgrades himself is incapable of esteeming others.

"I have called you by name" (Isa. 43:1, RSV). The God of the universe knows us by name. And we are His. It is comforting to know that we don't live a lifetime qualifying to become sons and daughters of God. At the moment of conversion we are adopted into the royal family—becoming sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters to each other. "Dear friends, we are God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when it is disclosed we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2, NEB). Through prayer, Bible study, and Christian witnessing, we strengthen the relationship between our souls, the Saviour, and our fellowmen.

REACT

What is the role of self-esteem in a love relationship?

by Earl E. Cleveland

Earl E. Cleveland is retired and is a part-time teacher at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 6, November 1-7

The Voice of Love



“He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love” (Song of Songs 2:4, NIV).

Yeah, but Do You Show Her?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 3:16

The phone slammed into the cradle with a crash, leaving a steady ring cutting through the silent atmosphere of study.

"She's impossible!" Marc shouted, pounding his fist into the mattress. I didn't even look up. This was not an unusual occurrence. "She won't even talk to me. I never know what she's thinking anymore."

It was useless to try to keep on studying accounting. I turned from my work and went to stand by him, glaring out across the campus toward the girls' dorm. Marc shook his head. "We're always fighting. I don't even know why!"

We had been through this before, and I thought it would be better just to listen. But he didn't go on. He just asked, "What can I do?"

Immediately the philosopher inside me sprang forward with a bunch of lengthy solutions to the problems of all relationships, but I heard myself saying instead, "Does she know how you feel about her?"

His response was quick. "Of course. I tell her I love her all the time."

A young couple walked by the window, arm in arm. On an impulse I looked him in the face. "Yeah, but do you show her?"

With a sudden resolve in his eyes, he left the room.

Later, I sat on the porch watching Marc and his girlfriend sitting on one of the campus benches. She was smiling, one hand clasped in his, the other holding a rose.

The right communication is not optional for good relationships. For friendships and intimate relationships to be successful, there must be verbal, as well as nonverbal, dialogue. Instilled by our loving Creator in all of us is a deep longing for companionship, for knowing the thoughts and feelings of others. God has given us an example of this sharing of love, compliments, and dreams through words and actions recorded in the Song of Songs. Can relationships exist in happiness without these things? We will look at this question this week.

Communication is not only essential in our relationships with fellow human beings; it is also vital to a close personal relationship with God. Without it, such a relationship risks rapid deterioration. God wants nothing more than to talk with us, to show us how much He cares for us. All we have to do is open the door.

by Jeff Flowers

Jeff Flowers is a sophomore economics major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, November 2

Vignettes of True Love

LOGOS

Song of Songs 2:4

The Bible is a revelation of God's love expressed in various ways. Sometimes the writer gives a panoramic view of that love with broad sweeps of his pen, like the book of Daniel. At other times there are snapshots, vignettes that allow the reader to see special moments and scenes in which God gently but forcefully says, "I love you." Look now at some of those snapshots, a few vignettes.

Read the Song of Songs in various translations, such as The New Berkeley Version in Modern English or The Amplified Bible. Go with the flow, and what appears at first to be disjointed and unrelated passages will become a beautiful biblical masterpiece of God's expression of His love for each of His children. Remember, Song of Songs was written in another culture and at another time, so one should be judicious in quoting verbatim, but lavish in applying the principles.

Jewish rabbis, who found it difficult to accept what seemed to be a purely secular love song in Scripture, allegorized it, minimizing the literal sense and maximizing hidden spiritual meanings. Christian allegorists also repudiated the literal sense. Davidson quotes: "The Song of Songs in its plain and literal sense is not just a 'secular' love song, but is fraught with deep spiritual theological significance."¹

Solomon's Love (read Song of Songs 1:9, 10, 15; 2:2)

These vignettes let us see God's love being reflected in true human love. More is revealed here than just boy meets girl; royalty meets one of another class. There is more than mere external attraction; one is invited to see at each step in the story a portrayal of divine love. Since men cannot understand the language of heaven, God speaks in a language that can be understood—the language of love.

Solomon searches for something to compare his lover to. He sees in her the beauty, liveliness, and courage of the best Egyptian horses (see Song of Songs 1:9). Having not fully verbalized his feelings, Solomon makes another comparison—her eyes are like doves (see verse 15)—peaceful, serene, gentle. Another comparison likens her to a lily among thorns (see 2:2). All women are like thorn plants compared to her. Among all women, she alone catches his eye and his heart.

These comparisons have not fallen on an uneducated mind. The Shulamite maiden is well aware of these comparisons, and her heart is moved to respond clearly and positively.

The Shulamite's Love (read Song of Songs 1:12-14, 16; 2:3-9)

Solomon has expressed tenderness and love directly and through comparisons. His beloved responds in kind.

The ladies of the East often

by D. G. Rand

D. G. Rand is campus chaplain at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

wore little bags or bundles of various kinds of fragrances between their breasts. Solomon was to her as this bundle whose fragrance continually reminded her of him. She best expresses her love through things of nature with which Solomon finds natural affinity. Henna flowers, vineyards, cedar, and fir trees are all a part of her song of love. One is reminded that nature was given to Adam and Eve as a token or expression of His love.¹ She is following God's example.

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (2:4, NKJV). This is perhaps the pinnacle, the most touching verse in our study. It speaks of oneness that comes only when two people are totally committed to each other. One is safe in the lover's home and shielded from all that would be harmful by the banner of love that has been lavishly spread out. No more could be done than has been done to express the genuineness of one's love.

God's Love—the Story Behind the Story

Read the texts and spiritual applications given below.

Text: Song of Songs 1:9, 10.

Spiritual application: How Christ sees us makes the difference, not what men may say or think. That should brighten our journey.

Text: Song of Songs 1:12-14.

Spiritual application: The beauty and fragrance of the Lord's Supper should constantly

make His presence real to us because of what He has done, is doing, and will do. It is a spiritual love feast.

Text: Song of Songs 1:15.

Spiritual application: Christ sees our blemishes, but He also sees what we can be as the result of our relationship with Him.

Text: Song of Songs 1:16-2:1.

Spiritual application: As we receive God's blessings, we return them to Him by our treatment of others. The description of the beauty and physical strength of His house should be the goal of our spiritual house. More genuine humility in God's presence and in His house would greatly enrich our spirituality.

Text: Song of Songs 2:3.

Spiritual application: God has met all of our needs and more.

Text: Song of Songs 2:4.

Spiritual application: We've been brought from our hovels to His banquet and treated as an honored guest.

REACT

1. If you were to make a list of evidences of God's love for you as seen in the actions of others toward you, what would it include?

2. What three or four specific words would you consider to be most important in a love letter from you to God? Why?

1. Richard M. Davidson, "Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, p. 17.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46, 47.

Tuesday, November 3

Is It in His Touch?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 5:13

Communication, says the *Thorndike Barnhart Dictionary*, is the giving of information by talking, writing, touching. It goes further to say a "connection." To me, a connection occurs when complete thoughts and feelings are portrayed and understood.

There are two primary parts to communication—verbal and nonverbal. Furthermore, in many cases our nonverbal communication says more than our actual words, and it is remembered longer. Nonverbal communication consists of body language such as facial expressions, how we stand, our tone of voice, or maybe how or whether we touch.

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White describes the leper's determination to approach the Saviour as He was teaching by the lake. The crowd surrounding Jesus fell back in horror, trying to avoid any possible contact. Falling at Jesus' feet, the leper asked to be made clean. The first thing that Jesus did was to reach out and touch the leper, perhaps to reassure him.*

How often a mother takes her children into her arms to comfort

them, a friend puts an arm around another to let him know that "it will be OK," or a couple hold hands, sharing affection. In all these cases touch plays a significant role in letting somebody else know that you are there for them.

Throughout our lives we are surrounded by different forms of touching. Each kind of touch portrays a different emotion or thought. How reassuring it can be to receive a pat on the back or a quick hug.

I can picture Jesus reaching out to people, pulling a child onto His knee. Each one received something different and personal just for himself. And each person, leaving, felt better than when he first came, because of a "healing" touch. A simple touch lets someone know you are there for them in both good times and bad.

REACT

1. How does Christ touch us now?
2. How is touch used in Song of Songs to express affection?
3. How is touch employed differently as a relationship progresses?

*See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 263.

by Debbie Pezet

Debbie Pezet is a sophomore at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Listen!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Eph. 4:29

Everyone has people who they think are special. These can be parents or a spouse, a dating relationship or a close friendship. Communication is vital if any of these is to remain healthy and grow. The problem is that models of good communication are scarce in today's fast-paced world. TV sitcoms and romance novels portray arguments that are settled by kissing and making up, and *quality-time* is still a buzzword. However, relationship-building communication requires more than five minutes of rapid-fire talk at each other, or a passion-filled kiss.

In his book *If Only He Knew*, Gary Smalley discusses the art of communicating within intimate relationships. A key to effective communication is learning to listen. Smalley advises his male listener to let the other person state her needs, then "rephrase them in your own words until she says you have picked up her meaning."¹ This develops the skill of hearing the feelings behind the words, which, in turn, makes it possible to see the situation from the other's point of view. In order for communication to be effective, it is necessary for the participants to be discussing the same topic or situation. Unless the friend's point of view is understood, you might as well be talking about two different things.

Not only does effective commu-

nication involve technique; attention to content is also necessary. No one likes to be around a person who only criticizes. God's Word has counsel along these lines: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29, NIV).

Praise is another essential ingredient of communication. Smalley suggests looking for the positive side of traits or habits that might be annoying. Is he overbearing or is he a good leader? Be sincere and specific with compliments. As Smalley says, "Specific praise is far better than general praise."² When you are specific, you let your special person know that you appreciate things he does.

Just as with human relationships, good communication skills and habits can improve our relationship with our heavenly Father and open the way for a deeper and richer walk with Him.

REACT

1. How can you practice good listening skills with God?
2. Can you think of specific compliments you can give to God?
3. How do the lover and the beloved demonstrate good listening skills in Song of Songs?

1. Gary Smalley, *If Only He Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

by Debbie Toppenberg

Debbie Toppenberg is an economics and German major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, November 5

Terms of Endearment

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Songs 2:4

As people go through life they enter into a variety of different relationships, some of which may develop into special friendships that may last a lifetime. When two people have this kind of friendship, they often share a special language that may be as complex as specific conversations or as simple as having nicknames and giving hugs. For each relationship this language will be slightly different because no two friendships are alike.

It is with this language that people compliment each other. These compliments are a sort of affirmation, and they make people feel good about themselves. It may be praise for something someone did or said, or it may be as simple as an acknowledgment of someone's nice appearance. This affirmation is a part of loving communication.

These various methods of communication are essential to happiness within a relationship. No friendship or marriage will continue to grow and prosper if there is a lack of communication. When there is no communication the friendship is choked until in time it no longer exists. That is why it is so important to have communication in a friendship, whatever form it takes. Communication is the lifeline of all relationships.

Through the dialogue of the

lover and his beloved in Song of Songs, the poet uses a similar language in the terms of endearment, which are a form of communication essential to trust. Once there is trust in a relationship between two people, such as that depicted in our passage, they will feel free to be more open with each other. They will find it easier to reveal the longings of their hearts and find the answer to those longings. They will be able to deal with conflicts that may arise. Being open with someone makes expressing love for him or her much easier. This is the wholeness of this type of friendship.

Our passage from Song of Songs reminds us that human communication has great beauty, but it is only a mirror of our communication with God. "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (Song of Songs 2:4, NIV). God does not hide His love from us. He displays it as a banner so that all can know and see the greatest love of all. In order for us to have a perfect relationship with Him, all He asks is for us to trust in Him, be open, and show our expression of love as He shows His for us. "The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven."*

**The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

by Margaret Hort

Margaret Hort is a freshman at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

What Is Your Banner?

OPINION

Key Text: Song of Songs 2:4

Turn the radio on, zap from one music station to the next, and what are you most likely to hear? Love songs. Songs of new love, songs of grateful love, songs of crazy love. Things may change, but love (or at least what passes as love) will stand the musical test of time.

Throughout this week's lesson we have studied how real love finds a voice. The woman in Song of Songs expresses to us how evident her lover's affection is. She explains how he treats her with tender love as she says, "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (Song of Songs 2:4, NIV).

If we look at the two parts of this verse, we can see that they both have a deep meaning. The first half, "He has taken me to the banquet hall," describes an elaborate, ceremonial meal for numerous people most likely in honor of someone. Similarly God has brought us to the banquet, and we are His honored guests. Banquets usually feature the best food, drink, and entertainment. God offers us His best. As His children, God wants us to know Him better, so He sits down and eats with us. Eating with someone implies hospitality and trust between host and guest. Sitting down to eat with

someone also implies that we enjoy that person's company and that we think he's special. In the same way, God wants to have an intimate relationship with us because He thinks we are special. He wants to keep that lifeline of communication open so that we can tell Him everything.

The second part of the verse, "His banner over me is love," implies something of a military setting. A banner was a large military flag that held a fighting unit together in battle. In the noise and dust of the fight, soldiers needed a visible sign to keep them oriented. For the two lovers in our passage, the banner was a public and visible declaration of their love for each other.

Like the young lovers, we need a public and visible declaration of love, which God provided when Jesus died on the cross for us. This banner is there to keep us oriented as we battle the devil.

Although the love described in this week's verses is between two apparently young people, we can also read the passage in the context of God's love for us, for He created human love. This passage, along with others like it in the Bible, reflects how God communicates His love for us. Let us always remember that we have the supreme privilege of being under God's love banner. Let us do nothing that would take us out from under it.

by Gabriel Saintus, Jr.

Gabriel Saintus, Jr., is a communications major and prelaw student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 7, November 8-14

Look Alive



“My lover is mine and I am his” (Song of Songs 2:16a, NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 2:16

I come from a family of seven girls and one boy. My brother, the lucky one, got his own bedroom, his own closet, even his own sink in the bathroom! I shared everything: my room, clothes, air—everything—with my sisters. I also shared my parents, who, through loving concern for their daughters' welfare, had declared that none of us were to date until we turned 21. Additionally, we were not to marry until 25, and all potential husbands were to go through a half-serious, but very rigid selection course that involved meeting my entire family and learning everyone's name, in order.

As you can imagine, this "edict" was rather hard to uphold as my six older siblings went away to academy and college. The family rule and test became an inside joke that always came up when my sisters began talking of friends at school.

For me, however, things were different. Nearly six years younger than my next sister, and attending a public high school, I remained at home—there the rule was applied with a lot less humor. Throughout high school I don't believe I ever went on a "real" date. And except for the first few months of high school, I don't believe I argued with my parents about the "rule."

See, it was basically under-

stood that I wouldn't have to wait till I was 21 if I went to college. Therefore, I knew I only had to wait, get through high school, and then . . .

So I did. Instead of dating someone through high school and building an intensive relationship with one person, I made a large group of close friends. The really amazing thing was that despite how awful waiting to date sounded to me as a freshman, by the time I reached my senior year, I actually didn't mind it. Having my parents uphold their declaration made getting through adolescence much easier. Overall, I think my parents had the right idea. In Solomon's Song of Songs the poet speaks of a lover who will "strengthen" and care for his beloved by communicating with and caring for her. By making me wait so long to get into a serious relationship, my parents allowed me the time to mature and discover the richness that a friendship based on talking and sharing should have.

In fact, even now in college, I find that having a broad base of friends does more to keep me socially satisfied than any single relationship is likely to. I now have the time—and the necessary attitude—to sit back, away from tempestuous emotions, and form a friendship with someone whom I might end up marrying.

I believe that God's plan is the best way to form a great relationship. Try it! It works for me.

by Rebecca De Wind

Rebecca De Wind is an English major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, November 9

Can It Be Love?

LOGOS

Song of Songs 2:8

Ah, love—if a young man or woman came into my office using the literary language of this little collection of love songs, or this love epic, depending on your point of view, I would try to find some tactful way to suggest infatuation or possibly even lust—it can't be *love*. The descriptions are too graphic and too suggestive for this Western mind to grasp readily as religious allegory. So how do we go about finishing this article?

First, this Song is not for Western consumption. This is legitimate, and typically explicit, Eastern love poetry from the long-distant past. Once we get past this little obstacle, perhaps the suggestions of God's love for us in all this syrup is possible.

So, for literary purposes imagine you have read this class of love poetry all your life, and you even rather enjoy it. Try to allow all of your senses to interact with this second love song in the "love hymnal."

"The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice. My beloved spoke, and said to me . . ." (Song of Songs 2:8-10, NKJV).

She gets a lump in her throat

when she merely hears his voice, and in her fantasy she imagines her beloved bounding all over the countryside, but not just to bound; there is a spring in his step, and he will soon be with her. And when he does arrive, he teases, he runs from window to window peeking in and whistling or whispering a sweetness. If this accurately represents God and His yearning to be with us and share with us, our perceptions of Him will have to broaden drastically. You don't read much about the playful God. It is a little difficult to imagine the Majesty of heaven all robed and dancing gleefully about—perhaps like David, who, to Michal's dismay, laid aside a few layers of robes and really expressed joy. God is not as dull and lifeless as we had thought. Maybe the song is right about that.

And then what does this lover say? "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your countenance is lovely.' Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines

by Patrick B. Morrison

Patrick B. Morrison is a chaplain at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

have tender grapes" (Song of Songs 2:10-15, NKJV).

"Join me; let's capture spring; forget your term papers, your dirty windows, the piled laundry; set it all aside for a time, and let's run and dance and sing; let's put our feet in the icy water; let's walk in the rain; let's smell the blossoms and the newly thawed earth. Come on, don't try to hide it; you've noticed it too. Oh, I love you; let me look at you—talk to me . . ."

If this is spiritual analogy, why is our worship often so lifeless? Where is the spontaneity? This is not describing boisterousness, but there is certainly exhilaration and animation, and God is the initiator. This could as easily refer to either corporate or private experience.

What is the response of the love of His life? "My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether" (Song of Songs 2:16, 17, NKJV).

"My lover is mine and I am his . . ."

In today's parlance, this kind of ownership between lovers is frowned on by many. But it is exactly what God longs for in His relationships with us.

Oneness! "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be

one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23, NKJV).

His yearning is to have a closer relationship with us than the very best human relationship ever produced. It is also His hope that such a relationship will be alive and vivid with a variety of life events.

There is the possibility that this whole article has missed the mark for some, since it is personal rather than referring to a corporate relationship of a nation or church with God. Corporate experiences are the sum of individual encounters. If God is to be allowed to live in your worship events and in your church, He must be real and alive in you.

REACT

1. How could deeper study in Song of Songs vitalize married love?
2. How could deeper study in Song of Songs vitalize spirituality?
3. How could life be injected into Sabbath morning church service without offending more conservative members? Without offending God?

Tuesday, November 10

The Warmth I Feel

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Eph. 6:8

“Treat the customers as you would want to be treated.” This is a slightly different twist to what we commonly know as the golden rule, but as an independent distributor for a well-known company, I heard these words during my orientation. The lovely surprise was that in all my dealings with this company, this is how I was treated, so I naturally wanted to pass that good feeling along.

Treat others as you would have them treat you. Since this is the cornerstone of relationship-building, and since in this narcissistic age selfishness bombards us from all directions, I find applying this principle a real challenge.

But when I think back to a time when I stayed up for almost 72 hours straight helping a friend with her dissertation format check, and I remember that same friend gently stroking my arm and quietly encouraging me after the birth of our second son, I think of a friendship with deep and special bonds.

When I think back over the

past few weeks and remember how my husband went back to the office at 10:00 p.m. to put my materials into the computer so I could meet the next day’s deadline and still get some sleep, and how I said to him during the last frantic hours before his overseas flight, “Leave the rest for me, I’ll get it done for you,” I remember the warm and fulfilling happiness we have with each other.

God has given us a wonderful opportunity to experience His love when we love each other. When I wait for friends and family to make me happy, I am disappointed. But when I take the first steps, the warmth I feel spreads into all aspects of my life, and I can more readily accept happiness from others.

“Let each give love rather than exact it. Cultivate that which is noblest in yourselves, and be quick to recognize the good qualities in each other. The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction. Sympathy and respect encourage the striving after excellence, and love itself increases as it stimulates to nobler aims.”*

**The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361.

by Linda Morton Closser

Linda Morton Closser is the assistant director for academic support and advising services at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Making the Message Clear

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Eph. 5:16-19

A marriage counselor, when asked what the most important ingredient of a lasting love relationship is, said without hesitation: "Good communication!" This week's theme provides a good opportunity to explore the importance of communication in our lives.

Working for a history professor who teaches an American diplomacy class, I have been able to see what an important part good communication plays in international affairs. Diplomats are sent to represent their country and convey the wants and needs of that country to their host. There is a need for accuracy, understanding, and, above all, patience in making their message clear.

During World War I, foreign-service officers, behind the scenes, pulled off probably the biggest diplomatic coup of all time. With Germany, and later Austria and Italy, posing a serious threat to Great Britain, something had to be done. What England did was to persuade France and Russia to join in an alliance that later became known as the Entente Powers. What makes this alliance important to us is not that it was formed, but how. For years diplomats worked hard to make it happen. Because France and Russia had grave differences between them, it was no easy task to get them on the same side. The

diplomats' patience, through years of negotiations and working to bring mutual understanding, as well as being willing to take the time to make sure the messages were clear, paid off, contributing greatly to the success of the alliance during the war.

Equally important to a person's skills as a diplomat is the person's character. A diplomat must bring to the working relationship integrity, perseverance, and a great deal of respect for the host in order for the same to be accorded to him or her.

Is this not the same in our personal relationships and our relationship with God? Each of us requires the same understanding and patience in communicating with others as a diplomat who communicates for his country. All three kinds of relationships strive for the same goal: a meshing of different and unique wholes into one. To acquire the meaningful love relationship described in Song of Songs we need to put into practice the communication skills discussed in Ephesians. A worthwhile goal makes all effort worthwhile. What could be more important to any of us than a meaningful relationship with God and with those we love?

REACT

How many problems and frustrations could be avoided if we thought of ourselves as diplomats working for the accommodation of everyone, instead of looking out for ourselves?

by Heather Unger

Heather Unger is a history and French major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, November 12

Bouquets and Garters

HOW-TO

Key Text: Eph. 4:15

We gathered a few yards from the bride. *This isn't a football game, Megan. You can't tackle anyone*, I thought to myself as I watched the bouquet hurtle through the air. With my hands raised among a sea of arms, I jumped and seized the floral bundle. It was all mine! I let the old superstition go to my head. *I'm going to be married next!* I forgot there was no man in my life to help fulfill this dream. Paul, a groomsman in the wedding, brought me back to reality. "Megan," he looked at me with an all-knowing smile, "I have seven garters at home." Paul was nowhere near marriage.

The artificial flowers now sit on my shelf collecting dust. They remind me of an important truth: I'm already a "bride"—loved and adored by the Bridegroom. But why am I not excited? Is it because I really don't know the Man?

It is difficult to love somebody you don't know. Yet, God, the creator of relationships, has outlined one simple ingredient necessary for beginning and maintaining any meaningful relationship: communicate. It sounds easy, yet we often forget how communication works. Communication means more than talking—describing what is inside our minds. It includes attentive listening—seeking to understand another person. But note, to fulfill a relationship with others, we need to have a relationship with God.

He is the source of love, giving direction to our relationships with others. In order to grow in our relationship with God, we must communicate with others, for the love that God gives is nothing unless we share it.

Three suggestions can maximize our communication efforts:

1. *Be open and honest.* Talking about the weather may be fine in many situations, but when we share our dreams, ideas, and feelings we have actually shared a piece of ourselves. This is the self-revelation that promotes trust, encourages empathy, and draws people together.

2. *Be respectful.* Paul says we must speak the truth "in love" (Eph. 4:15). Some may find it easy to be open and honest, but to be tactful can be a challenge. Comment without criticizing. What another says or does may be something to learn from and not something to cut down. Also, we can help others more by communicating in a gentle way.

3. *Take time.* Private time is necessary. It is difficult to express your true feelings when there are distractions or if you are in a rush. Plan to take time regularly to share.

REACT

How did the lovers in Song of Songs take time to share? What listening skills did they demonstrate?

by Megan Greene

Megan Greene is a senior psychology major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Letter to a Friend

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 37:4

Hey! How's it going?

I had to write to you and pour out some frustrations and thoughts on this matter of love. As you know, I am not dating, nor am I married. That could be influential in my attitude; but right now I find that couples really irritate me. I mean, come on, how logical are couples in love? They behave foolishly and waste time and money on each other. "Oh, it's so sweet!" you say. Is it really? I've lost many friends to boyfriends and girlfriends. They just don't have time to go to Taco Bell on Saturday night anymore! Besides, it bothers me to see hearts broken and couples programmed for divorce. It happens too often, and we don't need to add to the growing numbers of broken homes.

In my present state of mind, I have trouble remembering that God instituted marriage, and maybe I shouldn't knock something He's blessed. I remind myself that Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding. I've often wondered why. Was it just because marriage is one of His main themes used for explaining salvation? Or is there more to it? You and I both know that God wants the best for each of us. I have to believe that God is interested in every part of our lives, and He can build relationships that go way beyond anyone's

dreams! It seems to me that He has trouble, though, because we don't trust Him enough.

Lately I've been checking out this verse: "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (Song of Songs 2:7, NIV). Now tell me, how do we do that? Does it mean we shouldn't jump ahead and awaken desire in someone else or in ourselves? Wait a second, can we help it? Maybe it's a warning to "matchmakers" not to meddle with people's hearts. So, do I wait for God to bring someone into my life? Jesus should be first, last, and best in all our associations.

Which leads to a final question: Is it logical to trust God with matters of the heart? How can we? I've heard the pat answer: Have faith, believe, and be like Jesus. But how? Somehow God will work it out, but how do I know? The sky winking?

Hey! Be careful of those relationships!

Yours,

The Questioner

P.S. Don't worry; I'm not forgetting the love God has for us. It's unconditional love, not give and take, but all *give*, as 1 John suggests,

REACT

1. Who is responsible for broken relationships?

2. Why should we trust God with anything?

3. Is love as tough as this letter says it is? Did the lovers in Song of Songs see these problems? Was their love blind?

by Janine Freed

Janine Freed is an English and theology major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 8, November 15-21

Halfhearted Wholeness



“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb. 13:4, NIV).

Some Enchanted Evening

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Cor. 13:7

“How did you meet your spouse?”—a great discussion-starter among couples. We all love sharing our unique experience.

“We grew up together,” he says. “Somehow, we stayed best friends even when girls had cooties.” She adds, “One day it just seemed natural to spend forever together.”

“We met at camp meeting. She led song service—off key. Nobody else I knew had that much spunk.”

“Or stupidity,” she adds.

“Of course, my friend was in love with him, and I thought he was OK. After several years of friendship, we dated, fell in love, and walked down the aisle.”

“I hated her. She annoyed me to no end with all her opinions and activity. I wished she’d go away.”

“But I loved him at first sight,” she said.

“It really didn’t take too long, however, until I fell madly in love with her too.”

“It sounds like a cliché, but our eyes really did meet across a crowded room. It was the gym at registration. We fell in love. Nei-

ther of us has ever turned back.”

Sharing how we began brings us together; sharing how we go on draws us even closer.

“He surprised me this year, really surprised me. He got someone to pack my clothes, take care of our children, even got me to the airport before he finally told me we were going to Hawaii!”

“When she became pregnant, morning sickness struck us both. And, delivering our child, feeling her chest expand as she took her first breath, that was the greatest moment of my life. How incredible that our love could create a new life.”

“She stood by, supported me, kept our family together when I fell at work. Yet, somehow even though she took care of everything, I felt needed, necessary.”

“The year my mother died, part of me died. The grief, when it came, overwhelmed me. He listened, over and over again. We rode it out together.”

“She’s there. My wife always manages to be there when I need her. The stress, the fun, the flow of life, she shares it all with me.”

“[It [love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Cor. 13:7, NIV).

by Lenita Skoretz

Lenita Skoretz is a homemaker in Colton, California.

Monday, November 16

Validating the Romantic

LOGOS

Song of Songs 5:16

Oh, isn't it exciting? Solomon is lovesick, and so is his bride. They sing songs to each other as if they were two players in a musical. How moving, how beautiful! The most wonderful thing about the Song of Songs is that it validates the romantic in all of us. Solomon brings to life the art of relationships and the tender loving that occurs between a husband and wife. God has offered to us the wonder of His love, symbolized by marriage, a reflection of the commitment and attention He has promised His bride, the church.

But He offers more than that. In the Song of Songs the Lord proposes a way for couples to be fulfilled and truly happy. But they must consciously "install" it into their life's busy routine. It may be unnatural at first because the routine is difficult to break into, but nothing deserves more attention.

Concept of Union

There must first be a belief in marriage as an institution. The concept is ordained of God. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). But far too often the underlying reasons for becoming married are forgotten or lost. And there are those who just don't believe in marriage, or they don't think it's relevant anymore.

This negative view of marriage may be caused by its portrayal in the media or by the notion that it's too much work. This environment takes its toll even on the strongest couples. The smallest seed of doubt grown in a garden of negativity can yield very bitter fruit. But the failing of man is no reason to discredit the original plan for marriage. It is one of God's most precious gifts.

Marriage Celebration (the Wedding)

Much of Song of Songs is devoted to the exchanges of a bride and her groom in preparation for a wedding. Even if this account is symbolic, the idea of proclaiming one's decision of love and commitment to another in this way is very important. It shows commitment to and pride in the person chosen to be married. Special ceremonies like the wedding are consistent with those God has established for us through earth's history, such as the Sabbath and baptism. It is to commemorate an important decision, or promise, usually in the presence of others. This holds true in the decision Christ made for His "bride" as the universe looked on. And what a celebration that will be. The lights, the music, the gowns, and the ceremony have all been described in anticipation of that grandest wedding of all.

The Importance of Detail (Romance)

One of the most obvious el-

by Douglas Mace

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ements of the Song of Songs is the attention to detail. It is the colorful descriptions and prose that dominate the entire song. The bride observes the grandeur of her approaching groom. The groom affirms his bride by describing her physical stature in beautiful narrative. There is mutual admiration here to be sure, but there is more going on than just that. Time was taken to praise the other, poems were written, and songs were sung. We see real energy spent, energy that could have been directed elsewhere but was not. So often the obvious is taken for granted. One might think that, because there have been no arguments lately, everything is fine, but this is only an indication that the marriage is not failing, when the real question remains, "Is the marriage growing?" Is there energy being spent to uplift? There are too many couples spending time on maintenance and damage control rather than on research and development.

Another name for this exploration within a relationship is romance. Solomon is the master of romance. The comparisons he makes between his bride and the wonders of nature are examples of his sensitivity to both. Love produces energy, and it is energy that is necessary to tend to the details of marriage. This means not only being aware of needs but also acknowledging and actively exploring the "unnamed" wants, those things that might catch one

by surprise because they were not asked for. Anything from a back rub to a handwritten poem. Money is not the issue here. It does not take an expensive weekend away to inspire feelings of togetherness; it takes motivation and energy. This is an affordable and renewable resource, and it must be used. This can be a very exciting process. The lessons from Solomon are examples given to us by the God who created marriage and the wonder of love borne within it.

Christ Our Point of Focus

2 Peter 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

As we work to enrich our marriage we should focus on the life that offers all the clues to happiness. In Christ we can find the tools to cultivate our relationships into caring and vibrant covenants of love. These are the relationships that help us understand God's love and, in turn, teach us to love each other more. He has unlimited motivation to care for us, more energy to save us, and He'll do all He can to make us happy. If we understood this "full-circle" love that our Lord wants us to experience, we could know happiness in our marriages in the way He intended. And within these marriages the love of Christ is reflected.

Tuesday, November 17

My Pounding Heart

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 19:4-6

To you, my love, I pledge my life,
and the pounding heart that
keeps it.

This crystal day rings clear to me,
my eternal commitment.

And with my vow to have and to
hold

I want to take this stand
Before my friends and family
I promise you romance.

These words are part of a beautiful poem written to me by my husband. I did not see these words until our wedding day. This poem still rings clear in my memory. I had been waiting for this moment for months, and now I was finally marrying my prince charming.

Marriage is a marvelous institution, given to us by God. The past few years of marriage have been so fulfilling to me that it is hard to imagine why so many marriages end in divorce. I look forward to spending the rest of my life with my husband.

We need to remember, as two persons become one in spirit and flesh, that Christ desires to guide their spirit into union with Him. Ellen White gives us some excellent counsel on marriage:

"In your life union your affections are to be tributary to each other's happiness. Each is to minister to the happiness of the other. This is the will of God concerning you. But while you are to blend as one, neither of you is to

lose his or her individuality in the other. God is the owner of your individuality. Of Him you are to ask: What is right? What is wrong?"¹

Focusing on your spouse's happiness and needs rather than on your own and keeping Christ at the center of your marriage; these are priceless principles.

We must be aware that our selfish nature can influence our actions every day. Sometimes it is difficult even to want to change, but to the struggling, there are these words of hope:

"Remember, my dear brother and sister, that God is love and that by His grace you can succeed in making each other happy, as in your marriage pledge you promised to do. . . . Live in the sunshine of the Saviour's love. Then your influence will bless the world. Let the Spirit of Christ control you. Let the law of kindness be ever on your lips. Forbearance and unselfishness mark the words and actions of those who are born again, to live the new life in Christ."²

With Christ at the center of your marriage, you can promise each other romance and a life of companionship and fulfillment.

REACT

1. How can you actively support your partner's individuality?
2. What are the benefits of praying aloud together?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 50.

by Susan Mace

Susan Mace is a dental hygienist residing in Loma Linda, California.

Unjust Love

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 5:27, 28

A May 6, 1991, article in the religion section of *Newsweek* magazine caught my interest. The article, "Roll Over, John Calvin," discusses a major Protestant denomination's struggle to "rethink the sexual revolution." This rethinking was performed by a 17-member committee and apparently was meant as a guide to sexual relations. At least two of their major points on ethics and fornication relate to our topic:

"On ethics: A Christian ethic of sexuality is needed that honors but does not restrict sexual activity in marriage."

"On fornication: No longer will the church insist that celibacy is the only option for single persons. The moral norm of Christians ought not to be marriage, but 'justice love.'"

In an effort to define the committee's meaning of "justice love," the *Newsweek* author described it as a "new ethic, one that measures sexual relations on the basis of 'mutuality, honesty, consent and fidelity.'" This sounds attractive, but I don't think it's possible.

First, because God is Creator, He knows everything about us including that which is both good and bad for us to do. Also, because God loves us perfectly, He would advise us toward that

which is good and against that which isn't. Now, the simple fact of the matter is that God forbids fornication. If such an act could have a positive effect on us in any sense, the Creator-God of perfect love would not disallow it.

I know a person who was convinced that he had to have sex with any girlfriend to make sure they were compatible. He said that God would understand. He had his own form of justice love. Put another way, his concept of justice love should really read, "God says, but I think . . ."

According to *Newsweek*, the above-mentioned committee would have its church liberated from an "unsophisticated reading of the Bible." The Bible has a sexual ethic, and God will teach it to us. We must, however, *choose* to let Him. To develop our own sexual ethic, independent of God, and based on our own sophistication, makes it hard for God to help. Why? That's simple. It is difficult to help those who don't want it!

REACT

1. If we reject the Bible's code of ethics with regard to sex or anything else, what is our basis for a personal code of ethics? How does this impact those around us? How will they set their codes of ethics?

2. What can a single person do to affirm the values expressed in the Song of Songs and to communicate them to others?

by James Pappas

James Pappas is a resident in pathology at Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, California.

Thursday, November 19

Looking Up

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 5:3, 4

Looking up can, at times, give you more than one interesting point of view. Consider our relationship with God, for instance.

Certainly there are many points of practical importance to ponder in any discussion of love and marriage. I will touch on several I think are of particular value.

First, our opinion or point of view does not sway God. This comes back to God as Creator. Think about it. As Creator, God knows how things affect me; He knows *everything*. The fact that the very first verse of the Bible identifies God as Creator is no accident. In fact, God's title as Creator surfaces again and again in the Bible. "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one is missing" (Isa. 40:26, NIV). The next time we're tempted to tell God what is good for us, we should just look up and then see if we still want to. Stated simply, it is God's point of view that counts.

Second, don't mix up God's willingness to forgive sin with any

thought that God will excuse sin. I'm sure the friend I discussed yesterday who suggested that God would "understand" and apparently excuse conduct obviously contrary to His advice has read many verses such as Psalm 103:8, but he has failed to balance them with verses such as Nahum 1:3. To think we can do things contrary to God's advice and assume that God will excuse us simply because we think our motives are pure (sound like "justice love"?) is presumption of the highest magnitude and can have only profoundly disappointing results.

I would like to suggest that there is victory, a power to overcome, through faith. "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God has overcome the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, *even our faith*" (1 John 5:3, 4, NIV). God's commands are not burdensome; they are principles by which humans function best. Finally, victory never comes by looking inside ourselves. On the inside is a fallen nature whose dominance renders man incapable of pleasing God. Victory comes from looking upward in faith. So maybe looking up can benefit us in two ways. It humbles us, and it gives us hope for victory. The Creator and Sustainer is our victory.

by James Pappas

James Pappas is a resident in pathology at Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, California.

Negative Space

OPINION

Key Texts: Gen. 1:27; Gal. 3:28

“Negative space,” intoned my photography teacher, “is the part of the picture that is not your intended subject.” Even though it is called negative space and is not intended to be noticed, it is a critical part of the picture’s composition. It is also the hardest part to get right. Any time the lesson topic/subject is marriage, we ignore the negative space that fills out the composition. The negative space for Song of Songs is singleness.

In a society where remaining single is an increasing phenomenon, single people are intentionally and unintentionally discriminated against. Sometimes the discrimination is shown in a condescending attitude, sometimes in neglect, and sometimes in insensitivity.

Often our single friends become objects for ambitious matchmakers, as we all “try to find a husband for *poor* Jenny.” Our circle of friends usually includes those who are most like ourselves. In a society based on the nuclear family unit, this leaves out singles. Too often singles are ignored when social gatherings are planned.

We consider marriage to be a requirement for human wholeness. It isn’t! No one is any less human, or any less whole, because he or she is single.

In the Creation story we find that God created humanity “male and female,” but that was in response to a human need for companionship, not wholeness. God said, “It is not good that man should be alone.” He did not say, “It is not good that man should be unmarried.” The uniting of the sexes within the marriage vow is not meant to create judgment of worth, dignity, or wholeness.

Wholeness, according to the Bible, comes, not from marriage, but rather from Christ. Paul says that “in Christ there is neither male nor female.” He also points out that Christ’s grace is sufficient for us (see Gal. 3:28). Distinctions that we use to measure people disappear in the grace of Christ.

As a church and as people who make up the church, perhaps we should take seriously God’s statement, “It is not good that man should be alone.” We should make sure that the singles who are part of the body of Christ are never alone because we are condescending, neglectful, or insensitive.

REACT

1. In what way are singles discriminated against? What can you do to avoid discriminating against them?

2. What is human wholeness in relation to sexual identity?

3. How do singles keep the marriage bed pure?

by Randall Skoretz

Randall Skoretz is associate pastor of the Loma Linda University Church and chaplain of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Lesson 9, November 22-28

How Does It Feel?



“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 of Songs 4:10, NIV).

Split Personality

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 2:14

“My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely” (Song of Songs 2:14, NIV).

Is the lesson to be learned from Song of Songs spiritual or secular? We have grown up with the idea that these are poles apart. Are the spiritual and secular compatible?

The early Christians did not have our divided concept. For instance, they combined their Communion service with the fellowship meal in what they called the Agape feast. When we plan an Agape feast today, we are careful to remove anything that remotely resembles the common, lest it detract from the spiritual.

With this in mind how do we look at Song of Songs 4? My natural inclination is to pigeonhole, and as I read the passage, given the choice of *sacred* or *secular*, it seemed to be the latter. But then I mused, *Why not both?* After all, God endorsed marriage, and the first honeymoon was spent in Eden.

Let's first look at the secular. In our chapter Solomon communicates complete acceptance of his bride. Previously we saw her neglecting her own needs to care for her brothers' (see 1:6). Now her lover's words fill her cup to the brim. She is treasured, cherished, loved, adored from head to toe.

He tends her neglected “vineyard” as she listens and glows. His soothing words bring a grateful response. “The winter is past. . . . Flowers appear on the earth” (2:11, 12, NIV). He has given her the ultimate compliment—affirmation. Her reply attests to the delight she feels: “Let my lover come into his garden” (4:16, NIV).

This passage confirms the power of the lost art of communication. Young lovers know this, but many soon seem to forget. While dating, the average couple spends at least 15 hours a week in meaningful communication. Ironically many a marriage has destroyed a good friendship. Solomon's appreciation shows his worthiness to enjoy the fuller delights of their love. He valued and loved her unconditionally. Her response bears out the results.

On the spiritual side, God's methods of wooing us are likewise completely affirming. He tells how treasured we are: His banner over us is love (see 2:4). If His eye is on the sparrow, how much more He notices our tripping and stumbling through life. We are valued. We listen. We feel affirmed. We respond. We accept Him.

REACT

How would you compare the methods of maintaining a good friendship to those necessary for maintaining a successful marriage? How do they compare to the methods of maintaining a successful relationship with God?

by Alyna M. Taylor

Alyna M. Taylor is administrative secretary, international heart institute, Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, California.

Monday, November 23

What's It All About?

LOGOS

Eph. 5:31, 32

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery—but I am referring to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31, 32).*

Perhaps my favorite commercial was prepared for the dairy industry. Speaking of butter, the voice says, “You’ll never find us saying it tastes like margarine.” That sums up popular tradition regarding the Song of Songs—only it isn’t expressed that way.

Often in a discussion of the canon, and in light of the fact that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, it is intoned that Song of Songs is just as inspired as . . . The point of comparison varies, though usually it is one of the Pauline epistles such as Romans or Galatians. It doesn’t matter, however, since the point is not the comparison, but the fact that it is being compared. Try the reverse—Romans is just as inspired as Song of Songs. Why would anyone say that? They don’t!

It is with a sense of pride—and not a little relief—that we quote Rabbi Akiba (c. A.D. 50-135), one of the princes of Jewish biblical commentators, on this very topic, since he takes the “high” view of the inspiration of Song of Songs.

“All of time is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the Writ-

ings [the third division of the Hebrew Bible] are holy, but Song of Songs is the most holy.”—(*Yad.* 3:5).

The circumstances of the time were surprisingly comparable to our own, since they too made little use of Song of Songs in regular worship. While it was part of the liturgy for the Passover, it, and the other books in the Writings, were not read regularly in the synagogue worship services. Pride of place went to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, as the portions featured each week in their regular schedule of reading.

Rabbi Akiba’s defense must be understood in its context. He was in no sense arguing for inclusion based upon the literal meaning of the text as a love song. For him the book was a sublime expression of God’s love for Israel.

Certainly there is precedent in the Old Testament for the comparison of God’s love to that of marriage and human interpersonal relationships, but these are clearly signaled as simile or metaphor. In Song of Songs not only are there no such indicators, there is nothing of God or the spiritual in the whole book.

When Alexander the Great crossed the Hellespont to pillage Asia, he set up a namesake city in Egypt that became a center for Greek culture. Many Jews from Palestine moved to Alexandria until it became a major center for Jews who had left Palestine. In time their ability to read Hebrew waned, and it was decided to trans-

by Bernard A. Taylor

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late the Scriptures into Greek. We call that translation the Septuagint. The immediate concern was to translate the books of Moses, but in time all of the Old Testament was translated into Greek. In this Greek version, Song of Songs is a quite literal rendering of the Hebrew, certainly not an allegorical interpretation.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, the trend was in the opposite direction. While the Jews were captive in Babylon, there was a major shift in language. Aramaic, closely akin to Hebrew, replaced Akkadian as the common language. Consequently, when the Jews returned to Palestine, they no longer spoke Hebrew, so their sacred Scriptures were no longer readily accessible to most. To accommodate them, the custom arose of reading the Scriptures in Hebrew in the synagogue, and then having an interpreter paraphrase them in the vernacular Aramaic. In the midst of all of this the tradition developed of expounding Song of Songs allegorically at a "higher" level. In time these Aramaic interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures were written down and became known as the Targums.

What does all this mean? In this version, in contrast to the Septuagint, the interpretation of Song of Songs became a history of God's dealing with Israel from the Exodus to the future end-time glory. In a complex study, key words were singled out as "hooks" upon which to hang the exposition. Let me illustrate from chapter 4:

Verse 3 in the Hebrew says: "Your lips are like a scarlet thread." Based upon the mention of scarlet, the Targum says, "The lips of the High Priest uttered prayers on the Day of Atonement before the Lord, and his words were turning away the sins of Israel, which were like scarlet

thread, but he whitened them like pure wool," drawing analogy from the Day of Atonement ceremony (see Lev. 16).

Verse 5 says: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle that browse among the lilies." The Targum looks beyond form to function and draws the analogy of nurture, finding application in "Moses and Aaron, sons of Jochebed, resembling two young roes, or twins of a gazelle; who, by their merit, were feeding the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness upon manna and rich fowl, and the waters of Miriam's well." It is a common theme in rabbinic writings that, since Scripture speaks of "Moses and Aaron," as well as "Aaron and Moses," neither was greater than the other, and so could aptly be described as twins.

If it were up to the next General Conference session to determine whether or not Song of Songs would be added to the canon, would it pass? In the West we have quietly developed a practical canon, and it does not include Song of Songs, even though we have picked up a few phrases like "the rose of Sharon," "the lily of the valley," and "it is the little foxes that spoil the vines."

Does this call inspiration into question? No, not necessarily. It is ironic though. Song of Songs is a book of love. The Jews looked at love between a man and a woman and thought of God. Christians, who follow Jesus, the model of love, took over the Jewish allegorical interpretation, but never came to terms with the love that enabled the Jews to see the hand of inspiration in the Song of Songs.

Perhaps, then, it is back to basics. If we cannot love people whom we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?

*Bible texts quoted in this article are translated by the author.

Tuesday, November 24

Happy Firesides

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Song of Songs 4:7

“Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another.”¹

“The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth.”²

“The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides. If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence.”³

“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. Jesus wants to see happy marriages, happy firesides.”⁴

“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.”⁵

“Let each give love rather than exact it. Cultivate that which is noblest in yourselves, and be quick to recognize the good qualities in each other. The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction. Sympathy and respect encourage the striving after excellence, and love itself increases as it stimulates to nobler aims.”⁶

“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, of which, as His chosen one, He says, ‘Thou art fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.’ Canticles 4:7.”⁷

REACT

1. How does this practical advice on love from Ellen White affect your view of whether the Song of Songs should be interpreted literally or allegorically?

2. If love is a principle and not a feeling, what is the role of romantic love?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 539.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356.

3. *The Adventist Home*, p. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

5. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

by Lenita Skoretz

Lenita Skoretz is a homemaker residing in Colton, California.

The Passion of God

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 4:1

"How beautiful you are, my darling!" (Song of Songs 4:1, NIV).

It is very curious that modern descendants of Solomon's "church" should have such an abhorrence of passion in church. Please note the beloved is not loved because she is theologically correct or of the proper denominational persuasion. Rather she is beloved because she is beautiful! When Jesus speaks in Revelation 21 of His bride being dressed for the wedding, shouldn't we consider the implied emotional relationship? If God placed the Song of Songs in the Bible as a forerunner of His relationship with today's church (see *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 69), then we must look at the church—the bride of Christ—as a group of people Christ loves; and longs to have them love Him back.

In marrying the Shulamite woman, Solomon must have noted she was not politically expedient or a great political alliance. But Solomon loved her for who she was. Can you believe God loves you like that?

"How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!" (verse 10, NIV).

Many Christians believe that God has condescended to invite us into a relationship of love to Him. What some find hard to believe is that God desires emotional re-

sponses from us. Note the language used in Song of Songs 4:10 and compare it to 2 Corinthians 11:2: "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine." "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (NIV). I read here an emotional plea from the King of the universe to humans whom He loves desperately.

"I have come into my garden" (Song of Songs 5:1, NIV).

This verse is the response of the bridegroom when the bride agrees to marriage. This verse parallels the words we will hear God speak on the day we come to the marriage supper of the Lamb as described in Revelation.

The rest of chapter 5 details a dream of the bride in which she fears she has lost the bridegroom. This is a fear we humans often have about God, fearing we have lost His love because we are not worthy. But God expressed in this story the love that He bestows without strings to every human being. We are invited to experience the grace of God just as this Shulamite did.

REACT

1. Why is it so hard to accept unconditional love?
2. How do you think God feels when we refuse to accept His love unless we "earn" it?

by Charles M. Liu

Charles M. Liu is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Thursday, November 26

With Eyes Wide Open

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Songs 4:10

We thought it would be interesting, as an engaged couple, to work together on writing practical advice from a biblical love song. However, phrases such as “hair like flocks of goats,” “teeth like shorn sheep,” and “you are a garden” puzzled us. Fortunately, advice from a pastor, prayer, and reading through a couple of commentaries suggested a few points.

Vision

As one reads the first part of chapter 4, it's obvious that the writer admires the appearance of his lover, regardless of any flaw she may have. Similarly, when I look at my fiancée, I'm not distracted by her braces, glasses, or small scar above her left eye. Rather, I'm entranced by her sparkling eyes, ready smile, glowing skin, and delicate hands. Instead of being blinded by love, I'm able to see more clearly because of love.

The analogy with Christ is clear. Christ does not look at His followers as flawed; He sees a people redeemed because of His love for them. Likewise, when we are filled with love for others, we see the good in them rather than focusing on their flaws.

Commitment

Many verses indicate that the lovers are committed to each other. Of course, we know that

Solomon was also involved with other women. And even though Christ has compassion for all people, His salvation is given to only *one* bride—those who accept Him.

Now, as then, there are plenty of other attractive men and women whom successful lovers ignore because of their commitment to each other. Likewise as Christians we must keep up our commitment with God and not be enticed by other philosophies or lifestyles.

Togetherness

Intimate relationships can't exist in a crowd. Although family and friends are nice to have around, every couple needs to get away for at least a short time to share their thoughts, dreams, and expressions of love. The garden references in 4:16 and 5:1 suggest an ideal place to get away together—in the great outdoors. Walking hand-in-hand down a dirt path, through a flower garden, or through a forest provides a wonderful chance to be away from life's intrusions—family, friends, work, school.

Likewise, even though church members and institutions are nice to have around, we must spend time alone with Christ in prayer and study in order for our relationship to grow.

REACT

Is Solomon's song of human love an accurate analogy of my relationship with Christ?

by Jim Banta and Marlynn Manuel

Jim Banta recently graduated from Loma Linda University School of Public Health, and Marlynn Manuel from the Loma Linda University school of nursing, Loma Linda, California.

Questioning God's Love

OPINION

Key Text: Song of Songs 5:1

Somewhere there's a song that quotes the famous Christian phrase, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me." Comforting words for people who would just as soon not have to think issues through. But for college people who are in school precisely to learn how to think and question life, I am concerned about the phrase just quoted. I believe it can lead in some dangerous directions. Let me explain.

In a church I once pastored, I had a self-proclaimed prophet visit my church to "set the members straight." He told them that he alone knew the "whole truth" of the Bible, and they must hear new truth from a living prophet—himself, of course. The result was that his followers sold all their possessions and gave the proceeds to him, leaving their families and friends behind, and moving into a commune with him. Eventually because of some illegal activities, some were arrested, and much suffering resulted.

What caused these people to follow blindly after a self-proclaimed prophet? They were from all types of backgrounds and socioeconomic stratum. Some had been church leaders and stable Seventh-day Adventists for many

years. What seems to have been the common factor leading to their involvement in this cult was their need for concrete, even blind, belief in a creed—one in which they didn't have to think. By avoiding the hard work of thinking through their own beliefs, they became susceptible to being misled—and they were.

I see the Song of Songs as a paean of hope against blind faith that short-circuits the process of relational sharing that God has established in every human being. God wants honest give-and-take in His relationship with us. He desires that we tell Him how we really feel! He wants more than sterile exchanging of ideas; He asks us to love Him as He has already loved us. And He describes that love in graphic and emotive language in the book we study this quarter.

I wish the song were sung in a slightly different way: "God said it, I believe it, He asked me to think about it. I did, we talked about it, and now it's settled for both of us."

But of course a verse like that would ruin the traditional meter of the song! And we all know what a powerful thing tradition can be.

REACT

What can I learn about God through this love song?

by Charles M. Liu

Charles M. Liu is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Lesson 10, November 29–December 5

Shattered Dreams



“His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song of Songs 5:16, NIV).

Over the Top

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Jer. 29:11-13

The hot summer sun beat down upon my sweat-drenched body. I stood at the top of "Monster Hill," the hill I learned to conquer after many attempts at climbing on my mountain bicycle. In actuality I learned more than just how to master the mountain-climbing machine. I understood what it meant to communicate on the hilltops with God, to share with Him the pain of ending a relationship with a lady I once loved.

"God, I stand before You, asking You to listen to my prayer. You alone understand the pain I've endured over the past few years. I thought I had found my lifetime companion, but my dreams have been completely shattered. Please pick up the scattered pieces of my life. Help me to make sense of everything that has happened and through the healing process, in Your time, may I once again be able to love."

The summer months of riding on the hills soon became comforting memories of getting back on track with God—the most important relationship in my life.

With school in full swing after the blur of registration, seeing familiar faces of friends and greeting new ones, I anticipated enduring another year of school (yes, to conquer another "monster"), then the reward—graduation.

God, however, had plans to sup-

plement my school year. It all took place after a group luncheon at the chaplain's home. I overheard one of the ladies mention that she enjoys mountain biking, and I knew that this was my cue from God to test the waters. This lady shared in two of my life's most wonderful pleasures—knowing God and mountain biking!

From that day forward we spent countless hours riding together, not only for the exercise but as a means of developing an intimate relationship. As a result of our bonding experiences, she and I established the "Over the Top Mountain Biking Association" with this purpose in mind: "God, You are the One who empowers us to face and conquer life's most treacherous hills—up and over the top—to experience better than the best, life with You, one equipped in building a wonderful, intimate relationship for a lifetime!"

God certainly does understand our need for companionship, compatibility, and love. Without God I would still be at the bottom of the hill looking up, wondering whether He could ever fulfill His plan in my life. His dream for me has been and still is becoming a reality, "For I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:11-13, NIV).

by Ken Finlayson and Angela Nobuhara

Ken Finlayson is a graduate of radiological technology, and Angela Nobuhara is a student in the School of Public Health at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Monday, November 30

Searching for What?

LOGOS

Song of Songs 3:1

Dreams are strange and wonderful things. Many non-Christian religions have long relied upon dreams as a pipeline to the will of the gods. Even Christians have at times discussed what we might learn about God from our dreams. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in part by a woman named Ellen G. White, who received dreams from God detailing His will for the church.

In the middle of Song of Songs we find a section dealing with two rather disturbing dreams of the bride about her relationship to her bridegroom-to-be. What are we to make of these? Disturbing insight into what might be if they marry? The inevitable result of too much bridal shower cake too late the night before? Instruction from God about what she is supposed to do? My real question is, Why did God include the bride's dreams of losing the bridegroom in the Bible? What's the point?

Perhaps God wishes to include this section of Scripture, just as He has the disturbing prayers of Habakkuk in which he questions God's fairness, precisely to let us know that He is involved in real life with us. He is not a god from far away who does not understand us. He is, rather, a God who truly has been walking with us through life and knows how we live and what we need to learn.

In this case, God sees our need to learn that life in marriage is not all a bed of roses; there are times when a bed of nails or thorns might more accurately describe the relationship in a world of selfishness and sin. How are we to live beyond the inevitable differences couples will have, when both individuals are brought up in a world that teaches us how to feed our own desires first? God includes these dreams for the bride to let her know that loss is a part of life on earth. But He also emphasizes, especially in the first dream of chapter 3:1-5, that finding of the lost can be a blessed experience.

By dreaming these fears of hers, the bride has actually lived out a very important principle that married couples the world over must learn to experience. She has prepared ahead of time for what will eventually come into her relationship. She has thought through and prepared herself for the winds of strife that any couple will face. It is no accident that shortly after this episode of dreamed loss in chapter 5, the most extensive communication occurs between the bridegroom and bride. Just so must couples learn that the key to overcoming loss and division in a relationship is to learn how to communicate about it. Ignoring a problem only intensifies it. To communicate about it gives opportunity to solve it.

One more important point derives from this passage of Scrip-

by Charles M. Liu

Charles M. Liu is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

ture. When the bridegroom begins his discourse on the attributes of the bride, following her dreams, you will note that there is a particular way in which he couches his communication to her. Please note that he does not speak down to her, nor does he give some generalized words of praise. Look at the wording of Song of Songs chapter 5. Do you see the love poured out in the language? There is very specific language used to describe the found lover who was lost. The description of the lover is a sure sign that this is no cursory welcome home. Rather, it is a heartfelt pouring out of what exists within: a love almost too deep for words. The key to this idea is found in the way the bride speaks of her found bridegroom. Please note in chapter 5:16 that

he is not only her lover but also her friend. What does this denote in today's society? Most important it shows that more than just a physical attraction is the complete relationship the two enjoy. A relationship that can be founded only upon strong communication built over time and based upon careful listening skills and strong attention to details about one's beloved.

God calls His bride to be more than just a lover. He wants us to be His friends.

REACT

1. What is my job in becoming a friend of God?
2. If I could say anything about God, it would be . . .
3. How does my favorite picture of God affect my relationships with others?

Tuesday, December 1

With Melting Hearts

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Jer. 3:14

Certainly we all have experienced shattered dreams. Almost always they involved another person, oftentimes someone to whom we've grown very close. In the passages we're studying this week, the obvious story is of a woman looking earnestly for her beloved. It is actually believed to be a bride's dream of separation from her bridegroom and subsequent praise of him as she reminisces about him. But what parallels are there for us in our marriage to Christ?

"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."¹ Especially relevant was Song of Songs 3:2, the phrase that says, "I will seek him whom my soul loveth," and verse 4, "I found him whom my soul loveth . . . and would not let him go." What a parallel to Christ's unceasingly deep love that constantly seeks each member of humanity (see 1 John 3:1; Rom. 5:8). If we could but realize the love that He has for us, perhaps our hearts would be melted, and we would repent.

Ellen White says, "He [Christ] should be presented as the Source of all true pleasure and satisfaction, the Giver of every good and

perfect gift, the Author of every blessing, the One in whom all our hopes of eternal life are centered."² She makes several references to Song of Songs, pointing out that Jesus shall be seen as the "chiefest among ten thousand," and the one "altogether lovely" (5:10, 16). She continues, "The love of God, received into the heart, is an active power for good, quickening and enlarging the mind and soul."³

So, as a remedy for hurting, painful, damaged relationships, we must look to Jesus. "The self-denying Redeemer, throughout His pilgrimage of love on earth was a living representation of the character of the law of God."⁴ He is the One who designed marriage, the family, and friendships. As we contemplate His death on Calvary, we begin to realize His love for each fallen member of humanity. Only this love, true selfless love, can bring restoration to our hurting hearts.

REACT

1. How can Christ become "the chiefest among ten thousand" to us individually?

2. Why did the bridegroom leave in Song of Songs 5:6?

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 175.

3. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 67.

4. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 49.

by Karis Cassidy

Karis Cassidy is a third-year physical-therapy student in the school of allied health professions, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Lost and Found

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 5:16

Someone once observed that the Old Testament can be divided into two main themes: people having trouble, and people finding hope out of their troubles. I'm sure there's more to the Old Testament than that; yet in Song of Songs chapters 3 and 5, there are certainly some interesting dreams about lost hopes that describe reality for many in today's society. And there's hope found, as described in the reuniting of the bride and bridegroom. What's the point? There are at least three points.

Life Is Difficult

M. Scott Peck, in his book *The Road Less Traveled*,* begins the first chapter with these words, "Life is difficult." These were profound words to a generation of people at the close of a period of great optimism. People were making huge amounts of money in real estate. Recession was a word to describe ancient history, and few conceived of job loss or a reversal of fortunes. Yet such are the conditions of the 1990s.

The Song of Songs recognizes the same truth when it describes in some detail the heartache and emotional pain of loss in the dreams of the bride. Even in the midst of a love relationship some differences will occur; some loss will be experienced. But that's not the end of the story.

Most of What You Do in Life Will Be Insignificant

Mohandas K. Gandhi said it: "Almost all you do in life will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it." This one sentence highlights two diametrically opposed truths. First, we mustn't think too highly of ourselves. We are, after all, like dust in the wind (see Ps. 103:14-16, NIV). Second, because we are representatives of Christ, feeble as we may be, we must do our best at insignificant jobs. And the rewards will be relationships that do give back some great experiences, to us and to those we love.

"I Can Do Everything Through Him Who Gives Me Strength" (Phil. 4:13, NIV)

Where, then, is the meaning and hope of life? Where do we find those relationships that God has created us to enjoy? By being motivated in our lives by Christ Jesus.

REACT

1. When I'm fighting with someone, I generally act like a . . .
2. I have found that I can overcome differences with someone I love when I ask Christ to . . .
3. I sometimes can feel hopeless about life, especially when I've experienced . . .
4. When I do feel hopeless, I have found it most helpful to . . .

*M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 15.

by Charles M. Liu

Charles M. Liu is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Thursday, December 3

More Than Words

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 4:19

Any kind of relationship (with a sibling, parent, spouse, fiancée, or friend) involves reciprocal action between at least two persons. Establishing a close relationship may be easy, but maintaining it can be hard. I give thanks to my father, who named me Joy, which I read as JOY—Jesus first, Others next, and You last. Whenever my relationship is at stake, I remember this acronym.

Popular media emphasize relationships in a materialistic, selfish, and animalistic context. Love songs are superficial and erotic. However, I like the hit *More Than Words* because its lyrics reveal love in action and not love as lip service. Read the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, for further understanding of love.

While having candlelight dinner on a cruise in the South Pacific, a friend narrated his eagerness to be married. In the course of the conversation, however, he paused and softly uttered: "But I am afraid to get married." His brother, despite a three-year-old at home, had recently gotten a divorce, and his own parents were divorced when he was six. Pain showed in his

face when he mumbled: "It was extremely hard for me to live without a father."

Here are down-to-earth guidelines for maintaining any intimate, happy relationship.

1. *Know the person well.* Unless you know the person, you will never be able to understand and relate with her/him intimately.

2. *Be open in revealing yourself.* The other person is not there to change you, but to accept you for what you really are, and vice versa. Love is acceptance of others.

3. *If one has done something to hurt your feelings, express how you feel to that person.* Harbored anger can ruin a relationship.

4. *Don't be selfish.* Human nature is selfish. Selfishness results in vanity and bitterness of spirit. Learn to say those magic words "I am sorry" and to accept the fact that you were wrong.

5. *Ask for help from God.* Trust in the Lord, and He will help you bring love into your relationships with others.

Who says that the five "how-tos" to maintaining relationships are difficult to follow?

by Mercy Joy Corpuz

Mercy Joy Corpuz is a Master of Public Health graduate from Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Friday, December 4

Close Enough for Joy

OPINION

Key Text: Song of Songs 5:9

Come close to me.
Come close enough to hear
me whisper
sweet everythings.
Closer my bride, my friend,
my child.
Take off the cloak. Indifferen-
ce is impenetrable.
Take off the garment. Hostili-
ty cannot exist.
Leave want and shame be-
hind you.
Take off the show that pre-
vails in circumstance.
Throw away the flimsy cast
of pride.
Peel away the self-assured fa-
çade enmeshed closely
within your aura.
Cast all your burdens.
Throw away,
Throw away.
Come with nothing,

only yourself.
I come close to you,
close enough to whisper
sweet everythings.
Close to you my bride, my
friend, my child.
To you I give my cloak, com-
plete enough to cover you.
My garment is for you, warm
with love.
I bring to you joy, peace, and
hope—
reviving the intimate, seeing
within you
the mirror of my love.
I come with everything.
Nothing is transformed to
beauty.
Come close to me.
Come close enough to hear
me whisper
sweet everythings.
Closer my bride, my friend,
my child,
and refreshing joy will be
multiplied.

by Nancy McHan

Nancy McHan is an R.N. at Loma Linda Medical Center, Loma Linda, California.

Lesson 11, December 6-12

Drink From Your Own Well



“You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners” (Song of Songs 6:4, NIV).

Just Friends

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 6:1

A small note slipped into my school desk sent a tingle up my spine that wrapped itself loosely around my neck and tickled my ears. The yellow lined paper looked like a golden formal invitation to my wide imagination. It simply said: "Will you go out with me? Check yes or no. Glenn."

All the girls in the room that year thought Glenn was cute. During my six-year grade-school career I had "gone steady" with him at least once each year. And each year our relationship lasted a little longer.

There was a lunch-box line against the wall in our classroom. Couples placed their lunch boxes next to each other with tender care to show the rest of the classroom their love and faithfulness. This, we considered, was a display of commitment. My box was "The Fox and the Hound." His was black and manly.

When we played four-square at recess, we helped each other. This was another unwritten rule in Mr. Morgan's room. We never got each other out. When we really felt brave, we played as partners. Of course, all of my girlfriends were envious.

We stared at each other a lot. I clearly had the advantage, though. I could see the back of his head while he studied.

Note writing was our major form of communication. (We

didn't talk on the phone because I was afraid that my parents would tease me.) I knew deep down in my sixth-grade heart that I was going to marry this man from Maine. He was the subject in my wandering thoughts.

Two months later my dreams hit a major obstacle. She was cute. Her name was Elizabeth.

She was perfect. And now she was available, for her relationship with an eighth-grader had suddenly ended.

Her long, dark hair feathered back more beautifully than my stringy, almost-brown mass. She was one of the few girls whose parents allowed her to wear makeup. Every girl wanted to be just like Elizabeth.

How could I compete with her dimple? My own blue eyes could not contend with her deep-brown eyes, which she described as "chocolate."

The locker-room babble was about Elizabeth. She wanted Glenn.

The talk made me more determined. I would do all I could in my power to keep my man.

I quietly returned to my desk after recess. I didn't realize that my lunch box was moved. A yellow-lined piece of notebook paper lay folded on my desk. I quietly read these words: "Gina, I think it would be best if we were just friends. Glenn."

Well, Elizabeth and Glenn stored their lunch boxes next to each other for the next several weeks.

by Gina McIntyre

Gina McIntyre is a senior journalism major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Monday, December 7

The Language of Lovers

LOGOS

Song of Songs 6:4–7:10

Do you know anyone who doesn't enjoy a compliment?

This passage from the Song of Songs articulates compliments between lovers in the most lyrical and explicit poetic language.

Remember, men of Eastern culture were more direct in expressing intimate compliments; our Western upbringing may cause us to blush or even skip parts of this poem in public presentations. The lover's adoration of his beloved's beauty and character take the form of comparisons we might not use in our culture. When was the last time you described someone's beauty (or handsomeness) in comparison to a city?

He says she reminds him of Tirzah, a site of great natural beauty in the north. And also Jerusalem, called "the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the whole earth" in Lamentations 2:15.

There seems to be a royal/rural motif running through the book; rural simplicity, court splendor; simple beauty, courtly grace; chariots and palaces, fragrant countryside.

The lover's lavish language in this passage in no way illustrates understatement; he is overwhelmed and is not spare in his descriptive language of her erotic delights. He is awed.

You are as "terrible as an

army with banners!" (6:4).

The word *terrible* suggests majestic; as awe-inspiring as the sight of an army carrying banners is splendid.

Solomon has referred to her eyes in previous passages as very beautiful. But here he says her eyes "overcome" him. The Greek word metaphorically means to put in a state of eager expectation, to stand on tiptoe with excitement. Clearly, he finds her glance seductive, exciting, and sexually arousing.

Her flowing hair moves sensuously; her teeth are pretty and straight; her cheeks blush naturally like ruby-red pomegranate halves.

The church is described as the object of Christ's supreme affection. Dressed in the pure, flowing robe of righteousness, she is beautiful in her unity and her diversity. There are many members, yet are they one body (see 1 Cor. 12:12).

Jesus is not the author of rigid uniformity; He distributed a wide variety of gifts to the church. Opinions, beliefs, gifts, temperaments, and approaches differ, but the church is one in loyalty to the Beloved, and in love for one another.

"The church is the apostle of hope, the champion of humanity. The church is a pledge of a better future for mankind. . . . The church changes deserts into gardens and prisons into palaces. Where dark despair awhile

by Pamela Maize Harris

Pamela Maize Harris is assistant professor of journalism and communication at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

reigned, she comes like the light of morning and opens a new day.”¹

Christ’s love pursues us and takes us into the family. It was love that raised Solomon’s beloved into the royal chariots, and love, not force, that wins others into the family of Christ.

The lover continues his frank compliments as he describes the physical attributes of his simple maiden from the country.

Her sandaled feet are beautiful to him; he describes the symmetrical beauty of her thighs, as crafted by a skillful artisan.

The navel is seen as a rounded bowl or goblet, and the light wheat-colored skin with the lilies suggests his intimate knowledge of her.

Her breasts are soft and youthful. He compares her neck to a tower of ivory, and her eyes to pools, here referring to their stillness and depth.

She holds her head regally like Mt. Carmel, and her hair hangs loose and free, rippling and shimmering, as she moves, like waves of mountain goats headed down the slopes. The king is captivated just watching her flowing hair.

The centerpiece of the poem, lovemaking, seems somewhat shrouded in metaphor, understated, veiled with words. But the meaning distilled by scholars is clear—physical love with one’s beloved is out of this world. He exclaims in chapter 7:6, “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!”

The translation suggests delicate, soft, luxuriously erotic delights, according to Carr.² The lover remembers lovemaking in the past and anticipates lovemak-

ing in the future. In all the world there is nothing so pleasant and wonderful, nothing so delights the spirit, nothing is as delightful above all other pleasures, he exclaims.

In verse 10 the beloved triumphantly affirms that her lover’s desire is for her. Isn’t it obvious?

God’s plan for pure affection connects true wedded love with delightful physical love. The result is long-lasting happiness. An elevated love that places the beloved in high esteem, raises him or her to a higher pedestal, and creates perfect freedom for loving affection. How opposite from the emptiness of selfish passion.

The palm tree comparison brings to mind the New Testament story of Christ’s festive entry into Jerusalem, with crowds waving palm fronds. The fruit reminds us of references to the fruits of righteousness resulting from loving hearts. This fruit is the true ornamentation and adornment of Christ’s bride.

Using their gifts to bear fruit—lovely, gracious actions—God’s church shows a hostile world the grace of Christ and His unspeakable gift of eternal life.

“How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!” (7:6).

What could be more delightful than eternal life, eternal bliss with one’s beloved? Or friends and loved ones? Or with Christ, author of creativity, love, language, and diversity in creation?

1. *The Pulpit Commentary* (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co.), pp. 158, 159.

2. G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, Ill.), pp. 146-164.

Tuesday, December 8

Till Death Do You Part

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 5:15-18

Our Lord is greatly concerned with our romantic, as well as our spiritual, love. When He says, "Drink waters out of thine own cistern" and "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth," He is simply telling us how to retain that special spark that ignites every young courtship and marriage. By holding fast to that decision to remain faithful to each other, we are not robbed of God's blessing.

However, infidelity has affected both the inside and the outside of the church. Why are so many drinking from other wells? At least two reasons can be cited: forgetting to express or communicate our feelings to each other, and searching for the expression of those feelings elsewhere.

Ellen White has said: "In many families there is a great lack in expressing affection one for another. . . . Tender affection should ever be cherished between husband and wife, parent and children, brothers and sisters. Every hasty word should be checked and there should not be even the appearance of the lack of love one for another."¹ This is not an easy thing for some people. Expressions of love and respect sometimes require a special effort, but the dividends will be worth it. This extra effort is not arbitrary, however. It is the *privilege* of every spouse.

If tender words and compli-

ments are not found within the marriage, a person will be tempted to fulfill these needs elsewhere. The desire to feel attractive, intelligent, and respected by the opposite sex is a part of human nature. Likewise, a person needs to feel that his or her spouse is genuinely interested in what he/she has to say. When asked the reason why so many people are unfaithful these days, a leading Christian counselor responded: "Every situation is different, of course, but I have observed the most powerful influence to emanate from ego needs. Both men and women appear equally vulnerable to this consuming desire to be admired and respected by members of the opposite sex."² These basic ego needs, however, should be fulfilled within a marriage. When they are not met, this can be a powerful determinant to infidelity.

To choose to remain faithful is to choose happiness. Express your love for one another daily, and your need to love and be loved will be filled.

REACT

1. How are we robbed of God's complete blessings when we do not follow His ideal plans for marriage?

2. How does God restore marriages/relationships that have been damaged by a wrong choice?

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 198.

2. *Faith for Today, Questions and Answers With Dr. James Dobson*, May 1991.

by Michael J. Adams

Michael J. Adams is a senior long-term-health-care major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

No Room for Selfishness

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 7:10

Love. Intimacy. Desire. Commitment. Belonging. The pure love God intends for marriage is filled with all of these things. In fact, it is the joining of two souls that is the tightest bond two people on earth can share.

God desires those same intimacies with His bride, the church. He longs to share with each of us the very same closeness enjoyed by the beloved and her lover in Solomon's Song of Songs.

To be someone's bride is a great honor, to be sure. But along with the honor comes a lot of responsibility. It means a new and deeper relationship with the bridegroom; it means putting another's needs above your own. Not everybody is willing to make that commitment, and understandably so, for there is sacrifice involved. I know from personal experience.

It was during my 10-month engagement that I began fully to realize why people say that marriage affects every aspect of your life. Although I had been friends with my fiancé for almost eight years, there were still some major transitions to make. Suddenly we were no longer spending *my* money or *his* money, but *our* money. His family would soon be my family, and I had to look for a job that would be best for us, not just best for me. There wasn't much room for selfishness.

It should be the same way when we fall in love with God. Most Christians find it safe and convenient to relate to God as a heavenly Father. We like having the "ultimate Dad" who listens to us when we need an understanding ear, rescues us from disaster, and gives us advice on any problem. With time, we can even grow to appreciate His discipline when we're slow to learn a difficult lesson.

But God also wants us to treat Him as our true love. That's new—and maybe even uncomfortable—territory for many of us. But it's important, because the marriage relationship is a key to understanding God's love.

As we unite our lives with God, we'll find ourselves spending more and more time with Him until we just can't help being like Him. We'll find we want His input on even the little decisions, and we'll want to do special things to please Him.

That's what true love is all about. We'll belong to Him, and we'll know that He desires us.

REACT

1. How can we make the same kind of commitment to both God and an earthly spouse without neglecting one or the other?
2. What changes, if any, should our church make in order to be called Christ's bride?
3. How can we find out what God needs from us in our relationship with Him?

by Debra Clark Hicks

Debra Clark Hicks is a 1991 graduate of Southern College's journalism and communication department, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Thursday, December 10

Refuge From the Storm

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Songs 7:10

The story apparently takes place early in Solomon's life, for he had only 60 queens and 80 concubines (see Song of Songs 6:8). Later he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (see 1 Kings 11:1, 3). "While the whole song is apparently a love story of Solomon and a country girl of northern Palestine whom King Solomon married only for love, the story itself serves as a beautiful illustration of the love of Christ for the church as a whole, and also for each individual member of the church."¹ Although the Song of Songs is not quoted in the New Testament, Ellen G. White finds Christ and His church typified in the book. She says, "We need to appreciate more fully the meaning of the words: 'I sat down under His shadow with great delight.' Song of Songs 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. . . . To all such Christ's invitation is: 'Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest.' Matthew 11:28."²

The church is the bride of Christ. And a bride likes to spend time with her bridegroom. Ellen White specifically mentions the end-time church. "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. . . . God will be to His church 'a refuge from the storm.' Isaiah 25:4."³ What comforting words!

The focus is on Christ. His unconditional love for His church is likened to the love of a bridegroom for his bride on the wedding day. She will have on the wedding garment—His robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10). The entire world will be against her (see Rev. 13:11-18), but Christ will stand up to deliver her (see Dan. 12:1). The bride will go to the "marriage supper" (Rev. 19:9) and spend a thousand years in a "heavenly honeymoon" before returning to an earth made new.

If we spend time with Christ, receive His presence to clothe us, we will be ready for the wedding banquet and eternal life with the greatest Bridegroom. Remember, this is a wedding day with the wedding banquet and honeymoon to follow the second advent. What bride is afraid of her bridegroom on her wedding day? In final events do not look so much at what is coming, but to who is coming, and then the good news is "Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18, NIV).

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1110.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 69.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 725; see also *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

by Norman R. Gulley

Norman R. Gulley is professor of systematic theology at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Beautiful Passion

OPINION

Key Text: Song of Songs 7:10

How many times did your parents read the Song of Songs out loud for family worship? Often people avoid this book because of its seemingly embarrassing content. Parents, pastors, and Sabbath School teachers are afraid to talk about it. But by holding this attitude, one of God's greatest gifts to us is ignored.

What is so frightening about the Song of Songs? Sure, it talks about hair, eyes, legs, and various other physical features. But who made these things? God, of course! He made us this way, and He gave us the attraction to the opposite sex. God was gracious enough to give us these feelings. What a gift! And aren't you glad?

Right in the middle of the Bible this precious book says, Yes! It's OK to feel this way. It's natural. God planned it this way. The young man and woman are simply expressing in this song their tremendous love for each other. Love in a marriage is meant to be this vibrant and fresh.

So how does this all tie in with God? What kind of relationship

does He want us to have with Him? The answer is plain to see when viewed through this book. Our relationship to God should be like a marriage. The love two people share in a marriage is the type of relationship God wants us to share with Him. But as with a marriage, this relationship can't be one-sided. God already loves and adores us. We too should love Him in return with a passion and with a zeal! God has shown us what kind of love He wants from us through the gift of a marriage relationship.

And that's why the Song of Songs is in the Bible. It's not to be skipped. Nor is it to be blushed over. It is about the purest kind of love that we as humans know—the love that exists in a marriage. And the great thing is this: God gave us this gift. OK, so the book gets rather explicit at times. But isn't God's love for us this real? This vibrant? Our hearts should be captured! He is the One we should desire!

REACT

How has the study of the Song of Songs affected your view of God, the church, marriage, sex, and yourself?

by Angela Dyer

Angela Dyer is a senior history major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 12, December 13-19

No Place Like Home



“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal over your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (Song of Songs 8:6, NIV).

Family Seal

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Song of Songs 8:6

Summer camp, day one, early evening.

"What time we gonna get up here?" an inquisitive 10-year-old asked me.

"Oh, probably about 7:00," I said.

"7:00? That's in just a few minutes."

A second camper quickly corrected him. "Andy means 7:00 a.m.—right now it's 7:00 p.m.!"

It is experiences such as this that confirm my desire to be a dad someday. Few disagree that children bring happiness. No wonder Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me" (Matt. 19:14, NIV). He likely needed a break from His 12 troublesome companions.

As I write from the porch of Raccoon cabin, my nine campers toss a Nerf football around the circle of boys. And I miss those days. The marble games on the playground, the bus rides home followed by Pop-Tarts, milk, and "Gilligan's Island," the evening walks to the creek with my family. How easy life was then. Or was it?

Summer camp also reminds me of the perils of being a child. Where else but among your young peers can you find yourself the object of put-downs, teasing, and laughter? Will I be the last one picked? Will I get the lowest grade on the math test? Will they

include me this time?

Yet, it is not the actual failure that damages a child emotionally, but rather his/her reaction to failure. Chad responds to a last-place finish with tears; Steve congratulates those who outran him. What determines how a child will relate? Often, a child's home life is the key.

"Place me like a seal over your heart" (NIV), the text reads. In other words, shield yourself with Jesus. He wants to help. Children need, more than anything else, to learn of this power in the home. Less about pierced ears, more about a pierced Saviour. Less about rock music, more about the Rock of Ages. Less about what is coming, more about who is coming.

A "sealed" home means love and support for children who need it so much. Over the years my mom and dad have watched about 10,000 little league games, school plays, and band concerts. Not because they had to, but because they knew it meant so much to their son. I was never the best on the field, but they always treated me as if I were. Their seal too has been permanently placed over my heart.

A close family, with Christ as its head, can overcome any hurdle the evil one throws at them. A sour marriage, suffering children, sexual immorality—tough issues, but all solvable through the love and Word of God. Take another look at the Song of Songs this week and allow the Lord Jesus Christ to be your family seal.

by Andrew C. Nash

Andrew C. Nash is currently a junior communications major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Monday, December 14

The Good Marriage

LOGOS

Song of Songs 7:11–8:14

Bride to King:

"Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country.

Let us spend the night in the villages.

Let us rise early to the vineyards.

Let us see whether the vine has budded and its blossoms have opened and whether the pomegranates have bloomed.

There I will give my caresses to you.

The mandrakes have given forth fragrance and over our doors are all choice fruits—both new and old, which I have stored up for you, my beloved" (7:12-14).¹

The honeymoon is over, goes the saying—as if the excitement of marriage is expected to sour or give way to boredom.

God did not intend marriage to end that way. He intended for it to improve with age. It does so in this model marriage between the Shulamite and the king.

So secure is the Shulamite that she has no hesitation in reinstating the courtship. He had invited her: "Arise my darling, my fair one, and come. For behold, the winter has passed. The rain is over and gone" (2:10, 11). She now invites him to go out into the country to spend the night in the villages, to see the spring come in. "There I will give my caresses to you" (7:12), she says. There she

has "choice fruits—both new and old" (verse 13) stored up for him. The marriage has not soured. It is even better than at first.

Love Partners Fill Many Needs (read 8:1-3)

The good marriage is a composite of many relationships—lover, teacher, student, and sibling all in one. The ideal marriage develops in the home where affection can be expressed without fear of ridicule. The marriage partners are like blood relatives—they make up a new family. And in that family is give and take. Both take turns leading and following. The partners are like brother and sister, like teacher and student, and yet ardent lovers.

The Right Time and Place for Sex (read 8:4, 5)

For the third time the refrain is given: "Not to arouse, not to awaken love until it pleases." It is followed by a passage indicating that the time had come: "Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?" The Shulamite then tells when and where she had awakened love: "Beneath the apple tree I awakened you; there your mother was in labor with you; there she was in labor and gave you birth" (8:5). The Shulamite aroused the king under the tree that is a symbol of the love that lays the foundation for a home, the love that can result in the birth of a child. When is the right time to arouse, to

by R. Lynn Sauls

R. Lynn Sauls is professor of journalism and English at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

awaken love? When it is possible for a home to be established. When a new family can begin under the apple tree, within the enduring bonds of marriage.

Bonding (read 8:7)

"Many waters cannot extinguish this love, and rivers will not drown it. If a man were to give all the possessions of his house for love, he would be utterly despised" (8:7).

The central message of the Bible is captured in this short text: Love endures. The love God has for us, and the love He wants us to experience need not be destroyed. This love, based on an enduring commitment, provides the bonding needed between husband and wife, between parents and children, between God and His people. Such love has no price. It can be freely given. It can be gratefully received. But it cannot be bought.

The Caring Family (read 8:8-12)

These closing verses of the Song of Songs provide a flashback to the Shulamite's childhood and condense her love story. Her brothers, concerned for their little sister, took steps to prepare her for marriage even before she was an adolescent. They decided that if she were a wall—that is, if she maintained the proper reserve, kept her virtue, and remained firm against boys' advances—then they would encourage and reward her. If she were a door—that is, if she were too familiar, manifested a tendency toward promiscuity, was too open to advances—then they would be strict with her to prevent her from hurting herself.

They need not have worried. She chose of her own accord to be "a wall" and played her part well. "Her respect for herself brought the same respect from others,"² and she became in the eyes of her beloved "as one who finds peace" (8:10).

In *A Song for Lovers*, by S. Craig Glickman, the interpretive paraphrase of 8:11, 12 shows the appreciation the Shulamite developed for the role her family had played in preparing her for marriage: "There I was, working daily in the vineyard my brothers had leased from you. And you 'happened' to pass by and see me. That's how our love began. I remember when I worked in that vineyard that a thousand dollars went to you and two hundred dollars for the ones taking care of its fruit for you. Now I am your vineyard, my lover, and I gladly give the entire thousand dollars of my worth to you; I give myself completely, withholding nothing of my trust, my thoughts, my care, my love. But my dear King, let us not forget that two hundred dollars belongs to the ones who took care of the fruit of my vineyard for you. How thankful we must be to my family who helped prepare me for you."³

REACT

1. How can the concept of true love be taught to children?
2. Were you taught about love in this manner?

1. S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 167. Glickman's translation is used in this Logos as adaptations of several of his ideas.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Tuesday, December 15

A Little Bit of Clay

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 22:6

So many times we find ourselves oohing and aahing over tiny babies and speaking of how exciting it will be to have our own. True, becoming a parent is one of the greatest and most exciting gifts our Maker has given us. However, being a parent is also one of the greatest responsibilities we will ever experience. These tiny, helpless babies will grow up to be men and women who will have an impact on society around them. And it is the responsibility of parents to train their children in a way that will be beneficial to society, to the church, and to God.

Ellen White speaks at length in *Child Guidance* on the seriousness of the responsibility of a parent. She makes very clear the importance of home religion and the strength that lies in it. Everything we do or say reflects in the lives and development of our children. She speaks of parenting as a missionary field in which we are bringing our children to Christ. There is one particular analogy she uses that I feel is very fitting. She parallels an artist and his work with the parent who is shaping living clay. A comparison is drawn between the earnestness of an artist with his work and what should be the earnestness that a parent displays in raising children. Being a parent is a full-time job and consumes

every part of your life.

With these thoughts in mind, the responsibility of raising a child seems overwhelming. To mold and shape another's ideas and thoughts is sobering. It leaves me with a helpless feeling. How could I possibly succeed at such a task? *Child Guidance* points out that if we are willing to cooperate and we have our own spiritual lives in order, the Lord will work through us to raise our children. What an inspiring thought! We are not alone in this huge responsibility. Just think what our youth would be like if we all allowed the Lord to take control and help us raise our children. How could we go wrong!

"We should ask the blessing of God on the seed sown, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit will take hold of even the little ones. If we exercise faith in God, we shall be enabled to lead them to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. This is a work of the greatest consequence to the younger members of the Lord's family."*

REACT

1. What kind of joy, power, and responsibility does parenting carry?
2. How can a parent still be molded by God? How can he or she maintain the role of shaper to a child and still be shaped by God?

**Child Guidance*, p. 502.

by Amber Murphy

Amber Murphy is a senior history and religion major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

The Mighty Flame

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 8:6, 7

Carol was on her daily three-mile walk. She treasured this time to clear her mind and think.

It had come so suddenly; she wasn't expecting it. Sure, she and James had been going steady for four years, but marriage? She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn't even hear the man coming up behind her. Carol became a victim of a twisted mind.

Every minute, another woman becomes a victim of a violent sexual crime. Why? The answer lies, in part, in a drastic misunderstanding of exactly what love is.

The Song of Songs is a beautiful display of what love between a man and a woman could and should be.

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal over your arm;

For Love is as strong as death,
Its jealousy unyielding as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire,
Like a mighty flame.

Many waters cannot quench love;

Rivers cannot wash it away”
(8:6, NIV).

In this passage we find three powerful phrases describing love: Love is strong as the grave, like a mighty flame, and many waters cannot wash it away.

The first phrase describes the constancy of love. Just as those who are now under the sleep of death have absolutely no change,

so will true love be ever constant. We know that God is love and that He never changes. This is a great comfort in a society where people have developed a way to turn their “love” on and off. This is not God's intention. Love is unchanging—the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The second phrase describes the passion of love. Passion can be defined as boundless enthusiasm. The Scripture says that love is like a mighty flame. The actual Hebrew word is *reshaphim*, which is translated elsewhere as “hot thunderbolts” (Ps. 78:48). Just as on a hot, gray afternoon a thunderbolt brings excitement, so love is to break through a gray existence and bring hope, joy, and boundless enthusiasm.

The third phrase describes the power of love. Pure love is such that nothing can destroy it. Man is constantly looking to obtain more and more power, be it physical, technological, or mental. Man need only realize that God has given each free access to the greatest power—love. This is a power that cannot be bought, bribed, or obtained in any way through self merit. Love, the greatest power, is a gift free to all who will accept.

True love is constant, passionate, and powerful.

REACT

1. What are some other characteristics of true love?

2. What practical steps could two people take toward developing this type of love?

by Kyle H. Robinson

Kyle H. Robinson is currently pastoring in Flint, Michigan.

Sex Education in the Home

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 22:6

Each set of parents on the *Donahue* panel explained the arrangements they had made with their teenage children for having sexual intercourse in their own homes. Their children were going to engage in premarital sex, the parents stated. And these parents felt that the home was the best place to control this experience.

Has the sexual revolution come this far? Is there anything Christian parents can do to help their children understand and enjoy love and intimacy in the beautiful way these traits are depicted in the Song of Songs?

Though parents can't live their children's lives for them, there are things they can do.

1. *Start early.* Parents who wait until their children are teenagers to deal with sexual issues are in trouble. Most children are exposed very early to unbiblical views of intimacy. TV programs, songs, and children's books present various and often conflicting views of love and sex.

Parents should screen these influences and should offer their children materials that provide a biblical view of intimacy.

2. *Talk about it.* Parents who establish communication about love and sex during a child's early years should find it easier to deal with these issues when the child

enters the more volatile teen years. Young children are naturally curious. Answering their questions tactfully but openly will encourage future questions and can result in meaningful exchanges about intimacy.

3. *Model a positive relationship.* What children see in the home has a tremendous influence on them. Do they witness natural, tender affection between their parents, or do their parents reserve displays of affection for private time only? Do children see their parents disagree and work through problems? Children's views of love as a principle or an emotion, as a complex spiritual, emotional, and physical experience or merely a physical act will depend largely on what they witness in the home.

4. *Pray without ceasing.* Ultimately, parents must turn the issue of their children's sexuality over to God. In today's world young people cannot escape the unhealthy views of love and intimacy that pervade our society. But remember, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16, RSV).

REACT

1. How should parents decide what materials to use and what topics to discuss for each stage of a child's sexual development?

2. What can parents do who suspect, or know, that their child is sexually active?

by David Smith

David Smith is chairman of the department of English/speech at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

A Healthy Sexuality

OPINION

Key Text: James 1:5

Love, sexuality, and intimacy are at the very core of human life and relationships. Unfortunately we have failed to share with our children a healthy, pure, and open picture of what God intended.

Not yet being a parent, I can only share from my experience the attitudes and approaches my parents used in our home. They taught me about love by example. My father and mother loved each other. Not because they were perfect, nor did they share the perfect relationship, but they were committed. They made a promise to God to love, honor, and cherish “till death do us part.”

My parents also approached sexuality in an open manner. As a child, my questions about my own sexuality were never shut down or ignored. My behavior as I was becoming aware of my God-given sexuality was never rebuked as inappropriate. They did not want me to feel embarrassed about my inquiries—they gave me frank and understandable answers. This parental approach cultivated a healthy spirit toward human sexuality.

Intimacy is often confused with sexuality; however, intimacy takes on many meanings. My parents shared with me, as the time and need arose, what forms of intimacy were appropriate in various relationships. I have found that my most intimate friendships are

those in which Christ is central. The intimacy shared by couples takes on a new depth as the physical element is introduced. The Bible provides many solid principles, and there are many books written by Christian authors that cover the subject in a scripturally based and thorough way. I feel very comfortable seeking further guidance from such sources.

God is the final authority. He created love, intimacy, and sexuality. This is easy to forget today, with all the degradation and perversion Satan has brought into this world. When God placed Adam and Eve together in the garden, I imagine it was a beautiful scene. God was allowing a man and a woman to experience the deepest, most precious intimacy. His desire was that this sexual bond, which He created, would draw a husband and wife into the closest of partnerships, and that they would be better able to understand the depth of the relationship the Creator longs to have with His children. As Christians, we should fight Satan’s portrayal of love and sexuality by teaching our children through example and honesty.

REACT

1. How do you feel your parents’ approaches affected your attitude toward sexuality?
2. What is common within your most intimate friendships?
3. What can we learn from Scripture about how to approach love, intimacy, and sexuality in our own homes?

by Suzy Mazat

Suzy Mazat is a sophomore biology major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 13, December 20-26

The Afterglow



“Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned” (Song of Songs 8:7, NIV).

Love Will Keep Us Together

INTRODUCTION

John 15:13

Is there any word in the English language more overused, overworked, and overestimated than the word *love*? It is everywhere. We hear it in music that testifies to love's apparent ability to overcome all hardships and problems. "Love will keep us together," sang the Captain and Tenille; and sometime before their divorce Sonny and Cher confidently warbled, "I got you, babe." In the sixties, the Beatles crooned that "there were bells on a hill, but I never heard them ringing. . . . I never heard them at all till there was you." And Dan Fogelberg promised that "longer than there are fishes in the ocean, I'll be in love with you."

Television, movies, and books inform us that love is not only powerful, but somehow magical. A tearful Ali McGraw assures her apologetic husband in *Love Story* that "love means never having to say you're sorry"; the power of love, she seems to say, overcomes the daily problems and pain that come with relationships. In the popular film *Ghost* a love is so strong that it reaches even beyond the grave. Daily TV shows teach us that in 60 minutes (minus the time allotted for commercials) couples can meet, fall in love, and develop the kind of relationship that will endure a lifetime. All in the name of love.

Does love have the power to

sustain and endure the way the entertainment industry tells us it can? Will love "keep us together" through the stress of serious illness or other devastating problems? How about through everyday mortgages, Visa bills, and dirty laundry?

The unfortunate reality of today's world is that love, as it is most commonly portrayed, is disappointingly ineffective. The love presented in song, music, and TV has little power to endure, enoble, or sustain. It seldom lasts through the first wrinkle, disagreement, or unpaid bill, much less through the kind of real crises that we all must face. The evidence is everywhere in broken relationships and divorce rates that climb ever higher.

And yet we need not despair. God offers us powerful and enduring love wrapped up in a package far more beautiful than the top-10 love lyrics or Hollywood's latest contribution to the movie scene. He offers us the sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate Gift of love. Through Christ's gift we can begin to understand that love can be sustaining and enduring, and can provide us with standards to carry into our own interpersonal relationships. The love that Christ gives us is not one that blinks at hardships or imperfections; instead, it recognizes that weaknesses are common to us all. It grows and expands—not with naïve expectations—but with insight, understanding, and acceptance.

by Jill Doster Evans

Jill Doster Evans is associate professor of English in the Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.

Monday, December 21

Straight Out of Fairy Tales

LOGOS

Song of Songs 8:5-7

It was the talk of the whole kingdom; a marriage straight out of fairy tales, but nevertheless true. While making a royal tour through the northern pasture lands, the heart of the young King Solomon is smitten by a fair and gentle country girl while she watches her father's sheep. He could and did have any wife he chose from any royal family near or far, yet he falls in love with a local commoner and through marriage raises her up to be the favored queen of the land. Like Princess Diana of England, the Shulamite bride must have quietly endured the universal attention. Perhaps she even enjoyed it. Certainly it dulled the sharp edge of her loneliness while husband was off doing his kingly duties. Yes, his job was important, but did he have to be gone so often? "*Am I not still important to him?*" she must have thought. "Don't you love me anymore?" she must have asked.

The Homecoming

In an effort to appease his wife, or perhaps because she felt homesick, Solomon decided to take his wife for a visit to her father's house. "Who is that coming up from the wilderness?" the servants wonder (verse 5, RSV). They soon recognize their master's daughter. She left in common attire; she returns in

dazzling royal robes. She went at the call of the king; she returns his bride. She who was shepherdess comes home a queen.

Unchanging Vows

But the king didn't come here to show off. He has brought his wife back because it is the scene of their first love. Gently he points out the familiar sights around the house and recalls their first meeting. "See, there is the apple tree where you were born. The same tree where you heard my first words of affection as we sat side by side just outside the house under its shade."

Set Me as a Seal Upon Your Heart, as a Seal Upon Your Arm

The signet-ring of the king was the guarantee of his authority and would be worn for all to see on a string around his neck or on a band on his arm. When used, it was proof of the king's intentions in matters of the kingdom. Solomon's statement is more than just a romantic "Press me close to your breast; enfold me in your arms," as some commentators think. "Put me foremost in your thoughts; display our love for everyone to see," seem to be the deeper meaning.

As the Priest-King, Christ carries us as a seal upon His chest, and He longs to enfold us and take us home leaning on His everlasting arms. Never is there a time when we are forgotten. "For you were sealed with that Holy

by Dan Stevens

Dan Stevens is associate pastor of the Kettering SDA Church, Kettering, Ohio.

Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13, 14, NKJV).

True Love

Together they renew their vows for time and eternity in praise of the deep, unchanging love they possess for each other.

Love is strength and tenacity—love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. It seems odd at first to compare love with death. But death reigns over its populace. Can we call back any from the grave? No, it would jealously hold them in its cold embrace forever if it weren't for God's resurrection power. True love outlasts its competitors and sees the lover through the difficult times.

Paul experienced Christ's unfailing love. "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39, NIV).

Love is vehemence and unquenchableness—its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. A volcano is what comes to mind here. Rivers and lakes are dried up in its path. Passionate love burns like that, taking one's breath away and crowding the mind of all other thoughts. Release of that love through intercourse between married partners is unstoppable.

But there is a fiery unquench-

able love that is deeper than passion. It is the love that never gives up, never goes out even when insulted or neglected. "Love is patient, love is kind. . . . It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. . . . It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8, NIV).

Love is value and incorruptibility—if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned. You cannot buy love. Love is received when love is first given. It is made sweeter because of the gift. Flowers, candy, or other gifts to our beloved are really only an extension of the gift of ourselves.

In the first chapter of the song, the young bride desires to be swept away by her lover. "Draw me," she pleads (1:4). That should be the Christian's daily prayer. God is only waiting to fulfill that request. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos. 11:4). "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you" (Jer. 31:3, NKJV). "If I be lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all men to me" (John 12:32).

REACT

1. How does our spiritual marriage to Christ lift us up above our former life?

2. When in a Christian's life would it be helpful to recall one's conversion experience, to remember one's first love with Christ?

3. How does the Spirit bring assurance to you today?

Tuesday, December 22

Stronger Than Death

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Song of Songs 8:7

As presented in Song of Songs 8:7, love is a very unusual thing. You cannot be bribed into loving a person, nor can you be forced to stop loving someone. Money or threats won't do it.

Why not? Perhaps because love is of divine origin. From our human point of view only love can explain why God paid the enormous price for our redemption. Satan's many "waters of temptation" tried in vain to quench Jesus' love for us, and floods of suffering did not drown

it, for "the heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift."*

How reassuring is the promise of God given through the prophet: "The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you will never end; I will keep forever my promise of peace. So says the Lord who loves you" (Isa. 54:10, TEV).

REACT

Is love an absolute, or are there degrees of love?

*Steps to Christ, p. 21.

by **Petre Udrea**

Petre Udrea is a medical student at Wright State University School of Medicine, Dayton, Ohio.

Like a Blazing Fire

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Song of Songs 8:6, 7

Solomon's bride wants her husband to place her "like a seal over your heart" (Song of Songs 8:6, NIV). In ancient times, when most people did not write, a seal was suspended from the neck on a string which hung down over the breast. On this signet ring or seal was an impression of the person's name that could be used for the signing of documents (see Ex. 28:11, 21). It is an expression of desire for Solomon to bear her as a precious ring on his heart and then over his arm.

This request is followed by intimate, personal, and powerful declarations of love. A love that is spoken of in general expressions with no personal pronouns used such as *my* or *our* love. It is paralleled with jealousy and expressed as a human passion and affection that is compared to the power of death and hades (the grave) as at least its equal. The idea is that when death assails, it prevails, and from it nothing can escape. Equally so, love seizes with irresistible force, and those whom love assails must reckon with its power.

Love is said to burn "like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame" (Song of Songs 8:6, NIV). Some think this could be flashes of lightning. The mighty flame is translated from the flame to *Yah* in the Hebrew,

which is a name for God. It is a flame kindled not by a human, but by God. It is a flame that is unquenchable, that mighty waters and streams cannot overflow or extinguish. No earthly power can put out the flame of love that comes from God. It is not a love that can be purchased. The highest offer would be turned aside with mockery.

The Song of Songs sings of love that is all-consuming and overpowering. There is no mistaking this major theme and dominant pervasive passion. If there is a climax in this book, it is found in these verses and could be thought of as a doxology to love—love that is irresistible, invincible, and triumphant. It affirms a response that wells up in the human heart from its depths—love conquers all! Love's victory is set against whatever may threaten it. This passage is often said to have a force and power that is without parallel in literature.

REACT

1. Compare this passage in Song of Songs 8:6 to 1 Cor. 13:7, 8, 13, and Eph. 3:17-19. What similarities do you find?

2. Can the love of Christ as described in Rom. 8:35, 37-39 surpass or add anything to the love described in the verses from this lesson?

3. Do you agree from your personal experience that love conquers all?

by Robert L. Dunn

Robert L. Dunn is professor of religion at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.

Thursday, December 24

A Course That Flows Upstream

HOW-TO

Key Text: Song of Songs 8:5-7

Love is one of those words that gets bandied about a lot. Therefore, it is essential that we look closely at Song of Songs 8:6, 7 and avoid tuning it out simply because it conveys a message that we hear frequently from a number of different sources.

In this day of rampant materialism, overt hedonism, and blatant selfishness, we are in desperate need of priorities. Specifically, we can never be reminded too often of God's priorities; they run contrary to the values of the world.

Turn on the television, and we are bombarded with commercials that tell us that we must have this item or that to be truly happy. Go to the mailbox. Look through the countless fliers telling you how essential this item is to your happiness. Our society is fed, shaped, and directed by such commercialism.

Everywhere we turn, in magazines, bookstores, and television, we are being told to focus on ourselves. We are told that "we deserve" this, and "we're worth" that. We are advised to look out for number one. There is even a magazine entitled *Self*. It is indeed an interesting commentary on our times!

So how do we combat this infiltration of values that contradict the ones clearly established in God's Word? First, we must

launch a counterattack! We must start a bombardment of another sort—one that will strengthen the perspective we are in danger of losing. The Song of Songs is full of verses that can help us reestablish the importance of love in our lives and give us insight into the divine love that completely transcends materialism and self-absorption. However, before we can take it to heart, we must expose ourselves to that message in a sufficient amount to counter the large dosage of worldly values and priorities we are fed daily.

Second, we must become aware of the subtle invitations to materialism and their sources, as well as being aware of those sources that tell us being self-centered is justified. This means stepping out in faith and doing things in love that can make us vulnerable, remembering that it is the power of Christ within us that protects us. It may mean putting aside our own needs to advance God's cause, even when we are being criticized for being idealistic or impractical.

To choose a course that flows upstream is never easy. However, the beauty of Song of Songs is that its spirit is not one of martyrdom or resignation. The love found within Song of Songs is not grim and tight-lipped, but joyful and willing. Perhaps the true message here is that even though God's love calls us to standards that rise high above anything the world recognizes, we too can proceed joyfully and willingly.

by Vail McGuire

Vail McGuire is assistant professor of English at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.

Taking Time to Love

OPINION

Key Texts: Prov. 5:18, 19; Lam. 3:25, 26

The last article in the last lesson of the last quarter of the year—and it's Christmas! Perhaps this is an appropriate place to contemplate spiritual and marital afterglow. It is certainly appropriate for the end of our study of the Song of Songs.

Afterglow is a term that would not have crossed our grandparents' lips, much less appeared in their Sabbath School lessons. Yet, it embodies a concept that I believe has marital and spiritual significance. Within a marriage relationship, afterglow is that attentiveness that follows the peak of excitement. For the exercise enthusiast, it would be considered the cool-down period! Those kisses, caresses, embraces, and loving words communicate the fact that I do not simply love love-making, but that I genuinely love my spouse. Afterglow tells my spouse that he/she is important.

Now, if the Song of Songs teaches us parallels between our human love relationships and our relationship to God, then what is the message here? Could it be that God doesn't appreciate being "rushed" either? Could it be that God wants our attentiveness? And that He appreciates it when

we linger with Him?

There are times within our spiritual walk when we have opportunities to linger. Though it may not be realistic to always spend those extra moments, it is worth considering those times when we could be more attentive. For example, following prayer how often do we immediately rush to our next activity? How much do we lose by not passing a few minutes in listening for God's response? In our personal worship the same abruptness occurs. Our corporate worship periods often provide a transition via a musical postlude that can allow a few moments of reflection. Yet we often hurry to talk to someone after the service. Of course, none of us has ever been guilty of performing the Sabbath countdown on Saturday night!

We are not likely to be so successful at time management that we will always have appropriate transition times. But unless we stop to consider the opportunities, we may *never* have them. When we feel intense love, we find time for the one we love. Perhaps when we recognize His intense love for us, we will more willingly return His attentiveness.

REACT

What can we gain from extra attentiveness to God? And what does it mean to God?

by Brian Christenson

Brian Christenson is a systems consultant at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

Next Quarter's Lessons Health

If you have not yet received a copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY for first quarter 1993, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Why Be Healthy?

Scripture: Jeremiah 30:17

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Lesson 2: None of These Diseases

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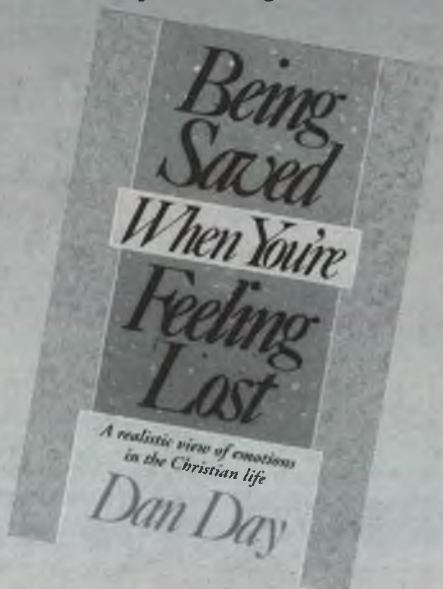
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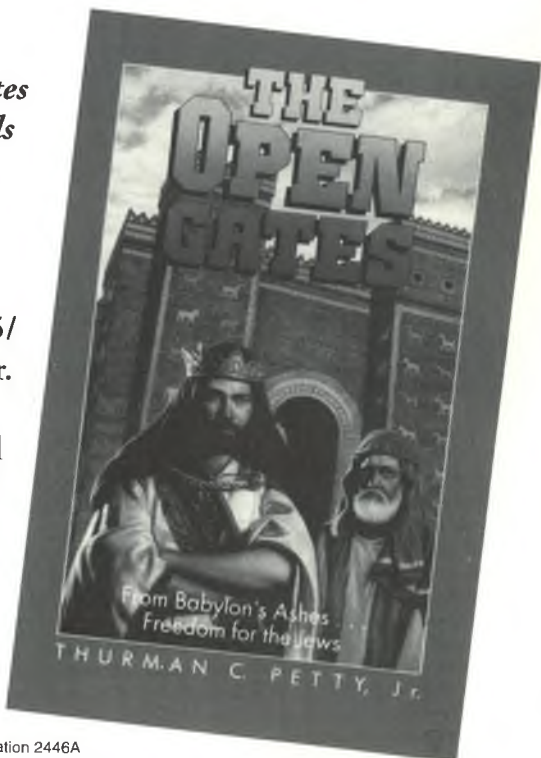
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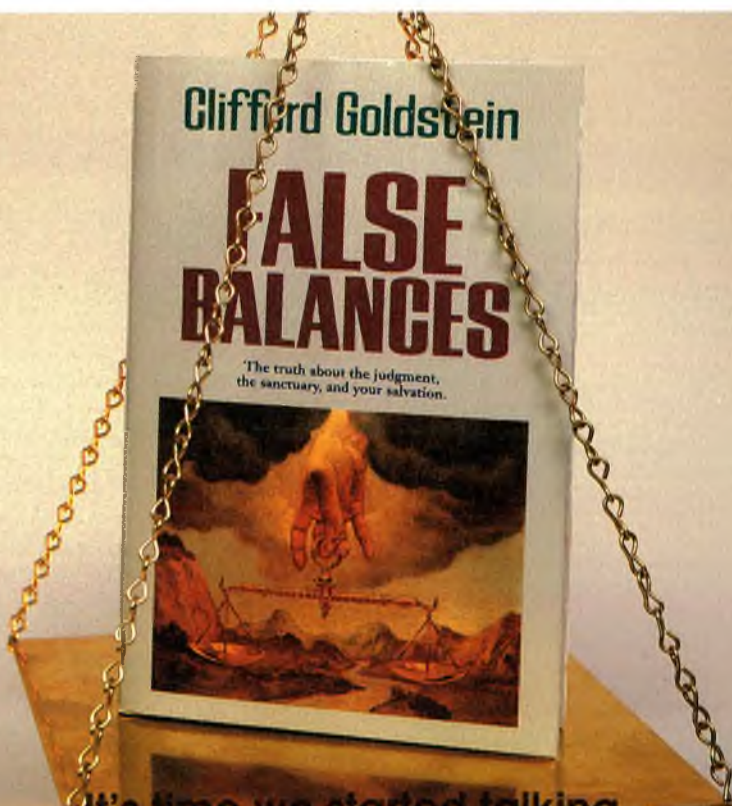
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